

**Darien, Illinois
Oral History Project**

An Interview With

Debbie Kieras

**conducted by Deb Barrett
October 22, 2014**

**Indian Prairie Public Library
Darien, Illinois**

Today is Wednesday, October 22, 2014 and I am with Ms. Debbie Kieras at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Ms. Kieras was born on May 31, 1951 in Maywood, Illinois. She has lived in Darien since 1955, and is here to share her memories about the area.

Life Before Coming to the Area

So, Debbie, when did your family first move to this area? Where were they living and why did they move?

My parents lived in Maywood, Illinois, and I assume they wanted to move out to the country. My dad was starting a business at that time – DuPage Roofing Company – and started out here in [what was known as Clarendon Hills] Darien. We moved to 74th Street, the second house east of Eleanor, [which is no longer there].

How many neighbors were there?

Well, there weren't as many houses that filled the block. We were one of the first ... [homes on 74th Street] ... A man named [Mr.] Leonard – and I cannot for the life of me remember his first name – built the houses on 74th Street. And he also lived in a couple of them – as he built them he lived in them. [Sold them and built another.]

I just remember Route 83 being a two-lane gravel road, 75th Street did not go through to Route 83 – it stopped at Plainfield Road. I remember a lot of open land [with farms]. We used to play in a field where Hinsdale South is now. My uncle would come and hunt pheasant and rabbit in that field. We found Indian arrowheads. We just had a ball playing in the field. That was our place to be. [There was a huge hill of dirt that we called the “big hill”.]

And it really was the country at that time.

It really was the country. There was nothing. In fact, we would drive – and now that I know a little bit about this area I realize ... [it was] the Wehrmeister home we used to call the ghost house as we drove by.

And that was where?

That was at the point at 75th & Plainfield, on the ... [north side of 75th Street].
It was a lot of fun back then being a kid! [We never had to be afraid.]

So you still had relatives in Maywood?

Actually, no. My uncle moved out to Downers Grove, to Lemont Road and 75th Street. He had three acres of land out there.

We didn't have relatives around here. My mother was from Wisconsin. My father's parents died when he was 16.

So your uncle was really the pioneer, coming out here first.

Yes, he was. And that's probably what drew my parents out here – following my uncle.

How much before your parents had he moved out here?

I'm not quite sure. Probably no more than five years before them. ... In fact his house has just been demolished for progress! It was right behind Kohl's – the first house behind Kohl's on Lemont Road.

So he came out here and your parents thought this sounded like a good place to be.

Yes, although I think it was real desolate. I remember having to drive to downtown Clarendon Hills for gas. There was a Phillips 66 gas station right in town. We used to have to go there for gas. In downtown Westmont there was a Jewel on Richmond and Cass Avenues. That ... [was the closest grocery store]. There was nothing in ... [this area at that time]. There was a country store on Clarendon Hills Road and Route 66 – I55 had not been built yet.

And Darien wasn't Darien yet.

Yes, Darien wasn't Darien yet. We were actually at one time Clarendon Hills, at another time we were Westmont – they kept changing, and changing the names of the roads, too.

What were some of the roads that you remember changing?

I remember Jonquil Terrace; I don't even know what it is now. Stewart, Jonquil Terrace – I'd have to look at a map to see what they're called now. But they were right near 74th and Eleanor. 73rd Street is now Elm – that one I know; it used to be 73rd Street.

I know some of the numbered streets were changed and got names.

But I think 74th is still 74th ... that's the road the Patio is on.

Moving to the Area

So you were four years old when your family moved.

Yes.

Do you remember anything about the move itself?

No. My first recollection of being out here is that they had pallets. I remember walking on pallets to get out to the street from our house.

Why were you walking on pallets?

Because there was no grass. There was just dirt and mud. ... That's really my first recollection of being out here.

Did you have friends nearby?

