

Beth Macke Transcript

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Damian Macey: Interviewer

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, January 2018

D: Today, I am in the lovely home of Beth Macke to do an oral history for the Friends of the Library. Beth is not originally from Marshall, but she has been a resident for many years, and a teacher. This will probably be the only interview with a doctor's wife. So with that, I will introduce you to Beth Macke.

B: First of all, it's an honor to do this, and I will start with where I was born. I was born in Flora, Illinois, on February 11, 1953. My older brother and I were both born in Flora because St. Anthony Hospital in Effingham had burned in 1949 (many lives were lost in that fire). The new hospital was completed by the time my younger sister was born in 1954. My father and mother both came from Beecher City in Effingham County. My dad grew up on a farm, but became a banker and an insurance agent. He was president of the Stewardson National Bank, later known as the Prairie National Bank. My mother taught school in a one-room school house, returning to Eastern Illinois University to complete her bachelor's degree. With four young children, she went on to earn her master's degree from the University of Illinois. She taught fifth grade in Stewardson, and later in the Stewardson-Strasburg School District.

B: My parents were Ray and Florence Richards. They were both born in 1923, my father passed away in 2006, and my mother is still living. She is almost 92 (my mother passed away in 2017). While I was in high school, I worked at a little shop called Lake Paul Custard Stand in Stewardson. The mayor of our town was our neighbor, and he owned the custard stand. We would sell fishing bait, hamburgers, and custard ice cream. We would go to work at noon, and work until 10 pm. We earned 50 cents an hour, except on 4th of July when we earned \$10.00.

D: Did you actually have a car hop service?

B: No, the customers would come to the window and order. The farmers would come in late in the evening, get a hamburger and custard, and sit and talk for hours. The owner had a little golf cart that he would let us use to drive around the lake that was there. That was a good memory.

D: Did you do any cooking?

B: We fried hamburgers, made ice cream custard sundaes, and wiped everything down at night. The owners would come before closing and clean the machines.

I graduated from Stewardson-Strasburg High School in 1971, in a class of 44. When I was in high school, I enjoyed being involved in National Honor Society, student council, cheerleading, newspaper staff, yearbook staff, and FBLA. In the fall of 1971, I went to Eastern Illinois University. I pledged a sorority, Sigma Kappa, and made lifelong friends there. I majored in elementary education, and wanted to teach kindergarten. I finished student teaching in Champaign on a Friday in December, and the following Monday, I began teaching third grade in Streator, Illinois. This was an open concept classroom, with two third grades together, and the other third grade teacher and I would team teach. The next year, Streator was talking about budget cuts, and non-tenured teachers were afraid we'd be cut. I had a teacher friend who invited me to Peoria to look around. This friend, Paula had a blind date for me, with Steve. Paula's husband, David, and Steve were good friends and medical rotation partners at the University of Illinois in Peoria. I fortunate to get a kindergarten teaching job in East Peoria. Steve and I had both gone to Eastern, but hadn't known each other. We began dating and later got engaged. Steve graduated from the University of Illinois School of Medicine in June 1976. We were married on June 19, 1976. My younger sister, Julie, married Al Krietemeier on June 13, 1976, so my parents had two weddings in one week!

Steve started his residency in Rockford and I got a job teaching kindergarten in Belvidere. Our son, Chris was born January 11, 1978, and our daughter, Megan was born February 25, 1979. Those were two of the worst winters. My dad brought my mom to Rockford to stay when Chris was born, but because of the snow, he couldn't come back to get her for two weeks. The time in Rockford, away from our families, made us realize that we would really like to be closer to

family and grandparents. Our third child, Maria, was born in March 6, 1981, at Union Hospital after we moved to Marshall.

When Steve was finishing his residency, we looked at places closer to home, like Effingham and Marshall. And, of course, we came to Marshall. Dr. George was here, and he took Steve under his wing. It couldn't have worked out better.

D: Were your parents disappointed?

B: I don't think so. I was so much closer than I had been, and would now be just an hour away from them.

D: Your first impression of Marshall...

B: Growing up in a town of 750 people, we would go to Shelbyville, Mattoon, and Effingham to shop, see movies, and see movies. When Steve first began practicing at Cork Medical Center, there was a welcome reception. I remember Rita Tarble and the board of directors' wives helped with the reception. I didn't know anyone at the time, but looking back, I can remember the faces of many of those who were there. When we first moved back to Marshall, we lived on old Route 40, not too far from Lawrence's. We lived there from 1979 until 1986. Our house was well built, but with three little ones and being on the busy highway was not good. All three of the children got to the highway, so we knew we needed to move. We bought our present home on North Eighth Street in 1986. Neal and Grace Hollenbeck had built the house, and soon after it was built, Mr. Hollenbeck died in a car accident. When we looked at the house, we had our kids with us. The girls saw a mink stole laying on the bed, and thought it came with the house. They were so excited (it didn't come with the house)! We did buy some of the furniture at the estate sale.

