

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace

Personal Experience

O H 940

JANE WOMER

Interviewed

by

Evelyn Mangie

on

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M This is an interview with Jane Womer for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Evelyn Mangie, on November 5, 1985

Do you remember your parents?

W Yes, I remember my parents My dad died when he was forty-nine, in 1937 My mother died at seventy-eight in 1966 I remember them quite well

M Where were they from?

W They were both from Pennsylvania originally, but they lived here most of their lives

M In Youngstown?

W Youngstown, yes. They lived there for a long time.

M Where were you born?

W In McKees Rock, Pennsylvania. We moved here when I was a baby Except for eighteen months in 1941, I have lived here all of my life

M Where were you for those eighteen months?

W In Titusville, Pennsylvania

M When you were growing up in Youngstown, what was it like?

W It was alright, but we were poor all of our lives. We lived in all different sections of Youngstown

M Like where?

W We lived on Irving Place That is down behind Mahoning Avenue It runs the same way as Mahoning The only ones I know you can get to it is down by the old Ward's Bakery You would go down Tod Avenue, which we had lived on, too, and down to the end of that street and then turn to the right Then we lived on Tod Avenue, Meridian Road, Mahoning, Frederick Avenue in Austintown, Woodland Avenue three times that I can remember, Erie Street, Case Avenue, Wayne Avenue, Henry Street, and the last one that I can remember where we were all together was on Truesdale We also moved out onto McCollum Road by Mill Creek Park, right across from the cemetery there We did not live in

those places in the order that I gave them Truesdale was when my father died, and my mother had to take up housekeeping I went to live with a sister and quit school to go to work in Girard, keeping house I was there for about a year and then moved back to Youngstown and got married very young

M: How young?

W I would have been seventeen in July I got married on July twenty-sixth

M Did you have a big family?

W Yes I had three brothers and there were six of us girls

M What was your position in the family?

W I was a twin and we were next to the last born We were the seventh and eighth to be born

M How old were you when your father passed away?

W Fourteen He was very ill He could not work for years We were always on welfare when I was at home

M Was that the reason for so many moves?

W. Yes It was cheaper to move than to pay rent, as my father used to say We just could not keep up with it In those days, you only got a few dollars from welfare They never thought of paying the rent They only would give you money to eat on That was about it

M What were some of the housing conditions like?

W. Some of them were nice and others were just a house, but some of them were really nice My mother always kept them clean, but you can only do so much. Then after my father died, she went to work on WPA (Works Progress Administration) for awhile as a seamstress She did not even know how to sew, but they put her on machines anyhow. Then she got a job as a nurse's aid at South Side Hospital

M WPA How did they work that?

W Not WPA, they did not do that for her She got that on her own They sent them to different locations, schools She worked over at Madison School They had a

sewing project over there

M For the students?

W No, I think they sewed clothes and distributed them to the poor people during the early 1940's She worked there in 1938 and 1939

M You must have gone to a lot of different schools, then

W I did

M What were they like?

W I liked some of them Some I did not like at all Every time we moved, we changed schools We never started a school year in September that we finished in June, only the last one we lived at on Truesdale. We went to Roosevelt and Lincoln from the fifth to the eighth grade I did not complete ninth grade when I went to Grant. I went to all the schools in between there, a few in Youngstown, grade schools

M Do you have a favorite, or do you remember anything in particular?

W I remember a favorite teacher She was at Market Street when I was just tiny Her name was Miss Murphy That I can remember, but some of the others I cannot When I went to Lincoln, Mr Adrian Swifga was a Latin teacher there, and he was our teacher He was nice Then a Miss Leary there was real nice

M What were some of your reasons for never liking school?

W. I never looked nice going to school That is kind of hard

M Was it hard changing and not making permanent friends?

W. I never had permanent friends, no

M How did you meet your husband?

W He was living down the street from my sister on Ridge Avenue when I was staying with her I met him We went together for awhile and we got married

M. That was in the 1940's?

W We got married in 1940

M When you came back to Youngstown after living in Titusville, where did you live?

W. We moved into a furnished room on Hayes Avenue

M Where is Hayes?

W It is behind Market Street You go down Market Street and you turn left from the bridge There is Woodland Avenue, there is Henry and down here is Hayes It ended at Woodland and ended at Wayne It was only two blocks.

M Furnished rooms?

W Furnished rooms.

M How long were you there?