The neighborhood kids would always play together – oh, yeah. And if we went up the hill towards Route 83, that was far to play with those kids. But we did play with them. And my mom would let us out at dawn and call us back at dusk. We just played outside all day long.

And your parents didn't have to worry about you.

No, they never had to worry.

They could probably see you from the house.

Probably. Yes, there were no trees or anything, so, yes.

So you were four years old. You moved here not long before you started school. Where did you go to kindergarten?

There was no kindergarten. I went to first grade at Marion Hills School. We walked from 74th Street to Marion Hills School, which was probably a half-mile. That was quite a ways for a first grader, and no parents walked us.

All the kids walked?

All the kids walked. We'd gather in front of our house, because we were at the end of the block on Eleanor, and we'd walk to school. In fact, that's one of the pictures I brought because my mom always took first day of school pictures.

So you'd walk to school. How many kids tended to walk together?

There were probably six of us. There weren't a lot of kids in the neighborhood yet. It was still growing.

So was Marion Hills the only public school? Or was Lace School built already?

No. Lace School was built in 1957 ... [Marion Hills was built in 1951.] There was the one-room schoolhouse – the Old Lace School ... [before 1951].

That's now the Historical Society.

In 1951 the Marion Hills area was building up. Kids were coming in like I did, and they found a need to build a [larger] school, and that was Marion Hills School on Plainfield Road, which is now Kingswood Academy. So that was built in 1951, and Lace was built in 1957.

As Marion Hills got too full, then they moved fourth through eighth to Lace.

Until they built the junior high.

And that was after my time.

So when you went to Marion Hills, you went in 1956?

Yes. [1956/1957 school year, then to Lace in 4th through 8th grade.]

That was the only public school?

Well, actually, my mother worked at Gower. She was a teacher at Gower School – the old Gower School on Madison and Frontage Road [and then at Gower West when that school was built].

Near the Chicken Basket.

Right – east of Chicken Basket [and Madison]. So there were boundaries. We were in the Lace area, and she taught at Gower.

So all the kids in the Lace area, first through eighth, went to Marion Hills at that point?

They ... used the one-room school house for the older kids. [That was before my time.] ... [At Marion Hills until Lace was built in 1957. Then 1st through 3rd at Marion Hills and 4th through 8th at Lace.] ...

How many kids were in your class? Do you remember?

I have class pictures and I should have counted them, but I'd say maybe 16, if that many – I'm not sure.

What was a day like for you in first grade or second grade – those early grades?

School was always fun for me! [Teachers were kind and recess was fun.]

What time would you leave to go to school?

I don't remember, but I do remember my mother had to leave before us, and we were on our own to get out the door and get to school on time. Because my mother was a teacher she had to be at her school. And, of course, my father was off working.

And there was no concern with you being on your own.

No! Isn't that amazing when you think about it? And I still think that people now would never let their little kids walk to school. It amazes me that we did that.

My younger sister, who's a year younger than I am ... She was kind of the teacher's pet, and Mrs. Zakula was the principal when she was at Marion Hills. She must have also been a teacher as well as the principal, because my younger sister used to answer the phones for her when she was busy! I think that's funny that a little second or third grader was answering phones for the principal!

It was a very different time!

It was a very different time ... [Not a lot of people and every family knew every family.]

So you went to school. What did you do for lunch? Did you bring a lunch?

We used to go home for lunch, so we walked back home for lunch. And, of course my mother wasn't home so we'd go to the neighbor's house. There was a babysitter for the whole block on the street – a woman who didn't work – and we would go to her house. And if we got sick we'd go to her house.

Sort of like the block mom.

That's right.

So did you have sandwiches for lunch?

Probably. I remember when I was sick she used to give us these straws with strawberry flavor in it and milk. I think that made me sicker than when I was sick! I don't know if you remember those straws that had that flavoring. They were terrible!

Do you remember anything about your classes when you were at Marion Hills School?

