

What's your name?

**Nancy Welty Clark.**

What was your address during the war?

**803 South Fairview Avenue, Park Ridge.**

Can you tell us a little about your parents, brothers, and sisters while living through the war?

**My father was an architect and also an insurance salesman, but during the war he went to work at Douglas Aircraft that used to be at O'Hare, drawing airplane designs for templates and things like that. My mother had worked for Mohizures and she went into business for herself and was helping people redecorate and fix up their houses. I have a sister two years younger than I am and brothers four and five years younger. We all went to Roosevelt, Lincoln, and Main East. I was heavily into anything that was mathematical, scientific, or musical. And I was in what they called the water ballet. When my sister started two years later, she was so good at water ballet that I dropped out because I didn't want to be in a competitive environment. What else do you want to know about that?**

*What class were you in?*

**What class?**

*Yeah, what class year.*

**1946.**

*The class of '46. Okay.*

**My freshman year, I hated study halls. Absolutely detested study halls. So one of the things several other of us who detested study halls said maybe we can get it was Mr. Harley at the time to teach a music appreciation class during the study hall time. So we did that and we quickly discovered that Mr. Harley was terribly boring. So then we asked him if we could learn about instruments. So he lined us up and said, "What instrument?" and he had us hold our hands. I held these out and he said, "Bass fiddle" because these are big. So we started our own little group instead of a study hall. Pretty soon we were in the concert orchestra and concert band. Main Township had one of the best concert bands in the country those couple years. They were not under Mr. Harley; it was Mr. Seraka. He was wonderful. He taught really well. He did little tricks. Like he would be in the middle of conducting and if you didn't stop right on there, you were playing by yourself. [LAUGHS] And he would swap instruments with anybody in the band if he felt**

somebody was not paying too much attention. He'd say, "Okay, you conduct. I'll play your instrument." And he would go play their instrument and do it badly on purpose to annoy them. [LAUGHS] And it was funny and it served the purpose. He also taught ear training, harmony. These were after school; they weren't school projects. After school we would stay and do things like that. **But because I was good at music, I auditioned for the Chicago Symphony when I was fifteen, which was positively ridiculous. But the conductor of the Chicago Symphony, first had me supposed to play part of Rimsky-Korsakov's Russian Easter Overture and I just looked at him like he was crazy. Put my hands down. There was no way in the world. That Russian Easter Overture is in 5-1 time- one, two, three, four, five, one, two, three, four, five. I couldn't count that fast. So he said, "I don't think you are ready." I said okay. He said, "Wait a minute" and he put up Franck's D Minor Symphony, which I absolutely love. And I could play that. He said, "You're not ready to be in the orchestra. You should come back in a year or two. But in the meantime why don't you sit in on rehearsals if you want to?" So that night I joined the union and sat in on a rehearsal. And after the rehearsal they said, "This is the schedule of the concerts and the rehearsals. Anytime that we need a substitute, you can play as a substitute." I didn't miss an evening or weekend concert for two years because someone always had a better job. It didn't pay well. They paid three dollars for a rehearsal and thirteen dollars for a concert. And you had to go back and forth to get there. It ate it all up. So if they could get a gig for a wedding or something like that, they took it and called me. So somewhere along the line, someone wanted to know if I would play for the USO. So the USO was a little farther south on Michigan Avenue than Orchestra Hall, but that same general area.**

*What was the building? Do you remember?*

No.

*Okay.*

I know it was ground floor and it was not very big. But with my bass fiddle that I borrowed from somebody at Main, **I would get the bus at Maine Township High School to the middle of Park Ridge, walk to Edison Park, take the Edison Park bus to Jefferson Park, the streetcar to Madison Avenue, and then walk to the USO with this bass fiddle. And of course I did that to Orchestra Hall, too. And then afterwards you'd reverse the whole thing. And when you got home, Park Ridge had rolled up the sidewalks and turned off all the lights. There was nothing. You can't imagine, unless you have been in a cave, how dark it was in Park Ridge. Because that was before all the glow from the city lighted up all night.**

*So tell us about... how old were you? You were sixteen at this time?*

Fifteen. And they were a little hyper about that.

*Fifteen. So tell us about what it was like doing the concerts. And what were the soldiers and sailors like? Did you talk to any of them?*

Actually we got very little chance to talk to any of them, except to answer their requests. They'd come up and say, "We want to hear Sioux City Sue or Doing What Comes Naturally." That was their two favorites, or Coming in On A Wing and Prayer. Those were over and over again. And another one called The Gypsy that I hated. But Sioux City Sue or Doing What Comes Naturally were fun.

*And they were all dancing?*

Yeah. And we were pretty much on a small stage, a step up and little way up from where they were dancing. So we didn't really get much communication. By the time we'd cleaned up at night, they'd all left. There wasn't much communication except one man who wanted to communicate who asked for... I don't remember how... Yes, I do. His father had my name so he called my parents and asked if it was okay for him to come out and meet me. And I dated him for several years. He was Air Force photographer. I have in the front hallway a collection of pictures that he sent back, war scene pictures. Some of them are really neat. Old Cathedrals bombed out, just really weird.

