

# **Darien, Illinois Oral History Project**

**Elmer and Diana Kalny**

**interviewed by Deb Barrett  
April 30, 2013**

**Indian Prairie Public Library  
Darien, Illinois**

**Today is Tuesday, April 30, 2013 and I am with Mr. Elmer Kalny at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Also joining us is Elmer's wife, Diana. Mr. Kalny was born August 22, 1927 in Chicago, Illinois. He has lived in Darien since 1957, and is here to share his memories about this area.**

**Life Before Coming to Darien**

**So when did you first move to this area? Where did you move from and why?**

Elmer: Well, we moved here in June of 1957. We moved from the only house I ever lived in, around 31st and Kostner – what is now “Little City” or “Little Village.” That’s my ex-neighborhood.

We started coming out here in probably 1949 or 1950. My sister and her husband started building a home in what is now Burr Ridge, on County Line Road. Whenever I was able to go on a weekend I’d try to go give them a hand – another hand to hammer nails in. We would go out there because on Sunday you’re going to get hot dogs or hamburgers – they were going to grill out. We were not married yet. We started using this as a Sunday afternoon place to go.

**So you were already grown. You were an adult when you were coming out here.**

Elmer: Yes. We got married in 1950. I don’t know what year we finally moved in – it might have been 1952 or something like that. We thought the area had some merit. You came out here and there was fresh air. The skyline wasn’t full of smoke or anything like that. We started looking at the area – looking around. And we thought it wasn’t that bad. So when we started thinking about a home we thought we’d look around here. And we wound up in Marion Hills. I think we bought our home on Valentine’s Day of 1957, and we moved in the 14th of June – five months later.

**Did you build that house?**

Elmer: No, we moved into an already built house.

**Where was it in Marion Hills?**

Elmer: It was on Janet and Poplar. It was Janet, but not Poplar; it’s Poplar now.

Diana: It was Williams Drive.

**What kind of house was it?**

Elmer: It was two-and-a-half bedroom ranch. And we were also able to get an extra lot next door. So that gave us a lot of property, because my sister and brother-in-law, when they built on

County Line Road, they built on an acre of land. So we saw what kind of garden we could put in – which he did. So we did. We gardened the first couple of years out there. Then we got involved in all the things we got involved with and didn't have time to take care of the garden and everything else.

**So the lot you had, you had a double lot. Was it two-thirds of an acre, or an acre.acre?**

Diana: It was just shy of an acre.

Elmer: We had a lot of trees around there. It was nice. It was a pleasure to come out here where people did have trees.

**It was out in the country at the time.**

Elmer: Right. It was out in the country, and the kids could run around and we didn't have to worry about them.

**So your kids were all born out here?**

Diana: Yes. When we came out here my daughter was starting first grade.

**So your daughter was born in the city.**

Diana: Yes. Both of our children were born in the city, and she was starting first grade. She only had to walk to Marion Hills School.

**Marion Hills was already there.**

Diana: Yes.

**What Marion Hills have for grades at the time? Was it all grades?**

Diana: No, it just up through fourth grade. Then they transferred to Lace. Then Lace was fifth through eighth.

Elmer: There were four rooms at Marion Hills, and four rooms at Lace.

Diana: Then they added on to them.

Elmer: They just kept adding two to four rooms at a time, or whatever.

**So your daughter was five when you moved out here. Your other daughter was younger, I'm assuming:**

Diana: Right. We have a son, so it was my daughter then my son.

**So your daughter was five. How old was your son?**

Diana: About a year-and-a-half.

**Your son was a little young to understand what a move was. But your daughter probably had some friends. How did she feel moving? Was she okay? Was she excited?**

Diana: I think she was excited. She was going to parochial school in the city. And when we moved out here we thought we'd send her to a parochial school, too. And I had called up Notre Dame in Clarendon Hills, but they said we weren't in the parish. They asked where we were going to church, and I said we were going to the Seminary for church.

**At the Marion Hills Seminary.**

Diana: Right. But we weren't in the parish, so if there was a vacancy that they didn't fill, then she could go to Notre Dame. So I asked if my daughter got into Notre Dame, would my son be able to go. They said no, that if you weren't a parishioner it was one at a time. So I thought I didn't want my kids going one and not the other. And we thought Marion Hills School was just down the block and she could walk to school! And we didn't have to pay tuition, besides. They didn't make it easy. As a result, when school started she was enrolled in Marion Hills School.

