

INTERVIEW OF IRMA PIOGORSZ FOR THE FOREST PARK HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

SC: ...Hold on, you know, I didn't start my tape. Again, this is Steve Cushing at Altenheim Senior Citizen's Home; we're in the Arbor Wood division with Miss Irma Pigorsz, its May 28th, 2001, part of our interview series with long time citizens. Miss Irma, can you tell folks the story of how you came to Forest Park?

IP: I sort of grew up with Forest Park. My parents came out here when I was 2 ½ years old, and I will be 97 soon, and I've lived all but 2 ½ years here in Forest Park. And, we moved to Marengo Avenue in the 1100 block and I had a big home and it got a little bit too much for me to handle so I've come over here to Arbor Wood where I am enjoying the amenities here, so.

SC: What was the address over on 1100 Marengo?

IP: First of all it was 1129, that was a 2 story house. But then when my folks came out here his relatives came too and they owned, my dad bought 3 lots and my mother's brother bought the next 2, my dad's sister bought the next 3, and his brother bought the next 2 so we had ten lots in a row on Marengo. And, we built the big house, the 2-story house first. And then I think it was 1925 that we built a bungalow on the other part of our property, and that's where I lived for the rest of my life!

SC: And what year was that, that you actually came to Forest Park that you family came?

IP: 1908 my family came out here.

SC: What did your father do?

IP: It was just, they all talked about it still being Harlem when they came here, so I don't know when it became Forest Park.

SC: Interesting. What did your father do for a living?

IP: My dad was a machinist at Peter Schitler Wagon Company. He made farm wagons.

SC: Where were they located?

IP: Pardon me?

SC: Where was your father's company located?

IP: In Chicago someplace, I don't know where, but I know that he enjoyed his work.

But he was a man of all trades. No matter what we needed my dad could make it.

(Laughter) So...

SC: And how many were there in your family?

IP: I had 2 sisters and they were older than I was and all 3 of us were teachers. My older sister taught 50 years, less than 1 month 50 years at our church school in Oak Park. And, she was my first teacher and she taught me for the first 3 years! And, my other sister taught at Field School when I did too, and then she became principal at Betsy Ross when that school was built. She was Miss Clara, that's how I got the name Miss Irma because there were 2 Pigorsz's at the school at the same time. (Laughter) But, is there something else you would like to know about Betsy School? When I came our church only went up to 7th grade so I came over to Field School for my 8th grade.

SC: Where did you go to school?

IP: Pardon?

SC: Where did you go to school, which church?

IP: Christ Lutheran on East Ave. and Harvard, and my sister taught there for almost, just about, 50 years. And, when I came to this Arbor Wood here, my neighbor across the hall, which seemed to be a coincidence, she was a daughter-in-law of the superintendent of schools in Forest Park at that time, Mr. Brown, and Verna Brown lived here for a year but

she has gone since then. But, we became very good friends because we sort of had something in common that we could talk about, you know, so.

SC: Where did you receive your training to become a teacher?

IP: I can't hear you.

SC: Where did you receive your training to become a teacher?

IP: Oh, I graduated from Chicago Normal, but that was just a 2-year course. And then I got my bachelor of arts from IIT, and the rest of my training was from the University of Minnesota, and Northwestern, and Concordia in River Forest. I seemed to be going to school all my life. (Laughter)

SC: When did you actually start teaching 1st grade or teaching school..

IP: I started to teach in 1925, and I retired in 1965.

SC: My goodness!

IP: After that then I enjoyed, I think, 5 years of retirement and then I went over to our church school and I taught there for 3 years. And, then I retired again, so.. (Laughter) I really retired twice! But, I just enjoyed teaching so much. If every teacher had as lovely a time as I did it would be wonderful!

SC: Did you begin teaching at Field Stevenson? Did you begin teaching at Field Stevenson?

IP: Yes, isn't that strange! That's the school I graduated from and that's the school I taught in-the only school I taught in too.

SC: So, you spent the entire 40 years at Field Stevenson?

IP: At Field School.

SC: And, was it all first grade?

IP: Well, I had 1st and 2nd sometime. And, then when Mr. Kranney was principal then I was assistant principal for a while.

SC: Is that right? You were assistant principal.

IP: Yeah, with Mr. Kranney. Did you have him?

SC: I did. Yes, I had Mr. Kranney, yeah. And, you know, if I recall correctly when I was there we had a situation where you had 1st grade but you also had about 8 2nd graders that were with us.

IP: Right. And see we had mid-year graduation all the time too. We had 2 classes during the year, and so sometimes I would what had they would call it the high first grade or the lower 1st grade and I would have the high 1st grade and the lower 2nd grade then. And, a few years I had a combination, but most of the time it was just 1st grade, yeah.

SC: Can you reflect, talk about how 1st grade changed over the years that you taught?

IP: I really don't know what it's like now. At the time I taught, the children were really responsive I think and I think they showed a little bit more respect for the teacher, and the parent's were so cooperative. And Field School was in a neighborhood where there were a lot of German families and Italian families and they really cooperated with the teachers and I think they were taught at home to respect, you know, authority of any kind. So, I don't know now if I could go back and teach!

SC: Did it, did the course itself, did the academics, the things that you were required to teach the students change over the years from when you began?

IP: I imagine it has, yeah, yeah and there's more freedom in the teaching, I mean you know, it isn't. They aren't confined to a seat or anything like that now. I visited a couple

of classrooms and you know, the children are, they're more, it's more informal I think now than it had been.

