

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace

Personal Experience

O. H. 1083

KATHLEEN MOSER

Interviewed

by

Elisa Calabrese

on

December 9, 1985

KATHLEEN ALLISON-MOSER

Kathleen Marie Allison, daughter of Thomas L. Allison and Katherine J. (Uber) Allison, was born December 6, 1945 in Youngstown, Ohio. Kathleen Allison attended St. Ann's Elementary School and graduated from Ursline High School in 1963. On the college level she attended Youngstown State for three years from 1963 until 1966.

Kathleen Allison married Jan Robert Moser on September 7, 1966. They have three children. Past employment consists of: St. Elizabeth Hospital 1962-1964; Union National Bank 1964-1967; and Farmer's national Bank 1968-1969.

The Moser family attends Berlin Center United Methodist Church. Mrs. Kathleen Moser is an active member of United Methodist Women and is associated with 4-H. Special interests and hobbies include; Calligraphy, Dressmaking, and Quilting.

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INTERVIEWEE: KATHLEEN MOSER
INTERVIEWER: Elisa Calabrese
SUBJECT: Youngstown 1950's, Low Income Housing
DATE: December 9, 1985

C: this is an interview with Kathleen Moser for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Elisa Calabrese, December 9, 1985, at approximately 10:00 a.m..

Well, just to get started, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

M: I'm a mother of three children and I'm active in church and 4-H. I'm forty years old. I've lived right here since 1967 so I've been here for a while. Three weeks after I got married we moved in, so we've kind of stayed put. I enjoy doing crafts. I do calligraphy professionally, and I also make quilts, so I have a variety of interests.

C: What was it like growing up there? (Westlake Terrace?)

M: One thing I like to remember is that there were always a lot of children to play with. I think we were all what you would consider underprivileged, but I don't think that bothered anybody because we were all in the same boat.

C: What years did you live there?

M: My mother said from the time I was four until I was thirteen, so for nine years. 1949 to almost 1959.

C: What was the daily routine for a young child there, maybe with activities. I know there is the Hagstraum

House there. What type of activities did they have for children?

M: Well, younger children on Saturdays had crafts, they had a library there and they would have stories that they would read to the children. They had a nice gymnasium, and they'd have active games for the kids to do. I know a couple of years I took dancing lessons there that were free. A dance teacher from the area had volunteered to give free dance lessons to us, so we took dance lessons for a couple of years. I took piano lessons one year that were given there free also. As we got older, we would volunteer to help read stories and take over some of the jobs for the younger children. Just before we moved I think there was a Negro man up at the Hagstraum House that organized a club for young teenagers. We would meet like once a week and discuss problems you were having at home and then he'd always have a snack or treat for us and then he would try to do an activity. We would either play basketball together or play board games, whatever we would want to do afterwards.

C: You mentioned this group of teenagers coming together to talk, was this segregated?

M: No, it was integrated by that time.

C: Do you remember where you lived?

M: Yes, I do. We lived at 39 Wirt Street, apartment 245. It was the first section there...Madison was this way and Wirt came down...And then it was the first section. The Negroes, when we first lived there were segregated across the road, across Madison there. We lived in the first complex across Madison, the first group of housing there.

C: Were they segregated the whole time you lived there?

M: No. I don't remember what year they started to integrate the Blacks with us, but I'm not sure how long after we were there that they integrated them. I know for the first, at least two or three years, it was segregated. They even had their own YMCA that was right there.

C: Yes, right on Federal. What events during those nine years that you lived there stands out in your mind? Any type of events that you went through as a child in the Westlake community itself? Any type of happenings in Youngstown that affected the community?

M: I don't think there is anything I can think of right now.

C: Do you remember what stores were around there?

