

**Darien, Illinois
Oral History Project**

An Interview With

Bobbie Norris

**conducted by Deb Barrett
October 29, 2014**

**Indian Prairie Public Library
Darien, Illinois**

Today is Wednesday, October 29, 2014, and I am with Mrs. Bobbie Norris at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Ms. Norris was born in 1953 in Anaheim, California. She has lived in Darien since 1956, and is here to share her memories about this area.

Coming to Darien

So, Bobbie, when did your family move to this area? Where were they coming from and why did they move?

My mother was born and raised in Chicago – Frances Reiter. And she met my father while horseback riding, ... in Morton Grove. He was a stable hired-hand and taught horseback riding. And they met. He was a country boy and she was a city girl. They ended up marrying [in 1939] and moving to Bensenville, building their own home. And after that my brother was born. Actually, my sister was a World War II baby, so she lived in Chicago with my mom [in 1943].

But my brother and sister and parents moved out to California to find better job opportunities. So in 1951 they moved out there. And when they got to California, I was born in 1953, they realized that work was not available for my dad in construction. So they moved back to the Chicago area, to this farmhouse in Darien [in 1956].

Why did they choose this area? Do you know?

My dad chose unincorporated Darien because of the Route 83 and I55 connection, and the easy access to Chicago where he could do construction [work]. The types of jobs he needed to find were there in Chicago and he was able to make a good income for the family.

Was he in home construction or business construction?

He was mainly [both] home [and commercial] construction. And then he went to superintendent of construction. Later on he worked at Cabrini Green and helped build that on the inside. He built a couple of riding stables, actually. One was in California and one was in Chicago. He did a lot of different type of construction jobs. He did water sewage treatment plants in Milwaukee. So when I was a little girl he went out to Milwaukee all week and came back on the weekend. I found a ... cat and brought it in the house while he was gone. He came home and

said, “Okay, you’re my little daughter. You can have the cat. You can have anything you want.”

So, basically, this gave your family a way to live in what was considered out in the country.

Yes. [My dad was from Texas, then Naperville/Aurora area.] It was totally farm country. Hinsbrook didn’t exist. Darien didn’t exist. There were horses, cows. Burr Ridge wasn’t there, Willowbrook [?].

What was the area called?

We were Marion Hills. Some of my old letters are actually addressed to Marion Hills, [IL]. Some are addressed to Clarendon Hills, Illinois; Westmont. So I had all these different addresses, living in the same home, just two blocks west of Route 83 and one block north of Plainfield. That’s how we told people to get to our house.

So your parents were looking for that more relaxed kind of environment for a home.

Yes. My dad knew how to renovate and build. He fixed the farmhouse up. He changed it – it was changed quite a bit, so it wasn’t an original historic 1865 building anymore. It was very modern and comfortable. He changed the walls and ceilings – anything that needed improvement, he knew how to do that. A cement porch on the front. It was very nice. [Made the stairs wider.]

Did your mom work outside the home, or did she stay home with the kids?

My mom stayed home most of the time. She joined the Pioneer Women’s Club [that met in Marion Hills School].... That was a group of women who got together and, just like any women’s club, did their little carnivals for the kids, potluck suppers. It was really nice.

Then she worked part-time a couple of places. But the one that stands out was Dispensa’s Castle of Toys; Dispensa’s Kiddie Kingdom, which was up in OakBrook at Route 83 and Roosevelt Road. The Dispensa’s owned that toy store, so when she worked there at Christmas she brought home lots of toys!

That was nice! Do you remember anything about the move from California to here?

The only memory I have from California, [was that ... Disneyland was built], which I don't remember, but I was living right there [in Anaheim, California]. My mom drove a car with a trailer on the back and my dad drove a truck. So they were separate. I was in the car with my mom. And I believe my sister was about 13 at the time. She was probably taking care of me most of the time. I had to be potty trained on the way home. I was a little under three years old, but I was getting potty trained as we were driving from California to Illinois.

My mom was not too thrilled with our home when my dad rented it –... the [old] farmhouse in Illinois. She really didn't want to be there. It was a very mysterious farmhouse. It had snakes in the front yard – garter snakes.

There was a woman living there who lived on the third floor. We rented the first floor and second floor. And she was very mysterious old woman who had rented [out] this house many times. And she really was ornery. Her name was Mrs. Agnes Benoodt; Agnes Benoodt. When my dad bought the house she didn't want to leave. We had a hard time getting her to leave. So that was a little old history [of 6944 State Place].

And you said your mom and dad drove here from California on Route 66.

Yes. And I have no memory of it. This is one of my bucket list items, to drive back on Route 66 to where we came from. I still have relatives out there – my dad's sister's family out there. They were in Yucca Valley, but I'm [not] sure where they are now [in the L.A. area].

