

Darien, Illinois
Oral History Project

Ms. Lillian Brown

interviewed by Deb Barrett

April 2, 2013

Indian Prairie Public Library
Darien, Illinois

Today is Tuesday, April 2, 2013 and I am with Ms. Lillian Brown at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Ms. Brown was born on May 10, 1929, at home, in Forest Park, Illinois. She has lived in Darien since December 1, 1960 and is here to share her memories about this area.

Life Before Coming to Darien

So, you were born in Forest Park and you spent your childhood there?

Yes, until I got married. Then I moved to Downers Grove and lived with my husband's mother. He had gone into the service right after we got married, so I stayed with her.

What year was that?

It was 1952. When we had our third child the house was quite full, so when we found out I was pregnant for the fourth time we decided to look for a home in the area around here. We looked at a lot of homes, but we found this one in Brookhaven which I particularly liked because it was all on one floor. It had a washer and dryer on the same floor. At the time, I had a little boy, Jimmy, who was not yet one year old and I was expecting another child real soon, so I thought it would be nice to be all on one floor – I could do the washing and everything.

So, we looked around at a lot of places, but we thought these were the best buy for the money.

When you were in Downers Grove, that was a long way from Forest Park at that time.

Yes. I met my husband at the Continental Bank. We both worked there. We were both bookkeepers at the Continental Bank in Chicago.

In the city?

Yes.

Had you been out this way before?

No.

So you had lived in Forest Park and sort of stayed east of here.

Right; I lived in Forest Park until I got married. We lived in the same house across the street from the Legion hall. We got to see all the weddings and hear all the bands. All the parades started there, so we got to see all the Fourth of July parades. It was a very nice place to live.

When you moved to ~~Downers Grove~~ [Darien], how did that setting compare to what you were familiar with?

Well, it was very rural. There weren't any stores or anything around. In Forest Park you could take the "L" down to Chicago. There were a lot of stores and shopping in Oak Park and around, and out here there was absolutely nothing. You had to have a car or you couldn't get any place. There weren't even any grocery stores, and you had to go into Westmont to get milk.

One town over.

Right.

So did you borrow your mother-in-law's car?

No, my husband had a car. My mother-in-law didn't have a car. She was a widow and she was older. So if I wanted to keep the car for something I had to take all the kids to work with my husband – he worked 3:00-11:00 all the time at Shaffer Bearing in Downers Grove, or Rexnord as it was called later. Anyhow, if I wanted to go someplace – like if I had to take the kids to the doctor or something – I had to take him to work at 3:00 and then pick him up at 11:00 with all the kids in the car, because I didn't leave them home alone. So it was quite an inconvenience if we had to do something during at night. Until 2:00 I could have the car, but after that he needed it to go to work.

You said you had to go into Westmont for milk and groceries and all that. Where did you do clothes shopping?

Well, I'm not sure if Oakbrook was started then or not. I probably still shopped at Wieboldt's in Oak Park because I was familiar with that store. It was very nice and close, and you could park there. There was a Fair store in Oak Park and stuff. So I probably still shopped there.

So Oak Park was still your shopping destination.

Yes, for clothes and stuff. Then the Hillside shopping center opened up not too much longer after we moved here, because I know I took the two older kids there to have their picture taken with Santa Claus.

That was a lot closer than going to Oak Park.

Yes. I don't know what year it opened, but then it was there.

Living in Darien

You said you moved in December of 1960 into your new house. Was it a new house?

Yes. It was brand new. It was empty. It had tile on the floor. It was just a plain, empty house. And we didn't have a lot of furniture, so I got some leftover pieces from my mother's house and we made do.

This was south of 75th Street, and west of Cass Avenue – right behind the Brookhaven Shopping Center.

Yes.

Was that shopping center there?

No.

Nothing was there. So that shopping center came in after you did.

Right.

What was on that corner before?

There was a gas station there. I think it was a Citgo gas station on that corner.

That area where Cass intersects Plainfield – that's all little shops now. What else was there besides a gas station?

Nothing.

Just open fields?

Yes. There was nothing there when we moved in.

What was the situation with the roads?

There was no stoplight at 75th and Cass. There were just stop signs there.

Was there one lane in each direction?

Probably two lanes in each direction. That little white church was on the corner that was torn down – St. John's Lutheran Church. And I went to that church, so it was nice and close to take the kids to Sunday school and stuff.

How many parishioners were there?

I don't remember that; probably about 350.

It was a very little church. Where did the children go to school?

When I lived in Downers Grove, and I checked with the people when I was going to move out here, they led me to believe that there was a kindergarten here. But there wasn't when I got here, and I was sadly surprised to find out there wasn't one. The school didn't have kindergarten then yet. The kids went to Marion Hills School. My little son was very anxious to go to school, so I sent him to Bethel Lutheran Kindergarten in Westmont. Several of us parents car-pooled and took them up there to school – some other people, the neighbors' kids, went there to kindergarten, too.