M: Yes, my sister and I discussed this. Down on the corner there of West Federal and, I don't know if it was Wirt that came down or Madison that came down and intersected there, there was a grocery store there and beside it there was a place that sold cigars, candy, magazines and items like this. Another store over by Covington School, there was a dry cleaners over there, there was another little grocery store over there. I think the other street that ran up the side was Griffiths and up there a little ways there was a grocery store on that corner. If we went to a grocery store, we usually went to the one that was down on West Federal, simply because of the location, it was a lot closer.

S: Did the blacks and whites shop together, or did they usually have their own stores?

M: No, I think they went elsewhere. I think most of the stores were...I think the one over by Covington School, we all went there. I think occasionally you would see a black in that grocery store, mostly because he also sold fresh meats. I mean it was a regular grocery store, you could buy anything. It wasn't just like a corner store, he was a bigger store; you could get fresh meats and everything there.

S: Entertainmentwise, you said you were at the Hagstraum and there were a lot of activities there. If you wanted to see a movie, do you remember going to the theater at the time? Were blacks and whites separated from the theater?

M: I don't ever remember seeing any blacks in the theater. It was up on Belmont Avenue and I don't remember the name. I think it was just called the Belmont Avenue Theater. My sister may recall if it had another title, but we went every Saturday for 10¢. My mom used to say that was our treat on Saturday, to go to the movies. I don't ever recall there being any black people in the theater. I remember on the buses they sat in the back, when I was small they would. I don't think we thought anything of it, I don't think we thought it was being segregated, I think as a child I just thought that was where they preferred to sit.

S: I see what you mean. You didn't know any different.

- M: No. My family was not very prejudice. My mother and father, they weren't very prejudice towards the blacks. If people were good, they were good and if people were bad, they were bad. There were good whites and there were bad whites, and there were good blacks and bad blacks. When the things got segregated I had a black girlfriend that was very close and we were back and forth and everything together.
- S: Do you remember any of your neighbors, their names?
- M: Yes, the girl I was real good friends with, the black girl, her name was Sylvia Washington. I don't know where she lives now. Another girl, Lynn Dunn, I've run into her and her family since I've been married. I've kept contact with them off and on. Sylvia Maraz, because I went all the way through school with her. There is another girl that is married to my neighbor's son. Patty, I forgot what her maiden name was, but it's Yeager now. She and I lived there and went even to high school together, but we moved from there before she and her mother did.
- S: Let's go back a little bit, tell me about the activities that you had at Westlake and growing up. Do you remember the first day that you moved to Westlake?
- M: No, I think was too young. I remember, my mother said four months after we moved in...When we moved in she said we moved into only a two bedroom apartment because that was all that was available at the time. There were four or five children then in our family. After four months a three bedroom apartment became open with two floors; we were just on one floor in an upstairs apartment. I can remember moving. You didn't have to hire a moving van or anything, just all the neighbors helped cart everything across. It was just like across...There was like in the center, there was a playground area that was blacktop, and we were just on one side, so we went from one side to another so everybody just helped. I can remember carrying cushions and boxes and things just across there to move. Your big appliances were all built in, so you didn't have to worry about those, so it was just a matter of moving your furniture.
- S: Did your mother ever tell you what were her qualifications to live there?

M: She said she thought it was an income level. She doesn't recall what the maximum was, but she said our income at the time was between \$280 and \$300 a month. So we did meet the requirements.

S: What year was this?

M: This would be 1949. My dad worked for the post office then.

S: So, she says it was income. The whites and blacks were segregated, but do you remember any ethnic groups that maybe were segregated or were the whites all mixed together?

M: The whites were all mixed together, there weren't any groups that were specifically here or there. There were people of all nationalities.

C: Do you remember any of, say they checked up on you or...

M: You mean like inspected your apartment to be sure you were maintaining things?

C: Yes. Do you remember any of that?

M: No, they didn't. That I would recall, but if you had something that needed repaired they did have a maintenance department that would come and fix things. If you had plumbing that was wrong or something electrical wrong, but that didn't happen very often; you didn't have to pay for that service, it was included in your rent. You never had to pay for anything, unless it was some specific damage that maybe you had done. If it was just something that routinely broke down they came and took care of it.