SC: Just out of curiosity can you, could you recall, would you be able to run down a typical day what you did in a classroom in 1st grade over the years? How would you start the day? How would the kids come in, that kind of thing?

IP: Well, I mean see, we had our training at Chicago Normal and they really prepared a day for you, you know. And you would always have, we called it busy work, for the children to do while you work with half of your class on maybe on reading or something and the other half would be working at their seats. And, we taught regular writing at that time, you know instead of printing like they do now days. And, I don't know, we just taught reading, writing, and arithmetic like they did years ago I think. (Laughter)

CS: Again, I'm not familiar with the field of academics particularly for primary school, but I do remember that those of us that came through it, we, most of us recall fondly Dick, Jane, and Sally. How long were, that was the Foresman Group that did that? How long were Dick, Jane, and Sally around?

IP: I really don't know but I'm glad you mentioned Dick and Jane. You know when I, after I was teaching for a while I wanted a summer job sometimes. During the summer we either went to school, you know, to get more credit or we would work. And I applied at Scot Foresman and that's where they published the Dick and Jane series. And when I had been at Proviso High School, I was a mid-year graduate, and so I had a half-year where I was all finished with my classes so I would come to school and I just worked in the journalism department with Florence Iotis. Did you have her at school?

SC: No.

IP: She was the journalism teacher and she scared the daylights out of most of the people but you really learned something in her class. And, that summer I went into Scott Foresman and I took a proof reading test and it was 10 or 15 years after I had been in high school but I still remembered all the proof reading marks and that and I got the job! So for 3 years I worked on the Dick and Jane series during the summer though that was. And, that was really interesting. And to this day, mistakes in the paper just pop out at me because I'm so used to looking for them now. (Laughter) So..Ah..

SC: Do you have any recollection of what years those might have been when you were working as a proofreader? Do you recall the years, actual years and can you give me an idea of when that was, what years those were?

IP: Yeah, I can't remember exactly but, when you were there were we working on projects building things like we built a train one time in our room, and we built a store, and a post office. Each year we had a different project we worked on. And the kids, I remember having a great big train in my room, but that's when I had that double room remember the room that led down to the kitchen for the teachers?

SC: OK, OK.

IP: Yeah. And so I had this big room where we could build and out of crates and wrapping paper and everything we made I think we had about a 5 car train-I know there was an engine, and a sleeping car (Laughter), a dining car. Then we built a post office one day and a store. We had, I think that was, when could that have been, let's see.. I thought that would be about your time, wouldn't it? I still have some of those pictures someplace, but I don't know where they are right now.

SC: The one thing that I remember was that around Christmas time we gathered, they used to have the tin foil pie plates and we'd make wreaths out of those, we'd put ribbons on them and I think I still have that somewhere around. And I also remember there were different, weren't there different speed reading groups-people who were accomplished readers and people who were still struggling with reading? That's all I remember basically.

IP: Yeah, well see you didn't stay at Field School so long then if you moved to the other part of town. Where'd you go to Garfield?

SC: I went to Garfield.

IP: Yeah, see that was different. Who did you have there; let's see who were some of those teachers?

SC: Ah, I had, it was 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th and I had Miss White for 3rd grade and I believe Miss White left shortly after. I had Miss Paulson.

IP: Oh yeah!

SC: Marie Paulson, and then I had Marie Gallagan for 5th grade and then there was a fella in there, the only one of my teachers that I did not like was my 6th grade teacher Mr. Fletcher. I didn't care for him too much.

IP: All right. Those names are all familiar. We used to have once a month, we would have building meetings, they would all come over to Field School so that's when I would get to visit with them, otherwise I didn't know them too well.

SC: How many years was Mr. Kranney at the school?

IP: Oh I don't, he was there quite a number of years, yeah. His wife just died last year. And I kept in touch with them all the time too.

SC: Can you tell me; well I have another question about the 1100 block of Marengo. If you lived there for any years did you know the Faths?

IP: Say it again.

SC: The Faths, did you know a family on the 1100 block of Marengo in fact I think they lived at 1130?

IP: The Fath's, they lived across the street from me!

SC: Is that right?

IP: Oh my, Bill Fath was an angel in disguise, honestly. He would help me when I was all alone after my family was gone. Bill, he was such a big help to me! You knew young Bill Fath then too huh?

SC: Well, I actually dated the youngest girl Liz. I used to go out with Liz for about 3 or 4 years.

IP: OH!

SC: And I still know the, an older daughter, Jean who I believe is a teacher here in town.

IP: And Christine. Yeah, Jean still teaches at Field School. She takes the handicappers I think she teaches and something. Her name is Eikhorst now. Yeah, and Christine is the oldest of the 3. Oh, you knew the younger sister, yeah.

CS: Yeah, I knew Elizabeth, young Liz, you know.

IP: Isn't that funny we talked about the Fath's last Wednesday. I had cousins from Boston here and one of the sons lives in Algonquin and he brought his mother over to visit me, and he was a good friend of the Faths too.

CS: Is that right?

IP: So we talked about them then.

CS: He probably went to school with one of the daughters then.

IP: Oh, yeah.

CS: Does, am I mistaken, or does Jean live on the 1100 block of Elgin doesn't she?

IP: Oh, she did?

CS: I believe.

IP: What was her last name?

CS: Well Jean Eikhorst, I believe doesn't she live on the 1100 block of Elgin now?

IP: No, she lived only 3 doors away from me. No, she stayed on Marengo Avenue.

CS: She did?

IP: Yeah. Across the street sort of indirectly from her folks. She was a big help when her mom got sick and so..