What grades were in Marion Hills? Was it all grades, first through eighth?

No. It was probably first through third. Then they built Lace School, and Lace School was fourth through eighth.

So your kids went to Marion Hills and then to Lace?

Yes, except that there was a big building boom just then, and they had a lot of kids. So they had classes in the basement of the little Marion Hills Bible Church.

Across the street?

Yes. My little daughter went to third grade there – my youngest daughter. And they also had kindergarten in St. John's Lutheran education building before they built the church. My daughter went to kindergarten there. That was before they built an addition on Lace, and before they built Hinsbrook School, which now is Mark DeLay School; and Fairview School. Those weren't built yet.

So your older kids went to Bethel Lutheran kindergarten.

Just the one.

And the other kids, at that time they'd added kindergarten ...

By that time the two little ones got to go there.

How many kids did you have?

Four.

So they went to kindergarten at Marion Hills – kindergarten through first, and then to Lace.

Kindergarten through second or third, I think it was. I know at one time it was third grade because at one time my daughter was in third grade at the Marion Hills Bible Church. But then it moved down and was only kindergarten, first and second. Third grade went over to Lace School.

And this was before Eisenhower was built.

Right. My oldest daughter graduated eighth grade from Lace Marion School at the corner of 75th & Cass. The next year Eisenhower was built, and my son graduated in the first graduating class from Eisenhower.

During this time were you a stay-at-home mom?

I was stay-at-home, but I volunteered for a lot of stuff because my husband went to work at 3:00, but I could do things until then. He would watch the little ones while I went.

I used to do the health records for all the kids in the school – they used to keep them all at Marion Hills School. We used to put the immunizations down. We used to weigh all the kids every year and write down how much they weighed and how tall they were. We stopped doing it after a while because the kids didn't like that being announced. But they used to do that.

I was a room mother. We had hot dog day at Marion Hills. I was a picture lady. We used to have pictures that we learned about and we took to the kids to explain the different things we learned about the pictures.

Paintings and things?

Yes. It was quite interesting.

I used to go on field trips with the kids. My little son, Jimmy, he was real funny. He told the teacher, "Oh, my mother will take all the boys. She likes the boys," instead of giving me a few of each. So the teacher misunderstood him and I ended up with a group of twelve boys whom I had to look after at the Brookfield Zoo! And, of course, they all wanted to go to the snake house and see the snakes. Anyhow, I had a really big time that day keeping track of them all! I figured it would be easier if I had all boys instead of girls and boys when they had to go to the washroom and stuff. So he said, "My mother said she'd take all the boys."

What grade was he in?

Second.

A very active age!

Yes. Jimmy was a character.

So you were the mom who got volunteered to do a lot.

Right. And bake for the parties. I was more than happy to help with things I could do.

What sort of things did your family do for entertainment at that time?

Well, my sister and her family had a cottage up at Browns Lake in Burlington, Wisconsin. They used to go up there all summer. So any weekend it was warm and they were amenable to our coming, which was most any time, we used to pack up the kids. I used to get the car all ready. I took Bill to work in the afternoon, packed the car up and I'd meet him at 11:00 and we'd leave right after that to drive up to the lake. The kids would sleep in the car until [6:00] in the morning when my sister and her husband woke up. They'd have their bathing suits on and the first thing they'd want to do was go swimming.

Anyhow, she had a lovely cottage out there. It had a lot of room. There was a front porch that had two double beds on it. You could sleep up there. They had some cots for the kids, a little baby bed. They didn't have any kids, so they had all kinds of stuff for the nieces and nephews. They had canoes and a water bicycle, motor boat and a row boat – most anything you could think of. And it was right on the lake, so the kids could go right from the pier into the water and swim right there. They put down the ladder and had little life vests on.

I took them all to Hinsdale to learn how to swim because I had never learned how.

To the high school?

Yes.

South or Central?

[The two oldest to Central and the two youngest to South] South. They used to have swimming classes. I took the two oldest first, then I took the two younger ones. They all learned how to swim, even though their mother never did.

They enjoyed the water a lot and they enjoyed going up to that cottage.

So you got them involved in some things here like the swimming classes. What other kinds of activities did they get into?

The boys were in Cub Scouts [and Boy Scouts], and the girls were in Brownies and Girl Scouts.

Was that through the church?

No. It was sort of through the community. I was a troop organizer for a while for the Girl Scouts and started a bunch of Girl Scout and Brownie troops out here. There were so many. I'd get a group of twenty little girls for Brownies and they'd want to be in Brownies. I'd have to say we didn't have a leader, but if they'd be willing to be a leader we could start a new troop. And I said to some of the people if they couldn't be a leader, would they watch the leader's children while they had Brownies, because they needed to cooperate if they wanted to have a troop. So I got all kinds of people to do all kinds of things by hook or by crook. Anyhow, we got more Brownie troops started, and Junior troops the same way. There was a Cadet troop that was here. Anyhow, it was a nice cooperative effort of a lot of parents.

