

Evelyn Lundgren Interviewed By Opal Robinson-6-26-84

OPAL ROBINSON: June 26, 1984. I'm Opal Robinson, and I'm interviewing Evelyn Lundgren at 55 Hayden Street.

(break in audio)

OR: May I ask your name, please?

EVELYN LUNDGREN: Evelyn Lundgren.

OR: Could you tell me your age and your date of birth?

EL: I was born March 11, 1921, that makes me 63.

OR: Could you tell me about your family, your childhood growing up?

EL: I was born in North End of Bridgeport; I'm the oldest of six children. My mother and father were both born here, my grandparents were born in the -- in Europe. My mother's mother was Swedish, my mother's father was Norwegian, my father's father was Swedish, and my father's mother was Danish. So I'm a mixed-up Scandinavian.

OR: Were your parents employed?

EL: My father was employed at -- when he died, he was employed at Remington [01:00] Arms. My mother was -- didn't work except she, at one time, did tinting for Corbett Studios, but she d-- other -- after she married, she didn't work at a full-time job. Being -- taking care of six children was enough of that.

OR: What level of education did you complete?

EL: I went to the second year of high school, then I left because my father wasn't working. So I went to work and never went back to school.

OR: What high school did you go to?

EL: I had my first year in Congress; my second year in Harding.

OR: What -- how were the schools managed?

EL: What do you mean, how were they managed?

OR: The, um -- the way they were run?

EL: Well, as far as I'm concerned, I never had any problem. In fact, I met a former schoolteacher of mine that I haven't seen since 1935. And I had my [02:00] grammar school education at Sheridan in the North End of Bridgeport, which was a great school. And my principal up there, when I was, when I graduated, was [Augusta Mendel?], who became Superintendent of Schools. But it was a close-knit school, and as far as I'm concerned, all the teachers I have ever had made quite an impression on me.

OR: Were the schools within walking distance?

EL: Yes. To finish grammar school, I had to walk from Lindley Street, it was about a two-mile trip, and there were three of us that went up to finish our year up there, but we walked because there weren't any buses, we came home for lunch.

OR: Could you describe the relationship between the teacher and the students?

EL: They were all great. Mm-hmm.

OR: Could you tell me about your neighborhood?

EL: Which one?

OR: The [west?] one. [03:00]

EL: Well, I've been here since 1972, I spent 37 years over on Noble Avenue. Lived in a four-family house, and we all broke up at the -- there was one family that, where there was a lot of traffic, in and out, but the rest of the families, the other three of us, came in within three months of one another, and left after 37 years at the same way, we were very close-knit.

OR: How long have you lived in (inaudible)?

EL: Here? Twelve, since 1972. My mother and I moved over in '72, she passed away in '73.

OR: Can you describe some of the changes that has taken place?

EL: Well here, I can't tell you too many.

OR: What about (inaudible)?

EL: As far as downtown Bridgeport is concerned, as far as Noble Avenue is concerned, as far as the North End is concerned, yes, there have been many changes. Oh, I think there are fewer changes in the North End than there has been [04:00] in the East Side.

OR: What type of people resided in your neighborhood?

EL: Just --

OR: Were there different nationalities (inaudible)?

EL: We had all nationalities, yeah. That's -- we were -- we had even in the North End of Bridgeport. When I was a kid, I could speak Italian because we had a lot of Italian people in the neighborhood, but they were neighbors. And if you needed, if you had any problems, they were there. This is the way it's always been. I've been fortunate.

OR: What type of houses occupied your neighborhood? Were there any apartment buildings or boarding houses?

EL: Ah, no. Apartments across the street from us. And we lived, there were two stores downstairs and four apartments upstairs. Railroad flats, they were.

OR: Did the majority of families in your neighborhood own their own houses, or did they [05:00] (inaudible)?

EL: Ah, six of one, half a dozen the other. Because some of them were two-family houses, and they were owned by other people. So it was, you know.

OR: Did the families in your neighborhood have close relationships?

EL: Yes. We were never in one another's apartments or anything like that, but they say, if you -- if there was a need for anything, the neighbors were always there.

OR: Were there any churches in your neighborhood?

EL: Not too far, no. Are we -- where are we talking about?

OR: The first one.

EL: My, well. My first neighborhood was in the North End of Bridgeport. The church was approximately, I would say, a half a mile away. And that's where I was born and brought up, the church is no longer there; it's been sold and it's going to be re-- they're going to do something with it, [06:00] and it's going to be a business, which is real sad.

OR: Was religion strongly emphasized in the neighborhood?

EL: In the neighborhood? There were Catholics, and there were Protestants. And the Catholics went to school, and the Protestants went to the religious school. On Sunday we went to church, so I mean, I think there was much more emphasis on religion at that time than there is now.

OR: In the contrast with then and now, do you prefer your neighborhood as it was then or as it is now?

EL: If we're talking about the neighborhoods that I was in, they've changed because most areas have. As far as here is concerned, I don't think that this neighborhood has changed that much. The people have changed, we have different neighbors in and out, but as far as the area is concerned, Black Rock has a community council and they're very proud of being [07:00] out here, and they try very hard to keep

things going. And that's the only way it's going to work, you've got to brighten the corner where you are.

OR: Could you tell me about the Depression years?

EL: Oh, yes. (laughter) I was old enough to remember that. My father didn't have a job, the only job that he could get one time, he didn't take. It was a bartender and he wouldn't take it because he said he couldn't take money from people who were taking the money away from their families. But he worked in many jobs. He worked for a day on the WPA building, the Merritt Parkway overpass on Main Street, came home; he looked like a cement man. And he worked as a special cop, he did -- he was always busy trying to make a buck, and that was all he made. And when I lived on Noble Avenue, I worked doing housework three days a week. I worked from two in the afternoon until seven at night, [08:00] three days a week, and I got a buck and a half for the three days. I gave my mother a dollar, that's what she bought the meat on, and the fifty cents, I bought a green coat that I hated, but it kept me warm.