*What branch was he in? What service was he in?*

Air Force. He was a photographer so he went different places and took pictures, sometimes from the air. But usually he took them from the ground different places they went. I guess taking them from the air didn't work all that well. But that was one of the things. The fact that we went back to high school. The water ballet was my main after school activity. And they call it synchronized swimming or something like that now. But we would swim in these atrocious swimming suits. I mean you didn't want to be caught dead in these things; that's the way we all felt about them. They were wool and they stretched so much when they got wet that we would sit there and tie knots all over them, literally, to make them fit- more or less fit. And then of course, for the actual shows we got to wear something else. But in the classes and rehearsals we had to wear these horrible looking things that the school handed out. The guys got it better; they got to go swimming nude. [LAUGHS]

*Is the pool at the school, at Main High School?*

Yeah, it was a pretty nice pool. Good size pool, good diving board. What I remember is the ceiling rafters were not all that high, so one of the challenges was to spring the ceiling board, put paint on your fingers and put paint on the rafters before you went over, which kind of threw you off balance. Really hard to go into a good dive when you are trying to put your fingers on the ceiling but it was fun. Had a good swimming coach. I

thought I'd remember her name, but I don't. One of the things that I did in high school, and that was kind of unique to me as far as I know, I trade with other people for gym things because I was an absolute disaster in most of the other things. So I traded with somebody so I didn't have to go to basketball or field hockey or something else, and I could always go swimming. And because a lot of girls always wanted their hair to look nice, somebody would always trade with me. And of course the swimming coach never gave me away because she was glad somebody wanted to come. So she used me as assistant teacher. Every once in a while she'd forget that I couldn't float. She would say, "Get in and demonstrate the dead man float." I would get in and go straight to the bottom. [LAUGHS] Everyone would start laughing. I knew it was going to happen. "Oh I forgot, you don't float." [LAUGHS] After that class we would go out to a bus shelter (I think there is still one there on Potter Road) and wait for a bus. But after the swimming thing, frequently we'd miss the last one. So we ended up walking from Main East home several nights a week, even in miserable weather. And we weren't above sticking our thumbs out. As far as I know, nobody got in any trouble for sticking their thumbs out.

*So how common was hitchhiking back then?*

Pretty common. Not all that frowned upon. We went lots of places by sticking our thumbs out.

*Did your parents pick up hitchhikers?*

Yeah. And after I got my driver's license I picked up hitchhikers. Some way or another it has gotten to be a thing not to do. This is way aside, but I was in the ski area in Colorado and I was going up a two lane road and another guy was going up the two lane road with the mountain going up on one side and the cliff going down on the other side, when he lost control, went across the centerline and took out the whole left side of my car. I stopped at the ranger station and said, "Can I park my car here and sleep in it overnight because I am too shook to drive?" And they opened up a little cabin there. It was fine. It was really nice. The next day I was on my way somewhere and the snow got really bad. So I pulled to one of the ski lodges. This was summer; it wasn't the middle of winter. It wasn't open because it wasn't ski time yet. I knocked on the door and said (even in summer they have the occasional snow storms in the high altitudes). And she said, "Yes, I'll open a cabin for you." The next morning it was still snowing really hard. I didn't want to go any place. I said, "What can you do here?" She said, "Well, I got a gold mine behind." I said, "Oh boy!" [LAUGHS] She said, "You can't in the gold mine, but you can search the slag pile." So I go to where the thing is to search the slag pile and there is landslide. And the landslide comes down across the road, so we are just about right into the edge of this landslide. And it's a really narrow mining road; it's just barely wider than a car. And I couldn't really see all that well so I thought I'll open the passenger door, which was the downhill side, so I'll see how much edge I've got. I reach out and across, and the wind takes the car door off it's hinges and slams it into the front of the car. So

now I have a car that is a disaster on both sides. But I've got a rope along so I pick up [LAUGHS] the door and rope it back onto the car, and go back down. By this time the snow is quit and things are okay and I am on my way. Pretty soon I'm not thinking about it and here is this kid with his thumb out, so I stop. Once I stop, I think how is he going to get in the car? [LAUGHS] Because it was a two door car with both sides... So this kid climbs in the window and we go on our way. It was just the sort of thing you did. This is a fairly young kid out there with his thumb up in an area that's not a high traffic at all. Another thing that we did out there that was fun, in Roosevelt National Forest, you could go through some of the forest that is not public on a half-track, on an Army half-track. That was fun, too. Very rough. I mean if you were bruiseable, you got bruised 'cause there weren't any padded seats. This was for troop transport. So you are just all piled into the back of this thing. When you went downhill, everyone went towards the front. When you went uphill, everyone went towards the back. [LAUGHS] And somebody had little kids so everyone is trying to make kind of a circle around the woman who has this little kid so they don't slam into her. Anyway, that was another fun thing. And way off the subject. Shall we get back on it?

*That's okay. So we were talking about hitchhiking and getting around. Why don't you circle back on the parents and stuff?*

So you were saying you did a lot of activities with math, science, and music. Did you have some friends that did similar things?

Unfortunately as one of the geeks, I didn't have very many close friends. I was off doing things because I decided to do them and not worry about other people. And I discovered the hard way that I didn't get other people to join me. I tried a few times. I would say when we were in a group, "I'm going to do such and such. Come on." And nobody would come. I had some friends. It turns out now when I go back to them that they thought we were good friends. You know, I'm willing to go along with that although that isn't the way I remembered it. I was into lots of things but I wasn't part of a group or clique or whatever you call it. The closest came in the band. The band we had a few people who would kind of group. That band went everywhere. Every place there was a concert, we would pile in busses and go.

*So was it the Main High School band?*

Yeah.

*Okay.*

They were excellent. We were invited to contests in Wisconsin, all over the place. We would pile in...

*Was this the marching band?*

Yeah. But the marching band at Main East at that time was a concert band. The only thing that happened when it was a marching band was a few people had to change instruments. Because you can't play bass fiddle in a marching band. And timpany is hard. Those were the two instruments I played in the concert band. In the marching band I played cymbals because you still want to be part of things. And Mr. **Seraka** for two years tried to get me a glockenspiel because he thought that would be neat. But he never did.

