

Helen Johnson-Interviewed By Sue Flokos-6-27-84-Side A

SUE FLOKOS: Oops. Oh, you started, okay. All right. Today is June the 27th, I believe. I am Susan Flokos and I am interviewing -- what's your name?

HELEN JOHNSON: Helen Johnson.

SF: Helen Johnson at Saint Mark's. Okay. Mrs. Johnson, how old are you?

HJ: I am 72.

SF: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

HJ: My mother and dad both came from Europe, from Poland. They came here when they were quite young. Dad was 10, mother was 13, and they settled here. My dad came with his family, settled in Stamford, and at the age of three, when I was three years old, they moved into Bridgeport and settled down on Allen Street, because my dad came to work at Bullards, which was down at the Underwood Building then. So, I had three brothers and a sister, [01:00] and we all, well, we lived on Allen Street, then we moved to Beardsley Street, and then from there, we came here, 63 years ago. This was country then, and my mother just loved it.

SF: Why did your family come to Bridgeport?

HJ: For employment, yes. My dad's employment.

SF: What kind of business was your father into?

HJ: He worked for Bullards, and they manufactured. He did tool work, making tools to assemble with machines.

SF: Okay. So, you said their reason for coming here was the employment.

HJ: Yes, mm-hmm.

SF: Okay. What grammar school did you attend?

HJ: Black Rock.

SF: Black Rock?

HJ: Yes, and when I came here, we had a little old schoolhouse down at the foot of the street. It was a two story, with a bell on top, little old school house, and I went there to second grade. And then when I graduated from second grade there, I went to the front part of Black Rock School here -- [02:00] just the front of the building was there -- until the year I was graduating from there, and they put the rest of the building together.

SF: What high school did you attend?

HJ: Well, I went to Central at that time -- it's the City Hall now -- and went there three years, and I took up secretarial work. I could have been an artist. I wanted to go to art school, because my family was poor at that time and I was the oldest, so I had to give that up. I could have gone to Pratt Institute, if mother and dad were well enough off to send me there. And I did illustrate my

stories for *The Bridgeport Post*, the junior pages, and there were artists that were in Bridgeport, said it was too bad that I couldn't have followed the course. I really loved the artwork more than secretarial work, yeah. I had an art teacher there I liked very much, at the high school.

SF: At Central.

HJ: Yeah.

SF: [03:00] What kind of events did you do at school? Did you have dances and plays?

HJ: At Black Rock here?

SF: Yes.

HJ: We had an annual play, and well, when we were teenagers, we sort of went from one house to another. They had surprise parties, things like that, and I did go dancing. I loved dancing.

SF: Where did you go dancing?

HJ: I went out to the Ritz. It was burnt down; I think you remember when it was burnt down.

SF: No, tell me.

HJ: It was out on Fairfield Avenue by Ash Creek there, and I just loved dancing, so I'd go anytime I could get a chance to go.

SF: So you went dancing then.

HJ: And we went to Pleasure Beach, because at that time, Pleasure Beach was a really nice place to go to. It was an amusement park with an immense dance hall there. I went to other places to dance, too, because the crowd went.

SF: They had the big bands and everything?

HJ: [04:00] Oh yes, the Ritz had all big bands, yes.

SF: Do you remember about World War I and World War II?

HJ: Well, the only thing about World War I that I could remember, because my parents didn't talk too much about it, and I only remember: We had measles and we were all in bed, and my dad came home, and he was laughing, and calling out to us down the street that the war was over. And a couple days later, after that, I remember going out on the front porch and I saw this thing up in the sky and I got so frightened. It was just a two-wing airplane, but I had never seen one before, and they had come back from the war. So I really don't know too much about the fir-- except that my mother took me to Europe. We went to Poland, and I was two years old, and if we hadn't gotten the ship home at that time, the last ship in, we would've had to stay in Poland; I would never have made it back to United [05:00] States. That's all. I remember talk over there about the war coming on.

SF: Do you remember anything about the Depression?

HJ: Yes.

SF: Could you tell me a little bit about it?

HJ: Well, it was hard on all of us. My dad had bought the house --

SF: In Bridgeport?

HJ: Yeah, down at the foot of Seaview Terrace, and Mom went to work. There was no work. I went to Booth and Bayless, and they couldn't even supply jobs for people who had been there before, after three years in high school, and so I went out and did work. I went out and worked in people's homes, anything to save the house. It was really bad. We did without a lot of things. We did a lot of walking. But, the families were nice, family type. Everybody loved one another because we had nothing else to do.