**Did they have CCD classes?**

Diana: I guess in the homes.

**The religion classes were in the homes then.**

Diana: Yes.

**So Marion Hills, you said, was four rooms.**

Elmer: Yes, four room.

**How many kids were in her class? Do you remember how big it was?**

Diana: Probably 30, but I can't recall. And I was a room mother for Ken, my son, too. But I don't remember. It looked like a full classroom. In the city we had 48 kids in a class!

**So her classroom was smaller than she had in the city.**

Diana: No, I'm talking about when we went to school.

Elmer: When I went to school we had 40 and 48 in a classroom.

**When you moved out here, how did your life compare to what you had in the city? Was the house bigger or smaller?**

Diana: Well, compared to our home in the city, yes. Where we lived was where Elmer was born – he was born in that house in the city; he wasn't born in a hospital, he was born at home.

**Was it a single-family house?**

Elmer: No. It was a two-story.

Diana: We lived on the first floor. His parents had just passed away.

Elmer: It was a nice neighborhood – good Bohemian Polish neighborhood. Everything was there until we got married and had kids and figured now we had to do something. We weren't going to stay around there. So we wound up in beautiful DuPage County.

**So one of the reasons you moved was for the kids.**

Elmer: Well, yes.

Diana: Well, not only that. His older sister built a home. And then his brother purchased the house where his mom passed away. So after a few years they purchased the house and we were renting from them – we were renting all along. But then, when they saw the older sister's beautiful home they got anxious. But they wouldn't sell the house until they knew we were secure. Because they didn't have children of their own. They just would not sell while we were there. So we always had the feeling we were holding them back. So we thought it would be a good time since Karen was going to start first grade, and Grace and Emil already had their home and we enjoyed going out to visit them in the country. It seemed so far at first. But after we got used to traveling it wasn't that far at all.

Elmer: Well he and his wife, every weekend they were out there pounding nails, too. It was a family house going up!

**How did you get back and forth between your old neighborhood and here?**

Elmer: The interesting thing was that when we decided we might be going, we decided we needed more money. So I had to go to work somehow. If you remember the three restaurants – the Chicken Basket, the Woodbine and the Country Kitchen. Well, at the Country Kitchen she hooked on as a waitress.

**I may have seen you there!**

Diana: I was there a long time.

Elmer: Well, several a times a week and on the weekend the Bluebird Bus – this was before the Stevenson came in. The Bluebird Bus came down 66, which was right outside the Chicken Basket door. So she would get a ride to 26th & Ogden and catch a bus. Then I'd have to go at night and drive out there to bring her home if she worked.

Diana: The reason I went that far was feeling that we were holding my sister and brother-in-law back from buying and Elmer felt I should be a stay-at-home mom. He said if I got a job – Western Electric was not too far from our neighborhood; and I thought I could get a job there as a secretary work 6:00-10:00, but he said we would never see each other. Not only that, but he felt, at the time – he felt that I thought he couldn't provide for the family. I said, "No, no, no. We've got two children and we've got to save. If I go to work and we'll save. We're not adding to the income to spend more."

**You were adding to reach your goal.**

Diana: Right. And, as it happened, Elmer's sister and brother knew that we were interested – that I was interested in going to work. And they knew the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ who had the Country Kitchen. They were the Kraml girls from Kraml Dairy. Anyway, they went out there – they went out there quite often to eat. And Antoinette would sit and visit with them. They were just very personable people. And she was telling them how she needed someone: "I need a waitress. I need a waitress. I need help on the weekends." So they came home and said, "We have just the job for you. You only have to work one day a week."

**So that's how you worked it out. Did you work on Saturdays or Sundays?**

Diana: I worked on Sundays.

**Were you at Chicken Basket or Country Kitchen?**

Diana: I was at Country Kitchen. I had never been to the Chicken Basket. They were right next door, but I had never been there. And it was only recently, even now, that we just went there – only a year or two ago. My son and his wife took us there for our anniversary about a year or so ago. I was just true to the Country Kitchen.

So at the time, Angie and Frank Boteen were in Florida. So Antoinette called and said, "I've got the girl for you." So I started on Sundays. And I was nervous.

