

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Resident Experiences

O. H. 794

HELEN BARNES

Interviewed

by

Evelyn Mangie

on

October 22, 1985

HELEN BARNES

Helen Barnes was born in Youngstown, Ohio, and attended Covington and Rayen Schools. She left school in the 11th grade to find employment. At 18, she married and moved with her husband into Westlake Terrace, residing there for twelve years. She is the mother of five children, two of whom were born at Westlake.

She worked as Truscon during the war years, building floors and doors for airplanes, subsequently becoming a hairdresser, then a practical nurse, until she was forced to retire after a heart attack in 1981. She was widowed in 1981 and presently lives with her son at 533 Plum Street.

Evelyn Mangie

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INTERVIEWEE: HELEN BARNES

INTERVIEWER: Evelyn Mangie

SUBJECT: life at Westlake Terrace in 1940's, playgrounds,
schooling

DATE: October 22, 1985

M: This is an interview with Mrs. Helen Barnes for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Evelyn Mangie, on October 22, 1985, at Plum Street, at 3:30 p.m.

Just to get started can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

B: I was born and raised in Youngstown on the north side and went to school there.

M: What school did you go to?

B: I went to Covington and Hayes and Rayen.

M: That's interesting. You went to Covington as a child and now you are working there.

B: No, I don't work there. I don't work at all. I was a nurse's aide. I didn't do that until I moved over here. When I lived in the project, I had my children and stayed at home. I worked during the war at Truscon. I wanted to learn how to weld. I didn't pass the welder's test. I worked in the aircraft department I learned to rivet. We did the floors and doors of airplanes. That was the work I did during the war. I only worked about six or nine months before the war was over.

M: Just at the tail end.

B: Then they laid the women off.

M: Would you have kept your job if they would have let you?

B: No, I probably would have worked . . . They had a nursery

right up the street. It was right up on the hill there at Griffith Court. You would take the kids. I had two then. You would leave them there. I would get the bus, and that would take me right to Truscon.

We moved there in 1941. When they were building those apartments, the kids would go down there and watch. I would tell them that one day I was going to live in those apartments. They thought I was crazy. We did. I married at eighteen. We moved in there the next year when I was nineteen. We stayed there about twelve years before we moved over here. When spring came, I took my marriage license and up to the project I went and put my application in. I think Mrs. Neff was there then. She came down and interviewed me. It wasn't long before we got into the apartments there. It was called Westlake Terrace, and it was \$19 a month rent. It was \$19 for a three room apartment.

M: Three rooms, living room, kitchen and . . .

B: Yes, this was downstairs. It was three and a half because you had a big kitchen. I had a big kitchen.

My husband worked at Rose & Sons at Westlake Crossing. There was a store down at Westlake Crossing. There were a lot of little stores, grocery stores and hardware stores. They had a Hartzel's. They had a store down there at Westlake Crossing. My husband was working there. That was where he was working when we were married. Then after two kids came he started working at the gas station in Westlake Crossing.

M: Do you remember what the name of the gas station was?

B: It was a Sohio gas station.

We were married in 1940 and we moved into the project in 1941 in the spring. We liked it there. We stayed there for twelve years. I believe I would like to go back.

M: Tell me about it. What do you remember about it?

B: It was nice. The only thing was that the kids couldn't play too well because the kids were fighting. Some of the neighbors were fighting. I didn't like it.

M: Over the children?

B: Yes. It was the only thing that I didn't like. I didn't like the washing as well. When I first went there, the laundry room was right up under my building. Then when we moved to a bigger house, then I had to walk like from here down to the corner of Joseph to wash my clothes.

M: You carried it all with you?

B: Yes, I didn't like that.

M: Do you remember the numbers of the units you were in?

B: The first one was 122, and then I moved down below to 126. Each time I had four and a half rooms. Then we bought a hide-away bed so you could sleep downstairs. You could sleep downstairs then which was screen door hooked. Even when we left, we could do that. Nobody broke in. You could sleep with your doors open.

M: I have been down in those laundry rooms. Did you have your own washing machine?

B: When we first moved in, I didn't. Before the second baby was born, I got a washing machine.

M: Before you had your own washing machine . . .

B: Just by hand on a washboard. My cousin lived upstairs over me. She was there before I was, so we would go down and wash. We washed and dried our clothes. Some people had trouble with their clothes like if you put your clothes up, then somebody would come down because they wanted to wash. They would take your clothes down and put them in the basket. They would break your lock.