W He went to the Army while we were there When he came back, I was living with his sister and a brother-in-law on Henry Street, right in the same area.

M How long was he in the Army?

W. He was in there from April 1944 until he got out in August of 1945 Then he went back again in late 1945 and got out in 1946.

M. What did you do while he was gone?

W: I worked as a waitress, and then I went to Truscon as a welder until I got fired. I quit there back to waitressing.

M You got fired?

W: No, I caught fire We did not have asbestos clothing It was in the winter and you had to keep warm because those places are cold I would wear sweaters and our sweaters would catch on fire You did not know it was burning until you felt it, so I quit I did not want to burn up I also worked at Mackenzie Muffler and that was a lot easier than the other because you did not catch fire.

M Did you like it?

W No

M Was the pay good?

- W. No. If I remember, you did not get more than forty-five or fifty cents an hour. When I went to work as a waitress, you got eighteen dollars a week. You worked eight hours a day for six days a week, for eighteen dollars.
- M. That is a lot of time.
- W: A lot of time and very little money. You also had tips, but back then, if you made fifty cents a day, you were doing good, because people did not tip in those days like they do now.
- M. Where did you do your waitressing?
- W: There was one place called Central Square Lunch on Central Square. Strand Theater was there in Central Square. It was just around the Democratic headquarters up in the Realty Building. I worked there the longest, but I also worked at the Belvedere, Petruska's Restaurant, and the Brass Rail.
- M. That was downtown too, was it not?
- W. Yes, on the opposite side of Federal Street. That is about the only waitressing I did.
- M. What was downtown like?
- W. It was a lot better than it is today. There were stores, there were crowds, buses, trolley cars going through.
- M. On tracks?
- W. No, they were trolley buses. I remember the streetcars they used to have with the tracks in the middle of the road. The town was always crowded. You could not find a parking place then. It was a lot better than now. I am afraid to go to town now. I have not been down there to walk for years.
- M. And you were not afraid then?
- W. No.
- M. Even at night?
- W. Never at night. I used to go home at 2:30 in the morning. If I missed the last trolley, which went at 12:40, I would have to walk home up Market Street Bridge.

M That is far

W But I was not afraid It was much better than it is now

M Even during the war, were there a lot of shoppers downtown?

W Yes. Well, there were a lot of people who rode the bus who had to transfer to in town from one bus to another There was always somebody on the streets until 2 00 or 3 00 in the morning. When you worked until 2 30, you did not get out until 2 45 Then when you walked home, you always passed somebody There were cars going through town at that time of night. At Christmas-time it was jam packed You would walk down there and window shop They had the decorations up and the lights in the windows, all decorated up, and it was very, very nice. Now you do not even want to go down there.

M What kind of customers were there in the places where you worked downtown?

W Some were nice and some were rotten, even like today. But for the most part, they were nice people

M Of the people who worked there, do you remember anybody in particular?

W I do not remember their last names, but there was a lady by the name of Mary who was the head waitress She worked in Central Square One of the ladies who I lived in the project with worked there, and her name was Sarah There was another lady by the name of Esther. There was another lady who worked as a cashier, and I think her name was Clair, but I am not sure She had been there for years and years

M How about the people who came in? Were there any city officials or mayors?

W The cop who walked the beat came in None of the officials would come in there because they had the Purple Cow across from the police station. That is usually where they went for their meals, or the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) around the corner They had special places where they went

M Do you remember the Purple Cow?

W Yes, a lot of racketeers hung out in there.

M Do you remember any names?

W Santinaples was one, and Vadzagrillo There were a lot of them, but I do not

remember all of their names.

M. It is funny that the city officials would go down there. You would think that they would avoid that place.

W. But they did not.

M. When you eventually moved into West Lake Terrace, how did that come about?

W. He had come home from the service and it was so crowded at my sister's place. We had heard about this place. We just inquired about it and put an application in and they called us and told us that we could move in.

M. What was the process? What did you have to do?

W. They took an application. By then he was working at U.S. Steel. You just went over to the office and put in the application. If your wages were not too high, then they let you come in with your family, depending on the dependents and how many were in the family.

M. Do you remember anything about the specifics, like how many children you had? Was there a limit to the number of children?

W. For the number of rooms, yes. We had three children, and they gave us four rooms. The little girl was born in May, and we moved over there in January or February, I think. Then boys were four and five or five and six. All but my last child started Covington School.