There was another interesting thing, and I think my mother forgot about it, that is, over the summer months you were designated times to cut certain sections of the lawn. They supplied the lawn mower. I can remember us kids, my sister and I were the oldest, so we had to mow.

I don't know if any of your other interviews told you that they would allot you two specific wash days. Of course with six kids in the family you had a lot of laundry. I mean, just take your baskets and there was a laundry room in the basement of...Well, the way the apartments were set up were in circles, and for so many buildings--we had a whole circle there. I forget how

many buildings there were--there was one laundry room. You weren't allowed to have an automatic washer, wringer washers only. They had four sets of double, stationary tubs that were all in a little square along the wall. It was a huge room because you used to be able to store your washing machine along the walls. My mother said she always took her wringer out and her agitator and take those home because somebody would steal it if you left it. My mom had two days a week to wash and between certain hours. Adjacent to the washing room were drying rooms. There was a door to go through and there was forced heat in there and lines. You didn't have dryers; you weren't allowed to have electric dryers, but somehow they had forced air heat; it was like a cage. I don't remember how many there were, maybe six, eight, and there would be lines in there. It was all closed in wire, each section, so nobody could steal your clothes. You took a lock along, you closed the door, and you locked your clothes in. It took maybe three or four hours for your clothes to dry and then you'd go back in and take your clothes down because it would be someone else's turn to wash. You had a four hour period for your wash and your dry then you were supposed to clear out so the next person could have their time.

C: Every week that was?

M: My mom got twice a week because she had so many children. I think if you had a smaller family you only had to go once a week, or some of the senior citizens maybe only once every two weeks.

C: When you were young living there, what grade school did you go to.

M: We went to St. Anne's on West Federal Street.

C: Since this was the low income, did anyone ever make any remarks to you, like, "Why do you live down there?" Did you have any thoughts of why you lived there and not in a regular home like you do today.

M: No, that's where we lived. Well, like the school we went to, there were, I don't know what percentage...I would say there was a great percentage of my classmates that lived in the housing development, maybe thirty percent. The rest lived in the surrounding community. I don't think anyone thought anything of it. They were nice apartments to be living in.

C: Yes, they were well constructed and everything.

M: It was always well maintained.

C: Yes, it was.

M: So, I don't think anybody thought anything of it.

C: It was just like living in an apartment today or something. What were some of the good things and some of the bad things living at Westlake, you could just expound upon them if you'd like.

M: I think as compared to living rurally like we do now, I don't think you ever wanted for anything to do as a child. There was always the playground across the road and there were things to do there. In the summer there was a pool there, Chase. I don't know if the playground was called that too. I know we lived there at the pool, in the summer, and the playground. You never wanted for other children to play with.

Probably, what I remember as bad, maybe starting two years before we moved, things really...I would say the blacks were starting to outnumber the whites in the apartment. The blacks were getting very aggressive towards the whites, as far as the young people were concerned. I think my mother was really...I was accosted several times, beat up a couple of times by groups of blacks. I course, I had a big mouth. So I'm not saying that it wasn't warranted maybe once or twice. That was probably the one thing that really was the only bad thing that I would ever think of. The neighbors there were good to each other. If somebody was hurting for money, needed something, there wasn't any neighbor that you couldn't go to and get something off of. One thing that sticks in my mind that is a sort of humorous; we had a neighbor whose husband had a drinking problem and everybody knew if one of the children came over to borrow anything that had alcohol in it, you didn't give to them.

C: Vanilla?