**Had you ever waitressed before?**

Diana: When I was in high school, one Easter break, at the Kresge's on 63rd & Halstead. I lived in the "Back-of-the-Yards." I waitressed, working behind the counter. I did ice cream sandwiches, where you put the ice cream between the waffles. And there were long lines. That was the extent.

Once I worked in the dining room, and I like to tell this story. It was Easter and I was in the dining room – they had a dining room in the basement; they had asked me to work in the dining room that time. I had never worked the dining room. I was always at the counter.

**This was at Kresge's?**

Diana: This was at the KresgeKresge's at 63rd & Halstead. These two fellows came in. It was Good Friday, and they were ordering a hamburger. And I asked, "A hamburger? You're having meat? Today is Good Friday!"

**You just assumed they were Catholic.**

Diana: I just assumed. And I said "You don't eat meat on Good Friday." I don't remember what they ordered, then. But they did not order meat! And I got the biggest tip I ever got. And I had thought I was out of a job. But I was only working the Easter break, anyway. That was the extent of my work as a waitress.

**So you were working at the Country Kitchen before you moved. Did you continue to work there after you moved out here?**

Diana: Oh, yeah.

Elmer: Oh, yeah. How many years?

Diana: I worked there sixteen or seventeen years.

**So you reached your goal and continued.**

Diana: I worked there a year, a year-and-a-half or something, before we bought our house. It wasn't far. \_\_\_\_\_ and Grace were just down the street.

**Did you drive?**

Diana: No, I didn't drive until after we were out here. Elmer would take me. Then we learned about the Blue Bird bus coming up 66. Then he'd take me to the bus, I'd take the bus and he would pick me up at night. And my sister and brother-in-law watched the children while he came to get me. And it was all day – it was just understood.

**Changes over the Years**

**You said the Stevenson wasn't out here yet. What changes have you seen in the roads? What was not there now that we all take advantage of now, besides the Stevenson?**

Diana: Well, there was the airport across from the Country Kitchen. Now that's all Willowbrook and factory or office buildings.

**It was a small airport at the time?**

Diana: Yes, Ferris Airport. And they just have a building on the corner, across from ...

Elmer: There was \_\_\_\_\_ horse farm – a Cadillac dealer in Chicago.

**Where was that?**

Elmer: It was right next door to the airport, wasn't it?

Diana: Yes. I think it was east of the airport.

Elmer: He had his race horses there.

**So it was a very different landscape than we see now.**

Elmer: Yes.

**And you moved into your new house, and you went from a two-family house to a one-family house. What was that like?**

Diana: It was fantastic! I couldn't believe it.

**What did you like best about that?**

Diana: The fresh air. Being a city girl I didn't have a garden or anything, and then we had a garden. We had a lot of trees. That was one of the things we liked about the property. Then the trees got so huge it is all shade, so we couldn't have a garden anymore because it was too shady.

**How did your friends in the city react when you moved out?**

Elmer: "You're moving way out in the country! How did you ever find that place?" Things like that. And most of them are out here now!

**So they came out to visit you when you were out here, occasionally.**

Elmer: Yes. People came out. She had an uncle who just couldn't believe it when he came out here. He saw we had an extra lot, the garden we had, the fruit trees and trees.

Diana: He was from Poland and lived in the city.

Elmer: Every time he came out here he just couldn't believe it. And her father was the same way. "I'm going to move out here with you. We're going to put an addition on the house!"

**Where were you working at the time?**

Elmer: At the time I was working at Hotpoint. We were in Cicero, yet. I worked in the parts department which was a unit by itself; it was like it's own company broken off from the manufacturing end of the appliances.

**So you had to drive back and forth to Cicero.**



Elmer: I think it was fifteen miles or ten miles at that time. Then, as a parts department, we moved to Damen and Jackson.

**You moved further away.**

Elmer: Yes. That was after we were here already. We came out here in 1957, and I think we moved to Damen and Jackson in 1961.

**What route did you take to get to work since the Stevenson wasn't here?**

Elmer: I would take Plainfield to Ogden. When we were on Damen and Jackson I'd go down to Oakley Boulevard – just past Western. Then I'd drive up to Jackson. And going home was the same route, except if it was winter and snowing, then you had to change. But it took a long time, sometime.