M. From there?

W. From there. We had two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, and a bath upstairs. We had two floors. It was really nice.

M. Do you remember the number you were living in?

W. 83 Griffith Street, apartment 595. They have moved that building, though.

M. That is one of the ones that they moved.

W. They put the expressway in. They moved that, yes. It was really nice.

M. You were pleased with it.



W Oh, yes, it was the nicest place we have lived in that I can remember

M Did they figure everybody's rate according to your income? Is that how they figured that?

W Yes Everybody paid a different amount, depending upon the family and the income and the number of rooms

M What was it like over there? Did you make friends?

W Yes There was a friend, and I am still friends with her She lives in Cleveland now She was the only good friend that I had, but there are a lot who I can remember by their first names, I do not remember last names very good It was nice. The kids enjoyed it because they would play outside There were areas where they could play

M. In those little playgrounds?

W Little playgrounds in separate sections. There were a lot of kids there They had some friends there. It was kept clean They cut the grass all the time

M You did not have to take care of your own yard?

W No, they took care of it I think they cleaned the sidewalks off, too, from snow They changed window screens in the fall and in the spring I think they took the screen doors off We did not have any storm doors or storm windows They took the screens off and stored them and the windows and the doors They would repair them and bring them back in the spring It was nice

M They were comfortable and you got appliances

W. A stove and refrigerator were furnished Electric was furnished and gas was furnished

M You just paid one lump sum

W One sum, and I cannot remember what it was

M Were the children too young to make use of the Hagstrom House?

W It was clear on the other end of the project.

M Too far away for you?

W Hagstrom was up at Lexington We lived down by Madison

M You did not go up

W No

M Did they invite you?

W We could have gone up if we wanted to, but we never went that far We had to walk everywhere we went. We walked downtown if we did not have bus money, and we walked to the grocery store on Belmont Avenue and carried the groceries home

M Which grocery store was that?

W There was an A & P up there by the YMCA We used to go to that A & P Then the kids got a wagon for Christmas We pulled the wagon up or a sled in the winter

M For the groceries?

W For the groceries

M Did you have to go to the grocery store often more than once a week?

W We tried to go about every two weeks. He got paid every two weeks then We would try to get enough to last, other than bread and milk There was a store down on Federal Street that we could walk to

M An old corner market?

W Yes, a corner market There was a colored man who had a store that you could walk to and get bread and milk That is all I every bought in that store

M What, generally, was a day in Westlake?

W You had separate days, in the morning and afternoon, to do your washing, because everybody used the same laundry room You had your own washer down there You put it against the wall There was a place to hang them in there where the heat was controlled You could put your clothes in there to dry them

M I have seen those

- W They had to be out at a certain time so that the next person would use them. They were assigned to you. I had two days, Monday and Thursday mornings, to do my washing. Then they had a place for you to take your trash. It was called the trash bin. There was a window and you put it down in the cellar. You just dumped it down there. We did not have garbage bags in those times. It all went in one place, papers, cans, everything. You put that down there, and they would empty it out into a big truck and take it away.
- M Were there several of those?
- W There were three buildings that had to use the same one. There was one out here in the front. They had to carry their trash over here. It was this unit in which we lived. It was units like this. We would all put our trash there, halfway down the building. The center was the playground. There was a little bit of grass on each side.
- M Were they supervised?
- W No, not the playgrounds.
- M But well kept?
- W Well kept, yes. They kept the grass cut around there and the trash picked up.
- M I have seen some circular cement type things. Was that a fountain or something for the children to play with?
- W I do not know. I do not remember seeing them.
- M Your children stayed pretty close to home?
- W Yes, they were around all the time in that area.
- M How about on summer evenings? Did everyone sit out on their stoops?
- W Most often, or sat out on the back porch and visited and listened to the radio a lot. There were not any televisions.
- M Was it a friendly atmosphere?
- W Yes, except when the other kids would get into fights; then you would have a problem.

M: How about your general day? You washed on certain days

W: I washed on Monday, ironed on Tuesday; Wednesday I cleaned house, Thursday I washed clothes again, Friday I cleaned house and did windows, and Saturday I went to town and got meat. I went down to Junedale and would buy my meat and carried it home on a bus or a walk if we did not have the money for a bus. That was the day.

M: That was a pretty busy schedule

W: It was busy with three kids, yes

M: Do you remember Westlake being built at all?