M: In those fenced in areas where you hung your clothes up, did they break your lock?

B: They had a lock, yes. If you didn't have your clothes out at a certain time, some of the husbands would come down and break the lock. Then the wife would come and take your clothes down, throw them in the basket, and set them outside of the stall and hang theirs up. I never had that trouble because the ones who followed me didn't wash regularly.

M: Did you have a certain time?

B: Yes, you had certain days.

M: And certain times?

B: Yes.

M: Then you had to have yours down so that somebody else could wash?

B: Yes. What we did was we would go down in the evening after everybody had washed. If there was an empty stall, we just put our clothes in there. Then we would lock it. Then we would see who was supposed to follow us. That way I didn't have any trouble because we would do it whenever we wanted

to in the evening.

M: Because no one used it.

B: No one used it. In the morning when you got up, the clothes were dry. I didn't have anybody who followed me then who was that hateful. We would wash them on the washboard. Then they did have a Bendix washing machine there. You put a dime in and you could use that. I didn't like that because one man lived there and his wife was sick. He would bring those messy clothes and put them all in there. I couldn't use it. He didn't clean it out. Sometimes after somebody went in there and used it two or three times it got the smell out. Then I would put a dime in there and use some of it. I loved it; I really loved it.

M: Tell me about the nursery. You said you took your children to the nursery.

B: Yes. My one didn't want to stay. The other one liked it. They took care of them. They gave them food. The kids got along. There weren't any scratches or bumps on them when I got back. The oldest one liked it, but the second one didn't like it.

M: Did they have instruction for the children?

B: Yes, they had things to play with. The lady had somebody else helping. They seemed to enjoy it, and you only paid 25¢ a day.

M: Was there just one for the entire area or was there more than one?

B: No, there was just the one. There weren't too many people working. It was during the war. I don't know how long they had that nursery there. I think they kept that nursery up after the war because there were women working doing day work. I worked in the afternoon. I could leave them all night and come the next morning and pick them up. That would just be another 25¢.

M: They had beds?

B: Yes.

M: And someone stayed there with them all night?

B: Yes, there was somebody there with them day and night.

M: Were there many people who worked night turn?

B: Yes, there were quite a few. Quite a few young girls were living in there when I would go. They worked.

M: How big were your children when you lived at Westlake?

B: The first one was born there. When Mrs. Madison and I get together . . . We had children at the same time.

M: She lived there too?

B: Yes, she lived on the other end. I lived on one side, and she lived on the other one. She lived at 121. When I was living at 126, she was down at the other end. I don't know where Amanda lived at. I forget where she lived. We all were around together and our kids went to school and played together.

M: Is that where you met them? Is that where you became friends?

B: No. Mrs. Madison and I went to the same church and Amanda too. We all went to the same church.

M: What church was that?

B: Tabernacle. It is still there on 707 Arlington.

I'm doing good. My husband died in 1981. I'm ready to go back into the project. I would like to go back, really. They say that the safest ones are down on West Federal. On Park and Griffith and around there you couldn't go there. I don't know how they are up at Brier Hill. They moved some of them way up. I don't know how it is up there.

M: Were you there when they moved them?

B: No.

M: Do you remember the move?

B: A little bit. I thought that it might have been kind of rickety moving everything like that. I don't want one of the ones they moved. I rather would go back to the first ones on West Federal Street on West Federal Court where I was.

M: Any reason for not wanting to be in the ones that were moved?

B: I don't know. I just know that they were moved; that's all. These have been there and are stationary.

M: Do you know what the requirements are now? Are they similar to what it used to be?

B: Now you have to pay some of your utilities. I don't know which it is. We didn't have to pay any utilities.

M: None at all?

B: No. After I left they started paying the gas I think.

M: Your rent check covered everything then?

B: Yes. He only made \$17 a week. What you made a month . . . That was your rent. We had to put \$2 more on the week for the monthly rent. It was \$19 a month when we first moved. I forget what we paid. Each time it would go up. When my husband had the gas station, they wanted to see our books. They said that we had to show them our books or move. He wouldn't show them the books because we would have to pay back rent. He went back to work at the gas station. They would go up on your rent every so often. They wanted to see his books, and he wouldn't let them.

M: Had he made more?