We just stayed in one classroom at Marion Hills. I know at Lace we did all kinds of wall decorations, but that was fourth grade and up. [And in 7th and 8th we switched classes. There were 2 sections of 7th and 8th grand and we would go to the other room after lunch.]

School probably went to about 3:00?

Probably. I'm really not sure. And I know there was recess. That I remember – going out on the playground.

So it was just the playground area that you had, or did kids go out into the fields around the area?

No, you had to stay on the school property. And the teacher was out there with you. We were all such good kids! We didn't leave. We did what we were told.

So you had recess and came back in. Recess was at lunch time or at some other time?

I really don't remember. I want to say it was after lunch, but I could be wrong.

And you had homework.

Yes. Do I remember doing it? No! I'm sure they gave homework, but it probably wasn't much. [I do remember my mother bringing her class papers home to grade.]

And this is how things went for you for first grade through third grade. It was pretty consistent.

Yes.

Oh, I wanted to say; too, when we moved out [here] in 1955 we had a party line. I remember picking up the phone and other people being on it. I just wanted to throw that in there.

A party line. How did you reach somebody?

Well, you had to ask them to get off if it was an emergency. Otherwise you just hung up and waited until they got off. [But really we did not use the phone as children – we played outside.]

Did you dial the other people, or did you go through the operator?

I think we went through an operator. I really don't remember that, but there must have been an operator. I don't know if my mother would remember that anymore, either.

Did you call your friends?

No, we didn't. But my dad, starting his business that was the phone number [was] for the business.

So when you wanted to play with your friends, how did you reach them?

I ... went down to their house and knocked on the door! Or it was, "Look who is outside! Let's go play."

Yell out through the window! How did your family handle shopping and things like that?

Shopping – there was a country store on Route 66 and Clarendon Hills Road that we'd go [to] for quick things like milk and a newspaper, bread and ... [things] like that. There was a Jewel in downtown Westmont on Richmond and Cass Avenue. There was also the Stop-and-Chat on the corner. I don't know when that started, but I remember going shopping and then stopping at the Stop-and-Chat to get ice cream.

Clothes – in downtown LaGrange there was a Montgomery Wards with wooden floors. And my uncle worked there actually – the one who lived in Downers Grove worked at the Montgomery Wards. And we bought our clothes there. I think when I was in high school there

was a Robert Hall south of 55th Street on LaGrange Road. We used to go to Robert Hall and buy clothes. Otherwise my mother made a lot of our clothes, too. She sewed a lot of our dresses.

We always wore dresses to school. ... [Never] pants. ... [Even in high school it was skirts or dresses.]

Girls wore dresses.

Girls wore dresses – yes. And clothes were not cheap, comparatively to what the families were making, so my mother did a lot of sewing in her spare time.

And how many kids were in your family?

Three girls.

All girls?

All girls – one older and one younger.

So you got some hand-me-downs along the way.

Oh, yes. We got hand-me-downs!

What did your family do for entertainment? Did you get to go out to a movie every once in a while? Did you go roller skating? What did you do?

There wasn't anything around. There was a miniature golf across from Chicken Basket. Once in a great while we'd get to do that. Most of the time we had family come out from the city and sit in our back yard. We always had family every weekend. My father had aunts and uncles who used to come out. And we'd sit in the backyard and have a picnic. So we really didn't do a lot of things.

I remember getting our first TV, and ... [It had a very small screen and doors that closed to cover the screen. It was only black and white.]

Like about 12-inches?

12-inches, yes – it was very little, with the doors that closed. We were kind of sitting around that. But we really didn't go places.

And there weren't that many channels.

No, not at all – probably three channels.

We would go to my uncle's house in Downers [Grove]. So it was always visiting people that was our form of entertainment.

Did your family go to church?

Oh, yes.

Did you get dressed up?

Yes. We had to dress up for church, just as we did for school. But we went to St. Mary's Seminary, which was located on Clarendon Hills Road – north of 63rd; Clarendon Hills Road, Route 83 and north of 63rd.