SF: What did you do? Like you, for the Depression, you worked in other people's homes (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) -
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HJ: Yes, I went out and did work. I did housework.

SF: Voluntarily, or...

HJ: [06:00] No, but I was paid very little. In those times, the people didn't have much money to pay other people, so, I was paid by the month and I brought my money home to mama, and that was it. And then I worked in Bullards for a little while. I worked for about a year there, and I

worked in the timekeeping office. Our family, we're all Bullard people.

SF: You worked at Bullards and you worked as like, a housekeeper?

HJ: Well, housework, yeah, cooking and everything else, waiting on table and all.

SF: Could you tell me about the neighborhood you used to live in, or the neighborhood you live in now?

HJ: The one I moved into?

SF: Yes.

HJ: Or my dad's house? Well, I lived there for, oh, quite awhile. It was a nice neighborhood. We were down when we first moved in. My mother was so happy because there were cows all over and she just could dream of having that beautiful garden, because of the cows, [07:00] and when we moved down there, it wasn't the way it is now, no way. We had the Meadow Banks, we had the Swedish club, and we're Fayerweather, a yacht club, and the other one is -- we just had a dock down there, and just posts like, and dirt roads, and it was all together. But then we could go to Seaside Park by going down there, and paying Mr. [Bloomer?] five cents to take us across in his rowboat, because the island there, they had a couple shacks and they had this little store where Mr. Bloomer and his daughters ran the store.

And then they had tents there, and in the summertime, the campers were out there at night, and I lived on this side of the Black Rock Harbor, and that was on Fayerweather Island. And we could hear them at night singing, and the campfires going. It sounded so nice, ukuleles and all.

[08:00] So that was a real nice part of, being able to go to Seaside Park, to Fayerweathers, just put the boat and walking over there.

SF: Sounds like a lot of [fun?].

HJ: Yeah, well, we walked everywhere, see. We didn't have a car.

SF: You didn't go by trolley car, or --

HJ: I did go by trolley car to high school, or downtown. That was a nickel, yeah, so had a nickel jitney bus.

SF: What is a jitney bus?

HJ: An old bus.

SF: Wow.

HJ: They called them jitneys then. Because we didn't get a jitney bus ride very often or trolley car, we did a lot of walking because we were like a group. Going to high school, we would walk the two miles, come back the two miles.

SF: A lot of walking.

HJ: There wasn't very much money around so we didn't worry about it. (laughs)

SF: What religion are you?

HJ: I'm Catholic.

SF: You're Catholic. What church do you go to?

HJ: I belong to Saint Ann's.

SF: Mm, (inaudible).

HJ: Mm-hmm. I've been there since before the church, because when we moved to Black Rock, there was no Catholic Church, [09:00] and we had to go to Saint Peter's on Colorado Avenue. And then we got the little wooden church, and from the wooden church, we got the basement, and we went to basement for quite awhile before our new church was built.

SF: So, you just went into, like, it was a wooden church then, nothing like it is now then?

HJ: Oh no, it was portable, yeah, a little portable church.

SF: You mean it would actually -- you can move the church?

HJ: Oh yes, it was brought from here to there, wherever they started a parish, and there wasn't a room for us kids. Only the grown up people could sit in the seats; we had to stay in back of the altar.

SF: And you had to kneel down or sit on the altar?

HJ: Yeah. We had Father Ford then; he started the church.

SF: He started the Saint Ann [spiritual?]?

HJ: Yeah, uh-huh. So I'm a charter member at Saint Ann's.

SF: How many years have you gone to that parish, do you remember?

HJ: Well, I'm in Black Rock 63? Must be all of between 55 and 60 years since the church is here, because I can't [10:00] remember how many years we went to Saint Peter's.

SF: What -- I shouldn't ask you that because I already know. What kind of sports were there in Bridgeport?

HJ: Not too much. Black Rock is the place that really could use a youth center, a real good senior center place, because we are going to be out of there, at [Bartram?] House, and for the lack of it. It seems like, back in old times, where there was baseball, used to go ice skating or sled riding on [Thorne's?] Hill, or in the back of here. We didn't have much sports.

SF: Where's Thorne's Hill?

HJ: It's up at Saint Mary's, you know where the houses are built way up on the hill there by Saint Mary's, and Saint Mary's. [Eames?] Boulevard wasn't always Eames Boulevard. It was a road that went around, where the road goes now, but it [11:00] was more like a dirt road or partially built road, and then the boulevard was nothing like that. It was just the wall around the water, to hold the water from coming in, and it used to be called Lover's Lane at that

time, in the old days. Am I repeating anything that somebody else has told you? Because I wouldn't want to repeat things, no.