CS: OK. I don't believe I ever knew Jean and Christine's mother. William Fath had remarried I think by the time I.

IP: Yeah, they were older than you. You wouldn't have known them.

CS: I know he remarried Fran? Fran I believe was the woman he was married to at that point. Well, what can you, I know that most of your career and your life was around the school system, let's just talk about the town of Forest Park or as you say when you knew it it was Harlem in general. Can you just tell me things that you recall, things that happened in the old days that are long gone that people might want to be interested in?

IP: (Laughter) Oh my goodness!

CS: How much of the things over to the west of Des Plaines Ave., how many, how much of the amusement park was still there, the Hassa house, all that kind of stuff?

IP: Well, when we came out here, the park you are talking about was still a racetrack, a horse race track. There was the big bleacher I can remember and the man next door was a jockey. And, after, let's see, when they when they raced horse, when they took that down then it was a landing field for a little while. I know that Lindbergh was supposed to have landed here. And after that it was a golf course and all the kids in the neighborhood caddied-all the boys were caddies there. Then it became the Amatorp, the torpedo factory, and now it's sort of a deserted mall. But when we came out there was only one house on Marengo Avenue on our side of the street and it's still standing. It's the one, you know where Hide-A-Way was? Well, it's the 1st house by the alley on Marengo Ave. on the 1100 block-and it's still standing! And, so it must be about 120 years old because Mrs. MacDonald was born in that house and when we came out then we had the other 10 lots and I can remember we kids would run to Roosevelt Road where the trolley cars would come, go down you know, and they would run down Roosevelt Road to Des Plaines, and Des Plaines to Madison, and Madison back to Harlem. And, there was a trolley line that ran on Harlem Avenue and the man upstairs when we were still living in that 2-story house; he was a conductor on that line, I can remember. And, on each corner of Harlem Avenue there was a tavern with a picnic grounds and we kids used to run there on Saturdays and peek through the knotholes and watch the picnickers in these places, and we would like to watch the funerals from the Jewish cemeteries go down there, go down Roosevelt Road with there, they would only rent the caskets, they never bought a casket. And then we would wait and see how long it would take them to come back again and with the empty casket. There was one house on Roosevelt Road, south of Roosevelt right on the corner. It was owned by the Ventura family, and I know

they lived upstairs and underneath them they had their barn and they had cows underneath-I used to play with Josie Ventura. I'd go over and get some of the fresh milk from the cows there. And, at the end of the block on 16th street and Marengo Ave., that family the Zimmerman's had goats so it was like a little farm down there. But, I can remember every other morning the baker would come from Madison St. with his wagon and my mom would buy bakery goods from him. Then he would always, there wasn't any bakery down at our end of the town at that time. And, I know that I had a long way to go to school all the time because our church was on Harvard and East and my sister's and I would roller skate to school and I can remember that!! (Laughter) After one sister began teaching then we would take the trolley and all my relatives were living in the houses that had been put up there so we would all go together on the trolley, and ah..

CS: When you talk about your school being on Harvard and East that would be just north of Roosevelt Rd, right there. Harvard that runs?

IP: Yeah 2 blocks, yeah..

CS: And that's the one that's east of Oak Park Ave.

IP: It's 4 blocks east of Oak Park, yeah.

CS: So basically you were in south Oak Park is where you went to school.

IP: Yeah. We really should have belonged to St. John's here in Forest Park, but the man across the street who was out here before we were even had joined this Christ Church in Oak Park and so my dad did to. And that's where my sister began to teach then.

CS: Well you talk about some of the notable things that were in your end of town around Roosevelt running to Des Plaines, but basically what filled in all that area? Now it's all

built up with houses and there are businesses and store fronts on Roosevelt, what was in that area back then? Was it all open, vacant lots?

IP: Yeah it was just a few houses in each block. Do you know Ed Eubner?

CS: I don't.

IP: Oh, well the Eubner family was on Circle behind us about even with us and that was about one of the only houses there at the time too.

CS: So, if there were no houses there was there still a street grid, were there streets that ran?

IP: Oh yeah.

CS: But, there just were no houses built along the streets.

IP: No, not when we first came out, but it didn't take long to build!

CS: And when did most of those houses go up? Was it a steady process? When did it start and how long did it take everything to fill in?

IP: I really don't remember. I was having such a good time as a kid! (Laughter) I didn't pay much attention what was happening.

CS: For instance by 1925 was it all built up?

IP: Oh yeah. By that time there were, yeah, because when I came to school at Field School, you know, there were lots of kids going to school already so most of it was all built up by then. I don't remember-see I was only 2 ½ when I came out so I don't remember too much. I just remember the house I had to give up! (Laughter) And isn't it strange I don't miss the house as much as much as I miss my car? Oh, I just, used to love to drive! And, I had to give up the car though so. I drove for 71 years and didn't have an accident, thank God! So I was the chauffer for all the relatives! And when I was left alone

now, and the rest of the family were gone then I had 2 friends, they called us (Laughter) the trio and they would go with me to Minnesota and we rented a little apartment up there twice a year we'd go up there. I don't know what else I can tell you about myself. I love to write, and I wish I could, and I can't use my arm anymore! But, I wrote our church history, and I wrote our family history, and I wish I could do some more!

CS: Have those been preserved with the Forest Park Historical Society or who has possession of those now?

IP: Oh yeah. I always belonged to that but I haven't been able to go lately, and Dr. Orland would, I think I still am a member, I think I sent in my dues for this year, but I just can't get there anymore but.