**It was a long drive without the expressway.**

Elmer: It was a long drive. I would never have taken the expressway anyway. But my brother-in-law, when they moved out here – he worked at Steel Sales, which was at 33rd and the tracks in the city. When he was driving he had no trouble at all. He'd go in early and come home early. He liked the Stevenson. But me, I couldn't take it because of the traffic was building up, like it is now, in the morning. Then we closed the plant and I had to find different jobs. But it was all relative. You get used to driving.

**So the plant closed up at Damen and Jackson? Where did you go to work then?**

Elmer: I dabbled in real estate for a couple of years. And I wound up at Amphenol in Broadview. We closed that plant down. That was a parts plant. That wasn't bad – it only took me a half-hour to get there and a half-hour to get home. That was all right. Then I wound up at U.S. Tobacco, where they make snuff. And that was in Franklin Park. Now they're shutting down!

**Now when you moved out here, you had family out here and you were going back and forth to work during the week. And you, Diana, were going on Sunday to waitress. What did you do when you had some free time? What did you do for entertainment?**

Diana: We got involved with the kids going to school. I was a room mother. My daughter started with the first Girl Scout – Brownie – troop in the area.

**Who started the troop?**

Diana: Our troop was the very first Brownie troop – Troop 17.

**Were you one of the leaders of the troop?**

Diana: I was an assistant leader – co-leader. So we were active with the Brownies, and being a room mother and with the PTA. We were involved with the PTA. And I belonged to the Pioneers. Did your mother work there?

**My mother didn't work there, but I have many relatives who did.**

Diana: It was a women's club.

**The telephone pioneers.**

Elmer: Not the telephone pioneers.

**The Darien Pioneers.**

Diana: It wasn't the telephone pioneers; that was Western Electric. This was just a women's club. It was just social.

**What did you do, Elmer?**

Elmer: Probably what I didn't do; I was never home! Sometimes I'd have five meetings a week. When we first moved out here, someone talked me into going to a civic organization meeting at the Marion Hills School. So I went, and lo and behold I came home and said I was the president of the group!

Diana: We were questioning something in the area – why is this allowed; why is that allowed.

**This was back in 1957?**

Diana: It was 1958 or 1959 – we were here a couple of years.

**So you asked a question and became president!**

Elmer: And then we found out all the things that were wrong with living out here! No zoning laws – DuPage County had no zoning laws until June of 1957. That's when they published their first zoning book. The southeast section of DuPage County, they didn't care about anybody south of 55th Street. You had to fight for everything you got. You found out the roads were bad, people burned garbage – things like that. Septic systems instead of sewers systems – no one knew what to do with a septic system. Private wells that ran out of water and wondering where to get money to dig a new well. Things like that. But wow! We lived in beautiful DuPage County, now!

The first thing we found out when we moved into the house – working for Hotpoint I had a Hotpoint automatic washer. So the first week I was at work and she called me up to say the fuses kept blowing. I wondered what was going on and came home to look at it. Well, the well was on a 115 line and needed a 230 line. It was plugged into the ceiling light, which was too much power. And every time the washer went into its spin cycle it needed an extra jolt. And as soon as there was a jolt of the washing machine and the well, the fuse blows. She went through a

box of fuses right then! Luckily some guy told me at work to call Edison. At that time Edison was for the people. They came out and measured up and said a new box would cost so much and they would put it in. Edison had crews that did that. So we got that fixed.

Then out next big issue was the septic system. No one knew how to take care of a septic system. And that's one thing we learned when my brother-in-law and sister moved out here – putting in a septic system. He did it himself and it was a lot of work.

We met one good family – do you remember Emil Balducci? He was the guy who cleaned the systems up. He used what was called the “honey-dipper.” That's how we formed the sanitary district. We worked with the County and got them to contract somebody to see what it would cost to put sewers in. And we worked through that. People agreed it was okay, and that's how things happened out here.

### **And that was the late 1950's.**

Elmer: It was in the 1960's – before Darien.

### **This was all a result of the civic organization?**

Elmer: I was president at the time and we started talking about it. People had problems. You'd go past houses and you'd see water sitting on top of the lawn. It was unhealthy. And the County wouldn't do anything for you. They said they could “red-tag” it. But we figured that wouldn't do anything for the people in the house. So we put the County in the sewer business. And that's why you get a sewer and water bill combined.