SF: No, no, you're doing a very good job.

HJ: So we enjoyed that. I had three children, and put them in the buggy and take walks down there, and I was about 18 when Eames, when the boulevard was started. It was built and opened with a big fireworks display at Fairfield -- no, right at the creek there, where the boat basin is now. See, because we could walk to Fairfield Beach. We didn't have the deep creek. We had beautiful sandbars in those days, and I always took my kids down there swimming. It was a [12:00] mile and a half from our house and a mile and a half back, three miles round trip, but we walked it all. Mm-hmm, the kids loved it. We had beautiful sandbars at Saint Mary's then.

SF: Nothing like it is now.

HJ: No, when we first came, there were remnants of Saint Mary's Church, the little old wooden building there, that they had in the old, old days. There were just remnants of it.

SF: This was like in the middle of the beach in Saint Mary's?

HJ: No, where you go way out, almost out to the tip, when you get off the wall and you start to walk on the bank on the sand. But see, we didn't have that big -- we could walk

across at low tide, and this way, they excavated everything and they put the sand, took our sand and put it on Fairfield Beach and they put all those rocks there. They changed it altogether for us. We're the losers, yeah.

SF: Big change. Going now to [13:00] politics, when you first came to Bridgeport, was there any particular mayor that you think did a great deal for Bridgeport?

HJ: Yes, Mayor McLevy.

SF: Everybody likes Mayor McLevy.

HJ: Yeah, he was a real reliable person. He was in there for years. I really liked him.

SF: Was there any reason why you thought he was the best out of all of them?

HJ: He was like Abraham Lincoln. He was an honest person, and a reliable person, and he was in there forever anyway. That was a Socialist party, and though we were not Socialists, we still voted for him because he was good. Yeah.

SF: Everybody says the same thing, McLevy. But, do you think he did a good job on Bridgeport compared to the other mayors, or...

HJ: Well, I couldn't say. We had a good mayor, Mayor Behrens was a good mayor, [14:00] and we've had a few others that were good.

SF: But overall, you think McLevy, because he was like one of the family or something.

HJ: Yeah, everybody liked him, yeah.

SF: Was there any other governor or mayor that was special than all the others?

HJ: You mean like a governor?

SF: Yeah.

HJ: I liked Governor Baldwin when he was in up in Hartford. They came and went, and I really didn't keep too much track of them, but I did like Baldwin, uh-huh.

SF: Do you think that people would have liked to have him back in office if they could?

HJ: Well, he's too old to be in office right now.

SF: Oh, I know, but, if they had the choice and he was still a young, do think --

HJ: I think so, yeah. He was a good governor.

SF: You think he managed the state very well.

HJ: Yeah, mm-hmm.

SF: [15:00] So, you said that you liked McLevy, right, Mayor McLevy?

HJ: Mm-hmm.

SF: Okay, what other things were important in Bridgeport in those days? What other things were up? When they say "up

on Bridgeport," what do you think that they're meaning by that, to say "up on Bridgeport"?

HJ: Well, I don't know. Bridgeport wasn't the way it is now, no how. If you had seen old pictures of it, if you went downtown to the market, they had a public market down there with sawdust on the floors, and it was down where Mohegan - - well, you'd know it as the Duchess -- in that area there, and there was a huge market. But, it was really a pleasure to go shopping in there. Seeing the old places. You could go from counter to [16:00] counter picking things out. Yeah, it was a huge market. I enjoyed that, then I enjoyed the train ride to Stamford, because we had the old-fashioned trains that they had the cow sweepers on the front. You know what they call them?

SF: Yeah, I think I know what you're saying.

HJ: And oh, I used to love to ride the train down to my Grandma's, because we had a beautiful depot then. It doesn't stay there now. And then we had, for our enjoyment, we had the *Richard Peck* that went to New York, and that stopped at Rye Beach and we used to go on that. We enjoyed that. It was a big boat, and it came, came in regularly, every day. Enjoyed that.

SF: Did that ever come in Bridgeport, though?

HJ: It came right to the Bridgeport Harbor, yes, uh-huh.
Stopped at Rye Beach. We'd go down to ride on it.

SF: Was any boat rides coming like from around Black Rock area?
Like, you can take a ride and see all [17:00] Bridgeport on
a boat or something?

HJ: From Black Rock? No, just private boats that people owned,
no big boat. Though they say that the galleons used to
come in, and I could believe it, because they had the
places for them before they built it all up. They had the
places where they could come in. I guess they had to
dredge the harbor or something to get some of these oil
boats that do come in. I imagine a big boat could come in.

