

**Stella Kozlowski- Interviewed by Dawn Salvato-6-20-84**

DAWN SALVATO: [00:00:00] I'm interviewing Stella Kozlowski at the YMCA of Bridgeport. May I ask your name?

STELLA KOZLOWSKI: Stella Kozlowski.

DS: What is your age?

SK: I'm 62.

DS: Could you tell me a little bit about your family?

SK: Well, my parents are both gone, and I have just one brother. And I am single.

DS: Okay, did your family come from Bridgeport?

SK: No, we originally came from Milford, and we moved to Bridgeport in 1940.

DS: Did they come here for reasons of employment?

SK: Yes.

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

SK: Well, my father worked on the tugboats, and he didn't drive, and he worked odd hours. That's why we moved to Bridgeport. And I was looking -- ready for employment, and I got a job at Remington Arms. So, we moved to Bridgeport.

DS: All right, what grammar school did you attend?

SK: I attended grammar -- I had all my [00:01:00] schooling in Milford.

DS: Okay, let's see. All right, do you know anything about WWI and WWII?

SK: WWII I worked in a munitions factory. I worked at Remington Arms.

DS: Could you tell me a little bit about that?

SK: Oh, it was very, very busy, and people came from all over. They came from Pennsylvania, New York State to work in the munitions factory.

DS: What was it like working in the factory?

SK: It was hard work, but we had a lot of fun. In fact, I spent all my working years at Remington, and it's a lot different now than it was years ago.

DS: What was it like years ago?

SK: Well, now it's all [00:02:00] automated. A lot of it is automated where before we actually did all the work.

DS: Let's see, do you know anything about the depression?

SK: Oh yes, I remember very, very well.

DS: Could you tell me about it?

SK: Well, I was little at the time, young, and I remember my father couldn't get work. A lot of people were unemployed, and we depended on our neighbors for a lot of things, and what little we had we shared with everyone. I still see some of the neighbors that -- and the thing that's brought up is always "Gee, what good neighbors we were."

DS: Could you tell me about the neighborhood you lived in or the one that you used to live in?

SK: Well, when I moved to Bridgeport I moved on the east side. I lived on East Main, and it was a melting pot of all types of people. There were Poles. There were Italian, [00:03:00] Irish, German, and I used to walk to work, and I used to walk to work through the village, which is Father Panik Village now, and had no fear. We walked the streets, beautiful stores. In the evening, we used to go window shopping. You had no fear then like you do now. And none of us had cars. We used to ride buses all the time or walk. And we'd want to go downtown. Main Street downtown was, oh, you met your friends there. It was always crowded with people.

DS: Did you attend church?

SK: Yes, I went to either St. Mary's or St. Michael's, which was a Polish church.

DS: What kind of activities did they have in your church?

SK: Oh, they ran dances, and there were picnics, and [00:04:00] all your churches years ago would have picnics in the summer on Sundays, and one Sunday we would go to the Russian picnic, the next Sunday to the Polish picnic, and they always had vans, and we danced. We used to do an awful lot of dancing. And these were our good times.

DS: Did you go to Beardsley Park or Seaside?

SK: Oh yes, oh yes.

DS: Could you tell me what it was like?

SK: Well, we used to take the blankets and we used to go swimming at Beardsley, and we used to meet all our friends there, and it would be nothing to spread out four and five blankets and meet the gang, bring lunches. And it was a lot of good times, and the same at Seaside.

DS: Okay, could you tell me about some of the sports in Bridgeport that they had? [00:05:00]

SK: Well, I wasn't very sports-minded, but we used to go to some of the ball games. They had different clubs that had baseball teams and football teams, and we would go to Seaside and watch some of the games.

DS: Were there any sports for women in Bridgeport, do you know?

SK: Not that I can recollect.

DS: Well, that's -- gets the major questions out of the way.

SK: Our good times, a lot of it was dancing. We had places to go dancing. We had your Pleasure Beach Ballroom, and they used to have the big name bands, and Sunday's --

DS: (inaudible)

SK: Oh yes, every Sunday. Every Sunday and people would come from all over from the valley and all over, and you met a

lot of different people, [00:06:00] and we had a lot of fun dancing.

DS: Did you go to a theater a lot?

SK: Oh yes, oh yes, on Saturday evenings and Main Street you had your pick. You had Loew's Poli. You had Majestic. You had [Lyric?]. And the Lyric used to have vaudeville shows, and that was our entertainment really because we didn't travel really far for entertainment. We stayed right in the city. And at one time there was a lot of entertainment here.

DS: Would you say that there's been a lot of things that have been cut down on?

SK: Oh yes, oh yes, yes. I feel sorry for the young today because they don't have the entertainment that we had.

DS: That's true.

SK: And what there is is so expensive that the young people can't afford where we did things that didn't take a lot of money, and we would get together in groups [00:07:00] and have picnics and things like this, and it was a lot of fun.

DS: So, you would say there was a lot more things to do then?

SK: There was. There really was. There was Pleasure Beach, which had the amusement area.

