

Normandy Oral History Project
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Group Interview with Carol Chickey, Thomas Huellinghorst, and Dorothy Seiter
Interviewer: Elizabeth Eikmann

Could you share with us your earliest memory?

DS: My earliest memories were with my family on Sunday morning. All of us, there were 7 children, and so all 9 of us would go to mass together up to St. Ann's and then we would go visit my dad's mother and father who lived over on Page Ave. And we would go there every Sunday and we would go in and sit on the floor, oh no, we'd go in and kiss Grandma and Grandpa, and go in and sit on the floor. We didn't talk, you didn't ask for anything. We sat there for about 15 minutes and then we'd get up and kiss grandma and grandpa goodbye.

CC: But that's really cultural.

DS: That's the German way. We never had a drink of water, never had a cookie or nothing. Those are my first memories.

TH: My earliest memory? Oh lord. I was born in St. Louis and the first memory that I have was when were jumping on Mom and Dad's bed, which was against the rules. It was the bed one with the carved pineapple posts. I lost my balance, hit that thing and blood flew everywhere. I don't remember if you (CC) where there yet. But I do remember that Mom grabbed me, threw me on her hip, and grabbed my sister took my sister down...In those days we were on the second floor of an apartment down on Highland Avenue, it was a long way down those steps, but she carried me down those steps, dropped my sister, Jean, off at the neighbors and carried me a block over to De Paul hospital to have me sewn up. That's my first memory.

CC: What a terrible memory!

TH: I think I was about 3. I don't know how old you were.

CC: I thought I was born on Geiger.

TH: You may have been. This would be a bit earlier than that.

CC: Anyway, my first memory was of my sister learning to go potty. She was so proud of herself. She sat down on the potty and says "Makie poo-poo!" Of course, we lost that home and that's another whole story. And we moved to a house on Carson Road. There was no indoor toilet and we used to go outside. My father was digging a bathroom and he put in everything for the bathroom except we had to do the plumbing. And this house didn't have the plumbing downstairs.

TH: He dug out the entire basement to put in the plumbing.

CC: He dug out the basement to put in plumbing. And then Normandy school district came along and took that house.

DS: Where on Carson Road was that?

CC: It was the white house that was left that became the kindergarten. There were three houses alike.

DS: Starting out on on Natural Bridge, so you're saying south.

CC: Right.

TH: Carson road across Natural Bridge. There was the Mercantile Store on the corner.

CC: Yes.

DS: And the school is in the back of there.

CC: There was a brick house there, which was the Spades. Then there was a lot between their house and our house. We'd visit Grandma Spade and we'd visit the Schneurs who lived above the Mercantile library.

DS: She gave piano lessons, didn't she?

CC: Doris probably did. Well, I said that wrong. It was the Mercantile Store.

TH: It was a store, a country store. You know there were a lot of farms in those days, so they had tools and supplies for farming, plus they also had a little groceries. It was a multi; it was a Wal-Mart of its time.

DS: So it was on the corner of Carson Road and Natural Bridge?

TH: Yes.

DS: So it was still considered Normandy there, I think.

CC: Well, I don't know. I think it as considered Carsonville. And one of my memories is, and Tom remembers this. We used to get in a cab, no, it wasn't called a cab.

TH: It was a service car. Mom would hire a service car. It was like a limousine with the jump seats, so we'd all fit in there. And she'd take us and the three kids and she'd go downtown to Famous to shop.

CC: Well, I was just thinking about getting to school.

TH: I don't remember going to school that way.

DS: We didn't shop downtown. We shopped in Wellston.

CC: Well, we shopped downtown too, but we did shop in Wellston. Wellston was the major shopping center. It was down on what we called Easton Avenue, but now it's called St. Charles Rock Road.

DS: There was a JC Penney.

CC: There was a Central Hardware, JC Penney, and all kinds of little stores.

DS: There was a shoe store, where we'd all go to get shoes.

CC: Yes! I remember! It was very different from now.

How has the neighborhood you grew up in changed through out the years?