SF: Yeah, big enough harbor. What other kinds of things was
Bridgeport then? I mean, was industrial wise...

HJ: Yeah, it was mostly, industrial wise.

SF: What kind of factories? What was Bridgeport like, if you
could describe 40, 50 years ago? I mean, altogether, was
it a lot, lot different then?

HJ: It was a very clean city, a very nice city to come to.
[18:00] And at that time, the circus came on Fairfield
Avenue. I don't know if anyone had told you.

SF: The Barnum --

HJ: Yes, the whole circus came down there where the car place
is, down --

SF: Down on Main Street or something like that?

HJ: No, right here on Fairfield, down in Black Rock here, and the whole circus would come in. We could walk down to see it. That was really a thrill.

SF: So you went to the circus then.

HJ: Yeah. Well, yes.

SF: Tell me a little bit about the circus.

HJ: The circus. We had the tents, and we had the sideshow, and it was real nice; enjoyed going to it. Now if you want to go to the circus, you have to go to New Haven or Hartford and you have to be indoors. This was in the big old tent.

SF: You mean that there was just like a big, big tent that --

HJ: A real large tent, and then we had the sideshows that you could walk around and watch. They were a lot of fun. The people would come out, the little fat lady and the tall skinny man or this and that, and they would come out and entertain, [19:00] or the funny dancers, the show dancers. It was a lot of fun.

SF: Tom Thumb (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HJ: Yeah, mm-hmm. It was the big Barnum-Bailey Circus then, yeah.

SF: And, I'm trying to think. P. T. Barnum was the cochairman of this whole thing?

HJ: At that time; I can't remember if he was alive then or what. See, after that, they moved down by Seaside Park for their winter quarters, before Florida. Yeah.

SF: But, so that was like a big entertainment for everybody in Bridgeport then.

HJ: Oh yes, oh yes, that was really something when they came in.

SF: So it came right down here (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HJ: You know where the P. T. Barnum apartments are. That's what I meant; that's where it was.

SF: So it was down in that section of town, down by Fairfield -

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HJ: And Black Rock, sort of, yeah.

SF: You mean, it lined up all the way down Fairfield Avenue, the quarters?

HJ: It went backwards, where P. T. Barnum [20:00] is. The entrance would be on Fairfield Avenue.

SF: Oh wow. That must have been fun to walk down and see them.

HJ: And then we had, down here, we had Champs Farm.

SF: What was that like?

HJ: That, they went swimming and boating. That was on Gilman Street.

SF: Mm-hmm, I know where that is.

HJ: Yeah, and they had all these big outings and big affairs there. That was torn down to make room for new houses.

SF: But it was like a big farm that you can bring your kids to go see and everything?

HJ: Yeah, was a nice place.

SF: And, you got fresh stuff from over there, did they sell stuff?

HJ: No, this was an entertainment place where people went, and then they had outings and different affairs they ran there. It was a real nice place, yeah.

SF: What did they run, picnics or --

HJ: Yeah.

SF: For the whole family, you could just come in --

HJ: Yes, uh-huh. You could go swimming in front there, right there, too.

SF: Sounds like very nice. [21:00] So, overall, you would say that it was a lot different then than it is now.

HJ: Oh sure, sure was. I wish Bridgeport was as nice now as it was in the old days. I really do, and I do wish that the mayor would do something for us in Black Rock, make a center or something out here. I mean, you live out here, so you know that I'm telling the truth.

SF: Oh, I do. I do. I feel, myself, that they should have more things for senior citizens.

HJ: They do it all over the city.

SF: I know, but there should be one in Black Rock.

HJ: Oh, I've been for that for a long time. But they seem to just ignore us. I don't know why.

SF: That's a shame. What other kinds of things did they have around here? Did they have little markets you could go to, or...

HJ: [22:00] Oh, all of Fairfield Avenue was different than it is now, too.

SF: Sure, tell me about it.

HJ: We had the open market too, with the sawdust on the floors, and of course, at that time, we had the wagons with the horses, and the vegetable trucks, and the iceman came with the horse in the beginning, and the bread man.

SF: And they came to your house and delivered this stuff?

HJ: Yeah, they went all around and you buy that way, yeah. And then, we only had one shopping center -- that was First National. When they took that and moved it away, that was a loss. Yeah.

SF: So, First National was like the biggest supermarket around.

HJ: Yeah, mm-hmm.

SF: There was no other --

HJ: They moved it down to P. T. Barnum and then they lost it, with vandalism and all. They had to move out.