M: Anything. My mother said you don't give them vanilla, rubbing alcohol, or any kind of extract, no cough syrup. That's just like a way a lot of us looked out for each other. There was another young girl, I think their family name was Frohman. Their daughter--I don't know what was wrong with her legs--didn't walk right. I can remember she had surgery on her legs where they opened them all the way up from the knee all the way to the heel in the back. We'd take turns pulling her around in

the wagon because she had casts for a while. I think the kids were always very considerate of each other. When we were real young, when it was all white right there, were very considerate of each other and helpful. The Cox family, their boy had polio and was in a body cast for quite a long time and the kids didn't think anything. I think he went to public school but when they were home, I know different kids took turns taking him to school and things like that. We played baseball a lot; we played a lot of games on that blacktop. After school, Saturday, Sunday, we played baseball games and mudgutter and Mother May I. You name it, we played it for hours on end. That was the thing to do after supper and we always made sure that these kids were part of it. If they couldn't physically participate, they were there; they were our rooting section.

C: That was very nice. It seemed you had a good relationship with people.

M: It was a community then and not just an complex.

C: I think it's a lot more concern. My brother-in-law--he lives in Denver--lived in an apartment and said you never knew your neighbors and you didn't know what was going on. Here I think people really intermingled even though you went to different churches and you went to different schools. You played together and you made friends and a lot of your friendships lasted a long time.

M: So you had a good childhood experience there?

C: I don't really have any...No until close to the time that we were going to move can I ever think of any bad experiences, or being afraid.

M: Do you ever drive by what's there now, what do you see that changed over the years as you just drive by? What are your impressions from when you lived there to now?

M: I haven't been to the inside part, but just the exterior, I'd say they don't keep it up as well. The whole general neighborhood there, there's a lot of debris that is always around. I do see that they have made improvements though. We never had storm windows or storm doors when we lived there.

C: Was it warm in the winter there?

M: They had--probably still do have--the steam heat. No I'd say at night it got cold. They shut off the heat at

night. It was shut off for certain hours of the night and then it came back on in the morning. In the winter, your bedroom windows, you could write on them. There would be frost when it was real cold, a quarter of an inch thick because there were no storm windows on there and then they shut the heat off so that allowed it to build up. Once the heat came on, it warmed up pretty quickly and the frost would melt off.

C: What other impressions did you get?

M: I know one thing. I don't know if they still do it there, but I know when we moved the first time, my mother said, "We're never going to have yellow walls again as long as we live." All the walls in every apartment and every ceiling was painted pale yellow.

C: In every apartment?

M: In every apartment. If something needed repainted that was what they came with, their old yellow paint. You could paint it yourself or the maintenance men would come in and paint the room for you, but it was always the same color, yellow. All the metal trim was a brown color, not a dark brown, but a medium brown color.

C: Tell us about the inside of the apartment, yours or all of them being same.

M: You came in through the kitchen in ours. You came in the door and there to the right was your cabinets. They were all metal and they were always only painted white; you weren't allowed to stick decals of them, nothing. The sink was right below the cupboards.

C: What kind, a double sink?

M: No, a large single sink with a drainboard along side of it. The drainboard and the sink were porcelain and there were cupboards underneath and over in the corner was a stove, the oven was little.

C: You had six children in there?

M: Yes, there were three bedrooms. My parents were divorced when I was in first grade, so in 1952, up until that time my three brothers had one room and we three girls had one bedroom. We three girls shared one bed and I think my three brothers probably did too. My youngest brother may have slept in a crib for quite a while. Then after my father wasn't with us anymore, my

younger sister moved in the bedroom with my mother and we had a little more room. For years the three girls, we slept in one big double bed together.

We had linoleum on all of our floors. I don't think that was any type of requirement, I just think we probably couldn't afford any type of carpeting. At the time, you weren't allowed to paint. At first you weren't allowed to put any paint on the floor. You just bought linoleum that went into your corners all the way or as close as you could get it. The kitchen was large because my mother had our table in there and she had one free standing cupboard; one that we bought ourselves. It was a big, white metal cabinet with a door on it. Out radiator was over in the corner. My mom kept her sewing machine in the kitchen. The living room was approximately the same size as the kitchen. Your only downstairs closet was in the living room. It was a fairly big closet because there was room in the back where you could store some boxes and things and hang your coats and things in there.