And there was the chapel at the seminary where you went to Mass?

Yes, that's where we went to Mass every Sunday. I remember the long driveway that was one car wide and lined with trees. It was beautiful.

How many masses were there on Sunday, do you know?

I'll bet there was just the one at that time. They started in 1955, when all the people started moving ... [into] the Marion Hills area. And, really, Marion Hills was the first area to be built up – to start building homes. It wasn't until later that Hinsbrook, I think, was the next. No, maybe Brookhaven was first, then Hinsbrook, then Farmingdale.

So you got dressed up to go to church.

Oh, yes. And we always had to wear something on our heads. So if we forgot our little doily, we had to put a piece of Kleenex on our heads.

Did you have any special rituals on Sundays after church?

There again, I remember every Sunday going to my aunt and uncle's house in Downers Grove and having ham sandwiches in front of Lassie and Ed Sullivan. Every Sunday night, I think, they put us in front of the television with our ham sandwiches... [We did eat a large home cooked meal around 1:00 every Sunday.]

And there were just the major networks – three of them.

Yes. I remember 2, 5, 7, 9. Then we got 32.

Eleven came up.

Yes, 11 came up at some point, too.

So, as you got older you moved from Marion Hills School to ...

To Lace-Marion Hills. Well, it was both Lace and Marion Hills schools, but they called it Lace-Marion Hills. When Lace was built in 1957, the older kids – fourth through eighth – would go to Lace, and first through third to Marion Hills. Although, I remember my younger sister, when I went to fourth grade she rode the bus with me, and she was in third grade and she

had class in the gym. I don't really know the reason for that – whether it was overcrowding or what at that time.

So when you got to fourth grade you took a bus to school.

Yes. Mrs. Hawkins drove the bus.

She drove my bus, too! I remember Mrs. Hawkins.

In fact, probably the older kids from the Marion Hills area who went to the old Lace School probably took a bus. They must have. I know the bus would come to Marion Hills and drive them to Lace, so it wouldn't go through the neighborhoods. It was just the one route – Marion Hills to Lace.

So you went to the new school. Lace was a new school for you.

It had been there for a couple of years. My older sister – she's three years older than me – she went to Lace. [When I went to Marion Hills.]

So it was a lot bigger than Marion Hills?

Well, it was four classrooms when it was built. I think Marion Hills was two or three classrooms when it was built. But they both had additions along the way at times. I think when I was in the upper grades – 7th & 8th – I was in the new wing of Lace, which was at the back of the school.

Did anything change for you when you went to Lace School, besides taking a bus rather than walking?

Meeting a lot of new people, because then you got into – I don't know, it just seems like all of a sudden there were a lot of new kids. Which I guess happens as people moved into the area and houses were built, [like Brookhaven, etc.].

Did your class size change?

I probably had a lot more kids in my class, but I'd have to look at the class pictures, which I don't have, to count them. I think I donated all of those to the Museum.

And since you took a bus to school, you probably ate at the school.

Yes. We had to bring our lunch. I remember once a week we'd have hot dog day, where you'd bring 50¢ or something – I don't remember how much it was. But you'd get a hot dog, probably a milk. I don't remember if there was anything else, but I don't think so. I think it was just the hot dog. And I think mothers would come and cook it.

And that was a treat!

That was a real treat, yes.

Do you remember any particular teachers during your grade school years, whether at Marion Hills or at Lace?

I remember Mrs. Pitts was my 5th grade teacher. Her husband was the band director at Gower, and he also started a band at Lace, too. And we used the old Lace schoolhouse as our band room. ...

You played an instrument?

I played a flute, yes. ... It's amazing when you think back how Marion Hills – the families that moved in there – formed everything. The fathers got together and started the Marion Hills Youth Club, and not excluding the girls – we were cheerleaders. We even made pins – they had [the] names of the teams; they divided the boys up on teams and named them. We had pins, and I still have mine. It's made out of colored toothpicks, with the little [alphabet] noodles that spelled 'bobcat' glued on. And that was my cheerleading pin!