SF: Oh wow. I never knew that. (inaudible) [said something?] (inaudible). So, like First National, if you had to go [23:00] your shopping, that's where you would go or --

HJ: Yes.

SF: -- [we'll say?] little neighborhood stores, if you had to go and get (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HJ: Well, we had little ones, yeah. We had them down there on Grovers Avenue, and on Brewster Street, there were little - - like [Ambrose's?] Store, then [Buddy's?] little store on the corner where Seaview Terrace and Grovers Avenue.

There, you could shop, yeah, and then there was a [Lundgreen's?] Store there down by the baseball field. Now that wasn't always a baseball field; that was a big house down in there, a big old fashioned house like Bartram's, and it was a big lot then; it was made into that. It was just a small field where they played baseball and all that, but when they enlarged the field, they took this big home down. It was called [Woodruff's?], and they changed it. It was all changed around. Yeah.

SF: So, it was like, there was just a property for just one family down at where Ellsworth [24:00] Field is, that's where you're talking about, right?

HJ: Yeah. They were people that lived in it. Well, you know this is a historical section, and mostly, when we came into

Black Rock, they were just starting to build the two family houses down along the water. Otherwise, it was homes, these big old homes. And there was one at the foot of our street, foot of Brewster Street here, and there was a little girl that lived in on the first floor -- it was a big old, old, old house, and it had three stories -- and she had me petrified because she'd always say, "Well, I'm going to take" -- (break in audio)

SF: Go ahead.

HJ: I'm breaking into another part of the program, am I not? Or is this still interesting?

SF: No, this is still interesting.

HJ: Okay, well, it was a large red building on the corner of Ellsworth, and it was the Protestant Orphan Asylum, and the orphans used to come over to Black Rock School. They were in there, and [25:00] then they decided to move it to Woodfield or somewhere, so Saint Ann's bought the building for the Catholic school, and it was real nice. My three children graduated from there, and Father Curtis started the school in the beginning, and we had a drum corps there too. My brother was the big drummer in the drum corps. It was really a nice school because the sisters. At that time, it was fully housed by the sisters, and they lived across the street in back of the gas station on Ellsworth,

in that big house that had that big porch. And they all lived in that big house, and then they came over and took care of the school -- it was really nice -- and they wore these big, white coronet hats, you know?

SF: I've heard of (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HJ: And the children got a good education there and they all went there, my three.

SF: And where was this again?

HJ: On the corner of Ellsworth Street. You know where that bank is?

SF: Yeah.

HJ: Yeah, it was a big --

SF: [26:00] Connecticut National?

HJ: Yeah.

SF: Oh my gosh.

HJ: It was a huge building. It had eight classrooms. It was three stories.

SF: And what grade did it go to, do you remember?

HJ: It went through eighth grade. And from there, they went to Fairfield Prep, and or Bassick High School, so my three graduated from Bassick High School.

SF: Oh wow, and what was it like, Bassick High School, like then?

HJ: They had a good education.

SF: No, but I mean, now there's two buildings; there's two
(overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HJ: No, there was only one building.

SF: There was only one building, and then there was, P. T.
Barnum's house is right in front, right?

HJ: Yeah, uh-huh.

SF: Okay, that's what I thought.

HJ: Yeah. It was nice. You didn't know about Saint Ann's
School?

SF: No, I didn't.

HJ: Oh, it was huge. And I was on the Mothers Club down there
-- we had a Mothers Club, and also, we had an altar society
in Saint Ann's and I was president of it one year. I
worked hard for Saint Ann's. I did a lot of work. (break
in audio) All the mothers were involved there. And,
[27:00] it was really a nice school, because it was fully
manned by the sisters. There were no lay teachers; we just
had the priest, Father Curtis. It's really very strict
with the children though. It was different than going to a
public school; public school was a cinch toward that. But,
they all graduated, knowing. When they went into Bassick,
they knew their work, so.

SF: They all graduated from high school?

HJ: Yeah, yeah. And then they build Saint Ann's on the top of the... In 1955, I think it was that they built the rest of the school on top (inaudible).

SF: Where it is right now.

HJ: Yeah, but we had already moved into the new church. By that time, the new church was built, and they built the school on top there, and then somehow or other, when the sisters... More or less, they were worked like charity sisters. They're supposed to be [28:00] sisters of charity, but afterwards, when this school was started, see, we had less and less of them, and then we had more lay people come in. Of course then, the sisters were being paid, too. They were being paid for working, and they hadn't been paid at the other place because we always had pantry, showers for them, or something that we did for the sisters. But it was good.