And the Boy Scout troop met at Cass School, down the road ~~on 75th Street~~ [at Bailey Road and North Frontage Road]. They had little Cub Scout troops [too]. One lady behind me was a Cub Scout leader.

It was nice. We all kind of helped each other. I drove sometimes to the places.

One time I remember I drove and it was pouring rain. I didn't think the campout was going to be. But I had a station wagon and had all the tents in the back. I had four little boys with me and they were all excited. Well, they finally canceled it. But they didn't cancel it until about 11:00 at night because they were still hoping to do it. But it rained too hard. So I brought the kids home and these one set of parents didn't answer the door. I don't know if the bell didn't work or not, but anyhow we finally honked the horn and they came out and took the kids out of the car.

In the meantime, when we were driving home there were these big puddles and I was hoping the car wasn't going to conk out because the water was flying over us. But the wetter it got, the happier the little boys got. They were laughing and giggling and carrying on. But I was hoping and praying I was going to get them home safe before it got worse. It was an experience!

What about you and your husband? Did you go to movies? And where did you go?

There weren't any movies right around here. I imagine there was one in LaGrange. But we used to go to the drive-in movies. There was one by Route 66, south of Plainfield Road. We used to go there before we got married, too. They used to have little in-car heaters that you could hang in the window. We used to take blankets and go in the winter all the time. And for the kids, they had a playground there where they could play. And they'd fall asleep in the back seat, eventually. So we only went to ones like that.

My husband was a smoker and didn't like to go into places where you couldn't smoke.

What about restaurants?

There was a Dog 'n Suds on Plainfield Road, and that was about the only thing around here. There wasn't any McDonald's. We didn't go out to eat very often because we didn't have much money. But every once in a while my brother-in-law, who was in Forest Park and was one of the Lions Club members there where they would have pancake day, would buy tickets for me and all the kids in the family. So that was a big deal to go to pancake day in Forest Park. But they eventually had them out here, too.

I still like to participate. I like to go for the pancake days. I go for the Lions Club and the Boy Scout troops who have them.

You still have family in Forest Park?

Yes. My mother lived there and my one sister and her husband lived there a block away.

My one sister got married and moved to Iowa, then to Milwaukee. That was really a coincidence. Every couple of years she'd have another child and they'd always seem to come in the summer. And my mother went out there because, naturally, when you had a baby your mother came to help. And I always got to go, too. So I learned all about taking care of little babies and babysitting when I was young. And I used to babysit for a lot of people in Forest Park, too.

How did your life with the kids compare to your sister's or relatives' who were still in Forest Park?

It was different out here because it was more country-like. The kids used to build forts where Knottingham is. None of that was here. And behind the houses across the street there was a tree farm. They used to go out there and play in the tree farm. They would ride their bicycles down to Rocky Glen. My one little son used to be gone all day picking up bugs and stuff, and little tadpoles – most anything you could find to do. The neighbor lady would pick him up and drop him and her son off there, and they'd be gone all day. They'd have a lunch and just enjoy themselves. You didn't have to worry about the kids being away. There must have been a hundred kids on my block when the kids were little, so there were always people to play with. I didn't worry about them too much. They always came home when it was time to eat! Other than that they had a lot of friends.

Be home when the sun goes down!

Well, a little before that. They'd know to come home when they got hungry, but they'd always come home by dark.

So as your kids got older, what did they do for part-time jobs, or did they have them?

Yes. My daughter worked at Longhorn Restaurant which was in Brookhaven shopping center. She was the oldest one. She had fun being a waitress. She waitressed a lot of time during her life.

My oldest son, he worked at Ponderosa – there was a Ponderosa Steakhouse at 63rd and Main Street in Downers Grove. He enjoyed working in the food industry. He also worked at Kinney Shoes for a while on Ogden Avenue. He was real funny. They had a bunch of kids working there, and one would say to another that they would have the supervisor check to be sure of the right size, and Joey would come. He would know nothing else about shoes, either, but he was the person they would talk to. He was a real talker, and he could be very congenial and friendly to people. So he worked there for a while, too.

Then as he got a little older he worked at McDonald's when it came in. He had sort of an interesting job. He used to order stuff. They had some kind of a star program that he helped with. Once they got the kids at Eisenhower to order hamburgers and they'd take a big order there once a month to the kids. It was real thrilling to the children.

But there wasn't that much around here to do. There wasn't any bowling alley until Mike Ditka's came in there. There weren't any theaters around until the Tivoli opened in Downers Grove. It was open for a while.

When was that?

I don't exactly know, but when we lived in Downers Grove we used to go to the Tivoli.

It was open for a while, and then they closed it to renovate it?

No. It was always open. It's a beautiful theater. Have you ever been in it?

I used to go there a lot, and I still go there.

They have an organ that would go down into the floor. It was really nice.