C: At this time, did they have doors on the closets?

M: Yes, there were doors on the closets just like a door with no windows, just a regular wooden door. The doors were all wood. We had two entrances. One that went into the kitchen which came off of the playground area, and then you had a front door. It opened up and the stairway was right above it. It was sort of just a little, mini, hall that went upstairs and gave you access to your living room. If you went straight up the steps, you went right into the bathroom first. I think there was a metal medicine cabinet hung on the wall above the sink which was just a free standing sink. It wasn't closed in underneath; you could see the plumbing go right into the floor and the bathtub. There was no linen closet there. In each bedroom there was a closet. I don't remember where my mother kept her linens, maybe my sister will. There was a nice sized closet in every bedroom. She said there was a linen closet.

C: How were the bedrooms set up? Were there closets in each room?

M: Yes, there was a closet in each bedroom. I think the bedroom my sister and I shared for the longest time, I think it was the biggest bedroom. It had a double space for a double door, I don't know if they supplied a curtain rod or my mother just put it up, but we just had a curtain that hung down over the closet.

C: Anything else about Westlake you remember or would like to share?

M: No, if I think of something I'll tell you, but maybe my sister might trigger something. She recall, I think, a lot more than I do. I think it was good growing up there. Even though we went to Catholic School...I went to kindergarten at Covington. We had good comradeship no matter where you went to school or what your religious background was. I wanted to add one little thing. I don't know if anyone else told you, but there was a St. George Hall on the corner. They'd have wedding receptions and there was also a tavern on the corner there too.

C: On which corner?

M: West Federal and Madison. There was a tavern on the corner and next to it was St. George's Hall where they would have wedding receptions and things like that.

C: Did these wedding receptions get crashed? Did you go in and get some food?

M: Right, that was a big deal. There would be a group of us, maybe six or eight kids in the neighborhood. We would get on our Sunday church clothes and we'd go down and get a free meal and dance to the band.

C: No one ever knew?

M: No. Here's two families and maybe the people have never met before, so they don't know who the children belong to. They can't keep track of everybody's kids. We used to get all dressed up and we'd go down and have ourselves a free meal and dance, stay an hour or so, and go home.

C: Fun times, huh? Anything else like that, any happenings?

M: I know we walked to school.

C: You walked. There were no buses.

M: There were buses.

C: But not to a Catholic School, right?

M: Well, the one bus, yes we could. I remember a couple of times we took the bus to school, but only if it was really pouring down rain. We still had to walk a

little ways from where the bus stop was to our school. It was rare if we took the bus. Now, my sister was in high school and so was I--I was there my whole freshman year of high school--and we walked. I walked over to Ursuline. Maybe when I started at Ursuline that was the first time I was embarrassed of where I came from. There were a lot of very wealthy, young people there.

C: At Ursuline.

M: Right, at that time they came from up around Crandall Park and the Liberty area. So that was the first we felt that you were the lower class and there was an upper class.

C: Did that continue through your high school years, or just in that early time?

M: No, I think it with me it stayed, even though we moved out of that area. I had a lot of friends that lived over on the east side which was a lower class too. It seemed like it didn't take you very long to sort out what kids would accept you. There were some wealthy kids. There were a couple of girls that were doctor's daughters that didn't care who or what you were, they accepted you for what you were. There were several other cliques. The boys didn't care, they didn't care who you were, where you came from, or anything else, they were willing to be friends with everybody. Some of the girls were very snobbish, they had their own little clubs and you just didn't get into them because you lived here or you lived there. It was only their own little cliques.

C: So that was about the first time that you kind of realized that Westlake wasn't up to par with their neighborhoods?