*Glockenspiel? What is a glockenspiel?*

It's kind of like a small xylophone but it is on a frame that's raised up in the air so you whap it. Kind of nice. Would have been fun. And then my senior year I was offered so many scholarships that I was overwhelmed- Juilliard, Oberlin, Northwestern, Eastman, Knox. I was deluged with scholarships that terrified me. I was pretty much a loner and a homebody and pretty timid. In spite of the fact that I did all sorts of things that nobody did, I was pretty shy. So the idea of going to New York to go to college was just completely overwhelming. I went and visited Knox and I didn't like the fact that half the kids were drunk. I visited Oberlin and I didn't like the religious atmosphere there, which I probably was exaggerating because as a high school student I was pretty sensitive to that kind of stuff. I didn't want to go to Northwestern because they wanted me to be a non-resident. And I figured that I was shy enough and inhibited enough that being a non-resident was going to make things worse. So I ran away from home and I joined a traveling dance band. Played with it for a little while and it was awful.

*What is a traveling dance band? You played at dances?*

They typically played at resorts. We were mostly in Michigan. We would play a summer resort for a week and then we would go to a different resort for a week. I don't know why or how they managed it. That wasn't my part of the things. But it was terrible; it was an awful way to live. So after three weeks, the same boyfriend that I'm talking about came up to visit and he kind of said, "Oh let's go home." [LAUGHS] So he took me back. I got back home and my mother said, "You're not quitting. You signed up for this. You are behaving like a mature adult. You are going to go back and give them two weeks' notice." So I did that. And then I got back just in time for graduation and I thought, "This is weird." Mrs. **Perelini**, the English teacher class, said, "You know, you've missed enough class that I've got to give you a B. I can't give you an A." And I thought, "My goodness, I'd be happy to get a C from her," because she was really, really stiff. I could tell lots of tales about her.

*So getting back to...*

You are going to have to keep pulling me back.

*That's fine. So when the war started, your dad started working for the Douglas Aircraft. So we were coming off some hard times. Talk about your family. Go ahead.*

So when the war started, the Depression just finished. How is your family dealing with the change? How did it have to change for you?

*What was the economic situation before war in your family?*

**My mother was a terrible workaholic. So as soon as I was eleven, mother went back to work. She was working part-time before then, but when I was eleven she went back to work and the house was my problem. I cooked, did the laundry, that sort of stuff because she was working for Mohizures.**

*Tell us what is Mohizures.*

**Okay, there still is a little shop on Prospect just about half a block on this side of the train tracks. There still is a shop there. Mohizures was kind of a gift, dry goods, clothing. Kind of like you took a Kmart and shrunk it down to a little shop. It had all sorts of stuff. And in the basement they had the yarn goods and the decorating shop where my mother worked. After a while, my mother realized this is ridiculous. The Mohizures were making most the money and she was doing most the work. She brought things home. The dining room was the yarn good section. The living room was the cotton section. The banisters were the intermediate. All our beds were full of things that we half done. When you wanted to go to bed at night, you had to find a place to unload somebody's drapes or slipcover so you could climb in bed. My father was also helping with that some and working at Douglas and selling insurance and occasionally doing some landscaping, depending on what is available. Luckily, if you know Lake Villa area, almost to the Wisconsin border, it had people living there who were affluent enough not to be terribly affected, like the Peacocks from Peacock Jewelry, Hawthornes Melody Farms, Johnson Wax. A bunch of big people. And their estates tended to be things like sixteen acres. They'd have their own dog kennel, little bit of a golf course, swimming pool, everything. They hired my father. And he hired me. We would go up there on weekends with the transit and everything lay things out, decide where to plant trees, where to clear.**

*So your dad was a landscape architect?*

**Yes, predominantly. He could do other but what he liked was landscape. And he taught landscape architecture at the University of Iowa after he graduated from the University of Illinois. That is after he was in World War I. In World War I, he was second lieutenant. And my father was a complete pacifist. I mean the worst thing I ever heard him say was confounded, and he didn't say that really loud. He kept a diary when he was in the army, which I have upstairs. It amazed me in my old age when I got the guts to read his diary to**

**learn that he taught bayonet. For somebody who is that much of a pacifist, it seemed so contradictory. But I am sure they were just spearing straw piles and things like that, dummies. And horsemanship. He also was the coder/decoder for secret messages for President Theodore Roosevelt. So that was pretty interesting, a little hard to read, but pretty interesting. I'm way off the subject again.**

We can swing back. When World War II started, what do you remember about the start of the war? Was there like big reaction in your family and such?

**No, there was not. It was just another thing happening. Nobody got excited about it. We changed a few things about the way we lived, but nothing really seemed to impinge our life too much. I mean you couldn't get sugar to can stuff. You had retread your tires because you couldn't buy new tires. There was gas rationing. You saved things that you would think are ridiculous now, like toothpaste tubes and aluminum foil and rubber bands, were part of what they recycled and were big deals.**

*Why would you save toothpaste tubes? Were they made out of metal?*

**Yeah. They were I think zinc or something. I think they were zinc. So we had an agreement. My mother is from a farm in Indiana. On weekends we would go down to the farm once in a while, maybe once every two months. And we would take our sugar coupons with us and we'd trade them for gas coupons because if we were going to get back and forth, we didn't have enough gas to get back and forth. And we could get along without sugar. My mother was never a big sugar user anyway when she was cooking, so that wasn't a big deal as far we were concerned. It was really quite a ways into the war before it started sinking in, at least to our family. I mean there were things like my father going to work at Douglas. But it was really toward the end of the war that it started to sinking in for me, when I graduated from Marquette and went to work at General Electric Aircraft Gas Turbines and started working on the design of the F-86D fighter plane. At that point, things did get pretty important to me. But up until then you just went on your way. That was way over there; it wasn't over here. Maybe not a very good way to feel, but that is what we did feel- or me at least. And I don't remember anybody else getting all that excited for the war. Unless they were about to be drafted, and then they got interested. The kids that were too young to be drafted weren't paying any attention and the girls weren't paying much attention. Except that a lot of the girls thought dating somebody who was in the Army or Navy was pretty neat. That was about the extent of our lack of interest.**

Do you remember when Pearl Harbor was bombed? Do you remember where you were or anything like that?

