

BARB GAGEN

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Interviewer Damian Macey

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, September 2016

D: This is Damian Macey and I am with the Marshall Library Project and I am sitting in the kitchen of Barb Gagen who lives just north of Marshall on Route 1. With that, I introduce Barb Gagen...

B: Hello, I am Barbara Gagen and I have lived here in Marshall all of my life. I was born here and all my brothers and sisters were born here. My father is from here and my mother is from Paris.

D: Did you live in town or out in the country?

B: We lived mostly in town. Now it would be considered out of town but then it was considered in town.

D: Did you go to school in Marshall?

B: I went in Marshall all of my twelve years. I went to grade school at South school and then to the high school where it is now.

D: Would you describe the neighborhood where you grew up...

B: We had a pretty good neighborhood, all the neighbors were friendly. There were a lot of kids, more boys than girls. Girls didn't get outside like the boys, we mostly stayed pretty close to home.

D: I bet you had some chores to do...

B: Yes, we did have a lot of chores to do. Especially like curtains in the spring, they were hung up on stretchers to dry. And then we had a washing machine, of course we didn't have clothes dryers so the laundry had to be hung out on the line. In the winter time the clothes were hung in the house which was aggravating because you had to dodge clothes, they were hung mostly in the dining room and kitchen. There was a stove in the kitchen with a reservoir.

D: Explain what a reservoir is.

B: It was just a little area on the stove where you heated water. Like to wash dishes or anything else that needed washing. We had a refrigerator, but it wasn't like the refrigerators that we have now. Ice was delivered sometimes in the summer, twice a week, usually on Tuesday or Wednesday and then on Saturday so that you would have it over the weekend.

D: As I recall the gentleman that delivered the ice knew where to deliver because you would put a card in the window.

B: Yes, he delivered either 25 or 50 pound blocks. And the kids job was to empty the water out of

the refrigerator from the melted ice.

D: And if someone forgot that?

B: Ha Ha...generally speaking you didn't forget. And another thing, when the ice man would come, he would have to chip the ice to get the right weight and he would carry it in on an insulated cover he put on his back. Well, the ice chips would fall into his truck and us kids would all go and eat up the ice chips.

D: I did that too, my dad delivered ice.

B: Mr. Smitley was our ice man.

D: I believe he had the ice plant, as I remember.

B: I can't remember his first name.

D: Was it Cleo?

B: No, I don't think so. But there was a Cleo Smitley.

D: Thinking back do you think neighborhoods are different nowadays?

B: Oh, I would say that neighborhoods were friendlier back then. Seems like you helped each other out more when help was needed. I don't know how to describe it ...

D: I think people were just more sociable back then.

B: Well, kids don't play outside anymore. And back then we didn't have the toys that kids have today. We had balls and bats to play with. My brother bought me my first bicycle with money he made shining shoes. He bought it at Western Auto.

D: Did you say that was your brother?

B: Yes, my brother.

D: Sounds like you had fun even though you didn't have a bunch of toys to play with.

B: Oh yeah, we played outside under the street lights at night. We used to play Andy Over and just a lot of kids games. Black Jack, marbles, jump rope or sometimes we would just sit on the curb and visit and talk.

D: That's the type of things that people just don't do anymore. Even adults, just don't seem to visit much. We are too busy on our cell phone. What is something that you remember vividly about school?

B: The teachers, I can remember all my teachers. And some of the teachers were very friendly and you participated a lot in class and then some teachers were ? especially of principal who was Cora

Church. Mrs. Cork was my first grade teacher, second grade was Mrs. Ingram? and then my third grade teacher was Clara Claypool and my fourth grade teacher was Mrs. Redlan and my fifth grade teacher was Mrs. Finkbiner. Some of those teachers would teach other grades too, Mrs. Cork was also my eighth grade teacher and Mrs. Geisert was my seventh grade teacher. Do you remember Mrs. Geisert?

D: Yes, she was my wife's favorite teacher in high school. She taught English. You had her as an elementary teacher?