CS: Well I think they've had a major change over with Dr. Orland passing away and Cora sort of confined to the house at least for the meantime and they've actually had to go out and recruit some new people to try and pick up the torch.

IP: That's right, yeah. I've been reading about that in the "Review", yeah. I know.

CS: I have a friend Bob Cox who, well actually he got me involved in this project he said we'd like to go out and talk to some of the people who have been here a long time before we lose their stories forever. So, well let's talk about some of the businesses that you remember. Apparently, as you grew older were you able to go to Madison St. on your own?

IP: Oh sure!

CS: And, what businesses do you remember along Madison St.?

IP: What?

CS: What businesses do you remember along Madison St.?

IP: Oh, let's see. I can remember the dime store very, very well, the old dime store.

And, the Hornisher shoe store-those are 2 that we patronized a lot.

CS: Which one was the Hornisher shoe store? Where was that located?

IP: Well, it was almost in the block across from the bank.

CS: OK.

IP: Yeah, and then Steger's Ice Cream Parlor was there too, you know, and that I can remember for the French creams. And, the Harlem Bank, of course, and let's see, and until just until I came in here I always went to the hairdresser on Madison St. still, but then I could still drive, but I haven't been driving now for 5 years so, I miss that!

CS: How about I understand there were some major grocery stores on Madison St.

IP: See, I don't know too much about that because by that time we had stores on Roosevelt Rd. though and then, yeah. We had a lovely bakery there, and Frank the shoemaker, do you remember, you know Frank? His son has the shoe store on Madison St., the Shoe Repairman.

CS: Well maybe what we could do since you're familiar, most people know Madison St. but you're the exception apparently you know a lot about Roosevelt Rd. Maybe you could help me reconstruct the things that were along Roosevelt Rd.

IP: Yeah. Oh yeah,

CS: Why don't we start at Roosevelt and Harlem and work our way west on Roosevelt going to Des Plaines?

IP: Well let's see, there was Unger's drugstore on the corner of Elgin and Roosevelt Rd.

CS: Was that the northeast corner?

IP: Let's see, yeah the northeast corner.

CS: And what was the name of that?

IP: It was Unger, U-n-g-e-r! Unger's , their drugstore! Let's see what other stores were in there. I know across the street was the bakery, and on the corner of Roosevelt Rd. and Marengo Ave. but that was on the South side there was a store that we patronized a lot, and then let's see.

CS: The earliest thing that I remember there was a little food store that was run by the Dolos family? Dolos, they had a son Mike Dolos.

IP: By the what?

CS: That would have been much later, A big muscle-bound guy, that would have been the 60's.

IP: I don't know, but let's see at our corner there was a store called 2 Sisters, did you know those?

CS: I didn't.

IP: Oh,

CS: Tell me about that.

IP: Well the Nordbruck's ran it. and Dorothy Nordbruck and her sister were the 2 who really owned it, it was called 2 Sisters. And they were an old, old family in town here to the very well known. The Nordbruck's and let's see what was her maiden name; I can't think what it was now. And then after that it was sold to this one who had the Hide-A-Way. You must know about the Hide-A-Way, that speakeasy didn't you? (Laughter)

CS: Is that, it's on the northwest corner, that would be the same side of the street that you were on. And, a big clapboard thing now. OK. But that was remodeled from a previous and earlier reincarnation.

IP: Yeah, and across the way from it is Kelly's tavern. Yeah. Tom Kelly ran that for years and years but he 's been gone for a long time and they stilled retained the name though, Kelly. And, there was a hardware store next to Kelly's, and I can't think of all of the different places now.

CS: There was, again my recollections would be much later, there was a Bishop's Chili on..

IP: Oh, on Elgin, a chili place on Elgin, yeah. But, that's gone now too. And Walgreen's has taken over that from Harlem to Elgin. It has changed on Roosevelt Rd. that's for sure! But there are lots of businesses there and there's a good restaurant right now too, Andrea's that is well patronized. I just wish they could build up the mall a little bit more, you know, and have more stores there.

CS: Yeah, I don't know, I think that mall may be a lost cause, apparently that church, the Living Word of God is taking it over, so I guess it's better to have something there than nothing, huh?

IP: Well I thought there were rumors around that Dominick's was going to come in there but I don't see it happening.

CS: No, I haven't seen that either and who knows how long Kmart will stay. They're there, but.. You know one thing that when I was talking to Cora Sallee, she told me that she had recollections of 1st grade and she said that when she came in during the day before, the 1st thing that would happen when she came in the morning was that you would play the piano and the kids would march in to class. Now I don't remember anything like that ever happening. Did you used to play the piano?

IP: (Laughter) I can't remember doing it-she told me that too!! I know that I had to do the playing all the time because the rest of them didn't play. But, she said I used to play marches and they would march in. I can't remember that! (Laughter)

CS: How about, did you also lead singing?

IP: Yeah a little bit and at that time there was Mrs. Kapple. Did you have her?

CS: No, I didn't have Kapple.

IP: Oh, see you didn't, she was up in 7th grade and she would put on all the dance programs and she would entertain the PTA and that and I was always the accompanist. (Laughter) But, now I can't play at all!

CS: And did you have one of those, what do they call them, the pitch pipes, those round things that everybody would get the correct pitch?

IP: No, the music teacher did though, Miss Geilig, you must have had her even over at Garfield.

CS: Oh, I certainly had Miss Geilig.

IP: She would go from building to building.

CS: How long did Miss Geilig stay?

IP: What?

CS: How long did Miss Geilig stay there?

IP: Which one, you mean Geilig?

CS: Yeah.