### **So in the early 1960's is when the sewer system came in.**

Elmer: I think it was 1967 when the sewer system was all in. It took a couple of years for them to put it in.

Diana: But you had to go door-to-door.

Elmer: It was a lot of campaigning. We had to form the district, and the County left it up to us to get somebody to do it.

Diana: Elmer and Gene \_\_\_\_\_ and George \_\_\_\_\_ went house-to-house in the Marion Hills section. Elmer contacted Clarefield for that homeowners group about whether they were interested in sewers and stuff because we were going to work on our neighborhood because of the need with more building coming on. The ground can't hold all that. So they went house-to-house and we had an election. It's in the Darien book.

### **So the homeowners' association started working together more to make some of these improvements to the properties, to get the attention that was needed.**

Elmer: We had some action. But we had a supervisor on the County Board who, at one time told me – I used to go every second Saturday to meet this supervisor to tell him what our

problems were and ask what they were going to do for us. Finally, one day he told me, “Elmer, when those people start voting Republican you’ll see you’ll get a lot done.” I never forgot that!

Diana: He said all the Democrats were moving out here and voting Democrat, so why should they provide us with anything – we were going to vote them out of office.

### **So you had a lesson in politicking!**

Elmer: The streets – everybody thought because we were in the township they should be able to do something for us. They said they could do something for us – we should go neighbor to neighbor and collect a nickel or ten cents a foot if you have an empty lot across the street, and they would put some tar and chip down for us. That was what we got from the township and the County – every June.

Diana: The roads were all gravel then. Plainfield Road was gravel. Route 83 was only two lanes. 75th Street was a gravel road, cross streets were all gravel. And in the summer we had oil put down. But if you paid a little extra they’d put down a layer of real fine gravel so the oil wouldn’t splash up on your car so much and you wouldn’t track into your house.

Elmer: You’d go out to buy five gallons of fuel oil to get the tar off your car.

### **When did roads like Plainfield and 75th – when did they first get paved?**

Elmer: That would be in the late 1960’s, I’d say.

### **I think in the mid-1960’s, because I know by 1968 they were paved.**

Elmer: Actually, from County Line Road up west it was all gravel. Once you ended up at County Line you knew you were in DuPage.

But Clarendon Hills Road was another one that was in bad shape. They would put big rocks. We had a grocery store on what was Route 66 and Clarendon Hills Road – Irene’s – that’s where we had to go to our groceries, or go to LaGrange. I don’t know how many sets of tires I burned up going on those rocks.

Diana: We used to do our grocery shopping in LaGrange.

Elmer: We banked in LaGrange. That was some of the bad part about moving out here.

### **You really were pioneers!**

Elmer: Oh, yeah. I think when we moved out here in Marion Hills, it was subdivided already. I don’t know when they did that, but there were six hundred and some lots, but we had two hundred homes, only. At that time, if you recall that period of time, there was an outfit called Ace Builders. That’s where you see all these Cape Cods in Marion Hills. They built a shell for you, and once that shell was up you came out and finished it. But, DuPage didn’t have any zoning laws...

### **They were finished differently!**

Elmer: We had one home in the area that put cardboard boxes up for walls! The house finally burned down. But that was why – no zoning laws! Then, like I say, June of 1957 is when they came out, but now they had nobody to enforce them!

One thing we got cleared up a little bit was the garbage burning. I think we did that by our own insistence from the civic organization that you had to stop burning garbage. I would say so. We'd have meetings and bring it up at every meeting.

### **How did garbage get disposed of, then?**

Elmer: We had a garbage company – \_\_\_\_\_ Garbage; Johnny \_\_\_\_\_. And he had the whole area under his wing. He was good. He was punctual – whatever your day was, he was there. But he was a one-truck operation. The guy worked like a slave. That's how we got rid of the garbage.

**So for shopping you went to LaGrange, for banking you went to LaGrange, you got the garbage burning taken care of by getting \_\_\_\_\_ to pick up the garbage. Did you go out as a family, like to a movie? Where would you go?**

Elmer: Well, we had the Tivoli in LaGrange. There are six now. That's where we would go.

**Did you ever go to the toboggan slides? When your kids got older did they go to the raceway?**

Elmer: No. We didn't do much of that. We took one vacation a year and they'd go: "When are we going to get there?"