So you came out to Illinois. Your parents found this old farmhouse and you were renting it at first.

We were renting, and I have a rental slip for how much they paid, but I don't have it with me. My mom didn't want to stay there, but she ended up staying there 23 years after my dad fixed it up.

Where did you stay while your dad was fixing it up?

We were right in the house. There was always some kind of construction going on!

Describe the house. What did it look like?

It was just a very basic farmhouse – like a block.

Like a square or cube?

Yes, maybe even Victorian [style], although I don't know that you'd even call it that. It had a side, a smaller building, on the side of the house. They said it was a summer kitchen for the big part of the house -- you would cook in the smaller summer kitchen to keep the heat out of the main building. It has a foundation of stones they said were gathered from the stones in the field, which made the foundation of the house. And it has oak beams in the basement – hand-hewn oak beams.

And the home included: A hundred [fifty] years ago before we had it, it had 160 acres that went with the home. There was an apple orchard to the south. There was a chicken coop to the north. As kids we played in the little foundation of the chicken coop because we didn't have chickens. We put water in there and used it as a swimming pool!

We had a lot of really nice neighbors. [The Strohscheins, Gatz, Strohfeldts, Day] had three boys,.... And the Anderson family was in the back. We had no fences – the kids ran all over the place. We had a great time. The Anderson family had 5 kids they raised out there. And the Frickers are still here. They had a couple of kids. And Mrs. Radovic, a grandma-lady who was to the south of us. And she was in the house with the apple orchard.

My dad owned our house and two properties which he sold to a builder. And the builder built [on] one of the [properties] just [North] [on Logan.

So, a lot of changes.

My dad had the opportunity [to buy] along Route 83 – the Burger King property. He didn't do it. He didn't buy it. It was very affordable. It wasn't even Willowbrook; it was unincorporated. But then Willowbrook got a hold of all the good properties in the area.

So you were three years old when you moved. Your brother and sisters – where did they go to school?

My sister, she was 13, she right away went to Marion Hills School in eighth grade. They had first up to eighth, and that was one of the only schools right there.

Mr. Nothacker was her teacher. She graduated from there and went to Hinsdale Central – South wasn't built until 1965.

And Hinsdale Central was called just Hinsdale High School at the time.

Yes, she went there. And my brother, he was only three years [older] than me so he went to Marion Hills School and Lace School for grade school – we went to both, because we were in the baby-boomer generation

So Lace School, the building that's there now for Lace School, I understand was smaller at the time.

Yes.

But what happened with Marion Hills while you were there? Your sister had been through eighth grade. And when you went what grades was it?

When I went to Marion Hills School it was only up to third grade; I don't think it was even fourth. It only went to third grade. And I went to Lace School for fourth grade through eighth. But fifth grade, they didn't have enough room at Lace. I can't remember when the addition came on, but the addition was sixth, seventh and eighth. That was the addition they put on to Lace. But in ... [1964] we had our classroom in the Darien Museum.

And that was the old Lace School house.

Yes. So I had a class in fifth grade in that old Lace School. It was wonderful. We got to walk through the snow every lunch time. We got to walk over to Lace to eat in the cafeteria. I liked that – that was fun. [Mrs. Douglas was our teacher.]

And you brought your lunch to school?

We did. Yes, we brought it in a brown paper bag or a cute little lunch pail later on. Those were fun. I don't think the kids use them anymore too much.

Did your teachers stick around? It seems like the old teachers stayed for a long time. Mr. Nothacker, who became the principal at Lace School and then Eisenhower.

He went from a teacher at Marion Hills, my sister's teacher back in 1956-1957, he went from teacher to principal and then superintendent. And now there's a road named after him.

A little stretch of road! So what do you remember about Marion Hills School when you went? How many kids were in your class?

My classes were pretty small, actually [25-30 kids, at most.]. What I remember is my house was only two blocks north of Marion Hills School. There was no kindergarten – only first grade. We came out the door and walked to school. I believe the crosswalk man was Charlie [Smith], and he owned the farm that turned into Hinsbrook. He owned that. But he was a crosswalk man.

And we loved him. He crossed us over Plainfield to the school. But sometimes I'd take the shortcut just from the field straight from my farmhouse to the school, and bypass the crosswalk man – because we were country kids. We didn't care. We'd just run across the road.

There was not a lot of traffic.

There weren't too many cars.

I had awesome teachers at Marion Hills. Mrs. [Homme] was first grade. I had 25 kids in my class or something like that.

But second grade we had Mrs. [Souerbry]. She was not really that old, but we thought she was a grandma instead of a teacher! She was probably 60, ... maybe my age – 65; 70 at the most. She was the best teacher. We'd do the Mexican Hat Dance in school – she'd let us do that. And one of my classmates ended up becoming a missionary to Mexico [City]. So I tie that together with second grade and learning the Mexican Hat Dance. We just had a lot of fun, and she was a great teacher. She was ... a nice grandma-type teacher.