IP: Oh, I don't know. But, Mrs. Kepple was there all her life too! She taught there long too. I don't know how long Geilig was there. She was such a dear person.

CS: Because I know the kids gave her an awfully hard time.

IP: Aww!

CS: They did! They, she, I think she had a genuine interest in music but she wasn't a real firm hand when it came to the kids and I think particularly in 7th and 8th grade kids are just rascals, you know? I remember we gave her an awfully hard time.

IP: (Laughter) I know, now kids are doing things that I don't think they would have thought of doing, but at the time we thought it was pretty bad too! But, oh I would hate to be teaching now in the upper grades! But, I will say that I really had a happy time. I loved every bit of it. And that was thanks to the parents too, and the kids they were all nice too. I hope the lives that I've touched, and I must have touched a couple thousand, I hope I had a little good effect on them so. (Laughter)

CS: How many of your former students do you still hear from?

IP: What?

CS: How many of your former students do you still hear from?

IP: Well, let's see. I hear from Marion Kerwin, she married Louis Jazmanchek from Forest Park. She used to work in the library too with Cora. And, she lives now in Arkansas. And, I hear from her most of all. And then I hear from Carol Albright, and a lot of them come to see me though when they're in town here too, you know so. Jean Eikhorst, Jean Fath-there aren't too many living but I meet a lot in the restaurant. Sometimes I've had surprises I was at Andrea's one time with some friends and there was a dividing wall but you know you could see the heads and this man must have seen me sitting there and all of a sudden he stood up and he said, "Miss Irma?". And, I said, yes. And he announces to the whole restaurant, "She was my 1st grade teacher!" So he comes

around and he gave me a kiss and we talked and when he left he came around once more and talked and I meet May Bishop, that's Mark Bishop's mother, I meet her a lot.

CS: I've lost complete track of Mark. I have no idea where he is or what he does these days.

IP: Mark, what was the other one's name? Mark, and, is he the one who married the black woman? One of her sons married a black woman.

CS: Is that right, no, I didn't know. I think after high school I lost track of Mark Bishop.

IP: Yeah, I don't remember either. I can't even remember what the other one's name was.

CS: Have any of your students your 1st grade students gone on to fame, notoriety?

IP: Well, I mean in my 1st class Oliver Goldstein, I guess he owned a series of restaurants. And, La Brusse owned a publishing company. And, I know one of them wrote a book about his Navy experiences and he came to see me one day and he gave me the book too. I don't have it handy right now. But, oh a lot of them this Marion that I'm talking about Jazmenchek, she's quite a poet. She's written a lot of poems and she sends them to me. And Carol Albright is a harpist and she plays for the Children's hospitals and the schools up in Minneapolis on her harp.

CS: That's interesting.

IP: It's a great big harp and then a smaller one that she takes to school. And she recorded all the Christmas hymns on her harp. For the 1st year that I was in here, that was her Christmas present to me! So, I've been playing it now for 2 years, and it sounds so nice! Oh, a lot of them have become-I think they're all quite famous!! (Laughter)

CS: Well, I ah...

IP: I'm really proud of the way everybody-I'm real proud of what you're doing too!

CS: Oh, thank you, thank you! I wish I could think of some more questions to ask you, um I just, I guess basically we wanted to capture the essence of Forest Park or Harlem. Do you recall the changeover from Harlem to Forest Park? Do you recall that when it actually happened?

IP: No, see I don't know except that I still have a bankbook that says Harlem on it instead of Forest Park Bank. But, I was too young to remember those things then.

CS: It happened when you were a young girl, still in school.

IP: Yeah.

CS: Oh gosh, how about do you remember the highway going in, do recall those years?

IP: Oh yeah, you mean through the cemeteries?

CS: Yes.

IP: Yeah, I can remember that because my folks are right next-door here at Concordia Cemetery. And, I can remember half of it was on one side of the, we called it the Aurora train went through it at that time and we had to sort of go over a little hill and then when the highway came through there then that little division was gone! And, I can remember that very well. They had to move some of the graves from our cemetery. They had to take some of them away and move them. My cousins were some of those that had to be moved so that I remember. But I can remember when Roosevelt Rd. though when it was first paved. They used to have all these round blocks in the street and I can remember my dad would go over every evening with a wheelbarrow, he had a wheelbarrow full of those round blocks or whatever they were when they began to pave it. They paved it then first

in brick. And then after a while then it was paved with asphalt or whatever you call it.

But, I know when we came out there were no sidewalks either, you know, so.

CS: What would your dad do with the blocks that he would collect from Roosevelt Rd.?

IP: I don't know what he did with them, or why he wanted them either! (Laughter) I

don't remember. But he could build anything you asked him having 3 teachers, 3

daughters as teachers. He wouldn't throw a thing away. We'd often say, "Why don't you

get rid of it?" "You might need it someday." And, sure enough he always found

something that we wanted him to make or something and he could make just anything.

My mother was a good seamstress and she could sew anything.

CS: Do you ah, if your mother was a seamstress do you remember the store on Madison

St., Euler's? Do you remember Euler's?

IP: Which?

CS: A material store with patterns, a sewing store Euler's? Do you remember that store

at all?

IP: I don't remember that much at all.

CS: OK, this was, it was west of Des Plaines-it was between Jackson and Des Plaines on

Madison Street.

IP: Oh.

CS: I know my mother and grandmother used to haunt it all the time, with patterns and

material and things.

IP: Yeah. Maybe my mother did, I don't remember that. My mother was a good quilter,

and we all quilted too. I've got her last quilt on my bed right now. (Laughter)

CS: How, when did your parents pass away?