I was in 4H, because out here with the farmers 4H was a big deal. But I wasn't from a farm, so I was in the baking and the sewing part of 4H. And we would put on our displays at the DuPage County Fair and get ribbons. They did have Girl Scouts – I was a Girl Scout, too. So mothers volunteered to be leaders.

But I always think back and think 4H was odd. My meeting [place] was way on 39th Street and Fairview, [in Downers Grove] – was the woman who led the cooking and sewing; because there weren't many people to do the cooking and sewing. They all raised cattle or pigs or ducks.

So you weren't farmers, but you lived in the neighborhood with farmers.

Right. So we joined their clubs.

So it sounds like you had a very active social life, and the families were very involved with getting the kids into all these activities.

Yes, and starting the activities, too. I give the parents a lot of credit. Because there was really nothing out here. So they thought about us.

Oh, I want to mention, too, growing up on 74th Street my neighbors – I don't know if you remember St. Germaine Aviation, the airport that was on Frontage Road across from Chicken Basket; ... [the helicopter is there now]. Well, that was an airport [with a runway] and my neighbor, the Brown's, built an airplane in their house.

In their house?

Well, pieces – like the wing in the living room. And they'd be gluing the paper on. And they actually flew it out of St. Germaine when it was built. And my father [and older sister] went

up in it. I wouldn't! I was too scared. I saw where it came from! [This must have been in about 1960.]

You saw it being built and you weren't sure.

I saw it being built and did not believe it would fly.

So you talked about being in 4H with the sewing and cooking.

And baking.

What were your meetings like in 4H? What did you do?

Oh, we got together and talked about our activities. I just remember it being more social – getting together with girls. And the girls in my 4H, since they were so far away, were new to me. I didn't know them and it was fun to get together. Probably once a month we got together.

So you got to meet some more friends.

Yes. It was fun. Different!

How did your world expand when you got in to the upper grades? Did you get to go and do things you hadn't done before?

Well, the theater was the Tivoli in Downers Grove. I remember going there. I remember Connie Stevens coming out ... [for the premier of "Two on a Guillotine"]. But that was the big deal, to go to Downers Grove. ...

And you would have been junior high age or younger?

I don't think younger. It would have to be ... [7th grade or 8th grade].

So you graduated from eighth grade from Lace School.

Yes, in 1965.

And what was your graduation like? Did you have caps and gowns?

Yes, we had caps and gowns. Lace-Marion Hills, their colors were red and white at the time, gave a ribbon with a pin. ...

Yes.

I don't know if they do that anymore. I doubt it.
So we got ribbons and pins.

How many kids graduated in your class?

There were quite a few. I should have written all this stuff down! I don't remember, but there were a lot. Half the kids went to Downers South.

Cass was the dividing line.

Yes, so half of my friends, that was the last time I saw them. It was hard to keep in touch when you didn't drive.

And then you went to high school.

And then I went to high school. And that was the year they opened Hinsdale South. I entered as a freshman. They brought over sophomores from Hinsdale Central, so it was just freshmen and sophomores.

So it was a pretty small group.

Yes. We didn't even use the third floor of the school. And when I look back at the school – we had the pool, the football field. We had a lot. It was a pretty nice school.

It was a lot smaller than it is right now.

Oh, yeah.

There have been a lot of additions.

Well, really there haven't been that many additions. The field house, the science wing.

The building itself has been expanded with the science wing and the field house.

But really, the rest of it is pretty much the same.

So you only used the first two floors. Any idea how many kids?

Probably, maybe it opened with 400 kids, I would think, because it was just freshmen and sophomores. My [older] sister went to Central, so she never did experience South, even though we were on 74th Street. She had to go all the way to Hinsdale Central.