DS: Can you tell me what Pleasure Beach was like?

SK: Oh, it was a grand spot. You had entertainment. You had all your rides, and of course you had a swimming pool there. You had a roller skating rink, and your big dance hall. It was the biggest dance hall in the area, and they came from all over because at that time they had the big bands, and on Sunday that was a must. You know, people used to stand in line to get tickets to go inside, and sometimes you couldn't even get in, and you would just stand outside and listen to the music. [00:08:00]

DS: What kind of rides did they have?

SK: Oh, they had the roller coaster. They had the merry-go-round, which was one of the nicest in the area. Oh, they had the boats, and oh, just all kinds of rides.

DS: What else can you tell me about Bridgeport that you remember, something that stands out in your memory maybe?

SK: Well, it was one of your biggest industrial cities in the area. I think in all of Connecticut you had big factories here, and people came from all over to get jobs here. A lot stayed and a lot went back after the war. A lot went home. It was kept clean, and you had no fear. You would just go anywhere and not have any fear. You had your policemen on the beat. [00:09:00] They used to walk the street. You knew the policemen on the street, and you just had no fear to be out late at night. You felt protected,

and it was a great place to live. It really was. People had pride, and they kept their homes. I can remember different areas now that are so run down, at one time your people used to sweep the sidewalks, and you'd ride by a street, which now they consider slums, but you looked up at the windows, the windows had such beautiful curtains, and people had pride.

DS: You think that's changed a lot?

SK: Oh yes, I really do. I really do because, I mean, I was always proud to live in Bridgeport. You had your friends come in, and there was always something to do, and it was a lot of fun growing [00:10:00] up, you know, being young in Bridgeport.

DS: Did you stay -- did you work a lot? You know, about how long did you work in a day?

SK: Eight hours, but we worked shifts. I worked for a while, I didn't work it too long, but I worked rotating shifts. I worked three shifts. I worked 7:00 to 3:00, 3:00 to 11:00, 11:00 to 7:00, and many times after we'd get out of work at 7:00 in the morning we'd stop and have breakfast and then maybe go bowling or go horseback riding, and then go home and sleep, you know. But there was always something to do. I mean, my young years here in Bridgeport were really great. There was so much to do.

DS: Could you tell me anything else about what you would do?

SK: Well no, I can't think of -- [00:11:00] and that then we didn't have cars, but you had your buses, and you just went everywhere, you know. You'd hop a bus and go to the other side of town. You had friends that lived from one end of town to the other, but you'd hop a bus and just go over, and sometimes you'd stay late and take the last bus home, but you weren't afraid to come home.

DS: So, most of your time as a teenager you spent with your friends then?

SK: Oh yes, oh yes, and well, when I started working I worked in the factory. And I met the people from, you know, that came in from other parts of the country, and you made friends, and some of them you still have, and even though they've moved away you still keep in touch with them.

DS: Can you tell me anything else [00:12:00] that you've noticed that's changed a lot over the years?

SK: Well, the crime is one thing, and the fear. I mean, people are afraid to be out alone, especially at night where at one time you didn't have this. I mean, you walked the streets and you would go out window shopping, and you had nice stores, and even along Stratford Avenue I lived out that way for a while, and oh, they had beautiful stores, and oh, they had ice cream parlors, and you'd meet your



friends there, and in the evening, you know, we didn't have a lot of money, just like your young people today. You know, you feel sorry because they don't have the places to go that we had.

DS: Could you tell me anything about like, any certain events that stand out in your memory like during the '60s or anything like that, or back farther even? Any [00:13:00] really major events that stand out that happened in Bridgeport, maybe?

SK: No, I really can't. We were just so busy having a good time, you know. And there was so much. You had your parks, and you had your -- like I say, your different places to go dancing, and they had picnic groves where, you know your churches and different groups had the picnics, and it just seemed that the young crowd all used to get together and have a good time.

DS: So, you'd say that one of the major entertainments in Bridgeport was dancing?

SK: Dancing and the beaches and skating in the winter.

DS: Where would you go skating in the winter?

SK: Oh, we used to go to Beardsley Park. Seaside Park had a skating area that they would [00:14:00] -- a little pond that would freeze up. We used to go skating there, and then of course there was always roller skating. You had

your roller skating rinks, and a lot of your young people, you know, took up roller skating, and would go.

DS: Can you think of anything else you'd like to say?

SK: No, only that I'd like to see Bridgeport get back to what it was --

DS: Do you think it will?

SK: -- because -- well, I hope so because it was really a city that people were proud of, and you look at Main Street now, and it's nothing compared to what it used to be. People would come in shopping from other areas, and you met different people. And I'd love to see it get back to what it was [00:15:00] because I was always proud of Bridgeport because I made my livelihood here. And I think that I can't think of anything more that I can add to it.

DS: Well, I've been asking all the questions I can think of, so I'd like to thank you very much, and --

SK: And I thank you very much.

DS: You're welcome. Okay. [00:15:27]

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