IP: Well, let's see, my mother died in 1940, and my dad in 1949. But my first sister, my sister who was principal at Betsy Ross, she only lived to be 37. So she was..

CS: Is that right?

IP: Yeah, she died first, and then my mother died, and then my dad. And, then I had this older sister and I and she died in 1961. And, since then I've been alone. But I have an adopted family sort of. An adopted man from a cousin in Minnesota came down to work at O'Hara when he was 19 and he lived with me for 3-4 years. And, so he always calls me his other mother. And those are his 3 daughters, their pictures, and they've been calling me grandma all the time. And, now 1 has a baby so I'm a great grandma!

(Laughter)

CS: That must be nice for you!

IP: Yeah, it is nice! But, so I don't feel alone because they've all been down to visit me within this last month. They take turns to visit and they brought the baby down so I could really hold him. His name is Colin. I've got a great big picture in my bedroom of him-it's just darling! (Laughter)

CS: Let me ask you as a teacher, do you like television?

IP: Did I what?

CS: As a teacher, do you like television?

IP: Do I watch it?

CS: Do you watch it, do you like it?

IP: Well, I watch only certain programs. I watch Millionaire sometimes. And, I like Channel 11; they have such good programs all the time. And then, to get a laugh I watch I'd say I watch "Everybody Likes Raymond," I like that one. (Laughter)

CS: OK, so you don't have as a teacher, as an educator, you don't have a philosophical problem with television in general.

IP: No. No, well I don't like the dress sometimes that they, you know, the way they are dressed on television. And, I wish they did not have to use so much swearing on television and always have to have some sort of off color remarks and stuff. That bothers me! But, I mean.

CS: I guess that's just the world in general today. It's not just television; it's everywhere out there it seems to be.

IP: Yeah.

CS: Well thank you very much for taking the time to..You know I wish I could think of some more questions, I wish we could...

IP: Well, I don't know if I told you anything worthwhile! But I've really had a happy life since I came here. I enjoy it here, and I've made lots of new friends! And, I like the fact that I don't have to cook! (Laughter)

CS: All your meals are done?

IP: Yeah, we get our meals here. I make my own breakfast, and a sandwich in the evening, but at noon we can get our ½ meal. And I love the elevator that I don't have to climb steps anymore!

CS: Can you recall the, it's a company, the building that was right by the expressway on Circle and I know for a while it was the Borden Dairy. Do you recall that? Circle and, oh my goodness, not Lehmer, Harrison, Circle and Harrison in Forest Park.

IP: Didn't the board of education or something move into that building or what was that again? I know, like the triangle building you mean?

CS: No, this would be by Circle Bridge as you go up Circle Bridge over to your right.

IP: Oh, Roos's!

CS: It's..

IP: Roos's Cedar Chest!

CS: No, Roos is on the left., that was the cedar chest.

IP: Yeah and the other one is the Ferrara Candy Company, yeah.

CS: Do you recall what was there before the candy company was there?

IP: I remember when the cedar chest factory was there.

CS: Is that right?

IP: Yeah, that's where Mrs. Kepple's husband worked there. And, he made all these beautiful cedar chests and I knew the Roos's real well too, you know, the ones who owned it. They were a very important family in Forest Park at that time.

CS: Was that already a going business when you were a young girl?

IP: Yeah, oh yeah, I think so yeah.

CS: So the Roos's were older than you-would they have been your parent's age?

IP: Oh yeah!

CS: Because I know that Cora told me that they're still trying to find material, promotional literature from the Roos factory and have been able to uncover any. So, it's interesting to hear that you knew them. I think that they went out of business in what, the mid 50's at some point like that? As a child I only knew it as the pen factory, that's what we wee fascinated by.

IP: Yeah, I can remember when what is now that U-Haul place on Harlem and Harrison when it was Parisi baseball field. Parisi, what did he have a girl's baseball team or

something? Yeah, and I know I had the Parisi girl in school and Emory Parisi, their dad, he was so helpful at school and he made a lot of donations to our things and that. But I can remember that open field too. When we first came out here, the elevator was running on ground level, you know. And, a stop was on Harlem Avenue and my grandpa lived with my uncle and aunt in the 500 block on Elgin and every Friday he would come to our house and he'd spend the whole day at our house. And, I can remember cutting through that prairie all the time and meeting my grandpa at the elevator station so he wouldn't have to cross over the El alone. (Laughter) He was such a nice little grandpa. I can remember him sitting in our yard-we had a big garden before we built the bungalow and he had a long white beard and he would let us sit on his lap and braid his beard and put a ribbon in and oh, we had so much fun with him! (Laughter)

CS: Was your grandfather German?

IP: Yeah, his name was, he was the oldest let's see, there were 7 boys and 2 girls when they came from Germany. And, my grandpa stayed in Chicago, and 1 of his sisters, and they, my grandpa only had 2 kids my mother and then her brother. And, the sister only had 2 boys. And they didn't have any children. And, my mom only had 3 girls and we didn't marry so there were very few of our relatives here. But the 6 brothers went to Minnesota and the 1 sister and they all had big families. So, there are hundreds of Stephenhagen's up in Minnesota. (Laughter)

CS: That was your grandfather's name, Stephenhagen?

IP: Stephenhagen, yeah.

CS: Interesting, interesting.

IP: And I wrote that family tree too, so.. (Laughter)

CS: I guess I'm part of that same tradition because my grandparent's were Corman's from Germany and came over here and my father's family was Cushing's from England, around, I think 1850 if I'm not mistaken. It's interesting to hear about, I don't know if we continue to talk, do you remember when the park went in?