**Where did you go on vacation?**

Elmer: We went to the World's Fair in New York. We went to the Expo in Montreal. We've been to Washington D.C. with the kids twice.

Diana: We went to Mammoth Caves in Kentucky.

Elmer: She had a sister who lived in Evansville, Indiana, and we'd go to Santa Claus Land in Indiana.

Diana: The Dells in Wisconsin. It was just family vacations.

Elmer: We'd try to go someplace for at least a couple of days.

**Well, this area really grew – exploded – in the 1960's and 70's. What do you remember of changes you saw in the area? Do you remember Argonne becoming more prominent or expanded? Or the shopping centers like Oak Brook and Yorktown?**

Elmer: The shopping centers really took off. And all the car dealerships, and all the restaurants and gas stations along Route 83. Just the general build up. It was growing too fast.

**How did that growth affect the way you were living?**

Elmer: I don't know.

Diana: We had our gardens, and on Sundays we were just gardening. And canning -- we did a lot of canning. I was a Catholic city girl and we learned how to do canning. And we just canned everything we grew. We froze some things, but we did mostly canning.

Elmer: For me it was a lot of meeting nights.

Diana: Elmer was working on the civic organization.

Elmer: It was "What are we working on now?" We worked on the library.

Diana: That was later.

Elmer: Yes, it was. And we worked on the high school.

Diana: And we got the parade and the Little League. All this was started through the Marion Hills Civic Organization.

Elmer: The Lace Youth Club, which is the Darien Youth Club -- we started that.

**When did that start?**

Elmer: 1961, I'd say. And then we built the ball field where the high school is now.

Diana: We cleared the whole thing. We got permission from the high school district office. Everybody went to Hinsdale Central at that time.

**So the high school owned the property for the future ...**

Diana: But it was just vacant land.

Elmer: They didn't start building until 1964 or something like that.

Diana: And when the Youth Club was formed, and that Youth Club was formed so the kids would get -- the Marion Hills School had to go to Lace School, but they didn't know each other until after they went there. So they were like outsiders. So that's why they formed the Lace-Darien Youth Club, and it was strictly for District 61 so that the children and the parents would get to know each other.

### **Was it boys and girls?**

Diana: It was just boys. But after a while they had cheerleaders. But it was primarily through sports – good things happen. And you got to know each other and learned where you lived – this and that. And the sports teams were involved with kids from different areas who were on the team. It wasn't like kids from Marion Hills weren't with the kids who went to Lace. It was interactive. Then, as a result, when the kids went to Lace they already knew each other. They didn't go in as strangers.

Elmer: One other thing that changed, I would say, was access to hospitals and doctors around here. When we were in the city we asked who knew a good doctor. When we moved out here there were a lot of people recommending doctors. I would say that would be a plus – moving out here with Hinsdale Hospital.

Diana: My doctor even came to the house! They don't do that anymore.

### **House calls.**

Diana: When our children were ill on a Saturday, one time, he came to the house and prescribed a prescription. He called it in to the pharmacist in Clarendon Hills at home and gave him the prescription and it was delivered it to the house!

### **So you got your medical care – you switched your doctors to people out here when you moved out here.**

Diana: Well, we weren't really seeing any one in particular.

Elmer: We weren't that sick back then!

### **So you got some sports organizations started for the kids. You got involved in the civic organization. It sounded like you were very involved in your new home. As we got into the late 1960's, early 1970's, we got involved in Darien being incorporated. And you were involved in that as well.**

Elmer: Well, not as much until it got incorporated. And once it was incorporated, then I ran for city clerk. And I was involved with that for a year-and-a-half or so.

### **So you were our first city clerk.**

Elmer: Right. And we had to get things going. Being the first city clerk, we had to get ordinances to run the city. And we had to swear in the aldermen, run the next election. It was a lot of work. A lot of work. But I'd say it's paying off.

Diana: But before that he got his experience being on the school board.

### **You were on the school board for Lace School?**

Elmer: 1961. Yes.

Diana: And that involved a lot of time.

Elmer: We were always building – adding rooms on or a new school. But I was six years on the board and I don't think we went a year without doing something.