W: No, I do not remember it being put up. I knew it was being put up. We did not have a car, and we never went for a ride to see anything. I know it was nice when we moved in there.

M: In the beginning, Eleanor Roosevelt came and looked at them. Do you remember anything about that?

W: Faintly. I remember her being in town. I did not get to see her.

M: Was there a lot of excitement?

W: Yes, it was in the papers with pictures and everything. I think she rode down Woodland Avenue in an open car. I cannot remember.

M: When the children started school, they went to Covington School?

W: Covington, yes

M: Was that an old school at the time?

W: I think that was built when the project was built. It is a fairly new school. It was a nicely kept school. I would go to PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) a lot, and it was nice. The meetings were nice.

M: Did your children like Covington School?

W: Yes, they did. They liked it. When we moved, Gran School was an elementary school on Edwards Street. We moved to Rockview off of Mahoning Avenue. They went there then, but Grant used to be a high school when I went there.

That was where I quit school

M Then it was a grade school.

W Then it was a grade school I do not know what it is now I do not know if it is even open Almost all of the kids in my family went there, my brothers and sisters, at one time or another.

M You were at Westlake You lived north of Madison Avenue

W Right at Madison Avenue The parking area for our building was at Madison Avenue and Griffith Street. There was Workingmen's Overall Supply Company across the street

M It is still there.

W We would walk right past that and go down and catch the bus at the corner.

M: You were not worried then about walking around at night?

W No

M: I have heard people refer to Madison Avenue as the Mason-Dixon Line Were you aware of anything like that?

W. I did not know that was what they called it. That was where segregation started for the project Below Madison was the colored and up above was the white

M Did you know that before you moved in?

W Yes. We knew they were segregated

M Do you remember when that was no longer enforced?

W: Yes.

M When did that happen?

W: That was in the late 1940's that they started moving the colored in next to the white That was when a lot of the white people moved out. We had colored maintenance men there, too, in the white section They were always very nice, but I guess we did not want to live next to them.

M Did the children all go to the same schools?

W Yes, over at Covington, or some were bussed to the Catholic schools

M There were a lot of churches over there, were there not?

W Yes. St Columbia was up on West Federal Street. Then they closed that and moved out to Austintown There was St Peter and Paul over there, I think, at the bottom of Covington I do not know where it was, but it was over in that area

M Is that unusual, with two Catholic churches so close together?

W No, they were more ethnic churches. They were pretty close together, maybe seven blocks difference

M People kind of migrated to their own ethnic

W Back in the 1940's, yes, they did They would go to their ethnic church

M How was the feeling among the white among the ethnic people?

W We all got along We lived in the front building that was facing Covington Griffith Street Another building was facing Madison. There was a French lady in there and there were Italian people in there, there were Slovaks in there They all got along Everybody got along

M Do you remember any Jewish families?

W No, I do not remember any Jewish families I remember Bob Hagen moving up there Quite a few people have come out of the project who are well-known now

M Can you remember any of them? Were any of them your friends?

W No. I stayed right in the buildings right around me They lived farther up on the hill, but I remember the ones right in my own area Attorney Ingram was raised over there. I did not know him at the time, but since then, I have talked to a friend who said that he was raised in the project.

M What was your reason for moving out?

W My husband made too much money

M They asked you to leave?

W He had gotten raises and then my daughter was getting too big to sleep in the same room with the boys. We only had the two bedrooms. She was only six, and I think they were nine and ten, or eight and nine.

M Did they ask you to leave when your salary got too high?

W Yes. We probably would have never moved.

M How did they know? Did you have to report?

W You had to report. You had to take your income tax statement down and show them. They kept good track of it. Then they would tell you that you were making too much and that you would have to move. You had to look and find a place.

M What would happen if you did not?

W They did not give many extensions, they probably would have sent us out.

M Do you mean they actually would have gone in and taken your furniture?

W They were strict back then.

M. did they care about how you kept it? Did they come in and look?

W Oh, yes they would walk through the grounds. I do not ever remember them coming in and looking around. Most everybody kept them up nice. They washed windows all the time. I know I washed windows once a week and did spring cleaning and fall cleaning. If it needed painted, they would have to go in and paint it.

M Did you have to ask for that or was that a regular?

W No, you would have to go in and ask for it. They would come in and look around. If they thought you needed it, then they would do it. If you had repairs to do, they would do them.