IP: The park?

CS: Yeah, the park over on Harrison and Des Plaines, between Des Plaines and Beloit?

IP: You mean the baseball park.

CS: The baseball park and the pool and all that do you remember when that was built?

IP: Oh yeah. Compared to what they have now, oh boy! I can remember when that started, yeah. What I remember about this place is I knew this Altenheim here since I was a little kid. Our church used to, all the churches would come here for their church picnics in the summertime so I came here as a little kid. And, then when I began teaching, we used to come here for the school picnics, and we would walk down Madison St, you know, and all the little kids were carrying flags, and by the time they got to the picnic grove they were already so tired out that they had to rest before they could have fun! But, I can always see us still walking down Madison St. by grades, and so this is like old home here when I came here.

CS: When you say down Madison St. by Grays? What?

IP: Yeah, by schools and by grades! Yeah.

CS: Oh, by grades, OK.

IP: Yeah Grant School would usually come first because they were closest. And then the Garfield, and then we were always, they didn't have Betsy Ross at that time. And we would, I don't remember if we were bussed over or how we got to Madison St. but I

know we all walked by classes down Madison St. and sometimes the parents would walk beside us on the sidewalk because some of the little kids got so tired of walking.

Everybody was carrying a flag and we ah, so this was a real popular place. (Groan)

CS: How about the, do you recall any movie theatres in Forest Park?

IP: The what?

CS: Any movie theatres in Forest Park? Movie theatres in Forest Park?

IP: Oh yeah, let's see, there was one on Circle Ave. and Madison, and I think there was one on Des Plaines and Madison too. In fact I think one of our graduations was even in one of the movie theatres.

CS: But you weren't much for movies yourself?

IP: No.

CS: How about another thing we don't hear much about today are and you may have been around when these were still around were livery stables. And, stables in general because of course by the time we were kids all the livestock was gone. Everybody had automobiles. But do you recall..

IP: Yeah, I can't remember a single stable around here except by the tavern, and you know, there was one almost on every corner on Roosevelt Rd. I know there was one on Harlem, on both sides of the street-and then on Circle Ave., and on Hannah Ave. and then the next one. There were, maybe they had stables in the back, I don't know. But at the time, let's see, when I got confirmed I must have been about what 12 or 13, the automobiles were coming out then and I mean so, I can remember I felt so proud that my sponsor picked me up in his Ford at church when I got confirmed! Oh I was so proud to think I rode in a car! (Laughter)

CS: About what year would that be? Can you put a date on that, a year on that?

IP: What year? Well let's see, if I was born in 1905 and I was 12 I was confirmed in 1913, so.

CS: So was that an open-air car? Was the car open air, or was it?

IP: Yeah, you know, it wasn't closed up like we have now. They had to put, they would put up the side windows if it rained or something, you know, and his name was Algrham, related to all these Algrham funeral homes. (Laughter) And um, they still have funeral homes, all the Algrham's-that was my mom's cousin.

CS: That's an interesting memory. Can you shed some more light; you talked a little bit about funerals that would go down Roosevelt Rd. Were they only the Jewish funerals that went down Roosevelt Rd.?

IP: Well see, the one's going down Roosevelt were only for the Jewish cemeteries, because the other ones were along at the end of the El line. And it was usually, I know we would run down sometimes and watch. They had wailing men and women that they could hire, you know, for the funerals and they would all sit out in front of the Jewish cemeteries and when Dr. Orland had one of the cemetery walks, I know we went through some of the Jewish cemeteries. And my cousin Mirella who was over in this part of the building and she's now out in Oakridge, she and I had it, we did all the arranging for which graves we would visit. So, I know we went to Mike Todd's grave here and some of the movie men they were, what were they, I've forgotten, but that was interesting to watch. We came from a Jewish neighborhood in Chicago, I guess. I don't remember that too much but my sister who was 10 years older had a real good Jewish friend and she kept in touch with her even when we were living out in Forest Park all the time. And, she

would come out and visit so I learned a lot about the Jewish customs and so I was kind of interested in that. Pat MacDonald, you didn't know the MacDonald's did you?

CS: I don't believe so.

IP: The one in the little house next door to us, Mrs. MacDonald's first name, maiden name was Pfeifer and, that was the 1st house on our street. And, Pat MacDonald, after a while he became a millionaire. He owned the Rob Roy golf course out in Arlington Heights, yeah, or Prospect Heights and he also had something, he had racehorses in Florida, and I remember taking his mother down to Florida twice. She had gone blind and we flew down there and I took her down there twice. And, but that house I wish they had put that on the, you know, Historical Houses or something because I know it's over 120 years old! And it's still being occupied!

CS: That's the one on the west side of the street right near the alley?

IP: Right at the alley.

CS: The one that runs parallel to Roosevelt.

IP: Yeah you know where that Hide-A-Way was. Yeah, and it's the first house. There was an old one across the street too but that was next to Faff's and that was torn down for a parking lot now.

CS: Where the Miner's lived there for a while?

IP: Oh, did you know them too?

CS: That house was still standing when I was going out with the daughter.

IP: Oh.

CS: And after the daughter and I split up I noticed one time that they had torn that house down and put up a parking lot.

IP: Oh yeah. Yeah the Miner's lived in that, yeah.

CS: I'm just trying to think of what else we can talk about. Because I know you've got all sorts of, can you, can you talk well 2 things, I'd like to go back and ask questions clarifying things that you mentioned. When you talked about the Jewish funerals and that they would rent coffins, how would the bodies be interred without a coffin?