Which had been called just Hinsdale High School up until that point.

Correct.

And then it became Hinsdale Central.

Right. And we were Hinsdale South.

And then you really get into activities. I was pretty athletic, and they didn't have any ... [sports teams] for the girls. So I was a cheerleader because I had to do something.

What do you remember of your classes at Hinsdale South?

We just had the basic classes. It was English 1, your math class, foreign language class, PE – we always had PE.

What foreign language classes did they offer?

I believe it was German, Spanish and French. They are the ones I remember. Other than that, I don't. I don't know what else they offer these days, either, and how different that is.

I know at one point they offered Latin as well. But I don't know if they've done any other. So you have about 400 kids going through the basic classes. And that was the first year.

Yes.

And each year they expanded a grade.

Yes. Each year they'd bring in a new freshman class and we'd move up. So the sophomores graduated in 1968, and I was in the first four-year graduating class in 1969 going freshman through senior year.

What was your graduation like from high school?

... [It is basically the same as today except it was held in the gym, not outside.]

About 200 kids?

Probably more than that by that time, because new families were always moving in. In 1965, when I graduated eighth grade, is when my family moved because of the flooding.

You moved to another house in Darien.

In Darien [before it was Darien]. It used to be called Plainfield Highlands, and my father looked for the highest lot in ... [the area]. And that was before Hinsbrook was built. So we used to overlook a cow pasture, which was either the Schmidt or Pruder farm – I think they backed up to each other. And then, going into my freshman year they were building Hinsbrook at that time. So a lot of kids were moving in.

So your family moved to 74th?

From 74th Street to 72nd and Western, this is where I still live – my family's home!

Was the house similar to the one you had?

No. On 74th Street they were very small. We had a three bedroom – just a ranch house with a basement. But the basement was always full of water, I mean up to the top of the staircase water. The village knocked it down. It's an empty lot now next to the baseball fields at Hinsdale South.

But we lived next the ditch, which was one of our favorite places to play. Put a kid with a little water, crabs and all that stuff to play with. It was a lot of fun.

Then we moved to 72nd and Western, and my father built a raised ranch house.

So to get to the high school, did you walk?

We walked, yes. In fact, they still walk from my area.

So while you were in high school the area was building up. That's when all the subdivisions were coming in.

And I don't remember what year, but that's when we got the Brookhaven shopping ... [center]. It was probably somewhere in my late grade school or early high school years. They was a Dog 'n Suds on 75th Street – I would love to have a picture of it! So we didn't have to go all the way to LaGrange to the McDonald's.

There was fast food right there! When Brookhaven opened they had a little food store?

It was an IGA back then. I remember the drug store – Wronski's Drug across the street in the strip mall.

Which is being demolished now.

Right.

What did you do for fun in high school? Where did you go for entertainment in high school?

Well, you know what. We spent a lot of time in Hinsdale at the youth center. They had a youth center at Madison and Eighth. It's called the Community House now. And we had the Blue Village in Westmont.

I remember that one! For those people who don't remember, tell them about the Blue Village.

Well, it was a place where bands played and we danced. I think I was at the Blue Village only a couple of times. I spent most of my time at the youth center [in Hinsdale].

It was right on Cass Avenue, right, the Blue Village?

Cass and just north of the train tracks – across from the drug store; right on that corner where there is a parking lot now.

But the youth center had the same type of things. They had bands – the Crying Shames were there. It was a lot of fun. You danced and you met kids from Hinsdale Central. ... [It was a great place to socialize.]

There was also a drive-in theater on LaGrange Road and Route 66.

Did you go to the racing?

At Santa Fe [Speedway] Oh, yes! We went there because my husband – well, I met my husband in high school. We met as freshmen, but I hated him until we were seniors. But he didn't give up! ... He was big into cars so we went quite a bit [to the races. Santa Fe Speedway was on 91st Street, east of County Line Road].

...

Did you go to the demolition derbies?