Third grade was Mrs. Radavic. Mrs. Featherstone was fourth grade. She actually, that was at Lace School; she was a seamstress and if you wanted to she would sew something for you if you wanted a costume or [clothing]. So she was a special teacher, too.

Mrs. Douglas was my fifth grade teacher in the old Lace School. That was just [the best time]. We had our little bathrooms in the old school building and it was just a lot of fun. It was very private and special. And we'd play outside right outside the school building, and I ended up getting a, well, I guess they didn't clean the grounds like they do now because there was glass and weeds and I fell and got cut. So my mom came and I'm in the bathroom bleeding from the cut, and Mr. Nothacker was right there. He was right there and they wrapped me up and took me to wherever they took you to at that time – there were no emergency rooms, just the doctor to get my hand that I cut looked at. That was my big memory of fifth grade. [I still have a scar on my wrist.]

Sixth grade was tricky because it was junior high. But, actually at that time they didn't consider it junior high. Sixth grade was a transitioning. But seventh and eighth were separate. Sixth grade you still weren't quite [so] special yet. Mrs. Lot was the teacher.

Seventh grade – I don't remember this teacher so well, Mrs. Spanheimer; [really pretty]. But seventh and eighth grade were tough. You're really insecure. You don't like people and you don't think people like you.

My classes were basically pretty small. There were mostly 20 to 25. I'm calling them small. My husband went to school in the Chicago public schools and there were a lot more kids.

So besides the Mexican Hat Dance and cutting your hand do you have any other memories from school that were special?

Field trips were great. We went to the Brookfield Zoo. We always had a lot of really wonderful field trips into Chicago. The Field Museum, the Museum of Science and Industry ... Lincoln Park Zoo.

We had great field trips. We had moms who would come with and chaperone.

How did you get on the field trips?

Oh, the bus. We'd go on the big school bus. And usually Mrs. Hawkins was usually the driver. She was great. She'd yell at us, but you knew she'd care for you. She could yell as much as she wanted, but you knew she was just a wonderful person. [She kept us in control and safe.]

So how did you get to Lace School? You walked to Marion Hills, but how did you get to Lace School?

When I went to Lace I did ride the bus. I'm trying to remember where I picked it up at. I think it was High Road. We had to walk through the backyard to High Road.

Right by Marion Hills?

I think it was like Holly and [High Road]. And that's where they picked up my daughters, from the same location. When they went to Eisenhower they picked them up right there.

So history repeated it pretty much with my three daughters – they went to Marion Hills, they never went to Lace. They went to Marion Hills up through sixth grade and then they went to Eisenhower for 7th and 8th.

So you went to Marion Hills and Lace School. What was it like after school? What did you do for fun?

I have a really clear memory of going to Lace School and waiting for the bus – this isn't an answer to your question. I remember the day President Kennedy died and we were standing out in front of Lace School waiting for the bus.

What grade were you in?

It was November, 1963, so I was 10. I'm thinking it was fourth grade. It was just a shock and everybody was crying. That's just my real strong memory of Lace School – standing out in front and waiting for the bus and getting this news. [The flag was always flying there.]

How did you get the news? Who did you hear it from?

I think it was just word of mouth – it just spread through the group that was standing there. Probably one of the teachers had told us.

But also my mom used to pick me up after school. I didn't spend a lot of time after school in activities at Lace, because I was in baton twirling and my mom would drive me all the way to Lombard.

So you had lessons in baton twirling.

Yes. I went to Lombard for lessons [with Mrs. Carole Kelby].

Also, when I went home after school – I didn't stay for anything after school at Lace; I wasn't involved in anything they had going. They didn't have much athletics for girls anyway. But I would go home and I had a pony. My dad had bought me a pony when I was nine, so that's all I wanted to do.

Did you keep the pony on your property?

The pony was right in our backyard, which isn't huge. Our total acreage is less than an acre with the farmhouse. So he was in the backyard. And it wasn't even a barn – it was more like a shed – but he fit in there. He was a small horse, or a big pony [14 hands high.]. So I'd just go home and brush him and ride him

around the neighborhood. I knew I had something the other kids didn't have, and I was a little bit of a brat riding around the Marion Hills neighborhood.

But my dad, being the horseman that he was [from Texas], he taught horseback riding. He decided he didn't want to get in to any lawsuits, so he didn't let too many people ride the pony.

Did your brother and sister ride?

No, my brother and sister didn't do much [riding]with the little horse. [We had several horses and ponies before Peanuts.]