**What encouraged you to get so involved in local politics, in the schools and all that?**

Elmer: I don't know what encouraged me. I think a lot of it was people saying, "Why don't you run for this?" I'd come home and run it past her. Then when I got on I'd come home 1:30, 2:00 in the morning. I'd open the door and the first thing I'd see here was, "Dad, the dog's got to go out." And it was ten below or ten inches of snow on the ground. That's when I'd wonder why I got involved in it! But when you see results it's all right. It took us so long to get incorporated. I didn't have anything to do with the final incorporation. But from 1958 to 1969 we were doing other avenues – trying to get incorporated or annexed. We were in court I don't know how many times, and it would fail.

You said you talked to Sam Kelly. He's like those tentacles that hang on: "We're going to work on this until we get something going." And he never stopped.

Diana: He was on the public works committee. He started the sidewalks because the kids used to have to walk down Plainfield Road to go to Marion Hills School. And from Clarefield, west of Clarendon Hills Road and past Schmidt's Farm – those kids had to walk either down Clarendon Hills Road or down Plainfield Road. And the traffic was getting heavier because more and more building was going on – more and more traffic. And with the city, being on public works, Sam was very involved in making sure we had safety sidewalks. That was an important thing.

**So Darien incorporated and the city continued to grow, and it probably looks a lot more like where you came from before you moved here!**

Diana: Except we had big lots. They had only 25 foot lots. You could put five homes on our property!

**So what are your thoughts on the changes you've seen over the years – are they good?**

Elmer: I think that they are very good. Once we got rid of bad septic systems and the well system – the city put in the water system. All that improved the health and welfare of the area and the value of the properties.

And getting around. There's no problem getting around anywhere you want to go with the expressways now.

And the school – the high school – that, too, was a boon to the area.

**What do you miss with all the changes that have taken place?**



Elmer: What do we miss?

**What do you miss?**

Elmer: I don't miss anything!

**You like everything that's happened. What changes are you most grateful for?**

Diana: I'd say the sewer and water.

Elmer: The sewer and water helped the value of your property, and the value of living. Because people didn't take care of their septic systems.

Diana: And the thing we were getting a lot of before we got incorporated were gas stations. And we didn't have a say because in DuPage County they didn't care what was happening over here. We went to Willowbrook and they didn't want to annex us, but they wouldn't let us incorporate because they wanted vacant property.

And we were talking about, too, when I55 went in there used to be the Bulko station on Routes 66 and 83. And they had to move and they wanted the property on Plainfield Road and Route 83. And with the civic organization, Elmer was fighting it and the board was fighting it. But they put it in anyway. What they did – they went to Willowbrook and Willowbrook annexed them. \_\_\_\_\_. And once the gas station went in, it set a precedent – all corners could get a gas station. So they all wanted them.

Well, the civic organization wanted to fight that so they went to Willowbrook and they annexed the whole block because nobody could vote against them. They just took all vacant property and annexed everything.

I don't know how the City negotiated, now, that the Wendy's is in Darien – when it was no longer Bulko it became a Wendy's. How that was negotiated I don't know, but we're happy about it because it kind of squares it off. But that block is still Willowbrook.

And Willowbrook came up 75th Street and annexed all the vacant property because there was nobody to vote against it. They just annexed everything – the hotels, motels, car dealerships. Then they came up 75th Street and they wanted to get to Schmidt's Farm. So the apartment buildings right behind the athletic field of the high school, they annexed the apartment buildings. That's Willowbrook. Fortunately they never got to Schmidt's Farm.

We wondered why they wouldn't annex us. Well, our population was too great. Willowbrook was originally started with two blocks or something. That was the original Willowbrook. I criticize it because they were working against us and just taking care of their own by annexing all this property. To me it was always like an octopus – all the tentacles going every which way. But we had too much population and they didn't like that.

Elmer: I'd say one of the best things that happened to Darien, too, was the Lions Club. I don't belong to the Lions, but they have one of the most efficient Lions Clubs in the State of Illinois, and probably in a lot of states. They are really a help to the people who need it.

I always say this – the apartment buildings they built are the future slums of America. That's my opinion. Now we have those by the church that supposedly turned into condo's. But I don't know. And those by the library and the fire house.

Diana: That was another good thing – the fire department. It was a volunteer fire department.

Elmer: Another thing we miss. I don't miss it, but something you always looked forward to in the summertime was the brush fires. We called them prairie fires. Sunday afternoons, Saturday afternoons in the summers – all you heard was the sirens going. Those poor guys. They'd have to go all the way to Tri-State and come back here to fight a fire over here. But we had no fire station here.