M: Right.

C: Was it already starting to get labeled? Like Westlake, you live in Westlake?

Interviewee's sister: It wasn't called Westlake, they called them the projects.

M: Right, we just called them the projects.

C: No one ever termed it Westlake, it was always the projects?

M: Right, I never heard that term until after I was married and somebody asked me. They said, "Oh, did you grow up in Westlake Terrace?" I said, "Where do you mean?" Then when they said the inner section and I said yes, he said, "Well, what did you call it when you lived there?" We just called it the projects.

C: You never even termed it Westlake?

M: Not until I was married was I aware that that was the term.

When we got a little bit older, we used to go down and pay the rent. I think our electric was separate because on the sides of the buildings every individual apartment had its own electric meter. I can remember going down and paying that. Periodically, my mom said they would have re-evaluations. You would have to go down and fill out a paper that wanted how many people or what your income was. After my dad left, we went on ADC (Aid to Dependent Children), so that our income level changed then. She said periodically you had to go down, maybe it was annually, or every couple of years. She said she couldn't remember how frequently, but you would have to go down and fill a paper out on how many people were living with you now and what your income was. My mom, to get a little extra money and not let anybody know, used to clean house for a couple of people. It gave you a little bit of income, but you didn't dare let anybody know. Sometimes if a neighbor was mad at you for some reason, and it did happen a couple of times, somebody reported her. My mother never knew who. I don't think it made any difference in our rent but they cut my mother off of ADC one month.

C: Really? For one month only?

M: For one month because then she went back down and told them she quit the job. There was no way she could have supported us.

C: They supplemented your rent, the money you had to pay for your rent and you had supplement for that or you just got that and you had to pay the regular price?

M: Right, at that time they gave you a check; you got a check in the mail every month. Out of that my mother was supposed to be able to take the rent out and take out for our clothing and food. If you had medical bills, all you had to do was go to your doctor and you got the bill and turned it into welfare and they would take care of it all. They were really good about that. There

were free child clinics that you could take to get your injections and things like that so, that helped out that way. My sister and I have both worn glasses from the time we were in kindergarten or first grade and they allowed you once every two years to get a new pair of glasses, but if something happened to them they would not replace them. You had to take care of them, that was your responsibility, because you were only allowed to get them every so often.

C: So being at Westlake was a good experience for you?

M: Yes. I think the time my mom decided to move out, I think she realized it was the right time. She had three daughters that were just getting into their teenage years. I used to cut through to go to church. We used to cut across where Chase Pool was, there was a big park there. Well, it was a heck of a lot closer if you cut through that park than to walk all the way around. One time, I was going to Confession, and I went through there on a Saturday afternoon or morning and two black boys jumped me. We moved about a month or two after that happened.

C: For no apparent reason?

M: No apparent reason. After that incident...Nothing really happened, they were just...

C: You weren't severely hurt were you?

M: No, they were mostly just trying to scare me. They took turns just lying on top of me, one would hold me down. They didn't take any clothes off or anything, I think it was just a jolly. I was about twelve and they were about the same age or a little younger. There were two of them and only one of me and that really shook me up. It wasn't too long after that that we moved from there. It was starting to get to the point where like after dark you didn't feel safe walking.

C: Exactly what year did this take place?

M: It was probably in the late 1950's. About eighth grade, 1957 or 1958, starting around there. Then, even our circle there was mixed. I'd say forty percent in our circle by that time were black. It seemed like they didn't move the black the way up. It seemed like they started...We were just right at the bottom of the circle there, or right at the bottom or the...The beginning of the crossover of the black and the white, seemed like maybe they moved them in our area a little faster than

further up the hill. I can remember as kids we didn't have a fear of walking anywhere no matter what time of day it was. I can remember towards the end before we moved, I was really fearful of going out after dark.

C: Anything else you would like to add?

M: No, I think that is probably about it.

C: Okay, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW