

H Kurtzenacher-Interviewed By Anca Stacesen-6-19-84

ANCA STACESEN: I am Stacesen, Anca, and I'm interviewing Helen Kurtzenacher at 55 Grandview Avenue. Can you please tell me your full name and age?

HELEN KURTZENACHER: Helen E. Kurtzenacher.

AS: And your age?

HK: Seventy.

AS: Ah, isn't that nice. Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself?

HK: Well, what do you want to know? Let's see. I was a school guide for the city of Bridgeport for five years. I worked in [Ordint?] for eight years. I worked for the Diocese of Bridgeport five years, taking care of the elder people who needed rides, and, well, I was all around. What else would you like to know? I could give you a --

AS: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents? Were they residents of Bridgeport?

HK: We came from New York. I was born in New York. My sister and my brother [01:00] had died. We were all born in New York. My kid brother was born here. He's a schoolteacher of music for the City of Bridgeport. Now, my father and mother, they came to New York.

AS: What's the reason for which they came? Did it have anything to do with their employment status?

HK: Gee, I wish I knew, because both my parents -- well, my father and mother separated, and I don't know if my mother's alive today, but she's on the age. If I'm 70, she must be 88. So when my father passed away in '63, he fell down a flight of stairs. No. Now, I don't know if they came here or not, but I remember him working in the plush shop. We called it a plush shop. They used to make velvet on Kossuth Street. Now they don't, now it's gone, but that's where he used to work.

AS: [02:00] How many family members were living in your household?

HK: Let's see. It was four children. It was my mother and my dad, and my mother left me when I was nine years old. And then my father remarried when I was 12, and boy, wasn't she a mean stepmother.

AS: (laughs) Were you the eldest?

HK: No, I have a sister that's one year older than me. No.

AS: Can you describe the family life, the roles of the wife, husband and children?

HK: Well, I told you my mother left me, nine years old. She taught us how to --

AS: How about your stepmother?

HK: I told you, she was mean. I used to put curlers in my hair, and we had to start, and I was getting ready for school. I had to do the homework with a small light that we used to have on at night in the bedroom, because she wouldn't let me do it. Nine o'clock, she used to close the store, and I'd put curlers in my hair, [03:00] and she pulled them out and she said, "What do you want to do, look pretty?" She wouldn't let me go to high school; she said I'd be running, get the boys. She was really evil.

AS: Did you ever go to high school?

HK: No, because at that time, my brother went. My brother and I graduated from Franklin School at the same time, and we had to pay for our books, yeah. We had to pay for the paper. We had to pay for everything. It's not like today, that the school gives it to you. No, we had to pay for it.

AS: What level of school did you complete?

HK: Grammar school. My brother went to high school.

AS: So, you tell me that not everybody could attend school; only certain people like the upper class could attend school.

HK: What?

AS: The upper class could attend school, right, not everybody could? People didn't even have the money; they couldn't afford it.

HK: Yeah, like me. My mother-in-law -- my mother-in-law. My stepmother didn't believe that I should go to [04:00] high school, and she didn't want to buy me books, pencils, nothing. They only bought it for my brother. Well, she had a remark anyhow. She said, "What do you want to do, chase the boys?" She was a stepmother.

AS: Yeah, I see. What courses were offered in school?

HK: Oh, I don't remember.

AS: Were they like foreign languages, or sports?

HK: I don't remember. That was in 1928.

AS: I see. Do you think children activities have changed over time, as in things that you used to do in school then, and what you hear your grandchildren do now?

HK: Well, I don't know how much they could have changed, because I only got a granddaughter that just graduated from Saint Ambrose Friday night.

AS: Wow!

HK: They looked so nice. They had gowns on, and the public school don't have gowns; only in high school they have it, because my son had it. [05:00] But she had a white gown, and all in white. And when we had a Mass, it was really nice. I liked the Holy Saint schools for that reason.

AS: Can you tell me about your ethnic background?

HK: What do you mean by that?

AS: As in, your religion and...

HK: Well, I'm a Catholic. I got to thank God I'm here.

AS: You said you were Italian, right?

HK: Yeah.