The neighbors had ponies. They had Shetland ponies, right across the street. We would tie our pony out in the yard across the street, which was all weeds, and he would just eat up the grass and the weeds. So we were doing a benefit that way.

There were quite a few horses in the area. I would ride over to my friend [Eve's] house ... on Cass and 67th. They had bigger horses – the standard size horses. Another friend [Bob] was down Clarendon Hills Road ... [near] Timberlake. There were a lot of horses down that way, too. So I didn't have to go too far to find horseback riding company. [Even across Route 83, where the Willowbrook bowling alley is and old K-Mart.]

My dad was real careful about neighborhood kids jumping on and riding, falling and getting hurt and all that kind of stuff. We let people ride in our front yard, because we had a big front yard where they could get on the pony and ride around there.

So you went to school just for school, and then you came home and you had other things you liked to do around home.

Yes. My parents were like my grandparents – they were 40 years old when I was born. My mom spoiled me with the baton twirling, and my dad spoiled me with the horseback riding. So I was totally busy. And when I talk to my classmates from Lace School they'd tell me the activities they were involved in, and I missed that because I was so involved in my home life. I didn't get into that clicky-boyfriend-girlfriend thing that you do when you're in 7th and 8th grade.

But the Beatles were very, very important. They had just started happening in the 1960's. Somebody was selling a little booklet of the Beatles' pictures. So they would come to school with a necklace with the Beatles picture on it. I still have it somewhere!

And Yardley was important back then: Yardley makeup and lip gloss. It was 7th or 8th grade for a girl to be able to wear lip gloss, and it was a big deal. Nylons! That was a big deal in 7th & 8th grade.

So those are my silly girl memories.

Where did your family shop for food?

Way back, when I was really young, there was a grocery store – I think it was a tavern grocery store. It was on Clarendon Hills Road near I55. It was on Clarendon Hills Road, but it was overlooking [I-55]– my memory doesn't serve me well. It was a little grocery store, and it might have been a tavern.

The other one, this one I remember better. It was Clarendon Hills Road and 55th Street – not I55.

Where the Jewel is now?

[No], there's a restaurant now. It's called the Country House. That was a grocery store and I believe it might have been a tavern. We didn't call them bars; they were taverns. So we went up there. You had to climb up some stairs. It was old fashioned – like a house and grocery store. And it was fun. As a kid I would ... go there with my mom. I don't remember what we bought – just milk, eggs; whatever.

But the real grocery store, the first one, was probably the Jewel in, I believe that's ... [Countryside] – it's Plainfield; where 55th and Plainfield come together in a little triangle.

Countryside.

Yes, that's Countryside. And Route 45 is up there. [Big Boy hamburgers too, and Topps clothing store also.] But that was our first Jewel grocery store. And [she] went up there all the time.

How did that compare to the other stores you shopped?

Compared to the dark, little country-bumpkin stores the Jewel was [wow]. I didn't go there too much with my mom, but she did her big shopping there – she'd go while I was in school.

She would actually take the neighbor women – she mostly drove, but there'd be about three or four women – and they'd drive [out]. They'd actually go to Oak Park to shop at the Sears, Montgomery Ward in Oak Park. They had to go that far to get clothes and to get bargains – whatever they were looking for. And then on the way back, we were in school, and they'd come back on their way home and shop at Jewel. I don't know how all four of them fit their groceries in one car!

Three or four women!

Yes, and they'd stop at Jewel and come home. And by the time I was home from school everything was in place. The groceries were put away. So I didn't do too much grocery shopping.

So you said your mom would do the clothes shopping and stuff in Oak Park.

Yes, they had to drive that far. There was no Sears in Oak Brook, Yorktown – I don't remember the year [late 60's] Yorktown was built. But, as I was a teenager Yorktown shopping center was built – a young teenager probably – and that was fun. That was our mall. That was the only mall we ever went to.

What did you do for fun, for entertainment? Were there movie theaters around?

Yes. The movie theaters were, of course, were the Tivoli in Downers Grove – that probably [was] regular price; now it's reduced price and more affordable. But that was a major theater. And then the one in LaGrange on Route 45 was another major movie theater

Did you go to movies often?

No. I didn't go too much. I was really busy with the horse. And I was competing in baton twirling. [Also roller skating at Elmhurst roller rink with my sister, Sandy.]

In grade school?

Yes.

Where did you compete?

I would compete – I was actually in Lombard in a marching group. It was more military. It was drums, flags, baton – so it was a drum and twirling corps, they called it. We were Illinois State champions [in 1967], we got so good. And two years in a row my brother [Bill] held the American flag and I was one of the 20 baton twirlers. We had to synchronize and twirl, doing the same exact thing at the same time.

The one year we did win I was probably eighth grade – we won Illinois State champs. And then they went down to Mississippi to compete. And Bobby Vinton was there. He was one of the old [50's] singers. He was there, so that was a thrill.