Once in a while I'd get my mother-in-law to watch the kids. And I'd walk down there after they were ready for bed. And there was a little round-the-clock snack time that was across the street on the corner. And after the show was over I'd go there and my husband would pick me up from work – if I wanted to go see something special. But it wasn't too often.

You said there was a boom in the housing in the area that happened. When did that start?

Probably after we moved in here Hinsbrook started, and there were only a few homes in there at first.

That was in 1965?

Probably. It was before I started working for the school district. But I used to help take the census for the school district. They like to know how many kids were going to be coming up for kindergarten so they knew how to plan. I used to go to all the houses and ring the doorbell. I'd have to say I wasn't selling anything, just taking a census. They wanted to know the ages of the children and if they were planning to go to the public school, or if they planned to go when St. Mary's opened, which is now Our Lady of Peace, they knew some of them were going to be going there. But all the rest we used to keep track of.

They used to pay me something like \$200 for taking this census all summer. I had some people helping me, but I had to make sure they were actually doing it instead of just writing down what they thought, because they wanted it to be quite accurate so they'd know how to plan for the schools.

I got to know all the places in Hinsbrook quite well. A couple of times I parked my car and then couldn't find it because the streets curved around and I didn't know where I was going! Some houses weren't built, and some were. But I did take the census like that for several years.

When Darien decided they wanted to become a city, they had to have some means of knowing how many people lived in the area. So, I had to go to the DuPage County – to the court in Wheaton. And I had to be sworn in and say how many people lived in the area according to the school census. And they accepted that school census as part of the facts to make sure there were enough people for incorporation into a city.

That was quite a change! The incorporation was in 1969 or 1970?

In 1969.

So you went from moving to Brookhaven in 1960 and there was nothing around. And nine years later we were incorporating into a city.

Well, you see, Marion Hills was already established. Clairfield was established, and the southern part of Clairfield was established that was north of Hinsbrook between Clarendon Hills Road and Richmond Avenue.

That was Clairfield?

Yes, and North Clairfield – one was part north and one was south.

And there were people who had wanted all the time to not be taken in by the City of Westmont. So they tried for a long time to incorporate – first the smaller areas. Then, when Knottingham and people had people living in it and Brookhaven West and Brookhaven East, Marion Hills and Clairfield – they all got together and had a straw vote to see if all those people, the majority, wanted to be incorporated into a town. Well, Knottingham decided they didn't want to be involved in it, so Knottingham dropped out. But the rest of us incorporated then and became the City of Darien.

Along the way you saw other big pieces of property come about – Oakbrook Shopping Center. Did you start shopping there instead of going so far out?

Yes. And Yorktown came too, eventually.

Did Yorktown come after Oakbrook or were they close in time?

I don't remember, but I know we shopped in Sears at Oakbrook a lot. And there were other stores. There was a Zayre store at 63rd and Cass. I know I used to buy little dresses for the girls for school there and overalls for the boys – the jeans – at Sears because they double knees in them on the inside and they were real nice. They fit the older boy, then the next boy. Then my daughter Ruthie, the last one, was a little tomboy. She liked wearing those jeans, too. So they had good wear!

You saw Oakbrook come up and Yorktown. And Argonne?

Yes. Argonne was here already, I think. I was never experienced with anything at Argonne. I knew people who worked there. The man who lived next door to me worked there – Robert Kampwirth. He was instrumental in forming the library district. He worked there, and some other people from church. When I got to work at Hinsbrook School, a lot of those kids' parents worked at Argonne.

So you've been very involved in the school district. For how long?

I retired in 1994.

How did the schools change with all this influx of people? Hinsbrook came up, Knottingham – all the Farmingdale's.

~~Farmingdale~~ [Knottingham] kids didn't go.

Cass was the dividing line.

No. It was really weird. The dividing line was where the farmer's house stood. So, if the farmer's house stood in the part that was facing the road, that whole area that became houses went to that school district. The school district isn't a nice little squared off thing. It goes around, up and down and stuff – depending on where the farmer's house was who owned the land when they sold it. It was very interesting.

The school changed a lot. Of course, I still work at the school but I'm volunteering now. I go once a week and read poetry with the second graders – silly little poetry that's supposed to help them. I have a lot of fun with them. And it's nice because if I want to run something off, like a Christmas card for myself or something, they let me use the copy machine. And that's a nice thing to be able to do. So I still help at the school.

So how have the schools changed? What changes have you seen?

Well, first of all, when Fairview School opened up and it was that open concept school that was completely different. There were no walls or anything. I couldn't quite understand how the kids could learn with all that distraction around them. But supposedly it worked really well because it taught them to concentrate.

I mostly worked at Hinsbrook School all the time, which is now Mark DeLay. B

And Mark DeLay had been the superintendent of the Darien schools.

Yes. And I also, for a while, worked at all the schools because they couldn't afford a health aide at each school. So I worked one day here, one day here and one day at the other school and kept track of the immunizations and stuff for the kids.