**No, I don't remember. You know, I've got a really good memory but some things just aren't there at all and that is one of them that's not there at all. People remember where**

they were when Kennedy was shot. I don't know where I was. I remember hearing about it, but I don't remember where I was. Hiroshima, I don't remember where I was. All of these important things that were during my lifetime and I knew about. Now September 11th I know exactly where I was- in Resurrection Hospital coming out of a coma, thinking that the world has come to an end because all around me televisions with all this stuff happening and I was just opening my eyes from being in a coma. And I was begging the nurses to turn the televisions off, and they wouldn't. I realized later why they wouldn't, but at the time I thought they were just being inconsiderate. And I didn't realize it was real; I thought H.G. Wells had written another one.

*Do you know what that is?*

Was anyone in your family or your extended family go into the war, was drafted?

Yes, the older of my two brothers was drafted. Actually he enlisted; he was not drafted. He was 4-F, but you could enlist anyway. It limited what they did with you, but you could enlist anyway. He ended up being a coach for the Army football team [LAUGHS] and teaching part time in some of the Army schools. So he was never actually in the war. And I don't know a hell of a lot of what he did do. We thought it was pretty funny.

*It is.*

I think he thought it was pretty neat. [LAUGHS]

*Can you tell us a little more about the aircraft you worked on after you graduated Marquette?*

Sure. I'm going to start a little before it. I went the first two years at Rosary, that is now Dominican. And then after a six months off misadventure that I'll skip at the moment, I went to Marquette. And an interviewer who was coming to interview female mathematicians went to Rosary to interview and they didn't have anybody to suggest. They sent them up to me at Marquette. That is how I got the job at General Electric.

*If we could hold, we can go further in the second part. Because we want to go up to 1945. That is a very good story. So you were talking about rationing of gasoline and food. Did you notice any food changing? And how did you feel - you were doing all the cooking and cleaning and your mom...- how did you feel about doing all of that?*

I felt kind of a poor little me thing, that I shouldn't have to do all that, that I should be allowed to do some of the things that kids just did. I shouldn't have had to come home from school and cook. If I wasn't going downtown to USO, I had to be home cooking.

*So you had to cook and get down the USO?*

Well, I couldn't do both the same night. But any night I was not going down there. I don't know what happened the other nights. It would be pick up meals. But one of the things that really bothered me was on Saturday morning my mother would make a list of things I had to do before I could do any of my own stuff. And I'd pitch in and I'd try to get down that list, you know checking the things off that list. I kept thinking if I could get to the bottom of that list, I could do something I wanted to do. But my mother kept putting things below it. [LAUGHS] In two years, I never got to the bottom of the list, so I never got to do anything on a weekend that I wanted to do. I always had to do sewing, laundry, cooking, cleaning, all sorts of stuff. My sister got a way without doing it. She was just nasty and stubborn. Do you remember my sister's temper? She'd just tell my mother, "I don't have to do anything but die!" [LAUGHS] Rather than fight with her they would let her get away with it. I never got that ability to get that hostile or stubborn.

*So as far as food, you mentioned you swapped sugar coupons for gas. Did you have a victory garden? Did you ever suffer for lack of food or did you guys do anything different for food?*

Well of course that was one of the things that helped going back and forth to the farm.

*You got food to bring back ?*

Typically only two things: eggs and chicken. That was the deal. And it was nice; there was a White Castle on the way. And we would fill up at the White Castle on the way there and the way back. That was a big treat. It was about ten cents I think. They were good. Not much changed from how they are now. I was kind of brought up to cope with what was around, and I don't remember it being any serious problem for us as far having stuff to eat. Pretty plain stuff because I was cooking there was probably five different dinners I rotated: a meatloaf, Swiss steak, chicken, macaroni and cheese, those kind of dinners. They always were the same carrots and onions and potatoes and maybe a dressing for the chicken. They were simple dinners. We generally had enough to make the desserts we wanted to make. So I got good at devil feud cake, cherry pie, lemon chiffon.

*It didn't sound like you were suffering too much.*

No, we weren't suffering too much. We were doing okay. And when we went to the farm, they were short of sugar. But if we gave them the sugar, they could can things. And then sometimes we brought the can stuff back. Oh that was one thing that really was one of the reasons we were not in trouble. One of my aunts canned beef. And her canned beef was so good that you might prefer it to the average thing you get now in a restaurant. And you don't think of beef as something you can, but it was really good. They had grapevines and sometimes we, depending on the time of year, we might pick grapes to come home. But that wasn't a big deal because there was grapes around here. A lot of the fences along the alley had grapes growing on them. And there was rhubarb all over

the place, apples. So as far as fruit goes... And there is another thing. I haven't seen any kid that eats it now, but we used to eat what we called sourgrass, which is an oxalis. It's a weed. Tastes really good. It still grows around here and it still tastes really good. I pull it and eat, but when I tell anybody I'm eating it, they say that's a weed. So what? Dandelions are edible, too. A lot of things are edible and a few are toxic.

*So back during that time when you were a student, do you remember anything different as far as the environment? Besides your own rationing and things at your own house. What noticeable things were different in high school and in the community because of the war? Is there anything that sticks out that you remember?*

Yeah, we had these... I can't think of what they call them, but they would have these meetings where anybody would volunteer to help in an emergency and learn first aid and all the sort of stuff.

*Civil defense?*

I was too young but I was big so they never noticed, until there was a blood drive and I had to sign something with my date of birth. And they kicked me out when they discovered I was not sixteen yet. But that was one of the things that happened. And then blackouts sometimes. And of course most of us did not have blackout drapes or anything like that, so you just turned everything off. And sometimes if things were marginal, kind of halfway a blackout, we would play cards by flashlight. Because we didn't have any television. I think we probably did have a radio, but Lone Ranger and Cisco Kid and things like that.