AS: So, you have Italian --

HK: And my husband's German and Irish, but he speaks Italian.

He understands it more than he speaks it, (laughs) so I can never say anything. (laughs)

AS: Which church did you attend? Are you still attending the same church?

HK: No. I used to go to Holy Rosary, that's where I got my communion, my confirmation. I go to Our Lady Good Counsel. I just had the last rites [06:00] by my priest up here, when I had the stroke, two and a half years ago, and I was in a coma four days. I got to thank God I'm here; I'm Catholic.

AS: I see.

HK: I believe in God, anyhow.

AS: What's the reason for which you changed churches?

HK: Oh, because I moved. It's two block --

AS: Oh, so it was closer.

HK: And even now, I've got to beg for a ride to go to church, see, because somebody has to go with me, on account of the cataract eye.

AS: I see. Can you tell me more about your childhood, as in childhood experience, surroundings?

HK: Childhood, we didn't have no childhood, because my mother left us when we were nine. My aunt and my uncle lived with us. When they used to go out, we used to run downstairs and go play with the [kits?]. We [07:00] used to go downstairs to play with the kits, otherwise, my father used to make us take the shoes off at quarter to 6:00 when he went to work at night, and we had to stay in the house if my aunt and uncle went out. Then when we got the stepmother, she didn't do no housework. So we had to come home from school, my sister and I. At that time, we had the tubs, not the washing machine.

AS: Tubs.

HK: Tubs. And she used to scrub them on the first wash, and I used to scrub them on the second wash. Then the following night -- that was, we'll say Monday. The following night, we used to put the clothes out. We used to go get the clothes, and then we had to mend the clothes and all, so we really had no childhood. We hardly went out, and then when we went to store, she timed us.

AS: Wow.

HK: Yeah.

AS: You had to go buy things for her or you went like, for yourself?

HK: No, like me, I went to work for Mitchell Brothers, the [08:00] underwear place on Railroad Avenue. Now it's on State Street Extension. I was 14 years old, and I need a pair of stocking, and if I went up East Main, there used to be [Yudin's?] Five and Ten -- no more now, because the building's burned and Yudin's over here, it's on Capitol Avenue. And he don't have Five and Ten no more; the father had it, and he's passed away. And I used to go up in Yudin's, and I was timed. If I didn't get home a certain time, oh boy, she'd whack me or pull my hair. I mean, she was awful mean. I never --

AS: Where did you get your first job?

HK: Mitchell Brothers, the ladies' underwears.

AS: That was the first job.

HK: -- and the slips. I started for three dollars a week trimming threads, then the boss [09:00] gave me, marking the straps of where the slips went, six dollars a week. Then I became errand girl, eight dollars a week.

AS: Was that like pretty good? Was --

HK: Well, at that time, they say it was good, for 1928. And then '29, and then, I told my boss, because I came in one morning with all scratches on my face, my stepmother did

it. I told you: we were timed for everything, and if we weren't on time, if we were five minutes late, we used to get it. And so, he put me on the machine, and I started to make \$16, \$17 a week. And I had to pay board. I was making six dollars; I paid board five dollars. And one dollar's was for me, and I came all the way from, well, [Eli?] Street is not there now but Kossuth Street is there, [10:00] and [Howe?] Street, and I had to walk it, if I didn't have five cents to take a bus.

AS: Wow. That's how much it was, five cents?

HK: Yeah, and the trolley car used to go by too. I don't know how much that was.

AS: How were the trolley cars? How are they different? Were they cheaper? Were there --

HK: Well, they were cheaper at that time. The bus was five cents. On East Main, I used to get the trolley car, whatever came first, because they had to go all the way down near Seaside Park, Railroad Avenue.

AS: Do you know why they were taking out the trolley cars? Do you have any idea why? You --

HK: No, that, I don't know. I wish they didn't. I think today is too much hustle and bustle. Everybody's in a hurry. Now, my husband takes me out for a ride, because I'm in the house all the time, a shut-in. Do you know, some of those

women that are driving, [11:00] even though I'm a woman driver, they look at you so stupid? They cut you off. They get in front of you; they cause accident. See, when I got my license, I was 416th woman only, and I got mine. Oh my God, I got that every -- before my son was born. He's 37 years old.