D: She was a very gracious lady, used to walk a lot and had flowers. And, if I was working out in the yard and she was walking by, she would stop and visit.

B: I think Clarene Illyes was a good friend of Mrs. Hollenbeck, and she gave us a painting that had been done by Kate Meehling for Mrs. Hollenbeck. Someday, I would like to find a picture of Neal and Grace Hollenbeck. Our home on North Eighth Street was a great place for the kids to grow up. John and Jodie Ferris were across the street, and their children were Allison, Johnny, and Andrew. Allison was a babysitter for the girls, and the boys were best friends for Chris. The

Comerfords lived across the street, and their son Clark was also a best friend. Don and Kathleen McNary, Harold and Candy McConchie were next door, and Omer and Virginia Shawler, Bill and Vernice Tingley, Clarene Illyes, and Judy Rhoads were also neighbors. The Yargus girls were nearby, too, and best friends for Megan and Maria. The neighborhood kids would have whiffle ball games in the backyard of Nellie and Ruth Bennett. So many nice families were close by. Our kids were all lifeguards, either in Marshall or in Casey. A couple of summers, I was director of the Clark County Handicapped Camp. I went back to full-time teaching in 1988. I taught one year for Linda Stephens, and then taught learning disabilities. At different times, I had classes in all four Marshall schools. While the kids were small, I was home with them. I was room mother for each of the kids, and I worked at preschool screenings and substitute taught. All three kids attended the Marshall Parent Co-operative Preschool, where they had a teacher and the parents donated their time to help out. That was fun for our kids when they were young.

D: Is there any time in that early time that there were classes in the Ohio Building?

B: No, but I did have classes in the old girls' gym. My classroom was upstairs. In the morning it was the social studies room, and I used the room in the afternoon for learning disabilities. Drivers' education and art were in the basement, and the long study hall room was upstairs in the back. It was a neat old building. I finished my Marshall teaching years at North School, working mostly with fifth grade learning disabilities students. I taught learning disabilities with Joyce Lewis, and she became a good friend. Chris and Megan both had Linda Stephens for kindergarten, and Maria had Carol Halloran. The kids had great teachers – Daralea Smith, Cheryle Parker, Cheryl Marguson, and Vickie Meehan.

Chris graduated from Eastern Illinois University, and teaches in Palestine. He has two daughters, Zaylee and Sydney. Megan graduated from Millikin University, and taught in Mt. Zion. After Megan and Pete's second child was born, Megan "retired." They now have four children: Emma, Isabel, Olivia, and William. So, Steve and I are blessed with six grandchildren. Our daughter, Maria, passed away December 2, 2014. We love and miss her so much each and every day.

D: When did you retire?

B: I retired at the end of the school year in May 2014. I had actually started teaching in 1974, and 40 years later, I retired. There was a break in those years, when I was home raising the kids. I remember talking to Fred Eitel, and he commented that I had started teaching 40 years earlier. I thought, wow, it was 40 years ago!

So many people have touched my life, with their kindnesses. Dr. George and Millie Mitchell, Omer T. and Ginny Shawler, Isobel McCourt, and “older” Fred Eitel were some of those people. Fred would bring us a plate of home-baked bread, and tell me to keep the plate. He was so sweet. Isobel was kind of an adopted grandmother. She would come for May Day, and ring the back door bell. She would have made little paper cones filled with flowers. Isobel would bring little jars of homemade jelly and would make the kids cookies. So, she was very special to us. Isobel lived on South Fifth Street, and we would go to visit her. Maria would excuse herself, and go try on all of Isobel’s perfumes! Isobel loved to bake, and she would always have something pretty to show us.

Steve and I loved listening to Dr. George’s stories. They would go back and forth to meetings and talk. Steve and Omer had both grown up in the West Union area, so they enjoyed talking about that. I didn’t get to know Millie Mitchell as well as I would have liked, but she was always a sweet person.

One of your questions was how I chose my profession. My mother, aunt, and two uncles were teachers. At the time I grew up in the sixties and seventies, I think most girls thought of becoming nurses, teachers, or secretaries. These seemed to be the most popular professions for girls. When I was sixteen, I quit working at the custard stand and took a nurse’s aide class. I then began working at St. Anthony Memorial Hospital. I enjoyed working with patients at the hospital, but decided nursing wasn’t the best fit for me. I enjoyed being with children, and decided that I wanted to be a teacher.

D: So, you didn’t want to run a restaurant?

B: No, but my maternal grandfather did have a restaurant. My paternal grandfather was a farmer. Steve’s mother was a wonderful cook, and his sisters cook just the same way. The kids loved going down to the farm in the summers. There was always something to do, and his mother enjoyed having family get-togethers. There were lots of cousins, and lots of fun.