*How often did you have these blackouts?*

Oh, there is a period where it might have been once a month or so. But it wasn't regular. It would just kind of happen. I don't remember if it was a fire siren or what that indicated it, but there was some sort of a noise signal. And then there was another when you could turn things back on. Actually my memory is that ordinarily you couldn't turn anything back on until the next morning. They never declared it off, but the next morning you would assume it was off. But people did more do it yourselfing. That was neat, because I like do it yourselfing.

*What kinds of things did people do or did you guys do?*

One thing we did was we built tool sheds. Repaired things that you might not repair now without calling somebody. We did electrical, plumbing. We did all sorts of crazy things that now you'd say you have to have somebody licensed and approved to do. And every once in a while I get concerned that there might be something still in this house that I did [LAUGHS] back then that might not be up to code, like this room. But we had a victory

**garden. But our victory garden, this particular house victory garden, was not very successful because we had too many tall trees. We got green beans to grow reasonably well, but that was about the only thing that seemed to like our backyard. But we had crabapples. They were okay. We had chokecherries. People nowadays don't eat chokecherry either. There is a bush in the front right next to the fence that has chokecherries in the spring. A couple hundred kids walk by there and nobody picks a chokecherry and eats it. It's amazing. I even go out there and say you can pick them if you want to and they look at me like I'm crazy. [LAUGHS] They taste good if you are into tart. They aren't very sweet cherries.**

So going back to your high school experience with the war. Main High School had some assemblies when student soldiers were killed in battle. Do you remember anything about that?

**No, I don't. I don't remember it all. I don't remember if that is because after I got out might have been most of it.**

*Matt, you can ask her. Go ahead and ask her.*

Other than that victory garden and the civil defense work that you did, did you do any volunteer things?

**Well, I volunteered as an assistant in the fire department, which didn't do much except get you a little education.**

***Nancy, where was that located?***

**The fire department was on the Northwest Highway where there is now all this modern stuff, about halfway between the Touhey intersection and that next light.**

Summit? Summit Avenue?

**Yeah, about halfway between. It was on the Northwest Highway. It was a fairly small brick building. It has a pole. [LAUGHS]. I always thought that was neat. I liked it. I always wished we could go up and slide back down the pole, but they never told us we could do that. But they really did.**

Was there a dalmatian? A dog?

**No, nice thought but no. [LAUGHS]**

So you told us that you kind of jumped between a lot of friend groups and not a lot of people were exactly doing the same things you were.

**Right.**

Did you do any dating in high school? You seemed pretty busy.

**Did I do any?**

Dating.

**Dating.**

School dances?

**Really only this one photographer. And I quickly discovered that he was a complete dud at school events. I was a really good dancer, and he didn't know how to dance. I wasn't so key in teaching him well enough. That was one thing. At Lincoln, if you wanted to, two days a week they had a teacher come in and teach dance at lunch hour. He happened to be also the general science teacher. But he was an excellent dance teacher. Except there was a rule: nobody sits out unless there is an odd number. Everybody is on the dance floor.**

*I just got the impression back then kids danced a lot in general. When did you get a chance to dance? You did dance lessons. Where else did you dance?*

**Well, if you were crazy like me, waiting for the bus, in a restaurant, in the train station. If they weren't playing music, you whistled. It was just something you did if you wanted to. We also would sometimes sing in public. We would frequently do the things where they weren't rounds but they were back and forth. One person sang a verse, the next person, so you went back and forth. That was another thing. We had a group. It varied who came, but it was about eight regular people in this group that got together in the evening and sang. And we'd do that, we theoretically did that five nights a week but not everyone came five nights a week.**

*Sure, but almost every night?*

**Yeah, almost every night. It was kind of a 9-9:45 thing. After you finished doing your homework, we would gather and sing and relax and enjoy. And then you would go home and go to bed. That was kind of the routine for a while. It didn't last a real long time but for a while. We had a few people. There was another girl and I who was always there. And a few others, probably twenty other people who were off and on, making a total of eight of us on any particular night. It was something, it was somewhere between twenty and fifty songs we sang.**

*What was your favorite song that you would sing?*

**I am going to say something else weird about this: we sang in Latin. [SINGS IN LATIN] that kind of stuff. I can still do a few of them, but that's the only one I can really do all the way through. We kind of got a thing about that Latin group. Part of why it probably sprang up was Latin was not fun but it was fun to sing. So people interested in Latin made up a bit of the group.**

*Now I am going to digress a little bit. These are three very bright kids and they do very well in school. They take a lot of high level math and everything. Right, Andrew? Do you take.. both of you guys. I know Grace does. So you did very well in high school. What kind of math did they teach you in high school? That you achieved and did very well. And did you do it on your own, too?*

**They had good math classes: algebra, plane geometry, solid geometry, solid trig, and an advanced algebra. They were all well taught at the time.**

*Did they teach you any calculus?*

**No. I waited until I got to college for that one. Although because my boyfriend knew calculus and we do homework together, I did learn calculus, but not from school.**

*Was this the Air Force guy?*

**Yeah. When he was on leave, he went to IIT and took some of these vector analysis and all that kind of stuff classes. And we would do our homework together. We had kind of weird dates. We either did homework together or we went to concerts. Once in a while we would do something else. Usually it was a disaster. Like one day we decided to go swimming. We were going to go to Ravinia for a concert. So we decided before the concert we'd bring a picnic and we would go swimming in Lake Michigan. I didn't know he couldn't swim. And there was a dune out a ways, so I was swimming back and forth to the dune and back just to get some exercise. I did it about four times and went back to get a drink or something. And he's like, "Oh, I'm going to go with you." He gets halfway and goes under. My guardian angel tapped me on my shoulder and said, "Turn around." And I went back. I had taken.. that's the other thing, most kids did take life and civic classes. Went back around, got a hold of him, punched him in the stomach like they told you, pulled him around. I was struggling because he was panicking. A lifeguard finally rowed out and jumped off his little boat. And he says, "Are you in trouble?" I said, "If you get him, I'm not!" [LAUGHS] But I was really tired. But I learned to be a little careful where I took Alan.**

So during your experience as a kid in high school, did you go to a lot of shops or restaurants or libraries, like the Park Ridge Library, often?