SF: So you kind of volunteered worked for the sisters too, then.

HJ: We did, we helped, yeah, yeah.

SF: [Now?] I just want to make sure it's working. So, what else can you tell me about Black Rock or Saint Ann's Parish? Do you remember anything else?

HJ: It was a large parish. It was a real large parish. We had about 1,500 families, until the other churches started

being built around, then they sort of migrated away, yeah,
uh-huh.

SF: [29:00] I'm trying to think, what was the (inaudible).
(break in audio)

HJ: -- community. But, as far as along the avenue there, I
don't know if there were no industrial plants there, not
that I remember. I could probably think back and think it
over, but off-hand --

SF: Can't think of anything?

HJ: No, no.

SF: Was there anything, like the apartments down by Ellsworth
Field, were they there when you came here, (overlapping
dialogue; inaudible) --

HJ: Oh no, no, that was all waterfront. They tore a couple of
old houses there to put that up. You mean Fayerweather?

SF: Yeah.

HJ: No, no, that was all waterfront. All along there was all
waterfront, and banks. Those houses were all put up
afterwards. It was really nice, they were. Just the
Swedish clubs had that part, and then it was to the street.
The beach was to the street; it wasn't built out this way
and that way, like Williams [30:00] built way out on the
water, and the other one way down on Beacon Street. They
all built way out on the water, on frontage. It was

nothing like that. We went swimming on the other side of the Swedish club there, and we had to go down -- there was a path that went down and there all these rocks, and we used to swim in between the rocks, but it was nice sandy swimming. But nothing like it is now.

SF: What nationality are you?

HJ: I'm Polish.

SF: Polish, because (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HJ: Well, my mother and dad were, but they came here very young, so we moved to Black Rock. There were no Polish people here at all, so we just were brought up playing American. That's it.

SF: No, I'm saying, I've noticed that you've been saying Swedish a lot, and I was wondering --

HJ: My husband is Swedish.

SF: Oh, your husband was Swedish.

HJ: My husband is Swedish. He was born in Sweden.

SF: So, you went to all these kind of Swedish things that they had around here.

HJ: Not too much so, not too much, no.

SF: You were all just --

HJ: I have [31:00] Hungarian friends all these years, and I go to their affairs. I go to Holy Trinity when they have

affairs there, and I go out with them. I go out a great deal, if you want to know. I don't sit at home.

SF: No? That's really good. So you're very active then.

HJ: Yes, I am, and then on weekends, on Saturday morning my -- that makes noises. My daughter picks me up on Saturday morning and brings me home Monday morning. I go to Milford; I stay with my family there.

SF: Oh, that's nice.

HJ: So I'm never really alone, and the house I live in, I have a retired fireman, a retired lieutenant fireman, and he goes and I go, and he lives on the top floor. He made room for me to live there so I'm on the second floor, and then there's a fireman on the first floor, and I'm the only lady in the house, so I can do what I want, and they do what they want. So it's really, really wonderful.

SF: Yeah, it must be wonderful in case anything happens.

HJ: He's so [32:00] very good. He's a very good landlord.

Right now, he's coming back from England.

SF: So, where do you live,abouts?

HJ: On Prescott Street.

SF: Prescott Street, okay. How many years have you been living there?

HJ: Four.

SF: Four years? Where have you lived before you came to Prescott Street?

HJ: I was on Harbor Avenue. Was a disaster; I didn't like living there.

SF: Where is that, abouts?

HJ: That's right around the corner from Prescott, yeah. Before that, I lived in my mother's house for about 45 years.

SF: You just recently moved to Prescott Street.

HJ: Uh-huh.

SF: And you like it there?

HJ: Oh yes. I have a very good landlord, and the neighborhood is nice too. Everybody's nice that lives in the neighborhood.

SF: How many children do you have?

HJ: Three.

SF: Three children? How many boys and how many girls?

HJ: One boy in Texas and Houston. He has a family of four children. My grandson just graduated from [33:00] high school and he's going to go to Texas U, and then I have a family in Pensacola, Florida. And my oldest grandson, he's 28 years old, they have two small children, he's a vice president in a bank, and he worked his way all the way through Pensacola High School and to Pensacola University. He worked all the time so he is an independent, because he

knows what he worked for. So now he's vice president of the bank, doing very well. So... And four grandchildren down there; they're all grown up.

SF: Nobody lives down here, though?

HJ: My daughter lives in Milford, and she has two grown daughters.

SF: She's been living in Milford all her life, or...