B: Yes. They gave us a three day notice to move. I didn't want to be put out, but he didn't show them the books. I found this house. It was only \$1,000 down and we didn't even have that. They let us pay the \$1,000 in so many months. We only had \$900. We have been here ever since. We moved here in 1951.

M: You bought this when you moved out of the project?

B: Yes.

M: You said you remember the projects going up. Can you tell me something about what you remember?

B: When we would come home from school, we would go down there. I didn't live too far. We lived on George Street. That runs into the Covington School. Instead of going home from school we would go and walk around in the rooms. They hadn't put the windows and the doors in. I told myself that I was going to live in there. They looked at me like I was crazy. When I married, that was the first place I went after I got tired of moving. We settled down to live in there. It was nice after they got enough kids in there. Then they put the swings out.

M: They didn't have them in there right away?

B: No. They had swings and a little playground in different sections. In our building right in our back yard they put them up. We put the kids to bed, and we would go out there and slide and swing. We had a neighbor who was really fussy, and she called the police on us. They took the swings down. I was smaller then. I could get on the sliding board and have a good time. We would get to swinging. Her husband had to be at work early. He would get up at 4:00 in the morning and there we were out there swinging and sliding after we put the kids to bed. Then they took the swings down in the evening. We were young. Some of the ones up in our building did that.

- It was nice.
- M: I bet a summer evening would be nice with all of the neighbors.
- B: Yes.
- M: Did everybody come out front?
- B: Yes, we would sit out there. They let you plant flowers. One lady planted flowers. She would give me some. I didn't bother with the flowers. You really didn't have anyplace to put them. It was just a small place in the front. Before I left they had the single women in there like the widows. This is what they did, flowers. They kept their yards straightened up. I really didn't have too much with just the little bit in the front. The kids pulled the flowers. I couldn't have anything, but her kids were all grown. We had some good times in there; we really did. I don't know how it is now. They are breaking in and beating the people up, raping them and killing them.
- M: Times have changed everywhere.
- B: Yes. I said that I would like to go back. They said that West Federal was about the safest. It is not safe, but then it is quieter. I don't know how it really is now and what utilities you have to pay and your rent. My income is not very high. It is real low. It costs too much, \$300 for gas.
- M: Gas bills are just really high.
- When the buildings were first finished, Eleanor Roosevelt came by and went through them for an inspection. Do you remember anything about that?
- B: No, I don't remember that. I really can't remember what year they started to build them and how long it took them. I don't remember.
- M: It was in the late 1930's like 1939 when they were finished.
- B: We married in 1940, but I don't remember how long it took them to finish them.
- M: Do you remember going down and applying for . . . What other qualifications were there besides . . .
- B: Just your marriage license. At that time they took the married people. Then later they took the widows and single girls.
- M: If you had the right income and your marriage license . . .
- B: Yes. There were really too many people in our first house.

It was a big house and it was cold. When I went to apply, Mrs. Neff wanted to know how many people and I told her. Then she wanted to know how many baths, and I told her that we only had one bathroom. She couldn't believe it. It didn't take very long for her to come there then. She said that I had to go. I didn't want to have a baby there. The baby was born in July. I made sure that I was out of there before July. I think I went there in April to put in my application. We moved in May.

M: Mrs. Neff went to see where you were living?

B: Yes, they came to investigate. She came and saw. I think she went all over the house. She was tough. You didn't put anything over on her. Mrs. Neff said that I had to move. It wasn't long before they called me. I packed up our one room stuff and away we went. We had our stove and refrigerator there.

M: That was provided?

B: Yes, so all we had to buy was a breakfast set. Mr. Rose gave us a wicker living room set for a wedding present. My husband worked for Rose & Son clothing store at Westlake Crossing when we got married. Then we bought a hideaway bed after we came down to the bigger apartment. My mother would come and stay with us every now and then. It was \$19 when we first went in there. Then we had to clean our walls. They would paint them for you, but we had to clean them. All we had to do was clean them with wallpaper cleaner. Then we didn't have to wash them; then they would come and paint them. My cousin and I would wash walls. I kept them clean because of the kids. I was a good housekeeper.

M: Did they come to inspect?

B: Oh, yes, they came to inspect. If you didn't let them in when they knocked on the door, they would come and unlock the door and go ahead in. They never did that to me because I was always home. I heard they did that and were doing that after I moved out. They were checking to make sure that the girls didn't have any boyfriends living in there. They started that after I moved out. Yes, they would inspect.