I'm not sure how we first met Isobel McCourt, but she invited me to a DAR meeting. My aunt had done all the research, so I was able to become a member of DAR. I remember that the first meeting I went to was in the lovely home of Elsie Lou Huffington.

D: I think Isobel was a founding member of the Historical Society. She was instrumental in helping start the Historical Museum.

B: Isobel is a part of some of my fond memories. She would help with the Historical Museum, and it would be open on Sunday afternoons in the summer. They would have lemonade and homemade cookies, and our family would go. When Marshall had its Sesquicentennial in 1985, Isobel was in charge of the style show at the American Legion. She located vintage and antique clothing, and put the style show together. I believe Rett Smitley was the narrator. I modeled a big floppy black beaver hat that was so hot. I also wore a "Jackie Kennedy style dress" that belonged to Opal Masoner. Jenny Higginbotham, Jack Huffington's granddaughter, and I each wore a vintage dress on the noon segment of WTHI's news show, promoting the Sesquicentennial and meeting Kevin Orput. The kids were in the style show at the Legion. Chris wore my older brother's official Roy Rogers shirt and suede fringed jacket. Megan wore my aunt's official Shirley Temple dress and a dress belonging to Martha Buckner. Maria wore a dress of mine from the 1950s. Marshall also had a Sesquicentennial House Walk, and I was on that committee. The walk featured the homes of John and Sara Tarble, Peggy Hutson, Damian and Eleanor Macey, Alberta Dill, and Jack and Elsie Huffington.

I belong to the Antique Study Club that Isobel started, and it's still going on. I'm a member of the Walter Burdick Chapter of NSDAR, and the Mayflower Society (my ancestor, Edward Fuller, was a Mayflower passenger). Steve and I belong to the Clark County Historical Society. We were also members of Marshall Main Street when Pat McCammon was the director. Harley and Ann Bennet and I helped with the chili cook-off for Main Street, helping to promote the upcoming Jazz Age Chautauqua. I also helped with the Civil War Chautauqua. I believe Jackie Kitchen and Peggy Morris worked on the first Chautauqua style show. Carole Arney let us borrow beautiful dresses that belonged to her aunt, and Megan wore one of

these. Maria wore Connie Richardson's pretty negligee that had been made from a World War II parachute.

D: Connie was in the military.

B: Maybe it was Connie's parachute.

D: It was given to her by another lady. I interviewed her, and she talked about it.

B: We have pictures of the Chautauqua style show and events. The Chautauquas were wonderful. The Chautauquas were centered around different periods in history. These are some of my interests, which involve history and geneology. I enjoy reading, and through relatives' and their research, have learned that I am related to George Armstrong Custer and President Theodore Roosevelt.

As far as jobs, my career has always been teaching, though I did work at a custard stand and as a nurse's aide. Being a wife and mother was always most important to me, and still is. And, now being a grandmother is very important to me, too.

I think a major influence would be the work ethics of my parents and grandparents. After moving to Marshall, several people were positive influences on our lives. Dr. George and Millie Mitchell, Omer and Ginny Shawler, Isobel McCourt, and Fred Eitel all befriended us.

D: As a newcomer to our community, were you made to feel welcome?

B: Yes. I wanted to get to know people, and that had something to do with joining clubs and groups. Steve's family was here, and his sister-in-law, Eleanor, knew lots of people. We met so many wonderful people through our church. Steve's brothers, John and Patty Macke, and Ken and Eleanor Macke, and sister, Alice and Joe Schroeder, all attend the First United Methodist Church. Steve grew up attending the Brick Church near West Union, but since we lived in town, we attended church here. For many years, we came in the church's Seventh Street door, often sitting with or near Dr. George. Dr. George sat in the back row making it easier if he was called out. We sat there, too, so that it would be easier for Steve if he were called out during church. Getting called out doesn't happen anymore, so we sit wherever.

D: Somebody told me that Dr. George was very possessive of "his pew" and if a stranger came in and sat there he would simply ask them to move.

B: I don't think he would ask them to move, but for as long as he went to church, that was always his pew. I remember many times hearing the phone ring in the back, and soon someone would come and tap Dr. George or Steve on the shoulder, and they would leave. We would often go to church in two cars, and I would take the kids. I remember one Sunday, Steve was at the hospital, and the kids and I were in church. They were toddlers, so they were restless and not listening. They were crawling under the pew, and I really wanted them to behave. After church, Harley Bennet said to me that I was the only one that noticed their restlessness and crawling. His words were comforting.

D: You might elaborate more about being a doctor's wife, obviously a doctor is on call many times.