We took the train. Our group went on the train.

But this didn't have anything to do with my school friends. This was all outside. It was a whole different group of friends.

We did compete around the state – like in Naperville. The high schools had their competitions in their gyms. That's where they competed.

So you went to high school at Hinsdale South?

I want to say a little more about the drum and twirling corps. I haven't thought or talked about this for a while.

We actually performed at a Bears game in Chicago. That's how good we were.

Do you remember what year it was?

I stopped the marching corps in 8th grade, so it had to be 1967. We also marched in the Greek parade downtown. And one more big deal was at the Oak Brook Polo Club – we performed at the halftime for the Polo Club. All that stuff was a really big deal when you were 12 or 13 years old!

Yes, high school. I got into high school and I was still in baton twirling. I had all this competition background, and I did solo competition. So when I got into the band in high school, the band director, Mr. Tyriver I want to say, he was very, very nice and he let us form our baton group. We were a little bit competitive toward the cheerleaders. Whatever the cheerleaders in high school were getting, we wanted. If they were getting special uniforms or special attention, we wanted to be a group just like the cheerleaders.

So you were one of the people who initiated the batons.

Yes. Actually, when I went in, [Richay] Winters was there. She was a year ahead of me. And she had already been performing at Hinsdale South between football and basketball – I think both. So she had been performing by herself because she had had a lot of professional ballet and baton twirling. And her mother was a dance teacher in Westmont – Mrs. Dee Winters – and she had her own studio in Westmont. So her daughter was my example, in front of me. And we formed a baton group with five girls, [but Richay] was pretty much on her own.

So we performed at Hinsdale South for almost every football game with the band. And the band put up with us because we were the spoiled little “queenie” girls marching in front of the band. And the band does all the hard work – they do the music and the drums, and they do the formations and things. We were kind of the little cutesy girls out front, [“hornet honies”]

So when you started at Hinsdale South, it’s grown a lot since then. Do you know how many kids were in your class or the school?

I really don’t. I can get back to you with that information. [Lace Marion Hills graduated just under 100 students. HSHS in 1971 I graduated with almost 300 students.]

But one of my memories of Hinsdale South was coming in there. We had a deaf program for the hard-of-hearing. It was wonderful and that was my first experience with handicapped-type of people. And they were nice. They were just good kids. It was a real special group of kids. And that was the very founding, I think in the area, of teaching that type of children. I just remember enjoying that.

We didn’t have many ethnic groups. It was a very “white” school. There weren’t really other ethnic groups, so I really didn’t have any experience with other ... nationalities. My husband was in Chicago, and he had experience with all types of people and cultures. We were so different.

It was a little more homogenous out here. Everybody was pretty much ...

Everybody looked pretty much the same. We were country kids. There weren’t too many apartments, so we didn’t have city people.

So you took the regular classes. Did you have any idea what you were going to do after high school? Or did you plan for that?

Well, because I had done baton twirling and dancing, and a little bit of modeling – not much – I was really interested in performing arts with variety shows. I didn’t get into the theater part of it, but I got into the arts. We had awesome art teachers at Hinsdale South – just wonderful teaching. I enjoyed that.

Do you remember who they were?

No, I really don’t.

And home economics – I enjoyed that. We had ...

Mrs. Backus?

... [Yes, Backus was my teacher.] But we had sewing and home ec with food preparation. That was all so new, and our teachers were so young, most of them were only five years older than we were!

They were like in their early 20's.

Maybe a little bit more than that, so they were in their early 20's and we were 14. So they were about ten years older.

A lot of really new things were going on: new school, new teachers. The programs were excellent. The swimming pool was wonderful. I loved water ballet. A lot of really, really good programs at Hinsdale South.

So did you get more involved in those programs than you had gotten involved in school programs in grade school?

Yes. Grade school was mostly Spanish – that's what I remember learning. I took one year of Spanish in high school and I thought I was done – I didn't need any foreign languages. [Mrs. Carr was our teacher.]

Math was taught really well – math and science – at Lacey. The teacher was Mrs. Karem. And then when we got into Hinsdale South the math got harder and harder and I thought I had enough after algebra and geometry. Trig was the thing that threw me. The guys kept going – most of the male population could handle math and science pretty well.

So you got involved in extra-curricular activities. You were doing the baton twirling. Did you get involved in other activities or clubs?

The Durado Swim Club, Student Council was good – I was in there probably the first two years; I don't think I went all four years in Student Council. That was really a good program – government; learning how to make decisions for the school.

You were in high school in the 1960's – you graduated in 1971?

Yes.

So you were probably in junior high and high school when this area really started to boom with people. Hinsbrook was developed in the mid to late

1960's, and then Farmingdale. What did you see at the high school as far as changes?