AS: I see, wow. When did you get your first car? How old were you when you got your first car?

HK: Well, I go -- my husband's first car. I didn't get a first car. I didn't have no license [after?].

AS: When did your husband get his first car? Or when [he could?] afford one?

HK: He had it in the service.

AS: Oh, I see.

HK: Yeah. They just stole my '77 T-Bird in December. I'm paying \$1,680 because I've put a new transmission; I had a paint job [12:00] done. I put in the Midas muffler. I mean, they took it right in front of the house. That's nothing --

AS: Was the city safe then? Was it safer then that it is now?

HK: Oh, I don't know.

AS: As in burglaries (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: I think so. I'm afraid to go out at night and well, then, I wasn't afraid. I told you: I used to go buy stockings on

East Main Street and everything. I wasn't afraid, and I was what, only a kid, 15 years old.

AS: So it was much safer then (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

--

HK: Well, I think so, because they took my grill now, last Monday, the gas grill. They took a bench out there. I mean, it's ridiculous. I think there's more crimes today, and then, I asked for a cop up here. I want a cop to patrol this, because I'm going away the seventh of July; my son will be here, [13:00] but he works all day.

AS: Can you tell me anything about teenage dating back then? Were teenagers dating or anything?

HK: No, because I wasn't allowed to date. I don't know now.

AS: How about the other teenagers?

HK: See, we never were allowed to be like the --

AS: With anybody else.

HK: Like they are today: get on the telephone, call this one, call that -- we never did that. We never had a telephone.

AS: Oh, you didn't have a telephone, right. (laughs)

HK: We didn't have a telephone.

AS: You didn't even have TV set. You didn't have...

HK: We didn't have time to talk on the phone.

AS: I think this was in the early ages; you didn't have refrigerators and stoves? Is that...

HK: No, not exactly. As far as I remember, we had the refrigerator. But I remember the old icebox. The ice man used to bring ice --

AS: For the refrigerator?

HK: For the [14:00] icebox, not the refrigerator.

AS: Oh, oh, I see.

HK: Yeah, he used to bring it, come upstairs, bring it up in the house. They don't do that no more.

AS: No.

HK: No.

AS: (laughs) So, you weren't involved in any activities in your teenage years (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: No, I told you what my stepmother did.

AS: I see.

HK: Then, I got married just before I was 16, and I had the first boy. Well, he's over 50 now; he's a fireman. I had six children with a set of twins.

AS: Wow!

HK: But after 17 years, I divorced him, and I got married --

AS: So you got married early.

HK: Yeah, and I'm married 39 years with this one.

AS: Wow.

HK: Well, what does a girl know about love at 15 and 16?

AS: True. Was it that you got married because you really needed to get out of the house?

HK: No -- yes. I did. I went from the frying pan to the fire, [15:00] yes ma'am. I'm glad you brought it up, yes. Just to get out of the house. She was so mean. She used to accuse my sister of stealing some money from the store, thought, she used to get up and play ghost and everything at night, scare the shit out of her.

AS: (laughs) No problem. Can you please tell me about the neighborhood growing up, like the changes that occurred?

HK: What?

AS: How did the neighborhood change while you were growing up, as in...

HK: Well, what do you mean, like you take [Hallen?] School?

AS: Yeah.

HK: Now, Hallen School, when my husband went there, it was a wooden building. Yeah, was a couple rooms, a wooden building. And when you had to go to the bathroom, you had to go outside. So now it's a brick building, because my granddaughter went [16:00] there. That was according to my husband, because I didn't live over here. I lived back on Green Street, near Hamilton. I started on Nichols Street and went to Franklin School, and then we went to Sterling

Street, which is Pulaski Street now, where Kolbe High School was.

AS: Why do you think the names of the streets changed so much?

HK: They named it after Pulaski. He was supposed to be a great man. I don't know; I don't keep up with the times. But I went to that school, that's when my mother left me on Sterling Street, 211. The house don't stand no more. It was right across from school, but I went to that school. Then, they made a high school, and they sent us to Waltersville School. And I went to Waltersville School till the last five [17:00] months. We used to pass twice a year.