HJ: No, after she married. She lived in Black Rock, yeah.

SF: Do you think that she had a good time living in Black Rock when she was young?

HJ: Oh yes, just like the rest of the kids, yeah.

SF: [34:00] What did your daughter, would do when they were young in Black Rock, would they do for fun?

HJ: I guess what everybody else did, beside go to school and hang around with the bunch. They had friends, girlfriends, and... Yeah.

SF: So, you've been living in Black Rock, what would you say, like...

HJ: Sixty-three years.

SF: So you've seen a lot of changes in Black Rock then.

HJ: Yes I have, yeah.

SF: Do you think that they're going for the better or for the worse?

HJ: Well, I like the old days. There was more closeness. We had no TV, no radio or anything, but people, I think, were closer.

SF: What was it like growing up without the television or radio?

HJ: Oh my gosh, I wouldn't want that back again. Would you?

SF: (laughs) No, I'd go crazy.

HJ: No, no, the first little radio we got, we got a portable, one of those little ones. It was, oh, it was wonderful.

SF: So you [35:00] sat and the radio was your entertainment.

HJ: Yes, yes, because my husband worked at nights down to Bullards and I'd put that on after I had the kids to bed. I used to embroider, and I knitted and everything, and that was my company, really. And I was just talking to Henry this morning. We were rem--

SF: Who is Henry?

HJ: Henry [Olson?]. We were reminiscing. We have lived, since I'm born, through some of the worst times and then we have lived through marvelous times. Like I said, if my little grandmother should wake up from beyond and come, she couldn't believe, because I remember, when I used to go to Stamford to visit them, and I was brought up. Well, I used to go to my Gram's a lot on the train, and stay down there, and used to sit around the round table with the kerosene

lamp there. Everybody sat around the table. And I was just saying to [36:00] Henry, "If my little grandmother should ever wake up and see what we have, you know, when we" --

SF: Would be a big difference.

HJ: Because when we came to Black Rock, 63 years old, electricity was just coming into being, and we had these old, funny-looking shiny bulbs. They weren't anything what we have now. So we really have lived, through the wars; we've lived through all the wonders, and like Mama always said -- she used to read from *The Prophecy of Sibyl*, before the end of the world, how man would walk on water and fly like a bird in the sky, and really never -- we said, "Well how could that be? Will we live to see all that?" So we are really indeed fortunate, and you're so much younger, so you probably couldn't understand what it all means to us, to see all these wonderful things happening.

SF: Well, for me, myself, it would probably be like, [37:00] I can look back even 10 years from [now?], it would still be a big difference, because nothing was the way it was now.

HJ: My girlfriend, Helen Lesko -- we were chums, that's Lesko's Undertaker Parlor -- she used to go to --

SF: I know where that is.

HJ: -- yeah -- to high school with me; we used to walk to high school. And, I remember, we were coming from her house to my house in the open field, and we looked up at the sky and Lindbergh was going over to Europe. We watched him, and then, the zeppelin, the big Graf Zeppelin -- you've seen, probably, the movies, when it burnt up at Lakehurst?

SF: Uh-uh.

HJ: Well, it came twice from Germany, with passengers, and it was this huge thing and it went over the house -- they are huge -- and you could see the gondolas underneath. And of course, this morning, the second crossing over, we saw it go over the house. It was huge, and little did we know that, by the time it got to Lakehurst, it would burst into flame, but it had gone over our house [38:00] before, and we could see the people in the gondola that's underneath, and just big cigar. You think that the Goodyear little zeppelin is something; that's nothing compared to what that was.

SF: Wow, it must have been very big and like a big occasion, everything.

HJ: Well, everybody was alerted to it, that it was coming over. See, Black Rock is in the path of people going to Europe, even with the flights that they take off, and they go over to Europe that way. So naturally, that came, and it went

over our house. And it made a lot of noise, too, because those engines on it. Of course, it was all inflated except the gondola. But that was an experience, but then, to all those people burnt to death down there...

SF: That was like a big tragedy.

HJ: Yes it was, yeah, uh-huh.

SF: How about when they had the P. T. Barnum Festival and it burnt down when the -- I for--

HJ: You mean [39:00] the tent?

SF: Yeah. Was that like a big tragedy? Did --

HJ: Oh yes, yeah. I think after that, that's when they decided to hold in indoor buildings, if they could.

SF: So, it was like, when that happened, they realized what would happen if there was something else [going on?].

(knocking on door) (break in audio)

SF: But, [it?] --

MALE: Hello! (break in audio)

SF: But, it was a big tragedy and everything. Do you remember any other kind of big excitement around Black Rock? Was there Black Rock Day parades and everything then, too?