And I also went to school with the State of Illinois and became a vision and hearing technician, so that I could do the pre-school screening to check the little kids before they went to school, to

be sure they didn't have amblyopia, which is that ~~one-eye~~ [lazy eye] thing. And also to make sure they could hear well. One little boy had a piece of tinfoil stuck in his ear, and his mother didn't know and he couldn't hear a thing out of his one ear! It was really interesting.

We had a very good rapport with the Lions Club. A lot of the superintendents and principals of the schools belonged to the Lions Club. So when they wanted me to be this vision and hearing technician, the Lions Club paid for an audiometer for the school, and also a titmus vision tester. So when I went and became certified that I could do this, it was nice because I could help with the pre-school screening and check all the preschoolers. Also, any new kids that came in during the year that they didn't have a record of from their other school, and if the teacher thought maybe they were having a problem seeing or hearing, they would bring them over to Mark DeLay School because I had the machines there and I could test them.

What year was it that you started doing this with the machines?

I don't exactly remember. I could look it up at home because I have a little card that says when I started.

Anyhow, it was a really nice service for the school district to be able to do that on their own instead of having to wait for the DuPage County Health Department nurse to come out. We didn't have nurses in the schools. We just had health aides. But they had a nurse from LADSE who was in charge of all of us, so if we had a specific problem or something we didn't know how to deal with, she would come in and we could ask her to help us deal with the thing.

One of the most fun things was that we had to check for lice all the time! Over the summertime a lot of the little kids would get lice.

They'd have Brownies and put all their little hats and coats together in a pile and stuff. And the mothers would be most adamant that they thought lice came from being dirty, which it doesn't. But I had a hard time explaining that to the parents.

Finally we got real smart and when we found a live louse we'd pick it up with a piece of scotch tape and put it in the office, and then when the parents came they could see that with the microscope, and they'd be all grossed out because you could see the blood gorging in it. But then they'd be all concerned and want to have their hair checked, and the brothers and sisters hair checked. The teachers wanted to have their hair checked.

But we used to have a lot of fun, because the five health aides used to go one day to Marion Hills and check all the kids, one day to Lace and check all the kids, one day to Eisenhower and check all the kids. Then, if one of us thought it was a louse – we saw little lice eggs called nits – we could cut that little hair off and put it under a microscope and see. They are shaped like a little tear drop. They are very distinctive, and you could see what they were. But we would never tell anybody that they had lice until we were sure that a couple of us saw it.

It's real hard to see in little blond hair that's kind of shiny and shimmery anyhow. In dark hair it was real easy to find. We used to have sticks like Q-tips, but they didn't have ends on them. We

used to separate the hair with them to look for the lice. It was an outing at the beginning of the year. We all went out and checked for lice. We called ourselves the nit-pickers! We would sign cards sometimes when we were being silly to each other, signing “the nit-pickers.”

Anyhow, it was a good service and it was necessary, because otherwise lice would be rampant. If you had some of a whole family in the school and were friends with other kids, then they’d stay overnight or put their coats and hats together. Then they got all these little cubbies so that all their things were separate. And for a while they had all the kids bring plastic to put their coats and hats in, in the cubbies, so their stuff wouldn’t touch. But it was very hard for little kids because they didn’t understand. We tried to explain to them that they shouldn’t share combs and all this stuff, but it was a big problem.

Did you see any rise or fall in it as the years went on?

Well, I think when we started doing it at the beginning of the year and catching it, after the summer, then it went down a little bit. But it still sporadically came out. When they stopped using DDT it spread.

Your kids went to Downers South?

Mine went to Downers because I lived on the other side of Cass Avenue. Cass was the dividing line, except for one little hunk – there was a doctor who lived there and he wanted his kids to go to Hinsdale South, so he got a lot of people to sign petitions. So that one little area south of Plainfield Road goes to Hinsdale South, but all the rest went to Downers.

What year did your kids start high school?

I’ve got to figure that out! My daughter started in ~~1979~~ [1969].

Downers Grove South had been here for a little while by that time, but not that long.

No. Downers Grove North – the kids used to have to go to Downers North and Hinsdale Central.

I know about that because I had to go to South, and it wasn’t there that long when I went there. And I know Downers North is older than Downers South.

Right. I don’t know exactly what year it opened, but my kids all went to Downers South. They had all these portable classrooms for a while until they put additions on – they had to go outside and run across to the portable classrooms because there was not enough room in the school for all the classes.

Because of the big population boom with all these houses going up.

Right.

Changes over the Years

Is there anything you remember particularly about your life changing when you moved out here and you saw all the population coming up? What are some of the biggest changes you've seen?

Well, the shopping centers for one thing. Like at Route 83, I was happy to have Kmart there. It came before Walmart. You could go and get clothes there and stuff – underwear for the kids, and socks.

It was very nice to have more people to be friends with in the area. You got to be friends with the people from Hinsbrook and other areas – people you didn't know when you were just in your own little section.