TH: The beginning of my schooling, we were in Geiger Road in Grandpa's house. Pop has lost his job, and so we had to move out of the city and we moved in with Grandpa. He had a nice big house out there, he had 27 acres, where he grew grapes on the hillside that adjoined Bellreive Country Club and Bellereive Acres, on that southeast side. And then on the west side, it came up and there were a few houses on Geiger. He grew grapes there and he made a lot of wine. I'd say twenty 50-gallon barrels of wine every year. Later in life, he and his cronies started drinking it instead of selling it. But when it was time for me to go to school, it was a long ride. It was a mile and a half back up to St. Ann's school and Gerdie Feldhaus, who taught at our school, at St. Ann's, lives across the school from us.

DS: Is that Gerdie Meyer?

TH: Well, she was Gerdie Feldhaus in those days, then she became Gerdie Meyer. She married Art, I believe?

DS: Art Meyer, yes.

TH: But that was later, quite a bit later. But anyway, she'd come over across the street and down, we had a big long driveway. Grandpa has a lot of property there, so he had a big long driveway. She'd pull up to the front door, I'd get in the car, and she'd haul me down to St. Ann's school. And then in the evening, she'd take me home again.

CC: Oh, I have a wonderful memory. There is a picture of the three of us...My Mom has gone to the store and Tom had cut our hair.

TH: Oh yeah! I trimmed you guys.

CC: And all the hair was under the couch. We had this real butchered cut.

TH: I had it leveled though!

CC: Yes! You did a good job. That was a good memory. But there were lots, and lots of changed with the businesses. I'm moving along a little bit to grade school. We moved to Wayco, and that's where Mary was, and everybody.

TH: That house on Wayco was kind of interesting. I think I was like third or fourth grade.

CC: I was in fourth grade when we moved, so you had to be in sixth.

TH: Oh, okay, sixth. I was visiting with Charlie Carrey who lived on Wayco across from Mary Blackhard's house. And I saw this house for sale. I'm sitting at the dinner table and Dad and Mom are talking about what they were going to do. Bel-Nor has now emanate domains to claim this house, to claim the property, to claim three lots there. And so I said, 'I know where there's a house for sale.' Low and behold, they wound up buying it.

DS: Bel-Nor claimed Geiger Road?

TH: No, they claimed the house on Carson Road. At this point, we were at Carson Road.

CC: I was married before they moved, so I got married in 1955...

TH: They moved around 1960, didn't they? When Mom had cancer?

CC: How old was I in '55? Well, I know I was 21 before I got married.

DS: Well, I was 21 when I got married, and I got married in '56.

CC: Close enough! They (my parents) where there on Wayco quite a long time. From fourth grade, so 1943 till 1962, 1961.

TH: Yeah, Mom got cancer and thr house was much too much for them to manage.

CC: The house is still there. A fun story about that, is they sold the house to the Daughterys, Ann can tell you more about that. There were, I think 7 or 8 Daugherty girls that moved into that house. Well, Mary and I were close friends. Tom and Jerry Carrey were close friends and my sister tagged along with the three of us, and Dorothy Gettameyer. We spent a lot of time in the woods. Next to Mary's house, it was all woods and we had a real steep hill. The guys would be riding stuff down the hill, in the go-kart Tom had.

TH: Well, we actually...I had this little go-kart. You could go up to Augusta and it was a hill all the way down, pass in front of our house, and then you'd stop because the big hill, going to Florissant road there was only maybe 100 feet or something.

DS: ...and dangerous! It was dangerous to go out on Florissant Road.

TH: Yeah, so what we decided to do, was we went and got shovels and picks and went in the woods, and we cut down some trees and stacked them together, tied them together, covered them

with mud and that was the bridge across the ditch that drained the rainwater. We put this bridge right at a big oak tree. You'd come in, go across the bridge to get to the roadway at the corner of Mary's lot, pass the big old iron marker, and then made a loop, where you could spin around and stop.

DS: If you weren't going too fast! I never did that, but it sounds terrible!

TH: We would start at Augusta and come down, across the bridge, around it was great! It was like a 2 and a half block run.

CC: And then we would all play in the woods. We were always playing Hide and Seek. Several times we went to Blanchette Park.

TH: That was with school.

CC: Didn't we go on our own?

DS: Well, St. Ann's would have their picnics there.

CC: Yeah, but did we go to Clayton? On the bus?

TH: I don't remember.