Yes, [you could even enter your own car]. And I remember people, right before or soon before they knocked it down, people complaining about the noise. And I remember thinking to myself: That was here way before the houses were! Because we really enjoyed going there. ... [It was a lot of fun.] Did you go there much?

We did go there! I met my husband in high school at Hinsdale South.

Did you really? What year?

We met his senior year, my junior year.

Nice! My husband sat in front of me in U.S. History class – I think that was freshman year – and he used to pick up my desk. And of course we were wearing skirts. I hated him – hated, hated, hated him – until senior year. I was dating his friend and we broke up, and he asked me out!

A familiar story! There were a lot more different things to do once you were in high school.

Yes. I mean, really, I ended up getting a job as a junior, as soon as I ... [was old enough to] get a job.

Where did you work?

I worked at the Jewel in Countryside. That was, for me, the closest ... [Jewel].

Was that on 55th?

It was on Plainfield and Brainard. It's still there.

Where Plainfield and 55th meet. Did you have a car?

My first car was a 1957 Chevy. I bought it for \$125 from my cousin. And that's how I got to work. It took me 15 minutes.

And minimum wage was a lot different than what it is now!

I don't remember how much I made. I was just happy to have some money. But I do remember the registers. It was punch the button and pull the handle. It was not scanning. And we had to wear pink dresses – the Jewel pink dresses [were our uniform].

...

And the white shoes?

I don't remember, but I think there probably were white shoes.

So when you got to your senior year, there was a prom?

Yes.

Where was your prom?

The prom was at the Sabre Room in Hickory Hills. I think it has burned down since then. ... [and they] rebuilt it ... [My mother made my dress for that too.]

So you started to see changes in just the neighborhoods and the roads. What do you remember about commuting – about driving? What do you remember about the roads – Route 83 for example?

Well, that was a two-lane gravel road when we moved out here in 1955. And eventually they paved it and widened it. 75th used to end at Plainfield road. Now it goes through to Route 83, and it's going to be six lanes shortly. That also was just gravel road at the time. It was all just gravel roads around here.

When did you start seeing the paving happen with the roads?

I probably didn't even pay attention. I remember them coming through [every year]. What they used to do was put down oil and stone. I remember that happening. Every year they would do that to the roads, which was a real mess because we couldn't play on the street then!

But paving, I think that's something that just happened as I was growing up and I really didn't pay any attention to it.

You graduated from high school. Did you stay here?

Yes.

Did you go to college? Did you go on to something else?

I went right to work. I worked at the First National Bank in Hinsdale. I worked there for eight years, got married when I was 20 to my husband – we dated for three years and got married when I was 20.

Where did you live when you got married?

We had an apartment – Prentiss Creek Apartments; Woodward and 63rd [in Downers Grove]. Then we went to Fountainhead, which was on Cass Avenue in Westmont, just north of 63rd. Then we bought our first house on 69th and Eleanor in 1975.

So you came back to Darien.

Yes, we came back to Darien. And I now live in the house my father built on 72nd and Western.

What made you come back to Darien?

Well, my husband was from Burr Ridge – his family was from Burr Ridge. And my parents were still in Darien. I don't know – we liked the area, we could afford the houses at the time. Any place else they were kind of out of our range. So that's basically why we did.

You were working when Darien became a city.

Yes. And we were living in Plainfield Highlands, which they changed to Clarefield for the election – just to make it easier, because Plainfield Highland was just that small area on the hill. And really I don't remember much about the election because I was kind of disconnected at the time? I was into my own young life. But I do remember my parents being very upset about not wanting sidewalks and curbs in the area. And to this day we still don't have them! That was one of the big issues for the Plainfield Highland area: We moved to the country and that's what we wanted!

You wanted to keep that atmosphere.

Right.

Also, you said your family had gone to Mass at the Marion Hills Seminary. And Our Lady of Peace opened as a school.