I don't know why it brings to mind the cafeteria – I always enjoyed the cafeteria! It was just very modern and new. The food they served us was maybe not the healthiest, but to be able to go to school and buy your lunch, that was different. Because the only thing we had in grade school was hot dog day. We had hot dogs once in a while, I don't remember how often, and we could buy that. So we'd come to [high] school and buy our lunches – grilled cheese; it wasn't all so healthy. It was a very nice, clean facility.

And then we would use the cafeteria later on for dances and Homecoming. We probably even had proms in there at some point. But the cafeteria was a home-away-from-home.

And changes? I think just being in a big, huge building like that and having to go up three floors and find your classes. It was almost a nightmare sometimes, the day before school started every year: Am I going to find my classes? Am I going to get there on time? Am I going to get between one class and the next before the bell rings? All that was very scary as a teenager. It was scary, but it was good for you at the same time.

What do you remember just in the neighborhoods? Seeing all this new housing going up?

I was maybe a little, not jealous of Hinsbrook, but it was just a couple of blocks over from our Marion Hills area. And a lot of time the old timer people I grew up with would say we were in the old, poor neighborhood and Hinsbrook was better, or Farmingdale was better, or Brookhaven. And they would kind of put themselves down. And I would think: No, Marion Hills is the best! I had the best old farmhouse. I was always really proud of my house.

I made friends with two or three in Hinsbrook that were like my best friends. I was real good friends with them. And they were from Cicero and the suburbs of Chicago. So there was a whole different culture coming out here besides the kids I grew up with.

It was no longer just farm kids.

Right.

So what did you experience? What did you learn from all these kids coming in from non-farm places?

I think different nationalities, like the Italian and Polish – their cultures. I was German, which Darien started out being German-Lutheran. That's how it was settled. I was actually very upset when they took down St. John's Church, where the Taco Bell is now. I was very upset because that was one of the roots of Darien. And thank God they built another church.

The kids coming in – it was exciting and fun. We were crazy teenagers driving around. We didn't have cars in high school. Some of the guys did, but the girls didn't. We didn't have cars until after high school and had the freedom to drive. But I don't remember even too many of the guys having cars. I don't remember the parking situation. It wasn't anything like it is now! There wasn't a special parking lot where you had to pay for a spot. We didn't have that. If you did have a car to get to school that was really special.

So my brother's friend would pick us up and drive us some of the time. But we could walk to Hinsdale South. I never felt unsafe walking out there.

So you watched the neighborhood grow and change. You graduated from Hinsdale South. You stayed in the area?

Right. I lived with my parents up until I was 19. I was working at another Jewel in Westmont and met my husband in the Jewel bakery. We married and lived in Chicago. I was 20. I had actually gone to College of DuPage for a little over a year. When I met him I was still going to college. We got married and lived in Chicago just for a little while, in his grandma's old, old, old home. We lived on the third floor. It was right off the Eisenhower Expressway, and it was the Austin area. So I lived there.

Then we moved back out to Westmont because I didn't like the city. We came back out and I was in Westmont for the first 2, 2 1/2 years of my marriage. Then we bought my parents' farmhouse – the one I grew up in. So I was right back where I started!

What prompted you to want to buy your family's old house?

Actually, when we moved from Chicago to Westmont, we had a little home in Westmont. We had a little, little home, not far from the Jewel. My husband could walk to the Jewel on Ogden from our little house. We had our first baby there. We needed a bigger home and were looking in Downers Grove. The homes in Downers were so nice and we thought we'd find one there. But we couldn't find one, and my parents kept offering to sell their house to us. And we bought it because it was big!

I was a little bit questionable about buying my childhood home. I wondered if it was the right thing to do. But my husband loved it. [Rental income in house.]

And you raised you family in the same house you grew up in.

Same house, same schools, same neighborhood. They are almost like relatives – neighbors who knew me since I was three so they felt like relatives. They were right there and saw my kids grow, too.

So what differences did you see with your kids growing up in this area? What was different from when you grew up?

When my kids grew up and went to Marion Hills School it was kindergarten ... Well, first of all my children went to pre-school, which we never even heard of when I was a child. They went to pre-school in Hinsbrook. There was a home – Mrs. Newcomb had a pre-school that was awesome. It was such an awesome pre-school. I have to give her a lot of credit. It was on 69th ... [called Little Learners.]

So they did pre-school. Then they did kindergarten through sixth grade at Marion Hills School, and Mr. Gormley was principal. And I have to give him a lot of credit, because he had a Catholic background and was such a good principal with morals, and he had a lot of good programs in place to give the kids self-esteem and good behavior. He would give them awards, and certificates to Wendy's which was built. So my kids got to go to Wendy's for free food when they were doing well in school. That was a lot of fun at Marion Hills School.