I went to the Park Ridge Library fairly often. It used to be a little dinky building right on the angle between North Prospect and Northwest Highway- that little triangular building. That used to be the library. It was very small, a little bit musty smelling, but a nice place. Other place, I didn't personally go there but the group did, was the Canton Tea Garden. That was above one of the stores on Prospect between the railroad track and Northwest Highway. I don't remember which one, but about halfway between Pickwick and Pines. A lot of the kids went there after school because it was run by people who spoke predominantly Oriental languages. They didn't speak English well. But for some strange reason, they were really nice to the kids. So kids would go up there and they would put out a huge bowl of rice and a huge bowl of gravy and a bunch of dishes. And the kids would sit there and eat rice with gravy and have fun after school. Relatively harmless while you are having a little fun. Typically it was something, took a bus from Main East to that corner, Northwest Highway and Prospect where you got off. Then you walked to the other side to Cortland and Vine, that little park area, to get the other bus that took you to the south side of Park Ridge. So it was kind of halfway between the two. And I was usually running to get another bus to go downtown or something so I never joined in that group. But it's kind of fun. It's kind of fun to realize that something is still here that was there then.

Was there any other shops or places around the Pickwick area that stand out in your mind? That you might have went there a couple of times.

St. Paul the Cross was an old wood-sided country church, little. It stands out in my mind because of how crowded it was. People piled into that church. The fire department was there trying to stop people. They would fill the church. They would put folding chairs down all the aisles and the sacristy. It was completely full, just enough room for the priest up front. People would sit on top of the radiators or stand on top of the radiators. They would stand on the stairs up to the choir loft. They couldn't have an organ player because there was no room for one because people were standing all in the... That scared me, the number of people who would get in the choir loft. They'd leave the doors open and people would stand in the vestibule, on the stairway, and in the sidewalk clear out to the street. Father Smith could talk loud enough, without a microphone or anything like that, that everybody could hear. It was a mixture of nice and awful because he liked incense. When you burned incense in that crowd, it is depressing smell to me. I've got very many memories of Father Smith. Especially the day he said he had to make a public confession because he had stolen money from the church- quite a bit, not a small amount. Like \$20,000 or something like that, which was a lot back then. And that lot next door, where now the church has expanded onto, he bought. He says, "The lot next door just went up for sale and I have the \$20,000 to buy it." [LAUGHS] So he put all the money back then. And he just went to the confession to tell everybody what he had done, why, and what it was getting for. And then they started getting money together to rebuild the church. That was kind of funny center of attention because you really wouldn't think of

**kids as being... that was just a little strange. But there was a group that used to think that was a cool place to go.**

*Was this the same group that used to sing in Latin? Were they all other kids that went to St. Paul?*

**No, they weren't. I don't remember if any of them were.**

*Was the mass in Latin?*

**I'm sorry.**

*Was the mass in Latin?*

**Yes. And I can still say almost all of it. [LAUGHS] [SPEAKS LATIN]. All that kind of stuff. 'Cause I was enthusiastic about it.**

How did you come to learn Latin? I know you said you have a lot of experience.

**In high school you had to take a foreign language. You had to take two years of a foreign language. And at that time you had your choice of Spanish, German, and Latin. And Spanish and German didn't appeal to me so I took Latin. I wasn't good at it. I was really pretty bad at it. I finally tried to get a teaching minor in Latin but I failed the last class, so I don't have a teaching minor in Latin.**

Did they still teach German throughout the war years? That seems a little odd.

**Yes, they did.**

*Was there many other people who had German parents? Were there very many German households around in Park Ridge that you were aware of?*

**There were a few but nobody made much attention of it. The one family that did get attention was the one Jewish family, because there was only one Jewish family.**

*What kind of attention did they get?*

**I don't think anything very harmful. They were just the center of attention. Her name was Maxine Levi, and she was in my sister's class, the daughter. No big deal. It was just a big deal that she was Jewish and she was in Park Ridge and a member of our class. That was unusual. It was particularly during the era when people starting talking about that sort of stuff. But truthfully there wasn't much talk about Jewish until the war was over. Germans**

hid most of that stuff pretty well. All the awful things that were happening we didn't find out about until later.

*What newspapers did you have delivered to the house?*

Tribune. I think that's all.

So you were saying the German families didn't get so much attention. But were there any Japanese families in Park Ridge?