Yes ... [the school was built on Plainfield Road]. It was still St. Mary's at the time – they changed the name later to Our Lady of Peace. But I got married in the gymnasium, which

was where Mass was held. We had folding chairs with kneelers on the back. We always laugh about being married in the gymnasium! [They had to raise the basketball hoops for the wedding.]

What do you recall about all the changes that started happening in the 1960's and 1970's? Your family moved to the country.

It was different, though – this is what I knew and this is what I grew up in. Now, I look back, or feel overwhelmed with how it's grown. There are just so many people and so much traffic. And knocking down the things ...

That are part of your memory.

Yes. And it's hard. Maybe it's time to move on. I don't know.

I do remember, there was, going back to 74th Street, a Kolby's bar and store on 55th, which is now the Country House. We used to go there. My father would have a drink and give me cheese popcorn. Or there was Al & Bill's, which is now Tracy's Tavern. So those were places. If my father was in charge, he'd babysit us there! Which is kind of funny.

[That] and of course the bowling alley, which was built when I was in high school.

Mike Ditka's?

Yes, it was Mike Ditka's bowling alley, and now it's Willowbrook Bowl. But when you think of Mike Ditka ... I remember thinking Mike Ditka is building a bowling alley! It was so neat! I don't remember if you recall that or not, but it was a big deal to put a bowling alley in there.

Did you go to the toboggan slides in Palos?

No. We found things like that to do around here. In fact, when I was younger, on 74th Street, for some reason they moved the dirt around before we got there. So there was a big dirt hill that we used to play on around there. We'd take our sleds up there – it was right by our house [where Hinsdale South is now] so we didn't have to go anywhere.

So now, you and your husband had some kids.

Yes. We have three children. They went to Marion Hills School.

They went to the same schools you went to!

Right. They went to Hinsdale South [too].

What changes did you notice between the time they went to school and when you went to school?

I think their work got a lot harder! I always think back, and when my kids were in high school they were doing college work. I couldn't even help them! I think the work was much

harder and they had a lot more activities. Kids are busy these days, and even my kids then. My kids are older – my son is 38 now. I was busy with him – I was volunteering for his soccer, his basketball; everything he was in [then also with my girls]. The youth club started, so they were involved in the Darien Youth Club. It was Darien by then. So there were a lot of activities.

Looking Back and Looking Forward

When you look back on the changes over the years, what do you miss that was there before? What do you wish we still had?

A tranquil area, less people – I really do miss that. It was much more relaxed. In fact, and I shouldn't say this, but we used to sneak out in high school. We would never even see a car on Plainfield Road. We'd walk right down the middle of Plainfield Road and nobody would pass us. Now, no matter what time of the day you go out there's traffic. So that's what I really miss. It's almost to the point where we have to move back out to the country. This is no longer the country!

What changes are you grateful for?

Oh, no! What am I grateful for? Well, I think Darien has turned out to be a very nice place. And I know people complain there is no downtown. But we never did have a downtown. This is what we had, and this is what we wanted. And I think I'm thankful for the way it is – other than the traffic ...

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

Has anybody talked about – and I only bring this up because we played out there, too; played as older kids, [high school riding dirt bikes, etc.] ... – the prison farm that used to be out on County Line Road and I55?

No.

There used to be a prison farm there. When I was in high school, and it must have been later in high school because I was dating my husband – the prison had closed. Although, when he was in eighth grade a prisoner did escape from there. I remember that happening. I can't remember the name of the farm, I would have to research that, but we used to ride motorcycles in that prairie over there. The prison was still there, but the fields were open. But there used to be a prison farm there. And it was right on the edge of Cook County. Do you remember that being there?

No.

It must have closed when I was earlier in high school, because we could go in the fields – probably junior and senior year. So that was interesting.

Other than that, there used to be a Country Kitchen [restaurant] next to Chicken Basket and those were the two restaurants in the area.

I think that's it!

Thank you for sharing your stories of this area!