My children never went to Lace because it wasn't necessary. They went right to Eisenhower. It was built, I don't remember what year.

The junior high? It opened for the 1969-1970 school year.

It's been there quite a while.

My children enjoyed Eisenhower, and that's a hard time of life – that junior high, 12, 13, 14 year-old. It's always kind of competitive. And if you don't have a leather coat because it's in style this year, you might not be accepted type of thing. But they had a good athletic program at Eisenhower. They had soccer and a lot of choices for girls.

So the programs had really expanded for girls as well as boys.

Oh, yeah. Boys had everything – football, wrestling. I didn't have a son so I didn't really follow the boys' schedules.

But Eisenhower had really wonderful home economics and choir. And my daughter was able to go to Walt Disney World in Florida with Ms. Hanson, with choir. We just did a scrapbook on that. And Mr. Larson was the band director. Mr. Larson and Ms. Hanson were just amazing teachers at Eisenhower. So my daughters experienced the real good teachers, and then the hard part with getting along with classmates. They experienced both.

But there wasn't any kid of drug situation that my children were into. That wasn't a problem. I think with other kids there might have been.

And when they went to Hinsdale South it was easier. It was somehow easier to make friends and just be a little bit freer. Eisenhower had – I don't know what it was; more rules, maybe, more being watched over. Where Hinsdale South was a freer time for them. My three girls enjoyed Hinsdale South.

There was a slight drug problem at Hinsdale South where I went to the counselor and said there were things going on in the community and the high schoolers were walking home from school, and there was a house where there was marijuana and things going on. But it wasn't really addressed – and you might want to cut this part.

So, basically you are saying when your daughters went to schools the changes that had taken place from this influx of people from different areas and different types of people and different types of beliefs, just the sheer volume made it important to have more activities around. So there were more opportunities to do things that maybe weren't there when you were in the schools. And all the more people with more different beliefs, backgrounds, whatever, everything came in good and bad with everything. Opportunities increased, and maybe challenges increased as well.

Yes, and just awareness of different cultures, and a more worldly perspective than what I had. I just had Marion Hills [farm kids].

You were the little insulated group of kids. Now they're very worldly.

Yes. And we could learn a lot of their ethnic ways.

My daughter, one of her friends was from the Indian culture. She would sleep overnight there and they just had a whole different system of religion and worship. My daughter learned that.

And they learned about different food types.

All the different cultures coming were really a different learning opportunity for the kids. And I'm guessing your kids did a lot of learning with computers in school – not learning about them, but learning with them.

Yes. I think computers were really easy by the time they got to high school. The library had changed a lot in the way they did things at Hinsdale South. It was very basic when I was there. And you could walk in and out of the library. When my daughters were there it was more like you had to have a code to get into the library. It was very protected and you had to be careful. Even coming in the front door of the high school you had to be identified: who are you, sign in. When I went to high school you just went in and out. Your parents dropped you at the front door and you went in.

There was no policeman when I went to high school. That part changed. It had to be much more secure when my daughters were there. I didn't like that, but that's the way the world was changing.

Right. That's the way the world is now. So a lot of things had changed from the time you were in high school as far as the community. There's the library now – the Indian Prairie Library.

Yes. The library is amazing. We couldn't understand why they were petitioning – walking the streets for the library to sign the petition. I don't know if they said it was going to be eight million dollars to build it and we thought: What! How much money is that? That was just an amazing amount of money. I don't even know what it ended up costing. But it's a beautiful library. It's right by the school, which is just wonderful.

The Walmart was built, which brings in money.

The roads have changed a lot, too.

Yes. 75th.

What changes have you seen over the years? When you moved here, for example, what was Plainfield like? Was it paved?

I don't think so. I'm trying to remember. I know when my parents moved here Route 83 was a two-lane highway and it was not paved. That's back in the 1950's.

It was gravel?

Yes. I really don't think it was paved back then. My memory kind of fails me. Jeanette [Knecht] lived on Route 83. She was one of the old-timers. She started Marion Hills Bible Church. That's why I brought her name up – Jeanette [Knecht]. And she lived right on Route 83 in a home her husband built. She talked about Route 83 being just a two-lane highway. I don't remember if it was paved or not, but somehow I don't think so

So she started Marion Hills Church [with Pastor Pelzer and wife]. And that was an amazing little country church; just to have people gather and worship. Or even social, social events right there on the corner. It's been like a lighthouse.

That church hasn't changed much. It's been there 60 years. [A plaque in the church reads "I am the way, the truth and the life." 14:6]

So you talked about going to the Tivoli or the LaGrange Theater for entertainment. What did your kids do for entertainment as compared to what you did?