AS: Wow!

HK: Yeah. Eight first, eight second; seven first, seven second, that's what they called it. Not like me, I finished eight first. Oh boy. I finished eight first, in Waltersville School. I had to go to Franklin School, because I lived on Howe and Elias. Howe Street is there but not Elias, because... What is --

AS: Isn't Elias Howe a school now?

HK: Huh?

AS: Isn't Elias Howe a school now?

HK: No, that ain't the school. I'm not talking about the school; I'm talking about Franklin School. I lived on Howe

and Elias Street. What is there now? Oh, what do they call it? The ones that play the game. Highlights, [18:00] they're the ones that bought the property around. Well, right across the street. We had a store there, right across the street was Manning, Maxwell, and Moore. They used to make pipes. They used to make trucks.

AS: Oh, that was pretty good employment for --

HK: Yeah. How do I know? The boy that died, my brother that died, my stepmother, if he had a couple of papers left in the snow rain and ice, he had to go out and sell them. He used to sell the paper in front of the Manning, Maxwell, and Moore. I mean, I couldn't believe that she's really mean. There's such mean people. There is. And these children got it good today. And so --

AS: Where are the (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: And then another thing: on Green Street, near Walter Street, there used to be police station, the branch.

AS: Really?

HK: Yeah. They did away with it, [19:00] and now, [Terry?] Bakery used to be right on Green Street, buy bread for five cents a loaf, and we used to buy it in the bag. Sometimes people buy ten loaves of bread and they put them in the cloth bags, and they used to make sheets out of them, and pillow cases, yes. Yeah, with bleach, and wash them, and -

- excuse me -- try to get the print of the flower on it.
Sometime you got a nice -- sometime you got flowers, flower
material bags. Oh yeah. How do you like to buy a loaf of
bread for five cents?

AS: (laughs) In a flower bag. (laughs)

HK: And then the flower bag, you make sheets out of it, and
make pillowcase.

AS: So I can see now why you could do okay with \$15 a week.

HK: Well, three dollars a week at first. But then my
stepmother took five dollars from me. [20:00] I was
getting six.

AS: And she was getting like --

HK: She was getting five; I was getting one. Then afterwards,
I was getting eight dollars, for the errand girl. Oh, I
would be errand girl; I was getting eight, so I had to put
two dollars a week in the bank, one dollar for me, five for
my stepmother. And that bank used to be on East Main
Street near Bonham Avenue. It went out of business. You
know that we used to have a show we called *The [Garlic?]
House* up there?

AS: Really!

HK: Is it that? My father had to sleep because he had to go to
work on a Saturday, so he used to give 20 cents, five cents

each kid -- we were poor kids -- and one penny for candy.
You can't buy candy for one penny.

AS: You used to be able to buy one [21:00] candy, just one little, tiny piece of candy, and now it's like three pennies on candy.

HK: And then another thing. When you go to a show -- that's why I say times were better then -- he'd take your ticket and rip it. Now if you get there at the beginning of the show, you don't get no stub back. But if the show has started, he'll give your stub back, but you don't stay for the second show. You understand what I mean?

AS: Yeah, I see.

HK: Yeah. You go in, buy your ticket, like now, and you could stay for 20 shows; they don't care. Nobody chases you out. But over there, they had a man, and as long as you make the first show -- I remember Hoot Gibson and, what is it, Tom Ritter? All those [cop, I used?] -- they used to have a series, series, [22:00] you know what I mean. And then say, "continued next week." So --

AS: And, you would go for the series like, the next week?

HK: Yeah. Well, five cents and a penny, 24 cents my father used to give me to four kids, and he could sleep, because my aunt lived with us and she was a young girl. She just got married, when she lived with us, to my uncle.

AS: So then you (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: My uncle was on my mother's side, see, but he lived in our house. So, they don't do that no more. That's why I think we got a lot of crimes, because the kids could stay in the shelter the last [shill?]. You pay one -- no. Over here, if you didn't see the whole picture, he'd give you a stub, and then, the lights went on after the first show, and he'd check everybody [23:00] to see if they had a stub to stay; otherwise, out you go.