M: Did they inspect for what kind of housekeeping you did?

B: Yes, they did that once a year?

M: Just once a year?

B: Yes, once a year. One lady had a lot of stuff all cluttered up. A lot of the people weren't good housekeepers. Of course, we had roaches. Over in the washroom people would bring them there and it was hard to get them out. Every once in a while

- they would come and spray.
- M: They sprayed?
- B: Yes, they sprayed. I would spray in between. They would clean the back of the refrigerator and spray under the bottom where they would be. Then they moved out the stoves and cleaned behind there and sprayed there. They were a problem. If you lived upstairs . . . In the first house I lived downstairs. In the summer the heating pipes going up to the other apartment had roaches running up and down them. I had a problem from going from one apartment to another. But I still liked it.
- M: How often did they paint?
- B: They didn't paint every year. I think it was every two years. They would come around and inspect it. If they were really dirty, they would make you wash them. I would wash around the doors and stuff like that. Then they would paint.
- M: Were you allowed to choose your own colors or did they have their own colors?
- B: They had their own colors.
- M: You just took what they brought?
- B: Yes. It seems like now that you can paint whatever color you want. I really don't know how it is now. It was every so often. They have a certain time. I don't know if it was two years or three. They painted it beige. We would get that wallpaper cleaner, and they used that flat paint.
- M: Did they supply you with the wallpaper cleaner?
- B: No.
- M: You had to buy it yourself.
- B: Yes. The ones that were already clean could be done first by them. If you didn't get the spots off, they wouldn't paint.
- M: How about your appliances? Did everything work well?
- B: Yes. I had a mangle. I bought that during the war. I used that at nights and when I did the fuse would go out. I used it at nights after they had television on and everything. I quit using it even in the daytime. I just quit using it because I would blow the fuse out.
- M: They just weren't wired for that.
- B: No, it really wasn't. If the maintenance man started coming

too many times, then they started charging you 25¢. If your spigot dripped, you paid 25¢. I fixed it one time. I stood there and watched him before when he was there, and I saw what he did. The next time mine dripped I still had to call and have them fix it because I stripped the threads. He noticed the plyer marks. He said that somebody had been messing with it, and I told him that nobody could have done that because my husband wasn't here. He still said that somebody did, so I had to pay 25¢. Then it went up to 75¢, but that was how I learned to put the washers in.

M: You did it better the next time.

B: Yes. Then he unstopped the sink; I watched him do that. I messed up again and told him that nobody did that. He said that somebody had, and I had to pay 75¢.

M: If he came too often or every time?

B: He came too often, so he charged people. Now the men who knew how to do that had the right pipes. I didn't. I just thought the plyers would work, but they didn't. Yes, they still charged you if they had to come out too often.

When I plugged the mangle in, all of the lights would go out in the whole building.

M: You were connected to the whole building?

B: I quit using it.

M: Did the children go to school down there?

B: Yes, they went to Covington. All they did was go across the street there on Griffith. Then they would go down Covington.

M: We saw some pictures in an old film of one school closing and another school opening. Do you remember that? I think it was Covington opening while another was closing.

B: Covington had been there ever since I lived over there. I don't know where another one was. The school over on the west side in what they used to call the Monkey's Nest is closed.

M: Do you remember what the name of that was?

B: Butler.

M: Do you remember that when it closed?

B: Yes.

M: Why did it close?

B: There weren't enough kids over there, so they closed.

M: And then everybody had to go to Covington School.

B: That was over on the west side. Covington was the only one there ever since I was there.

M: And you went there as a child too?

B: Yes, I went to Covington.

M: Has it changed much?

B: I don't know about now. I don't think so. A lot of those older teachers who were there are gone now. Some of those older ones were mean when I was there. Then my kids had them, and they didn't like them.

M: Your children had the same teachers?

B: Yes, we had Miss Westlake. She had the kindergarten.

M: Westlake, that is interesting. Was that the same family do you suppose?

B: I don't know. She was a mean lady.

M: This has been really interesting. Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

B: I didn't think I would remember this much.

A neighbor gave me some tropical fish called guppies. I have been a fish lover since I left the project. I now have three small fish tanks and one 29 gallon tank with goldfish in it.

M: I appreciate you giving us your time.

B: I enjoyed it.

END OF INTERVIEW