B: Yes, all my teachers were pretty good teachers, I thought, they had pets. I mean...you really knew...my sister was one. She was tiny, just little, and they just all kind of took a liking to Norma. I guess I was just bossier...I guess I had to take care of my sister, she was about a year younger than me, and I had the responsibility of seeing that she didn't get into any trouble.

D: Do you have hobbies? I see you have some collections here.

B: Oh yeah, I collect coins.

D: Did you start that as a youngster?

B: Most of this stuff I collected after I got married.

D: What else have you collected? I see some plates.

B: I just gave some gold coins to my girls. (inaudible) Most of them were early 1900's but you know, I don't remember where I got these coins. I would say when gold really wasn't talked about much, you know. Wasn't given any special interest till now.

D: I see you have a pet, did you have a pet as a child?

B: A pet?

D: Yes, pet, like a dog or cat?

B: I had a dog and he would follow me to school and he would stay there until I came out to go home. There was another thing I did ... on the way to school there was a ditch that had lots of violets growing...I would pick violets and take them home to mom.

D: Did you take them to your teachers too?

B: Not too much. Some teachers I liked, I liked Mrs. Finkbiner. And Mrs. Claypool was different... I don't think she had any brothers or sisters so didn't interact with kids too well. And Mrs. Redlan, and my fifth grade teacher, I'm trying to think what her name was... she ran over a little girl later in life.

D: Looking out at your kitchen...how did meal preparation differ from when you were a child? Using the stove with the reservoir...I bet that was really cold.

B: It was cold. You started the stove with coal.. we had a garage and we didn't have any inside bathroom. We didn't have the sewer then.

D: How about the preparation of food with the old stove?

B: Mom would get up really early and start the stove. Dad always had to get up really early (inaudible) He was a policeman here in Marshal for a long time.

D: And his name was?

B: _____ Ferris...they called him Buddy. And he also worked out at the scales. He was also a councilman and the mayor here.

D: Tell us how (inaudible) and did a lot to help protect the public.

B: John Gagen. I met John in high school. He went off to service when he was seventeen years old. 33rd field hospital...we had a retirement dinner for him. He came back and Frank Gard bought John _____ and his gun. John used to help the farmers. When John was twelve years old he moved in with Frazier's. He was treated just like a son and he moved in with them. What happened was that John's mother had two children and she went to work for the children's home and she was only allowed one children so Garver said he could live with them so they raised him. Then he went to the service and went back down there. But he didn't graduate because he went to the service so quickly, but he did eventually get a diploma and graduated.

D: So you know each other

B: We knew each other from mainly high school.

D: And in what year were you married then?

B: We were married in 1946.

D: Well I know he had a lot of friends, people thought well of him.

B: Yeah, he was a good person. He helped a lot of people out who had had too much to drink. He didn't want to see them go to jail. He would come home and change out of his uniform and into civilian clothes so he wouldn't be considered an officer of the law and help them out.

D: He was what you would call a "people person".

B: Yes, he was. He helped a lot of people and when he passed away people said most didn't know how he helped people. Another job he did was construction. It was just an extra job that he liked to do. He loved heavy equipment. So he would go do that job after his state police job.

D: I remember one time you did a program at the library about your job at Velsicol. Would you tell us a little about that?

B: Velsicol Corporation had been in Marshall quite a while and they were short of people because a lot of the younger men were gone to the service and I went to work in the lab. Mr. McKenna was the chief chemist and he taught me all about weights, measurements. And I still remember several of the girls that worked out there. There was Emma Fritcher, Wanda Veach, Teresa Connerton, Dorothy Garwood.

D: So you worked primarily in the lab?

B: I worked in the lab and I used to go down to the yard to pick up samples. John Edwards was there, (inaudible).

D: Did you work there for some period of time?

B: After World War II was over the men started coming back from the service and that's when John and I started going together.

D: So that work in the lab, did you ever feel uneasy, was there any danger?

B: No, I never felt in any danger, I felt like I knew what would blow up and what would not. The only thing I ever blew up was a can of chicken noodle soup.

D: In the lab?

B: Yes, I put it on a hot plate not realizing that you had to put a hole in the can. And it blew noodles all over the ceiling. We girls spent all evening cleaning that up. The guys used to torment the girls. The men would bring samples up from the yard and we would have to test the samples to make sure they were ready for shipment.