AS: Wow. (laughs)

HK: That's better, at least the kids, you know they went to the show, they seen that --

AS: They get out, then.

HK: You know they've seen it all. And now, now the kids could do what they want.

AS: Tell me, do you think that young people and elderly people do not understand each other? Like --

HK: Well, here's --

AS: -- they have different points of view?

HK: Well, today, I think so.

AS: Yes, but do you think they don't understand each other?

HK: I don't see why not.

AS: Like, you could (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: They don't want, they don't --

AS: -- old-fashioned or, you know how grandmothers are, or --

HK: Yeah, well, you get that, all the time.

AS: But why do you think that is? Why do you think they don't understand each other?

HK: I don't know. I know what I did with my granddaughter. Two dollars to go to show, 13-year-old kid -- I won't give her the money [24:00] no more. That'll straighten them out. I don't know why, why they call us old bags. I don't know. Not everybody's like that. I meet a lot of young people now. When I walk, I've got to watch: if there's a sidewalk, go down, up -- a lot of them help me. One day I said to a fellow -- he was in front of [Bradley's?], not long ago. He said, "Flowers for sale." I looked at him. I love roses. So I looked at him, I says, "No free sample?" He took one, he wrapped it up, and he gave it to me. He was a young fellow. See, you can't say about all of them, you know what I mean?

AS: But sometimes, they really don't understand each other because --

HK: Why?

AS: They (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: Because if they get it --

AS: The elderly grew up like, in a different society, and the young grew up, and they really don't understand each other.

HK: A lot of grandmothers are coming [25:00] up to the standards of today. So I don't know. Yeah, I know what you mean, because young generation with all that baloney they sell in the store... My granddaughter, 13 years old, fingernail polish: I've put it on, but when I go out. But they...

AS: How about makeup? Were you allowed to wear makeup?

HK: I wore lipstick when I was 16.

AS: But were you allowed to, or that was when you got married?

HK: Yeah.

AS: But you weren't allowed to wear it in the house?

HK: Well, I don't care for makeup. I look like a clown when -- that's what I tell my granddaughter, "You look like a clown putting all that stuff on your face." See, maybe that's why they don't get along with the older people, because I said she looked like a clown. [26:00] And she'd say, "Oh Gran, oh Gran," you know how.

AS: (laughs) Could you tell me a little bit about relationships, as in, what, was racism going on?

HK: What?

AS: Racism? As in --

HK: I can't hear, sometimes.

AS: Was racism going on, as in, could some people not get a job because of their color or race or --

HK: I don't believe --

AS: -- discrimination?

HK: I don't believe in that. I work all kinds. Even when I was a kid, I played with -- when I had a chance to.

AS: I'm talking about like the society --

HK: Oh, you mean --

AS: -- in general.

HK: They shouldn't do that.

AS: But were they doing it? Were there, like, some jobs, you just go (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: Yeah, I know what you mean now, yeah, but I don't remember.

AS: I see.

HK: To me, see, like the woman down the street: she [27:00] was a good friend of mine. She was colored. She used to work at [Lerners?], see, so it didn't matter to me, with your question. See? Like today, they make a big issue out of it.

AS: So you think there's more discrimination going on now --

HK: Yeah.

AS: -- than there was before?

HK: I think so. I think so. Yes, because we were kids, and we went with them, and when we grew up, I still went to the Lerners to see the woman, and I worked with them. I worked for them in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

AS: Wow.

HK: She was the head secretary, and I've still got her telephone number and I call her. See what I mean? To me; I'm funny anyway.

AS: Yeah, but was everybody like that? Not too many people.

HK: Well, how could I say to you? It's not like today. Today, you know what's the matter? Everybody minds everybody else's business, [28:00] that's it. At that time, I didn't. I don't know how the other peop--

AS: You were on your own, like --

HK: Yes, but not like today, everybody --

AS: Yeah, I see. Can you tell me anything about the Depression years? Do you remember anything about it?

HK: Yes, that's when my first son was born.

AS: How did it affect your family?