I would imagine having the food shopping close by was a nice thing!

Oh, yes! That was very nice. I know one time I went to Westmont and got two gallons of milk. I had them on the front floor and was going down Cass Avenue. The car in front of me stopped and I put on the brakes, and the two plastic jugs broke on the floor. And you could not get rid of that smell of the milk out of the rugs. So finally we took the rugs out and didn't have any rugs on the floor because it smelled horrible sour milk. So I was so happy when at Brookhaven that one IGA store finally came in. And we could go shopping there. And then other things came along.

Was that in the late 1960's that Brookhaven Shopping Center came in? When my family moved here in 1969 I think it was already there, but I don't know for how long.

Hmmm. I'm telling things wrong. I was making it 1965 instead of 1955.

Okay. My daughter started at Downers South in 1969. [Ms. Brown figures aloud the time based on her son, Joe's, birth date.]

Now that Brookhaven IGA probably started in 1963. His [Joe's] teacher was the daughter of the man who owned the Brookhaven Water Department and those stores. His name was Mr. Betke. So one day they had part of the wall up and a big wind came up and knocked it down. So everyone went over to see the big wall that got blown over. Joe was in third grade then, and that would have been 1963.

Eventually some stores came on the other side. A barber shop came, then a little convenience store. There was a meat market there and a WronSkis drug store. Then, over on this side another drug store came in and a barber shop. They had an eye doctor, then a dentist – Tempestini. Anyhow it grew then. And it was nice when there were stores around and you could get the groceries right there.

In 1967 they had that big snow storm and you couldn't get through the streets for a couple of days. So I remember my oldest daughter and I took a sled and walked down the middle of the street and the snow was real deep to go get milk from that IGA.

Luckily, on the particular day that storm started – and it had been snowing that day a whole lot – my husband didn't go to work at 3:00. He worked in Downers Grove and he didn't think he could get through and get back. So he stayed home because you couldn't get anywhere for a couple of days. The plow couldn't get through the streets and all the neighbors were out shoveling. They didn't have snow blowers yet then because it seemed like they all were out shoveling.

My little daughter was out playing in the snow and the others all came running around to say she fell in the bushes and is upside down! Anyway, we got her out right away. But it was some snow. It was really bad.

You've seen a lot of changes over the years. What do you miss? What do you think were good changes?

I think the neighbors were lots more friendly when there was not much else to do. I am real involved in a lot of stuff. We have the Darien Seniors now which we didn't have. We have Active Seniors, too, because there was a long waiting list for the Darien Seniors and you couldn't get in for a year and a half, because they couldn't have more than so many people. They used to meet in the basement of St. John's church. But they didn't have an elevator there. So when the Sportsplex opened up, they moved to the Sportsplex because they had this lovely elevator to take the people upstairs. That was a real help with the community.

I'm involved with making quilts at church. I'm real involved with the Lutheran church with a lot of stuff.

I'm involved with the Downers Grove Township Senior Citizen Advisory Board, which helps to think of problems that seniors might be having that we can do something to help, or to inform them about scams and all kinds of stuff.

I was a secretary of the PTA. I know one time we decided to have a pancake day. We each decided to bring our own electric frying pans and make pancakes. But we kept blowing fuses because you could only plug one coffee pot in at Lace School, so we have to use all the classrooms to make the pancakes and then dash them down to the gym. It was really something else!

There were a lot of fun experiences, book fairs and stuff. One time my friend, Connie Seddon, who moved away, was involved in the school district, too. She had a truck and we went around some bumps and a whole box of books fell out in the middle of the street. We tried to stop the traffic so we could pick up the books to take them back to the book dealer. I don't know where we got the books from, but it was someplace out. It was really a mess.

I had a lot of experience with the band boosters. My kids were in band and they used to have these cute little uniforms with white pants and red vests that they wore. I was the band boosters' treasurer. When I was working at the school and they went on a trip to Missouri – to St. Louis – I got to go along as the first-aider. I had all this stuff. There was one kid who had asthma and

had to have medicine every day. So I had this thing I had to carry with me everyday – ice packs and stuff – in case anybody got hurt along the way. We had a lot a fun.

We went up in the arch with the kids, and this one band director who was a young guy in charge of the jazz band, he was scared to death. He didn't want the kids to know. So he said he was going up with me. Each time he'd go up a bit, then a little more. He was just petrified until we got to the top. But it was lovely. We had a lovely time. And we went to this little town in Missouri where the band director was from and played concerts there. We had a great time. My son was in a room with a couple of other boys who were a couple of little characters. So the man who was in charge of the chaperons, he took the kids pants away so they wouldn't sneak out at night. He was a real nice man. But his son was one of them! There was my son, the two Haddick boys and a few more of them together. Anyway, he wanted to make sure they weren't going to sneak out at night so he took all their pants.

It sounds like what you miss is the camaraderie that was there when people had less to rely on.