HJ: Oh, what I started to tell you about the house at the foot of the street: It was an old, old house, and this girl that lived in the first floor, she'd always say, "Well, someday I'm going to take you on the third floor because

there's a casket there," and she'd scare me out of my wits. So, we had a boy, his name [40:00] was George [Hubbard?], and he went to Black Rock School. He was in the same grade that I was in. Well, we didn't know this till he had set seven or eight fires in Black Rock, but he was burning down old things, till he got caught trying to set fire to a barn down on Seabright Avenue, then they caught him. Well, my mother sent me this morning up to the avenue -- we always called Fairfield Avenue, "the avenue" -- to get something, and I came along Grovers Avenue and I saw that old house with the big, long icicles hanging, and I said, "Well, there's no more ghosts living in that house." (laughter) So then the new houses were built, that was torn down, then the new houses were built on that lot, yeah.

SF: So there were funny stories going on?

HJ: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, those things, we talked about, because we didn't have radio, television, to listen to, and --

SF: It was just like make believe, but it was fun then. You wanted to find out if it was real or not. [41:00] (laughs) No?

HJ: No, not really, though I liked ghost stories, yeah, and we had the little old wooden library. We didn't always have this library here.

SF: What kind of library was it?

HJ: It was a wooden library. I think I read practically every book in the library. Well, we went there --

SF: Where was it?

HJ: It was on Fairfield Avenue where it is now, and we, all our homework was done at the library, with the reference books. We're there every day, yeah. So then, well, after I got married, I didn't have a library card because I didn't need it. I had enough to do at home.

SF: Yeah, with the kids and everything. But, it was a small building, just maybe --

HJ: Yeah, it was a two way, with an entrance in the front. Well, one side was for adults and the other side was for children.

SF: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) have it now.

HJ: Yeah, uh-huh.

SF: But a lot smaller. What other kinds of things were there around Bridgeport that you can remember [42:00] that were the up spots of Bridgeport?

HJ: Well, in the old days, yeah, well, to go to see a parade, all the movies. We had nice moving picture houses.

SF: This was like the silent type movie, where they (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HJ: They had that in Black Rock. We called it the Gas House. It was an old barn that was made into a movie, and I remember going the first time when they were strumming away on the piano, and we had the gray screen, and then it was always continued till the next week, and they'd be banging away on there. We got in for a whole nickel. And I remember the night I went to see Mary Pickford -- that was a silent movie -- and I liked it so much, I stayed for the second showing. My mother gave me holy hell when I got home. Though, we could walk the streets. There's one thing about Black Rock in the old days, if you were at the Ritz dancing till one o'clock, you could always walk home. You never had to be [43:00] afraid. You never had to lock your door at night. It was terrific, and I used to go out and babysit at night, for different people, and I'd walk home when the milkman was around, and nobody ever bothered you. So there was a difference that way, too.

SF: Not as much crime.

HJ: Now, you don't dare. I cross my fingers every time I walk over here. I walk the six blocks here to come to work here, and I keep my fingers crossed all the time, yeah.

SF: I know you have to watch where you're going and everything else.

HJ: Yeah, yeah. But that was one nice thing about the good old days, yeah.

SF: But, I mean, like theater wise, did you ever go to the theater or something like that?

HJ: Well, we had, like I say, we had the old movies, and then of course, Beverly was built. Well, we used to go downtown to the shows a lot. We had the Cameo on State Street, that was the closest to us, then we had the Palace and Poli's, then we had the [44:00] Globe on the other side. Then, we had a choice. Now, we have nothing down there.

SF: And how much did you pay for going to the movies then?

HJ: It wasn't very much.

SF: Two or three cents or something like that?

HJ: Nickel, in Black Rock, yeah, and then we used to go, later on, like when about the time I got married, we went to the movie house. There, you went each week and you got a dish. You paid 15 cents and you got a dish each week, to save.

SF: My mother tells me stuff like that. Used to go to the bank, you make a deposit of \$10, and they give you --

HJ: Oh yes, or you bought some gasoline and you get a glass, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

SF: So, overall, you think it's a big change.

HJ: Oh yes. (laughs) There's no comparison, no, really.

SF: Okay, now one question I ask everybody: If you could go back to maybe 40 years ago or so, would you like to go back when you were younger, would you like to go back then? Do you think you would have a better time then, than you do now, [45:00] or you think you're set off now?

HJ: Oh, I think I would like to go back.

END OF AUDIO FILE