HK: Well, I just gave birth to the baby, and he was making \$35 a week, and then as I was getting all those children, six of them. I had a set of twins, too. I used to live on \$35 a week. And then, see, like now, I make spaghettis, right? Well I use a pound of sausage and a pound of chopped meat, sometimes more. But then, that time, I used to use half a pound of meat and divide it with the six children, my husband, and I.

AS: There wasn't enough food, and --

HK: [29:00] No. Well, I mean, not with the pay.

AS: What was actually going on, as in, on the outside? What was going on with everybody? No jobs, no -- what was -- no food?

HK: Oh, I know there was no work.

AS: Was there enough food in the stores and everything?

HK: Well, yeah, I guess so.

AS: But there was no money to buy it.

HK: There wasn't that much money to spend, that's what it was. Because that's what I used to do, I used to cut a piece of meat for everybody, take half a pound of meat and make eight pieces.

AS: Were there food lines, and food --

HK: Oh --

AS: And rationing?

HK: Yes, there was, now that you remind me. I used to go in the morning and get milk and bread, on, that's [Steuben?] Street? Bootsie, boot, boot, boot. I used to get milk and bread. The Salvation Army used to give it, too, doughnuts and all. You had to go [30:00] downtown.

AS: To everybody?

HK: Well, I guess you -- I don't remember if I had to show anything or not, but as long as it's six kids could buy,

they'd give it to me. Yeah, I used to get milk and bread every morning for the kids.

AS: So, was there any rationing, as in --

HK: Oh, we had the boxes, WPA.

AS: Really?

HK: Yeah. He used to get the margarine, white, and they used to put a package of a yellow color, and then you had a --

AS: Oh, you had too much and --

HK: Yeah, and --

AS: -- stir it up.

HK: -- and rice and beans, they used to get. Now my father lost his house at Depression.

AS: Really?

HK: Yeah, he couldn't pay the last \$1,200. But he got it back afterwards.

AS: Really. How? What happened?

HK: I don't know how he got it back, but, all he used to tell me that he lost it that time, and he was working -- oh, I know. [31:00] I think he was paying out of the 560 they gave him a week, and the box, the rationing. And my father used to get it. He worked at WPA. He put the stone wall up on Ninety Acres. They gave him work to do. You don't --

AS: Is that what he was able to get (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: That's another thing they make a mistake: they get welfare here today. They don't work. Put them to work like they did with the box and the 560. See?

AS: True.

HK: And then, the welfare should look into it.

AS: But there's some people that really need the welfare.

HK: Yeah, the welfare should look into it. Now, I know Puerto Rican family. Well, I know she's there now. This was five years ago. She used to get three checks. She was married to three different guys -- that [32:00] wasn't true -- using three names. See? It's a mistake over here. We used to have the welfare lady come down to our house. Now, she never told us when she's coming. That's better. You know why?

AS: She got you.

HK: That's right.

AS: When whatever you do wrong.

HK: But today, they don't do that. They call up and say, "We're coming down Thursday," so if there's a guy living with them, they get rid of the guy. See, that's where there not making progress.

AS: Yeah, but --

HK: I know some people need it.

AS: They can't find it; they can't find the people home, and that's why they probably have to call, because they can't make the --

HK: They should go out.

AS: There're too many people, that's why, not --

HK: They should go out. I don't care how many people there is. The welfare, the social worker, should go out. You'll catch them one time or another, and I'm telling you, that's why we got [33:00] so many people on welfare today. See, at that time, they worked, 560 in the box. Then they used to give me shoes.

AS: Yeah?

HK: Yeah, they used to have a place on Grand Street, and the welfare used to give you like a ticket, and you go get you -- I had paper in my shoes during the Depression, \$35 a week. I had paper in my shoes. I got a pair of shoes; otherwise, usually, they give it to the kids. So we used to go up there and get shoes. See what a difference there is today? Go out now; I pay \$32 a pair of shoes for my granddaughter for graduation. See what I mean?

AS: Yeah. Prices have changed.

HK: Yeah. Well, I told you that the White Castle, the hamburgers, five cents.

AS: [34:00] (laughs) They had square hamburgers.