There were no Japanese families in Park Ridge at the time. It was definitely, almost the entire Park Ridge was WASP or Catholic. You know, just very few others. No blacks, no Orientals. Not even servants. It was a big deal if somebody hired a black person as a cleaning person or as a babysitter or something like that. And I don't remember it ever happening until I was out of college. And of course you say, "Are you afraid of dark people?" Well, yeah because we don't know any. If they were green, we would still be afraid of them because it was something we didn't know. And that was some of my problems when I was going down to Michigan Avenue to play in the orchestra, is I had to walk through some of the areas that had a miscellanea of people: winos, heaven only knows, beggars. Walking down Madison Avenue from the Northwestern train station or wherever we got off the streetcar to Michigan Avenue was scary. Once you passed State Street, actually probably Randolph, things were better. But near the Northwestern station was winos and it was frightening. So that was my experience as a kid with people I didn't relate to. There weren't any Negroes or Orientals in the orchestras. I don't know where they were, but they weren't there. And actually when my son was in high school, no in grade school here- which was a hell of a lot later- one of the first Japanese families moved in. I think her name was Ita- I-T-A. Anyhow, I went to Dominican. There weren't any other... everybody was white, Caucasian at Dominican. Went to Marquette. Five of us moved into a flat that was an absolute disaster. It should have been condemned and was after we moved out. But one of the girls who moved in was Polynesian and dark. So she decided to let the interracial club meet in our disaster of a flat. So then I met a lot of people. But that was really the first time and I was like a junior in college. And my parents were horrified. They came to visit one time and this group of miscellaneous colored people were in the living room. They said, "Nancy, come out here. You are not living here." [LAUGHS] And I said, "Yeah? Well, where am I going to live then?" Because where I was living at Marquette was only a couple blocks from classes, a block from a major bus terminal or bus route, and that same bus route took me a long ways out to a hospital where I worked at night. So if they were going to move me, they were going to upset my whole life. They did end up condemning the building. They tore that building down and a couple that were next to it. They were rat traps, literally. They built the college union on those lots, so it's really right in the middle of school. A really nice place to live if you didn't mind rats. We had to put all the wires for the lights in pipe because the rats would come out at night and eat the insulation off the wires. We had to hand shovel the coal

into the furnace. Nice place to live. No refrigerator. [LAUGHS] Ice guy came around and put his little sign on the window. He would bring you, what was it, thirty pounds of ice. We'd set it in the tray and try to keep a few things cool.

*You going to ask about Ms. Perelini?*

So going back to high school experience. Do you remember Ms. Perelini and that class? Other classes' teachers, too.

There's three people in the school at that time that I have vivid memories of. Well, four. Harley, but it is not good memories. Ms. Perelini is one of them. Ms. Ellen, who was the Dean of Women. And she used to whistle for attention like this with her fingers in her mouth. And she was very, very loud. And of course we didn't know it at the time but she was a lesbian. If the school had known that, she might not have been there. But it is obvious looking back at it that she was. And then Ms. Peralini, who was English teacher. Ms. Perelini ran the place like it was a military thing. You walked into the class. You put all your books on the floor, on the righthand side of your desk. You brought your book out, opened to whatever page she'd left off on the day before, had two pencils ready and a piece of paper to take notes before the bell rang. Because once the bell rang, you were supposed to be ready for class. And once she'd call on you, you were supposed to stand, come attention, and say, "Yes, Ms. Perelini," and then answer the question. I was a very shy kid, and I had gotten away from third grade to senior in high school answering every question ever asked with "I don't know" even though I did. Because I was shy. I didn't want to talk in class. So we were in Ms. Perelini's class. Our assignment was to read Macbeth. So she said, "Nancy." I stood up. "What did Macbeth look like?" "I don't know." She said, "We'll wait until you find out." I said, "He had red hair, he was fat, and had freckles" and I sat down really quick. She said, "How do you know, Nancy?" [LAUGHS] I stood back up and I thought boy, I am never going to get away with anything in her class. I said, "Because he sounded out of breath on the soliloquy at the top of the stairs." That was just the vision I had. She said, "Fine. Sit down." It was the first time I realized it was okay. The first time in my life that I realized it was okay to open my mouth and answer a question. And I didn't realize 'till much, much later was the reason I was afraid to answer questions was I was smarter than most the other kids and I was afraid my answer would be laughed at because it would be at a different level than they were talking about. Kind of like much later in my memory the same thing happened. I was asked what blood pressure meant. And I started talking about the Reynold's number that you flow blood through, you know? That isn't the answer they wanted. They just wanted it is the level your blood starts to flow and starts to flow without being impeded. And I'm talking about Reynold's numbers. Probably that is something that impeded me through school because I was thinking on a different level than they were. And I was always surprised at the answers that they gave that were okay. In one class in college I learned to ask questions. I listened to other people ask questions. This was a teacher who didn't like people to ask dumb question. He would jump on people who asked dumb questions. And

I was really, really in favor of the people that asked dumb questions because I wanted to ask them. But I discovered one kid that got away with the questions he asked, so I started listening to the questions. And maybe you can profit from this one. One thing, the guy wrote the textbook so he doesn't want any questions that intimidate that his textbook is not clear. This guy that got away with his questions would say, "On page thirty-five in paragraph three, you used the phrase if and only if. Why did you use that phrase in particular?" He would get the whole chapter explained to him. And another guy would say, "I don't understand chapter five" and the guy would say, "Go read it again." So it was one of my first things in learning how to ask questions. Another was when I started working at General Electric. The first week at General Electric I got assigned to study the afterburner of a jet engine at close to mach one, and I didn't know what a mach number was. Now a mach number may be familiarly reasonable vocabulary now, but it wasn't then. So I said, "I am afraid to ask what a mach number is but I better know." So I am going to books trying to find a mach number. It's not in any of the books I find. So I started walking up and down the hall, just asking arbitrary people as I walked down the hall if they knew what a mach number is. I asked about thirty people. This is an engineering building. You would think that people... About the thirty-first person said, "Oh yes, mach number is the speed of sound. And the reason we use mach number and the speed of sound is that it is nondimensional in certain things so that what you find out about something at mach one is sea level is also true of mach one at sixty thousand feet, even though if you used miles per hour it would not be." So then I decided this is kind of fun. So I went up and down another aisle asking people what mach number was, but this time I knew what the answer was. So I went on another adventure in learning to ask questions. Anyway, I'm off the subject again.

So you mentioned there were two other teachers you had pretty good memories about.