CC: The other thing we would do was play baseball in the middle of the street. It was a flat area right in front of our house and then down the big hill. In the summertime, we would all go out after dinner, play baseball until it got dark, about 8:30pm I guess. Then we would all walk down to the corner drug store and get a nickel ice cream at Blunker's then we would all come back and we'd all go home. Big difference in how life was.

TH: The neighbor on our south was Tom Bradley, who owned Bradley's Garden's. He decided that the city was getting large enough that the city needed fire protection. He got a group of people together and formed a committee. They decided that they needed a volunteer fire operation. They went back on his lot, those lots were really big, like 200-something feet by 50 or 60 feet. He had the lot and his house, so he had two big lots there. He went back at the end of his driveway behind his house and they built a big concrete block garage, big enough to put the truck in there. That became out place to play Superman We would climb the tree, get on the roof, and jump off.

CC: But also the kids that were going to Logan College at the time...Logan College was across the street, up the hill, which is now the Fine Arts building on the other side of Florissant Road. There were guys that were going to school who became the chiropractors. My Mom and Dad rented out the upstairs of our house to some the students. Then we would have these ballgames between the two houses.

TH: Well, that was always the place to play football, cause you couldn't play in the street. The other lots were too small for football.

DS: Well, now I was born in 1934, right as you came up Lucas and Hunt Road here and you turned in here, the house directly across, where the Gausts' lived, where Eddy Gaust lived, see I was born in that house.

CC: By Kay?

DS: Right, right next door to Kay. When I was six months old, my parents bought a house, or built a house in Pasedena Hills. I lived there until I was 18. My mother was getting older, it was a two-story house, she wanted a bedroom on the first floor, so they build a house in Bellerive Acres. I lived there from the time I was 18 until 21, when I got married. My sister, my younger sister, bought that house when my parents died, and she still lives there. But the biggest change that I see, from then to now is the transportation. You just didn't take a car. You walked, you got on a bus; there were busses and street cars everywhere. You could go anywhere you wanted. You didn't feel threatened and you didn't feel dangerous. I remember that I would come home and I was always involved in sports, I would have a basketball game or something. I would get off the bus at the entrance to Pasedena Hills, walk down Rolland to Huntington Drive, and then home. It was pitch black, 9 or 10 o'clock at night, nobody ever though anything.

CC: I was now going to school down at Xavier High School and so we'd come home on the bus and every once in a while there would be something going on in South Saint Louis. I would take the bus, Lindell to Kingshighway, Kingshighway to Natural Bridge, and Natural Bridge to out here, it only went to the wedge. I would walk home from the wedge.

DS: There was no depending on your parents to drive you. People didn't have the cars that they have now. Transportation was so convenient. And cheap!

CC: We would go down to the bottom of the hill, get on the bus, and go to work. We'd walk to school, I mean, rain, snow, sleet, whatever-we'd walk. My kids did too, down to Normandy High School, nobody took a bus to school.

TH: Remember, Mom and Dad only had one car.

CC: Yeah, Dad took it to work and that was it. Also, there used to be a bakery down on Natural Bridge, kind of at Lucas and Hunt. But there was always a filling station at the corner, right next door was Schmidt's Bakery.

DS: It was the same side of the street as the entrance to Pasedena Hills.

CC: Right. Yeah.

DS: That was a really good bakery. It was the only bakery in town.

CC: It was a great bakery. I remember I'd be home for some reason, my mom would be sick or something, is he wanted some stuff I never thought anything from walking from Wayco down to Schmidt's to pick up some baked goods to bring home. I'd say, 'Oh! I'll do that!' I was always

looking for sugar donuts!

TH: Well, we walked everywhere. That's just what we did.

DS: The streetcar ran right down Natural Bridge. It came through North Woods, went through Wellston Pine Lawn, came through North Woods to Pasadena Boulevard, and then headed down right alongside Natural Bridge, and then it turned onto Carson Road, did it not?

TH: It crossed Carson Road, but then it went back off of Carson Road off of Kimlock.

DS: Then it ended up in Ferguson because it turned around. But, you know, entertainment was mostly family. Neighborhood kids, but mostly family. If you did something, you did it as a family.

CC: Of course, there was no television. We listened to the radio.