IP: I don't know, they were wrapped like mummies. You know, people don't want to believe this, but I know it's true because I did it myself. When the father of this Jewish friend that I talked about when he died, my mother and I went to his wake and when we came to their house he was standing in the hallway, wrapped up as a mummy, standing against the wall and we went into their living room and then they served refreshments and that. And, they just rented a casket then to take him to the cemetery. And I imagine, they just put him in a cement box or something, maybe a wooden box, I don't know. I

CS: So there might not, would they have put him just in the ground without a vault or a crypt or anything?

IP: No, they, well I don't know see, we never stayed to watch the funeral itself because we stayed at our corner watching the parade. But, I don't know what they did with it, but I know they would bring the casket back again.

CS: And that was one of the only Jewish cemeteries in the entire area wasn't it?

IP: Yeah. Well see they changed a lot of that at Concordia here. You used to be able to bury on top of an older burial, you know. So when my sister died I inquired about that, I would like to have been where my folks were. And, they said you can't do that anymore. So now she and I will be in the other part of, a different part of the cemetery. But I guess they've changed that too now. The Jewish people now have, they use caskets now too.

CS: The other thing that you mentioned that I would like to follow up on was the airfield. Do you have any recollections of the airfield at all?

IP: The what?

CS: Of the airfield?.

IP: No, I don't remember that much at all. I do remember the racetrack. And, I do remember the golf course real well. But that air part, that I can't remember too much.

CS: When it was a racetrack were they racing cars or horses?

IP: No, horses.

CS: Horses.

IP: Because Mr. MacDonald was a jockey. And, Mrs. MacDonald that's where she met him. She worked as a waitress in the dining room, so she met this jockey!

CS: Do you know anything speaking of the cemeteries, don't one of the circus companies have a...

IP: Woodlawn.

CS: Is that right?

IP: Oh yeah.

CS: Can you tell me about that?

IP: Well I don't remember that too much except whenever I have company from out of town I had to take them to that cemetery and show them the lots that had the elephants around. That's what you're talking about.

CS: Is that Barnum and Bailey, Ringling Brothers, or what?

IP: I don't know but there's a big marker there that explains it all. Yeah.

CS: OK. I never managed to take the cemetery walk and all these years.

IP: Well evidently, something that happened in Indiana I guess or something. But..

CS: Well, OK I guess, I guess I'm out of questions.

IP: Well, I wonder if I've told you anything worthwhile. (Laughter).

CS: Oh, certainly! Certainly, no it was, do you, having been in Forest Park were you around for the building of Oak Park's business district? Do you recall that at all? When the Field store went in, when Wieboldt's went in..

IP: And when they came out now too! You know they're gone. I don't know but we surely miss Sears and Wieboldt's and that because I had cousins who worked in both of those stores and I haven't been back there now, except for I go to my eye clinic there now, in that area there and it's all so different. But I get toted around by this friend over in Briarwood here, so I really don't know what changes have been made there.

CS: Well and obviously you've been over there, the whole Wieboldt's building is gone, that's been torn down. And the Field's building is still there and the Field's company is still in business but it's not the Field's company anymore.

IP: Yeah.

CS: It's a crying shame to have seen those changes. Well again, thank you very much for taking the time out to talk to me.

IP: Oh, Steven, it was nice of you to consider coming here but I feel as though I haven't told too much that's of any value to you.

CS: Well you know one of the things I probably should have dragged Cora over here with me and she could have put you in an arm lock and gotten all the information out of you!

IP: I asked her if she didn't want to come too-she said it's too hard to get in and out of cars or something. And, I realize that too. I can't get in everybody's car.

CS: Well, I just couldn't believe it when she mentioned you, and I thought my goodness, Miss Irma, you know!

IP: (Laughter)

CS: When I go to the class reunions I'm going to have to tell everybody that I talked to you, and I saw you and you're still here!

IP: That's wonderful! Do you know Debbie Balpens?

CS: You know I had her older sister Ellen. I think Ellen was the older of the 2 wasn't she?

IP: Well there's 3 of them. There's another one older than that too.

CS: OK.

IP: But Debbie's, I mean Gayle, maybe you know Gayle Fahee, she is the one who arranges all the programs here for us and she said that, I guess, Debbie is one of her neighbors and she said she wanted to come some day this week. So, I don't know if she will or not. What is their last name? She married that butcher from Madison St.

CS: You know I don't know, Gussy was his name, I never knew his last name. How about another student that was, in fact, Ellen Ballfance and this girl Sue Bond used to be together. Susan Bond? Are you familiar with her, Susan Bond?

IP: What was there name?

CS: Susan Bond? She's just a little girl too, a little girl.

IP: Barg?

CS: Bond, Bond, Susan Bond. They lived up in, well Ellen and she both lived and then the Rubbles. All these names are coming back to me now that I was in 1st grade with. And then the family that lived right next door to the playground the Shiketi's . Do you remember Mary Rose Shiketi?

IP: See, that must have been when you were up north though in Forest Park.

CS: No that was by Field Stevenson that's why I, I can remember all the one's from Garfield. I have a hard time remembering the early ones from, and there was a girl that was killed in a motorcycle accident, Gay Block?

IP: Oh, I remember that accident. Yeah, I didn't have her though, but yeah.

CS: Oh no, you did. She was with us, Gay and Patty, those were the.

IP: Could I get you an ice cream or something?

CS: Oh no, no thank you.

IP: Really?

CS: I'm fine thanks.

IP: Aw.

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