Yes. You had to rely on each other.

But it's nice to have some of the amenities like buildings with elevators.

It is. It's very nice. They have a lot of nice things in Darien now. The Park District has a lot of lovely things – programs. The seniors have programs to take you on trips. I went with them to Branson this past year and I had a lovely time. I had never been there, and I thought it was just wonderful how you got to see all these shows in one day. I was a little tired, but I got to see three shows in one day – one on the morning, one in the afternoon, and one at night! We have a lovely time and I'm so happy I went.

I was involved in the bicentennial commission. We had a meeting every month with that. We had all kinds of programs for it. Eventually we took some of our money and, after we had a vote and decided to let the historical society be at Old Lace School, the youth commission wanted to store their bats and stuff there. So we had a big meeting and the historical society won. But we helped to pay for some of their bills for a little bit. It's a great society, too. They do lots of nice things. They just published that book – you've probably seen it. It's very interesting. It's got a lot of pictures of the old farms and stuff – Darien as it was before it was Darien.

So people in Forest Park now know where Darien is!

Yes! They know where it is.

Nobody used to know where Darien was. They'd never heard of it because it was new.

I was an election judge for forty years and used to go down to Wheaton to pick up the ballots and take them back. There was one election – it was a big presidential election – and it had a paper ballot that must have been this big.

Two feet long.

Yes. And you had to fold it up. And there was also on that same ballot a bullet voting. You could vote for one person, two or three people. If you voted for one, they got three votes. If you voted for two they each got one-and-a-half. And if you voted for all three they each got one vote. Anyhow, we had to count these ballots at night before we went home. So we started in this classroom. Well, school started the next morning and we had to move into the kitchen. We stayed in the kitchen working until lunchtime the next day. We finally got done, but it just took forever and forever to count those ballots.

I called up the commission to tell them that the ballot box was full. They said, "Oh, well, just take a yardstick and push them down." They didn't realize that when you pushed them down like that it was real hard to open them up without ripping them. Anyhow, that was something else.

Was this 1960?

I forget what year that was. But it was a horrible thing.

And they also divided into more things [precincts]. It used to be that all the way from Downers Grove they came to vote at Lace School and all kind of people. But they divided it into more precincts and then it was better. But originally, when you had to count all those ballots, you had to be there at 5:00 in the morning to set up for the next day. Then you had to stay all night through the next day until you got those ballots counted. Then I got my husband, luckily, to drive me back to Wheaton so I didn't have to stay awake in the car with the one democrat and one republican judge to take all the stuff back to Wheaton. And you had to make sure it was all in the right piles. It was really something else.

I stayed being an election judge until 2000. Then I started to get arthritis in my knees and decided it was too hard to sit there all day. Some of the judges, one fell asleep. We had crazy judges who were getting older, too. So I thought it was a good time to get out. So I told them I couldn't do it anymore because I couldn't sit that long.

But I liked being a judge at Lace School because I'd see all my neighbors come in. And I used to know most of them who came in. And it was a nice day when everything worked out well. But that didn't always happen. Then people would get really mad if they had moved and forgot to transfer their thing. They'd say, "You know I lived here." I'd have to say, "I know, but it doesn't say that and you have to change your address." Well they'd get all mad. And people never knew what precinct they were in. We had this big map and I used to try to be helpful to find out where they voted. One time I even took some Indian lady over because she didn't have a car and had walked over.

Anyhow, it was time to get out. And I'm real happy because now they do everything by computer and they have all these precincts there together. You have to give them your driver's license and they put it in to make a ballot on the machine for you. It's a lot different than what it used to be.

So everything is more automated now.

Right. And I don't care for all that automation. I have a computer, but I don't know how to do it. I can only play games on it. I had email for a while, but I could never figure out how to retrieve it right, so I just don't tell people that I have that anymore. I don't tell them that I have a cell phone. It's just easier to live simply.

And that sounds like that was your favorite part of moving out here – simple living.

Right. It was nice.

Looking to the Future for Darien

What do you foresee for Darien?

Well, I think it will keep growing. I think it's a wonderful place to live. I think the government of Darien is doing a good job of trying to keep the prices low and trying to keep gangs out and stuff.

I went to a couple of police academies which were real interesting. They showed you why the police put their car behind you when you're driving and why they talk from behind you, unless you have a card that says you are hard of hearing and show it to them. They want to make sure that they're watching you but you can't see what they're doing. There are a lot of safeguards that they have, and it was very interesting.

Once I went to one where we got to go to Clarendon Hills and actually fire guns. One time we got to go to see the jail at DuPage County. It was very interesting. They had some simulated situations where you could decide whether you should shoot or not shoot, or what you should do. It was a great experience. I really enjoyed it.

Do any of your kids live in Darien?

No. My oldest daughter was shot in Florida, and she's dead. My second son lives in Naperville. My third child, a son, lives in Wheaton. And my daughter lives in Centerville, Tennessee. So there are two sons around here, close.