HK: Square hamburgers. They got, in New York, the White Tower, yeah. In fact, Wendy's, Wendy's got square hamburgers.

Did you know that?

AS: No, I didn't.

HK: Yeah, and then I --

AS: I never looked at them; I just ate them. (laughs)

HK: Then downtown is [salty?]. I don't see why they don't all put the [pull ice on?], and the pull ice. I used to love to go there. But then, I told you, across the street was the Strand Theatre, and there was a lyric, the lyric. I have a book that's got like, Gus [Myer's?] name. All different actors, they signed my book. They used to have stage show. But they knocked it all down, they got an empty lot now, and they got the Clifford House. My sister lives in there. Well that's nice, that's near Main Street.

AS: I see.

HK: Yeah, and they used to have [35:00] a Strand Theatre on East Main Street. You had to cross [Alex?] Street to go there. They did away with that. Oh, they did away with lots of things.

AS: Well, Majestic and Loew's Poli.

HK: Yeah, they didn't open it. Poli's Palace and the Majestic. It's still down there. I don't know what they're going to do with it. You know what they're going to do with it, and

what people are starting to do now, with the taxes that our house -- my house is 10 years old. Now when I built it, they had the builder come down here, the inspector, to see what I had in the house. Four years later, I was going out, then, he came back. I says, "What's this?" And now, my house was 10 years old, and nobody came here. And they raised it, over two, two [36:00] times. It was 20... What was it, 24? And now they've raised it to 60 something. Now the people are starting to move. The people, when they can't pay for their mortgage, they're going to leave the house. I called the tax woman downtown. I wanted to go to a hearing, because I think this house is assessed too much. She said, "If you can't pay your mortgage, it's too bad." Too bad. Is that the way to talk to people? That's why I say, people are fresh today. Fresher than what? Well, they could have been fresh then too, but they were more... I don't know how to explain it. Just like the woman that lived next door on --

AS: Patient, understanding?

HK: Understanding, yeah. Like the woman next door, her brother owns a funeral home right across from the Polish church, well, on Pulaski [37:00] Street, instead of Sterling Street. I still say Sterling Street. Well, she knew my father was working nights, and when my aunt went out, she

used to watch out for us. Nobody told her. See, people understood more, I think, at that time than what they do now. They don't understand much.

AS: Can you tell me anything about the World War I or World War II, if you remember?

HK: No, my husband was in World War I.

AS: How did --

HK: I was divorced from my other husband, and I was following him all around. I got different jobs: in the tailor shop, and --

AS: What did he do? What was --

HK: Oh, well he was a corporal. He was a truck driver; he used to drive the trucks.

AS: This was the husband that went into World War I, right?

HK: This one here, not the first one.

AS: Oh, [38:00] okay, so you weren't --

HK: John.

AS: You weren't married at that time, to --

HK: No, I wasn't married to him. We got married right after he got discharged.

AS: How do you think that the war affected Bridgeport, economically, as well as other communities?

HK: You mean on account of the war?

AS: Yeah.

HK: I don't know.

AS: How did it affect your family at that time?

HK: I told you, I kept --

AS: Did people lose jobs or things like that? Your family was all right during that time?

HK: See, my husband went in; my husband lost his job. He was picking up paper, cardboard boxes, for [Pontilla?], and when he come back, they didn't offer him the job, so he went to work for the City of Bridgeport for \$22 a week.

AS: What did he do?

HK: With the bulldozer on the dump. He had to straighten out the dump to make it all even. Not like you got Seaside Park now. You got [39:00] rats and it stinks. How could they have a picnic there? I've seen people eat there.

AS: Which brings Barnum up, because Barnum gave this seaside to the city, part of it anyways. What can you tell me about Barnum? Can you --

HK: I can't tell you nothing about Barnum, but they should get all these people on welfare and go get them cleaned up. I mean it. He gave them so much, and then, they shouldn't have the dump down there. See, they built an incinerator, I don't know how many millions of dollars, and they're not using it.

AS: Do you know what happened before with the garbage? Were --

HK: It was on Bostwick Avenue.

AS: They had a dump there?