Oh, yes. Mr. **Seraka** because I already talked about the band. How good he was and how he got the kids into everything and got so many people enthusiastic about music. He was just incredibly inspiring. And he only lasted two years at Main. I think Mr. Harley, who was the other music teacher, got him fired. Because Mr. Harley had been there for twenty years or so and he was not very good, but he didn't like the competition. It was obvious he didn't like the competition. The concert orchestra rehearsed in one large room and the concert band rehearsed in another large room across the hall. And half the kids in the orchestra migrated across the hall. I mean, the orchestra was getting to be very scarce because the band was so much more fun. Mr. Harley put out music for us to play, typically five things in your folder. And what you knew was only three of them would be there next week and two new ones would be. So you knew that the two you only had one week to learn. And if you wanted to learn them, you had to learn fast. And you had to sight read them, get it down. His technique of doing that and you not knowing what was still going to be in the folder had kids learning really fast and sight read fast and not bored. And Mr. Harley would, August 31st or whatever when school starts, he would put the things in the folder for the Christmas concert and it would be there 'till Christmas.

Then he would put the things in for the spring concert and it would be there until spring. By the third week you were so damn bored that even though you might like playing bass fiddle or cello or something, you wanted to be in that other room where things were going on. And I think Mr. Harley decided that was not good for him and probably found some excuse. Mr. Harley was a good people person. He started what they called the music masters at Main and he would get all the parents involved. And they would collect money for different things and get all things. And the parents never realized how bad he was. [LAUGHS] So that was my memory of him that's not a good memory. I know there was a good physics teacher, but I don't remember him. I can't go back and figure that out. And I do remember the Latin teacher. Her first name was Shirley. Why would I remember her first name? [LAUGHS] Don't usually remember teachers by their first name. But anyhow, she was... the reason I used to play bridge here. My mother used to have the bridge tournaments going on in the house. We'd have bridge tables all over the place and she would come over and play bridge. And also she and Ms. **Perelini** would invite my mother and I go to the weekend seminars at the University of Chicago. So we would go down and listen to Mortimer Adler or something like that. Really a good, big deal for me. So I remember them because of that kind of things. The horrible art teacher, I remember that. We had a bad art teacher. Judging from the art I did in high school, he must have been really bad because I have grade school art that was pretty good, and I've got art after I got out of college that was good, and horrible art when I was in high school. So how did he unteach me to do so badly? [LAUGHS] I still got a couple. I may have recently thrown them away, but I kept them for a long time. Stupid. One of them was I was trying to do an abstract inspired by some piece of music. It was terrible. Another one was I tried to draw a picture of someone diving off a diving board. It was awful. Just different... He was not good at teaching me.

So besides your brother, there was no one else close that you knew that was in the war?

I don't really. I'm sure I knew others but I don't really have memories that are still in existence.

There was a war bond drive to buy a C-54 at Douglas Aircraft that happened 1944-1945. What do you remember about that?

I remember that we were trying to get enough money ourselves to buy, I think they were ten dollar war bonds, and if I remember they were at a four percent interest rate. And we were all trying to save up money, do errands, stuff like that, to buy a war bond. That is in my memory.

Do you remember selling any bonds?

No.

What do you remember about VE or VJ Day?

**Nothing. That they existed, but no details.**

I think you had said before that there was not much to remember about until later on. The last thing...

**If we turned on the radio, it was for Cisco Kid or the All American Boy or First Nighter or Inner Sanctum or something like that, not to listen to news. We were kids.**

So if you look back at your experience during these years in war, just at your life during those years, what would you want to tell today's generation about your experience?

**The things we did have trouble with and work at because of that were experiences valuable and I'm glad I had them. But at the time, we didn't think they were extraordinary. It's only comparing with what is happening today that you realize that some of the work we were doing... because we weren't asking to get paid for anything. Somebody needs some help with doing something in their house, over we'd go. If they needed help planting their victory garden, over we'd go. If you needed somebody to dig a hole, there we were. And it never occurred to us as kids to ask for money for anything, except babysitting. Babysitting was the one thing you could get paid for. Fifteen cents.**

A minute?

**No [LAUGHS], an hour. And sometimes they cheated on that one. But I remember that I would much rather do laundry or dig holes than babysit. I was not a good babysitter. Kids drove me crazy. It was a wonder the houses survived when I babysat because I could not hold the fort down and I avoided it if possible. But I did babysit for the people before **Hatchkins Pours**, two doors down. And I radically disliked it. I'll work hard, but that isn't just work hard. That is figuring out how to control things.**

*Okay, on that note I think we can end it.*

**That was about the time whiteout was discovered.**

*Well let's just back up a second. Nancy, we were asking you about your father working at the Douglas plant.*

**One of the stories he told us when he came home was this marvelous new stuff that you could put on top of ink that you've put in the wrong place and it would white it out. And that I think probably a new discovery then. It was not very good; it's still not very good. But it was a big deal because these drawings had to be perfect, the military designs for gears and heaven only knows what. And if they mistakes on them, they didn't want to**

have to start over. So that was a neat thing. And the other story was the night Douglas Aircraft burnt down. My father was on the night shift because he was selling insurance and doing landscaping during the day and working there at night. He came home, got all of us out of bed. We climbed up on the roof and watched the fire from here. That was, of course, the end of his working at Douglas because there wasn't any building there anymore.

*When did that happen? Was that in 1945 when it burned down or was it later?*

No, I don't think it wasn't later because he woke me up. In '46 I would have been off at college in the fall. We used to go out there, to where Douglas is now. You know the road at O'Hare that has all the car rentals and that good stuff?

*Is that Manheim?*

Yeah, it used to be Manheim. Now Manheim is a bigger road and this is in where the parking. The little side road that you can get to the airport. We used to go out there frequently as kids, bunches of us, and ride our bicycles and bring bananas and peanut butter sandwiches and have lunch in the forest preserve. And ride our bicycles. It was the safest place around because there was no traffic- none. You could ride on the airplane runways, you could ride all over the place there. If they were actually going to have take-offs or something like that, they would shoo us all off. They didn't have that much airplane traffic and we could wander all over what is now O'Hare Airport on our bicycles.

*That is great. I can see that.*

*Thank you. That wraps up part one.*