Well, I'll just go back to what I did as a high-schooler. We had sock-hops – in grade school we called them sock-hops, but in high school we called them mixers. So on a Friday night my mom would just drop me off at the high school. My friends were there. Actually, she'd pick me up. My mom was pretty careful about me just running out with my friends in their cars. She would drop me off and pick me up. I was very, very protected.

My friends on the other hand, they were running around in cars coming and going. So I was over-protected.

But my children, when they went to Hinsdale South they had similar [dances]. But they had more access to cars and friends and going to parties. It wasn't so much school related. Just very relational – a lot of friends. And it started downtown with the raves – the bad element would go all night long with the rave and that's where the drug scene would start happening. But that was in Chicago more than in the suburbs. ... [I believe.]

So your kids still did some of the things you did but maybe had more freedom.

They had more access to going to downtown Chicago. Even the homecoming and proms we had, we were fine to have things in the school contained in the cafeteria. But my daughters' generation was no, they had to go downtown to this facility or that. The biggest thing we did was go to the Palmer House for prom. Otherwise our other dances were at the school. But my daughters would end up – everything was in Chicago.

Looking Back and Looking Forward

You've seen a lot of changes over the years. What are your thoughts? What do you miss that you wish was still around? What changes are you grateful for?

I didn't do enough thinking on this!

I like the way Brookhaven Plaza has always been the same – the old stores and the set-up. It's changing now. The grocery store is still there – it used to be the IGA. I liked the way the old grocery stores were. But the stores now are a little more ethnic and catering to certain nationalities. I don't know – the Walgreens is very helpful; we have three Walgreens within five miles of my house.

I don't know what I wish would be the same.

I think, well, Santa Fe Speedway was a fun place to go. That was another recreation place. It was noisy. We could hear it. But it was comforting to hear the cars zooming around Santa Fe when I was young.

The traffic wasn't as noisy as it is now – Route 83, Plainfield, 75th. And I got really angry when they took a lot of woods out behind Burger King. They took trees and woods and landscaped it. I didn't like that. There was a pond back there off of Route 83, between Route 83 and Crest. I was not angry, but they changed the beauty and natural look. And when they built Portillo's, I believe they took down 20 acres of trees in a weekend not too many years ago – three or four years ago.

For that shopping center.

Yes. Michael's, Portillo's, Chick-Fil-A is over there. That I didn't like, when they built another shopping area [called] Willowbrook. ...[Center].

It's Willowbrook. But the country area is disappearing.

Yes. They took away the pond, and when I'm sitting over there – Panera Bread – I tell my daughter we're sitting in a pond and 20 acres of trees! I just keep visualizing: Paved paradise; Put up a parking lot – they sing that song. That's what happened.

As a child and teenager I had a lot of the hippy influence. Marijuana was a big, new thing in the 1960's. My husband was actually in Viet Nam when I was in high school. And I thought that was interesting: He was in the Philippines and

here I was in Hinsdale South writing a paper on Cambodia – what a contrast that was!

So what changes area you grateful for?

I guess I'm more grateful for the non-changes because my neighborhood looks a lot the same as it was. There are beautiful homes being built around the area –[mini] mansions you would call them. Those are nice.

Darien has excellent has amazing, excellent snow removal and road care. Our roads are the best. I go to Hinsdale [Church] and I can't believe Darien [roads are] better than Hinsdale. It just is. We have the best maintenance. Our city is a very good government. I love the mayor – Kathy Weaver. We have good aldermen. My neighbor is an Alderwoman. And I went to her with a problem. There had been a fire in a neighbor's yard. It got out of control and she took care of it right away. She addressed the problem. The police. I just think being the city and the government has been very good.

So a structure has been put in place and it's been helpful.

Yes. It's been very beneficial, even though I miss the country-bumpkin phase.

It was a trade-off from the more rural, country-type existence where you didn't have all these services. Now you've got the benefit of the services, but the trade-off was loss of the country [feel].

Our garbage pick-up is great, and the recycling. I love to recycle, and that's one thing that's really good. That's the hippy mentality – environmental. When my parents were here they had – I don't remember if it was Rot's, but our driveway was so long and they used to back up right to the house to pick up the garbage. And I missed that for a long time. I missed the truck coming and getting it because now we have to bring it down to the bottom. But there are so many more people.

You did have a few more benefits with less people. There are some benefits to that, where the more people you have, like your water pressure may get a little lower because there are so many people using it. Or your air conditioner might go out, or your electric might go out because there are so many people. So there are benefits to just a few people and benefits for a lot of people with a city. It's just totally different.

I was not happy a few years ago. Our electric was out for probably three days. It was tough. But everybody goes through that.

Is there anything we haven't covered that you'd like to add before we finish?

Yes! You're sparking a lot of memories. But I'm not coming up with much that I can add on, but maybe I can add on later.

Thank you for sharing your story!