DS: Yeah, at night you'd listen to the radio with your family.

TH: Yeah, when we were real little guys on Carson Road on Sunday evening...Well, first of all this house had 3 rooms on each floor, and the only heat was in the front room, the living room. There was a kerosene stove. We'd lay on the carpet, Mom and Dad on the couch and Kate Smith would be in the radio singing

TH and DS: (in unison) God Bless America.

TH: That was in the evening.

DS: Oh, you'd listen to Inter Sanctum.

TH: Yeah, Inter Santum.

CC: And The Lone Ranger!

TH: Well, you 'd come home from school and have The Lone Ranger, Superman, Jack Armstrong...

DS: Don't forget Little Orphan Annie!

CC: That was my favorite! I thought you were going to talk about the one thing I remember, I think I was 6 years old, was when President Roosevelt declared World War II, when we were going to war.

TH: That was '41. December.

CC: All I knew was that we were going to war and I didn't know what the meant. Were we going to be bombed or what was going to happen? I just really remember that.

TH: I remember Pop had an aid sticker for his gasoline because he worked at Wagner Electric and whatever they were doing, it had something to do with the war effort and so he could get as much gasoline as he wanted. If you had a C, then you had barely enough gas to get to the store.

DS: You had stamps. A, B, and C.

TH: When you pulled in to get gas, you had a sticker and that was the limit on how many gallons you were going to get.

DS: They had stamps for meat too, A, B, and C, I think.

TH: Yeah, when you went to the grocery store, you had the same problem.

DS: Stamps for butter.

CC: And the nylons.

DS: You didn't have stamps for nylons.

CC: Well you couldn't get them! I do remember the stamps, and I do remember being very careful how you spent your money and how you worked towards the war effort. Everybody pitched in, and this is what is so different. . .

DS: Very patriotic.

CC: From this Iraq War where everybody just says, 'Go about your business.' When we went to war, we went to war and everybody was in it together. And there was a draft, was there a draft?

TH: Yes, oh yeah.

CC: Everybody was drafted that was physically capable. I mean, everybody was physically involved. Today, so many people have lost their lives and we're not connected in the way that we were in World War II.

DS: What else was rationed? Shoes, I remember.

CC: Shoes, yes.

DS: Tires...

CC: I remember the tires, yes.

DS: But shoes were too, I remember it was hard because you only got two pairs a year and it was tough when you had little kids. So you got leather shoes, you didn't get tennis shoes, you got leather shoes because they lasted.

CC: Well, we didn't have tennis shoes!

TH: I don't remember tennis shoes until we were much older.

DS: I'd have liked to have Keds in those days, but I never saw them.

CC: Yeah, I don't think I did either.

What social change do you think has surprised you the most over the years?

CC: My two streets are mostly black now. And people think that because of that that this is a dangerous neighborhood. I don't feel it's a dangerous neighborhood. We don't have that much crime, no more than anybody else.

DS: I think that people stay in the house, they watch television, they play games. There isn't the community spirit that there used to be. There isn't the neighborhoods associating with other . . . There wasn't anything else to do, and there wasn't air conditioning. You didn't stay in your house, you went outside.

CC: Do you remember when it got so hot that everyone would go to Forest Park and spend the night down there?

DS: I never did it, but I remember looking at it in the paper.

TH: I don't remember doing that...

CC: We only did it once.

TH: I remember people doing it and I remember our house always being wide open to get in as much air as you could.

CC: Yeah, we put blankets down and slept as a family out in the open air. I remember doing it once, I don't remember doing it more than that.

DS: Well, and you got your news from the newspapers. We had a morning paper, which was the Globe Democrat and an afternoon paper, which was the Post Dispatch.

TH: Well, and we had the Star Times, too.

DS: For a while, yes, but I think that was later. But the Post tried to put the Globe out of business, because they wanted that morning business. They wanted that morning paper and finally they succeeded, so now we just have the Post Dispatch. But that's how people got their news. And you couldn't wait for the afternoon newspaper to get there because that was all that had happened that day. The Globe was things that happened overnight.

TH: I sold the paper at the corner of Natural Bridge and Carson Road for one summer. I guess it

was summer because it was nice weather. But the cars would come up and some of them would give me a nickel, but the paper was only three cents. So some gave me a nickel, boy that was nice! I was livin' high!