Diana: So that was a great thing.

Elmer: Sunday afternoon you could be sitting out in the driveway sipping beer and think: "There they go again."

### **And it was all volunteers.**

Diana: It was all volunteer firemen at the time. Then your fire insurance – your home insurance – goes up because it was all volunteer. So it was great when we became a fire district, and especially when they built the fire station.

Elmer: That is something good thing to miss!

Diana: When the fire station was on Plainfield Road you called to let your insurance know you had a fire station – it made a difference on your insurance. And then, when we got the water and we had a fire plug right across the street from us that made it even better. Besides the fire department being here, now there's a fire hydrant close by. So that made an impact on your home and brought up the safety of it.

So there were a lot of good things.

### **Is there anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to add before we finish?**

Elmer: Well, I hope things keep going. I always say they have to make enough revenue to run the city. If they do it right they will.

Diana: Do you know why we're a city and not a village?

### **It has to do with the government structure?**

Diana: If we just wanted to incorporate as a village you needed permission of your surrounding villages. And if they didn't give permission you could not incorporate. And Willowbrook would never give us permission. And the community wanted them to take us, but even if they totally surrounded us they didn't want to have us – they just wanted to dictate the property.

As a city there were certain dimensions and a certain population you had to have, and then you didn't need anybody's permission. And then you were represented by wards. So each ward has a representative. In a village your neighbors could be neighbors and they could dictate the whole thing – in a village.

I think we're better off being a city because we have representation by our aldermen – we have aldermen for the wards. And if you have a complaint, that's up to them – if they want to get reelected, if they're doing a good job.

And I'm very happy that it's neither Democrat or Republican. I don't know what my friends are. We never talk about their political leanings. And so far – and I hope it continues that way – I hope it never becomes Democrats and Republicans. I hope it always stays independent.

Elmer: Another thing is the historical society. I wish more people would support that because I think they do a good job. There are not enough people supporting it.

Diana: Elmer was secretary of the school board at the time before computers. So one of the jobs was the election. It was separate school board elections. School board elections were not held in conjunction with a main election. It was a separate election. And one of his duties was to oversee all the polling places and see that everybody for the various

\_\_\_\_\_.

One thing – I'm just very proud of what we've accomplished as a community. I'm very proud of that. And the friends we've made in the process. And they've all continued to stay active.

Elmer: That's true – all the friends we've made.

Diana: The Colley's and the Kelly's; many of the others we see are still active – maybe not necessarily in the city, but within the organizations like the Lions Club or with the schools. They're all still involved. And we've just been very proud of what has been accomplished in this time.

Elmer: We were in the PTA, and one time we were going to have a fundraiser. We were going to have a spaghetti dinner. And we wondered who was going to make all the spaghetti! So Emil Balducci said, "Let's go to Home Run Inn." They weren't out here yet – they were still in the city. Well, that's my old neighborhood. I only lived two blocks from it. I said, "Let's go try it." So one time we bought a five-gallon pot and had a spaghetti dinner at Emil's house.

We thought, "This isn't bad! It would pass. We could say we made it!" So that's what we did.

Diana: We were active in raising money because the school didn't have a library. So these spaghetti dinners and ham dinners – it was fundraisers to get books to make a library in the school. So we had these dinners through the PTA. We had spaghetti dinners and ham dinners, and various dinners in the multi-purpose room. And we always had a pretty good turnout. We did well.

Elmer: I'll never forget the times with our Little League. With the Little League you always had a banquet – a chicken dinner at Corky's in Oak Park. So two years in a row we had Mike Ditka come and talk to the kids. And Mike didn't charge us a penny.

Diana: You know the bowling alley on Plainfield Road?

Right. That used to be his. It used to say “Ditka’s Bowl.”

Elmer: And then I think the following year we had a guy named Bob Wills. He played for the Cubs one or two years. He charged us \$50 – the bum!

**Spoken like a true South Sider! Anything else before we wrap it up?**

Elmer: No. Thank you for the interview!

**Thank you for sharing your memories, and also for all your contributions to this community. As a resident of this community, I really appreciate it. And I’ve benefited from a lot of your work. So thank you so much.**