OR: What about rations? (inaudible)?

EL: Yeah. That was, you didn't have much meat. You couldn't get butter, you got that oleo, that was like lard and they gave you a little packet with color in it, and then you had to mix it up until it all became yellow. I still will not

eat oleo. (laughter) They say you can't tell the difference, but I would just as soon go without.

OR: Did all the families get this?

EL: Yeah. I mean, you had to apply for it, you know, and you had so many blue stamps, and red stamps. One was for meat, and so much for butter, and gasoline rationing. Everything was rationed. I used to get in the darndest lines. I'd get into cigarette lines [09:00] and I didn't smoke. Nylon stocking lines, and if I got, I'd take a nine and a half and I'd get a size of eleven, so you looked for a friend with a size of eleven. So this is what it was. Everything was lined up. You couldn't get to the theater without -- and get a seat on a Saturday night -- and they had no air conditioning. They had one fan down there, and everybody just got so enthralled with the movie, they forgot that it was hot.

OR: What about in World War II?

EL: Yeah, I remember that too. I was, I started work at Remington in 1940, and the war started in '41. And I worked during -- until last November, I worked at Remington. So I worked through the war, met a lot of people, saw them go off to service. Some of them came back, some of them didn't. We had -- but we had a close-knit family relationship with the people that we worked

[10:00] with. In fact we -- a women's club that was organized, 32 years, just broke up last night. So we had a farewell party. But we're going to meet once a year because we don't want to lose our friendship. So.

OR: Was anybody in your family drafted?

EL: I had two uncles who were drafted. One went over to Italy, and the other one went to the 43rd Division in the Pacific, he was a medic. So he was overage when he went in, and when they came back, the two of them took off their uniform, they never talked about the Service, what they had done, they said they did what they had to do and that was it. And my brother was -- went in in 1950, but that was, you know, the Korean. But he was stationed in Germany.

OR: How about bread and soup lines? [11:00]

EL: What was that?

OR: The bread and soup lines.

EL: Ah, no. I never got into that. We were on the city, we got help as far as food was concerned, milk, bread, grapefruit, things like that. But whatever we had, we made do. And if you've ever seen the Del Monte, the call sardines with the tomato sauce? Used to be 10 cents a can. We each had a fish, you know. I can remember days when we had bread and my father worked for a bakery one time, and whatever was left over was what we ate. If we ate cake, we

ate cake. And if we had bread, we ate bread. I still can't eat a piece of bread with peanut butter and jelly on it because it was -- you had one or the other. Not both. So some things, you keep [12:00] remembering, you know? And other things I've forgotten. (laughter)

OR: How did this affect your family, you know, the war and everything?

EL: Well, the war was something that was a very unhappy thing, and we went through it. We worked, did what we could, what we had to, and that was it.

OR: After the war, what kind of changes took place? With the industries and stuff.

EL: After the war, a lot of the women were laid off because the men came back, and they had given up jobs to go into the Service. Some of the women stayed, stayed on their jobs. But that was the beginning of more people working. Some of the fellows came back, were not able to work, some didn't want to work, some [13:00] took extended time to get their education, and they have gone on and done better things because they had the G.I. Bill so that -- but I think the change was in people, you know. Same old story.

OR: Was there a major [effect?] on the country?

EL: Oh, it certainly has had an effect on the country because people are not the same. When people got -- after the war,

when they were able to go out and buy cars, you no longer took a bus from work and met people downtown, had a soda or cup of hot chocolate-- we used to have hot chocolate at night, before we came home. That was where our [bull?] session before we went home, and then everybody would go home. If you wanted to go -- we had many, many theaters in the downtown area, and you could go to the theater every night if you wanted to, double feature. And [14:00] I spent many happy days. In fact, I have the paper that the city put out here, the *Bridgeport Times*, I don't know if you've seen that one or not, but they have pictures of the theaters. They were beautiful theaters. And of course, now, I don't know where you'd park the cars because not too many people take a bus. But I think when the war was over and people could get things, like cars and so forth, they didn't need one another any more. And the closeness disappeared. I think this is, has been one of the things that, nobody wants to bother any more.

OR: What are your feelings about Bridgeport today?

EL: Bridgeport is my home, I'm proud of it, but very difficult to be proud of it with the way it's gone. Because people don't care. I'm the only [15:00] one in my family that's left, the rest of my family have married and moved out of town. But this is still my home, this is where I was born,

this is where I expect to live, and this is where I expect to die. But the things that have happened, the things that we've lost, I feel sorry for the kids now because they don't have the things that we had. We had groups that would go out to the theaters, and you could go to the theater at night without any problem. And thank God, they had candy bars but they didn't have popcorn. Because when you go to the theater now, if you go to the second show you're walking into a garbage heap. You walk, you sit down, and you've got popcorn under your feet, and garbage cans, and it's not very pretty. We have many things here to [16:00] be proud of. But a lot of people aren't aware of it, and I think that this is a great idea because there are so many things that we have had around here, and things that we should be proud of. Many of the things have gone away, but I had a woman say to me one time, "Bridgeport, what's Bridgeport?" She came from Newtown, and I wanted to say to her, "What have you got up there except the nut house?" (laughter) It isn't, it was at that time, that's all it was, but now it's, they use it for all kinds of things, chronically ill and rehabilitation and everything, so I mean it's, serves more than a mental hospital now.

OR: Thank you.

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