But one son is going to move to Canada. He married a Canadian, and she never changed her citizenship. She's been living here for 27 or 28 years. He's going to retire, and she thought it would be nice to go to Canada for a while and show their girls Canada. So he went through a whole bunch of stuff and got his passport cleared and everything. So they're going to move up to Canada on June 7.

So life's gotten more mobile for everyone, and it's certainly affected your family.

And I got to go on a lot of nice trips.

My husband died when I was 55 and he was 57. He had smoked all his life and didn't realize that smoking contributed to heart disease and stuff. When he finally found out, it was too late. He had a heart attack and stopped smoking. He lived a few more years, and we went on some nice trips.

But my son had wanted us to come to England, because he was in England. When my husband died my son Joe bought me a ticket to England. He said, "Mother, there's no reason you can't come. Jimmy can put you on the plane and I'll meet you at the other end." I had only been on a plane once or twice, and I went all the way to England. He took me to Scotland to see Scotland. Then he came back and went to Puerto Rico, and I got to see him in Puerto Rico and San Antonio, Texas. Now, seeing that he's moving to Canada, I'm going to get another passport because mine expired. I'll probably go see him in Canada.

So for someone who spent her whole childhood in one town ...

Right. My mom and dad didn't have a car. I had older sisters, and their boyfriends had cars. They married these men eventually. But when I was their little sister, I'd climb up on their lap and say, "Oh, Harold! Hilma has such a pretty new dress today. And whenever they brought presents for Valentine's Day or something they always brought me something because I was the little sister. I was a spoiled little sister! Then they married those same people I'd known since I was 5, 6, 7 years old. It was neat.

And now your kids are out finding people from other parts of the world.

Yes.

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

No. I'm still involved in the city. I was the 1974 Darien Citizen of the Year, which was kind of neat because that was one year they let all the people vote in the city. So, seeing as I was the health aide at Hinsbrook School, a lot of the mommies knew me. So, anyway I got a lot of votes mainly because I had helped to go down and see how many people lived in the city and helped to get it sworn in as a city.

I was on the house numbering committee ...

You mean when the house numbers changed from 17W ...

And you know what those numbers mean?

West and south of the city.

Yes. State and Madison was the dividing line. So we were 8S and 1800W – 18 miles this way and 8 miles that way.

When I worked at the school we had a lot of salesmen come in. They were looking for 900 Frontage Road – or 900 Wilmette is what they were looking for. And our school was 800 Wilmette. The poor ~~bus~~ [truck] drivers couldn't figure out how to get there. So I'd get the map out and show them they had to go down the frontage road, then turn this way and Wilmette is there. But the poor ~~bus~~ [truck] drivers, they didn't have the things they have now that help you tell how to get to places. So they'd always stop and the secretaries would say, "I don't know, but I'll get someone who does." And I'd go to explain to them.

But, anyway, it was fun. I had a lot of fun working at the school. I was very patient with all the people who spoke foreign languages who would come. They couldn't understand and the secretary would always give them to me because I could understand them. I would explain real slowly and clearly what they had to do for the immunizations and stuff. It was confusing to them. They didn't understand all this stuff.

I liked doing the pre-school screening for the vision and hearing for the little kids. It was a lot of fun. I'd pretend I had a little bucket of things and tell them every time they heard the little chick make a noise in their ear, drop a ball into the bucket. It was too hard to get them to raise their hand because they didn't know. You had to be sure that when you did it, you didn't do it in a rhythm so that they'd know. You had to alternate. It was a real experience, and I really enjoyed learning how and doing it.

So you enjoyed your life out here in Darien.

I did. I never minded getting up in the morning and going to school. I had worked as a bookkeeper at the Continental Bank. My girlfriend and I both went down there to apply for jobs when we got out of high school. And her aunt was some big thing there. Anyhow, they asked me what my favorite subject was and I told them it was math. So they put me in the bookkeeping department. And they asked my girlfriend, but she didn't know. Anyway, she was a cute girl and she was a page. She used to go around and deliver stuff.

But we both met our husbands there. It was really nice. Bill didn't know where Darien was, so I had to go home on the train with him one time. I called up my mother and said I met this really nice boy at work and he wants to bring me home but doesn't know how to get here. So I said I had to go with him. We ate at the drive-in and stuff and went to meet his mother. Then he took me home.

Anyhow, we had a lovely relationship. He died when I was 55 and he was 57. I haven't been married since, so I've been a widow for a long time. But I've been involved in a lot of stuff. I stayed working at the school for 25 years. So I get a nice pension from the school district and I'm managing fine.

It sounds like Darien has been good to you and your family, and you've been good for Darien.

It has. I've had a lovely time living here. I don't regret it at all. I still like going home back to Forest Park.

But they know where Darien is, now!

Right. They all know where Darien is.

Well, with that we're going to finish. Thank you so much for sharing your memories.

You're welcome.