HK: No, they had the incinerator. My husband worked there.

See, after that there, my husband went to the incinerator, then he became foreman too, and I used to go up there and see him, [40:00] and see the garbage all in like a big pit, and they burnt it. See, and it don't affect the city, but the Seaside Park, it does.

AS: Can't get an ice cream for five cents.

HK: Hershey bars, they were bigger. Oh, you know what we had? See, they don't have nothing today. We used to have a man -- I remember, because I was only about four or five years old. I lived on Green Street; because we lived one side of Green Street then we bought a house. So, he used to come around, like, I don't know, once a week or what, and he had a truck, and he had a merry-go-round on it.

AS: Wow, that's cute.

HK: And I say, "Ma, give me two cents, the merry-go-round man's here." And for two cents, we used to get a ride. He used to give us a long ride. I don't see that no more. [41:00] But you don't know about then, huh?

AS: Nobody would let their kids go on the ride with him.

HK: Yeah with --

AS: With a man.

HK: Oh no, no, the man gave the ride.

AS: I know, but the parents wouldn't just leave the kids outside to play. They don't trust people.

HK: Oh, how come we were trusted outside?

AS: Yeah, but that was different times.

HK: Oh, you mean today.

AS: Yeah.

HK: Oh, I didn't know what you meant. You mean today. We were playing and we'd see the guy come and we used to go holler for our mother to give us two cents, and go riding around on the merry-go-round. That's something you don't see. See, there's no recreation, I don't know, and why does a child of today get bored?

AS: They get a lot of TV and...

HK: I think so. I think the television is spoiling them. You know why? I used to listen to the radio.

AS: [42:00] Yeah, because you didn't have a TV then. (laughs)

HK: That's right.

AS: When did you get your first TV set?

HK: Nineteen-fifty. My husband got it. But otherwise, I didn't care. But I used to listen to radio. And the kids used to sit down and listen. You know what? I had an easy time to raise six kids then, than they are raising two or three today.

AS: That's another question: If you had a choice of raising your kids now and then, as in, like, if you were young now and raising your kids and young then and raising your kids --

HK: I would never --

AS: -- what would you choose? Would you choose back then or would you choose these days?

HK: I would choose those days, because there was no television. It didn't make the children --

AS: At least you have them off your back. Like, you know they'd be watching TV (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: Yeah, but they used to go outside and play.

AS: And get air, [43:00] yeah.

HK: Yeah, they used to go outside and play. You take the kids today, even my granddaughter when she comes here, they sit by the television, look at the music, and look at the -- we got Cablevision -- and all that junk stuff. I hate that.

AS: Do they live with you?

HK: No, she comes down to see me every week since I had the stroke. No, my son lives with me. He's divorced from his wife. So, she's divorced kid. I feel sorry for her, because you know who pays for divorce? The children.

AS: True.

HK: Yeah, because they need both parents.

AS: That's very true.

HK: Yeah, so, well, I told you about the bread and all, huh?
Yes, and when I went to work, and oh, I didn't tell you
that my son graduated from [44:00] high school, but it's a
city hall now, because they had a choice --

AS: You told me.

HK: Yeah?

AS: Oh, tell me: I heard before that Beardsley Park was
something else before it became Beardsley Park. Do you
know (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: That, I don't remember. I always remember Beardsley Park.
Down at the end of the street of Sylvan Avenue there, we
used to have a beach. We used to go swimming, until they
made a highway.

AS: Wow. How did the highway change things, as in, people
(overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HK: Oh, it took away a lot of things.

AS: Do you think it's an improvement for the city, or do you
think it was better off without it?

HK: That, I can't say. That, I don't know. Because, now, look
at Pleasure Beach. They ought to do something with that.
We ain't got no recreation. [45:00] [You taught me?]. I
went to the [feastie?] of the night, Holy Rosary. Last
year, they had so many stands, so many things. I went the

other night when my granddaughter graduated, there's nothing, hardly anything. See, I like tripe, and they make it with gravy, and hot pepper. They didn't have nothing. Where was Italian food? Hot dogs, hamburgers. Oh, [a month ago?], I said so.

END OF AUDIO FILE