D: From the lab job, did you go into another job there?

B: No, when I was about a sixth grader, I wanted to become a nurse. I remember thinking I wanted to be like Florence Nightingale. But I didn't have any way to get to a nursing school. So back in the late 60's that I went to school. My Gina was nine, she was the youngest child, and I started going to school at Ivy Tech. I actually graduated with honors. I loved nursing. I worked at Union Hospital for several years. Then John got sick and I stayed home to take care of him. Then they called from Burnside's and wanted me to go to work and I worked there. (inaudible)

D: So how long did you work at Burnside's?

B: I worked there about five years.

D: That's an interesting change...from blowing up chicken soup to working as a nurse.

D: Could you think back on all the outstanding events that have happened in your life and tell how it might have changed your life?

B: I don't know if it changed my life but it was on a Sunday, I was listening to the radio because I

didn't have a TV, my brother was in the service and I heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. No one thought that that was something that could even happen, just couldn't happen and you know, by mother turned gray overnight. Come to find out, his ship was in the Pacific (inaudible) Mother didn't know where he was. I later got a letter that said they had silenced everything .

D: Have you had an opportunity to visit the Pearl Harbor site?

B: Yes, I have, it is very impressive.

D: It is a very emotional place to be.

B: Oh, yes, to think about all those young men who are in that ship...

D: Even today you can see bubbles of oil rising.

B: (several inaudible thoughts) I've been a lot of places, been to Ireland. While we were in New York, Janice met a man and she married him and would you believe his name is Gagen? Right now she's in Mississippi. She travels a lot, she works in Chicago.

D: What would you say are some modern day conveniences that have made a big difference in your life?

B: I would say the modern convenience in my house is, the biggest convenience is the refrigerator. That's something that saves a lot of (inaudible).

D: A lot of people say the TV set....but I could live without a TV.

B: I couldn't live without a radio, I don't listen to it much but A radio was one thing we did have when we were kids...it was a Zenith. And I can remember the first television we had a television on North Fifth St and it was a fifteen inch...in a box. There have been a lot of things that have changed since I was a kid. Several things were manual and now they are electric. And I like a microwave...I use it a lot of times.

D: And a lot of people think of a washer and dryer being the biggest convenience...not having to hang clothes in the house..

B: You can always hang them on the outside line. My daughter's daughter...she lives in Georgia.. her husband is in the Navy...she doesn't hang anything that is (?)

D: Some communities don't allow outside clotheslines. But there's nothing like the sun to make clothes soft. (inaudible)

B: You didn't realize that then but now, (inaudible) You didn't go to a doctor back then. If you went to a hospital, you were about to die. Chloe (I assume a dog) are you tired of us talking? Chloe, can you tell him what a good girl you are?

D: You are such a cutie...

D: Perhaps you met someone in Ireland or Mexico, and you were trying to tell them about Marshall... what would you say?

B: The first thing I would tell about Marshall is that it is small. I don't know what the population is now, but

D: We've got 4000 on the sign now.

B: If I was to describe Marshall, I don't know ... we've got 2 grocery stores, IGA and Walmart, I can't think of anything I would especially want to tell.

D: Would you say it's a good place to live?

B: I think Marshall has changed a lot since I was a child. When I go places like the Fall Festival I see many people I don't know. They could come from another town, Terre Haute,.... (inaudible)

D: I think out of town people do come to the Fall Festival. You said during the 30's and 40's people just didn't have cars. Was that primarily because they (several inaudible thoughts about cars)

B: And another thing is that when you would drive into a gas station the attendant would check the lights, tire, etc. There isn't anyone to service a car anymore. But you are still charged a big price.

D: Back then if you got a dollars' worth of gas, it would get a ways.

D: Well, it has been a real delight. I think this is the kind of thing that people will enjoy in the future. This tape will be in the library.

B: So many things have changed since I was a little kid. Another thing I want to tell you is I have never had bought clothes, my mother made our clothes, even our coats which were sometimes made from your dad's old coats. But it kept you warm...because we walked to where we needed to go.

D: Thanks again for taking time to talk today.

B: You are welcome.