B: Yes, but that has changed. When we first came, the phone would ring at any time day or night. You know, most people would say that a phone call in the middle of the night would scare them, but it became so much a part of our lives that a phone call in the middle of the night wasn't frightening. Often on Sundays, we would go to Sunday School and church, and then go with Steve to the hospital as he made rounds at Union Hospital. He would take us to the doctor's lounge, where we would watch TV and get a snack from a vending machine. The kids would wiggle and giggle, and once Steve was finished with rounds, we'd go out for a late family lunch. So, I guess that was kind of our "Sunday thing." Now our "Sunday thing" is to go to church, Sunday School, and then the Mackes go out for lunch almost every Sunday. Sometimes we eat in Marshall, and sometimes we dine out of town. Usually, there are 8 or 10 of us. I think our families are our best friends. You would think we would run out of things to talk about, but we don't.

D: I remember talking to Dr. George, especially in the earlier years that he would sit down for supper and the phone would ring and he would have to leave. Or they would have plans for the evening and he would get called out. That type of thing would be very hard to adjust to.

B: The kids got to where they could answer the phone, and they would take good messages. Steve covered the emergency room when it was on the lower level of Cork Medical Center, so he was always having to leave in the middle of a meal. I remember Dr. Mitchell saying that he had had ladies in labor in three hospitals at the same time (Union Hospital, St. Anthony Hospital, and Paris). When Megan

had senior night as basketball cheerleader, Steve had a patient in labor. I walked out with her, and Steve was able to make it back to see Megan cheer at the end of the game. Chris, Megan, and Maria knew that Steve getting called out or missing something, was part of growing up. They were proud of him for what he was doing. I'm sure they got a little disappointed, but that was a part of being in this family. I'm sure there is pride in being married to a doctor because you know that they are helping people. Hopefully, that is what we were doing...helping people thru teaching and health care. Steve is still practicing medicine in Clinton, Indiana, (he retired in December 2016), and I am helping in other ways, with my mother and grandchildren.

D: You mentioned your mother, does she live alone?

B: In 1981, my parents moved to Effingham. My mother retired from teaching and my father was still working in the bank. My older brother moved back to Stewardson, and bought their house, so the house is still in the family. He now does the farming and took over my father's insurance business. My mother fell in October 2013, and then moved to the Villas of Hollybrook in Effingham. She is still very sharp, and that is a good thing.

D: Is there someone in your lifetime that has really influence you in your thinking or in your career?

B: There are several. The people that I mentioned earlier, and my parents. My mom and dad lived through the depression, so they had the mindset that if something bad happened, you just kept on going. Steve's mom was very loving, and our families have been influential. When we lost Maria, people were so very kind. I don't think that there was one person, for me, there were many.

D: You have mentioned several people.

B: I think Marshall was so welcoming. I always tried to make a connection as far as who was related to whom, and whose siblings were whose, just trying to get to know who people were. I want to know people, because this is our home.

D: In a small town, there are so many related to so many of the town.

B: Maybe it's a part of my age now, because with all the students that I've had, I often ask them who their parents are, and now, I'd have to ask who their

grandparents are. I think you can connect better knowing families. Another thing I enjoy is art. I keep thinking I will sign up for classes at the Gaslight Art Colony.

D: Is there a particular historical event that has had a big impact on you?

B: I think growing up in Stewardson, I was not aware of a lot of things. I was aware of Viet Nam, and my older brother had a number that probably would have been called. I remember my parents telling him to study and keep his grades up. I didn't know a lot about civil rights, until I got to college. I could tell you, as most people can, exactly where I was when President Kennedy was assassinated. I remember school being cancelled, and watching his funeral on television. A fifth grade classmate's father was watching tv as Lee Harvey Oswald was killed. Another event I remember, was while I was a student at Eastern. Students were encouraged to listen to Gerald Ford speak at Lantz Gym (the talk was that someday he would be President because of President Nixon's and Vice-President Agnew's political indiscretions). I remember streakers on EIU's campus in the 70s. I also remember hearing on the radio that John Lennon had been shot.

D: We have so many modern conveniences today, is there any one thing you feel you just could not live without?

B: This sounds terrible...cellphones. I love staying in touch with family, children, and friends. It is just so nice to be able to be in touch all the time. I remember the first cell phone we had, it was a bag phone for the car. If you're without a dishwasher, washer, or microwave today, it's a big deal.

D: If you were in Europe or some foreign country, what would you tell them about Marshall and why they might want to visit?

B: I think I would say that it's a charming, old-fashioned historical town. It's a friendly place with good schools and wonderful people, and it's close to larger towns. I enjoy the Friday night summer band concerts with ice cream socials, and it's a great place to raise a family. It's just a pleasant little town.

D: Beth, thank you for doing this interview for the Friends of the Library.

B: Thank you, and you are very welcome.