DS: Well you waited for Saturday night because the Sunday paper would come out late Saturday. I remember I couldn't wait because I wanted to read the funny paper. We called it the funny paper then, instead of the comics. Couldn't wait to see the Sunday comics!

How did UMSL coming to the community change things here?

CC: I think it was the best thing that happened to Normandy.

DS: I think so too.

CC: People were leaving and moving out west and I think it helped stabilize the neighborhood.

DS: It was strange. I was living in Bellerive Acres at that time and my property went down to the fence of Bellerive Country Club. When they decided to move, I thought they were going to put up little tiny houses or something, but they gave the property to Normandy School District for \$1. And when they started building, it was so nice. And now it's so nice. It brings in people. It made people realize that North County is a very nice place to live.

CC: And the Touhill Center has brought in a lot of people. A lot of people were against it, but I just think its fabulous because there are wonderful performances there.

DS: The resistance could have come from the thought that there wasn't any need for this.

CC: The UMSL faculty did not want it. They wanted the money spent on programs. They thought the spending was frivolous.

DS: You meet people from all over the country and they say, 'I went to UMSL.' That's right down the street!

TH: Did St. Ann's have anything to do with stability, you think? They're pretty functional.

CC: St. Ann's is the cornerstone church in Normandy. To take that away from people...

TH: In our day, the Pacifist monastery were our priests.

DS: They were not supposed to be parish priests.

TH: Well they were our priests.

DS: But there were there and we needed priests!

Let's talk about the changes in the parish or the the school of St. Ann's.

DS: I think that education now is different because nuns are not teaching. I feel, and still feel, that I got a better education at St. Ann's than I did at any other school I ever attended. I got that basic: the English, reading, writing, and grammar.

TH: I met Norma, my first wife, down in the city, down on Kingshighway and Natural Bridge, just north of that. And so we started dating at 15, and I lost track of Normandy. I wasn't in Normandy any longer. I was gone down in the city.

DS: I met my husband, well, he was somebody we all went to school with for 8 years.

CC: My husband is a chiropractor.

DS: I didn't know that. Her husband and my brother went to school together. At St. Louis U High.

CC: No, he went to CBC.

DS: Well, how did they know each other?

CC: I don't know. I didn't know they knew each other.

DS: Yeah.

CC: Well, now...I've been divorced since my twins were this high. (holds hand about four feet from the ground)

DS: They know each other!

CC: Okay, so your brother said he knew Jack Chickey?

DS: I'm sure. When my brother was in high school, he was at the house.

CC: Jack was?

DS: Wait, your husband's name is Jack Chickey?

CC: Yes! I'm Carol Chickey...Wait. You're talking about Bob Chickey?

DS: Yes! That's not your husband?

CC: No, that's his cousin! This is kind of interesting...There's how many of us are left? Well, there's group of St. Ann's students, we all graduated together in 1948 and we had a 50th anniversary, that's when it all got started, at St. Ann's.

TH: It was a multi-year 50.

CC: Yes, his (TH) was the first year. Then the next year my sister had her 50th and then the next year we had our 50th. And there were 10 of us that got together to put this on. We had so much fun planning it, that we got together for the first 10 years every couple of months.

DS: And still do.

CC: Well, we get together but we're slowing down now.

DS: We've lost a few, too.

What do you think could make Normandy a more thriving community?

CC: A dear friend, Joe Lonero, did a lot in Ferguson to bring Ferguson up. Ferguson is a thriving community now. Normandy, I don't think is. We either need a Joe Lonero or a Joe Edwards.

TH: Joe Edwards is the mayor of the Delmar Loop.

CC: He is the instrumental person, owner of Blueberry Hill that brought U City back. It just takes somebody...

DS: with vision and a lot of work.

CC: Yes, Joe Lonero did that with the buildings in Ferguson.

DS: Absolutely.

CC: Normandy needs a leader.

TH: A leader, yes.

DS: He was instrumental in the people being proud of the city.

Have you seen the newly proposed plans for the Normandy Wedge area? It seems to be an attempt to redefine the area, what are your thoughts?

DS: The walkability is very important: the wider sidewalks. We would love that.