M How did you go about asking for repairs?

W You just would go down and tell them what was wrong.

M Down at the office?

W Down to the office, and they would send somebody up, one of the maintenance

men, and look at it. They would fix it.

M: Was it a friendly atmosphere in the office?

W: Oh, yes, they were nice down there.

M: Is that where you went to pay your rent?

W: Yes.

M: You had to take it to them.

W: Down there, yes.

M: Did you know anybody who did not do everything they were supposed to do?

W: No. I do not ever remember anybody being actually sent out, but a lot were told to move when they started making too much money. That was after the war. The mills started to pick up somewhat. Most of them worked in the mills, and they were asked to move.

M: When you finally moved out, how long did it take for you to find a place?

W: Maybe a month. There was an ad in the paper. A fellow called us. He had this house on Rockview. He kept a room there. He rented the place and he subleased it. We moved in the fall of that year.

M: That was before they moved the building?

W: Yes.

M: Did they move them in the 1960's?

W: I think it was in the 1960's.

M: Do you remember that?

W: No. I was really surprised when I went across Madison Avenue and saw that they had taken our old building down.

M: Did they not publish it?

W: It was published, but I do not remember reading about it.



M They really did a good job. I was over there. Can you remember anything else that we have skipped over?

W Not that I can think of. We have pretty much covered it. I do not know that the whole Youngstown area was nicer back then than it is now. They have torn down so many houses that I myself have lived in and have done nothing to put anything in its place. All of those places on the South side were beautiful residential areas. Once they started going, everybody moved out and they were ruined. People do not believe that, but I do. There is Woodland Avenue, Hayes Avenue, Henry Street, Wayne Avenue, all down Woodland Avenue. I lived in three different places there. After we moved from Mill Creek Park, we moved by Hillman Street, and that is a dump area over there. Down on West Woodland, that is maintained a little better, but not much. Falls Avenue is terrible all the way up to Midlothian. The side streets are really terrible. I really believe it is that people just did not take care of the places. We were never afraid to walk from one end of Market Street to the other. My mother and sister lived over on Logan Avenue. We would walk from Logan Avenue down through town, up Glenwood Avenue, to Idora Park, stay there all day, and we would walk back in the evening, and not be afraid.

M: That is far.

W I know it. You either walked or you stayed home. There were buses, but who could afford the ten cents for bus fair? That was how bad off we were. We would walk from Truesdale on the East side, out to Idora Park, down through East Federal Street. Then East Federal was not a real nice neighborhood at the time, but we walked it. We would come home in the evening. We could not ride the rides at Idora Park because we did not have the money.

M: Did you just walk around?

W We just walked around and watched what was going on. We would walk home in the evening.

M What was Idora Park like?

W It was beautiful. We used to walk there a lot. They had three cents a day, at times. Schools, one time, would have them and some of the dairies would have them, and some businesses would have them. You would go out and ride any ride you wanted for three cents, all day. You saved up your money for that, the change that you got. It was really nice. That was the fun spot. That was the highlight of the year, really, when you got to go to Idora Park. It was real nice in the 1940's and 1950's.

M: That was really far.

W: It was far to walk, and we did it all the time. We did it, almost every week we took a walk out there. We did not have anything else to do. We would walk downtown and window shop. That was about all we could do.

M: Did you go to the movies?

W: Once in a while we went to the movies.

M: Which one would you go to?

W: Anyone that had a good show playing and did not cost too much. Back then you could get into a movie for ten cents. When we lived on Wayne Avenue in 1933, there was a show up on Market Street called "The Astor." My brother worked at Golden Age and he would see that we had money on Saturday and Sunday to go there. There were three or four of us girls who would go, my twin sister, my younger sister, myself, and my next oldest sister. We would sit there all day and watch the movie over and over. When he did not have the money, we did not go to the show, because my dad could never afford to let us go.

M: Then after you left Westlake, the town picked up?

W: Somewhat. I went to work when we lived on Rockview. I went to work with Strauss as a shoe clerk.

M: That was downtown,

W: Downtown.

M: Your children graduated from high school?

W: Yes.

M: Did any of them go on to the university?

W: No.

M: They have no desire?

W: They have no desire.

M: Can you remember anything else? Did we skip anything?

W No, I do not think so That pretty much covers it

M It certainly has been enjoyable Thank you

End of Interview