

DONNA SANDEFER TRANSCRIPT

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Interviewer: Steve Arney

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, June 2017

S: I am here to interview Donna Sandefer for the Marshall Public Library Oral History Program. OK Donna, take over...

D: I was born at home in York just two blocks from the Wabash River. The doctor back then came to the house to deliver me. I lived there for nineteen years. I then moved to Florida for a year, came back and worked at TRW for a while. Then we moved again. Back when I was a kid we worked in the garden, that was one of our chores. And we mowed the yard with an old push mower, we helped feed the hogs and the chickens, gathered the eggs, brought coal and cobs in to heat the stove.

I went to four different schools. The first four grades were at York and the old York School is still there.

S: When were you born, Donna, if you don't mind telling us?

D: September 15, 1946.

S: So you started school at York.

D: Yes, they closed that school and someone bought it to live in. Then they transferred us to West York for the fifth grade and then they closed that school. Then they sent us to West Union for sixth grade. And then we ended up at Hutsonville for seventh grade through high school. I graduated high school in 1964.

I just went to my first high school reunion... 50 years...doesn't seem possible. That was three years ago.

S: What was the neighborhood like in York?

D: Very different than today.

S: How many houses were there?

D: Oh, I couldn't tell you...there were a lot of them. And everybody helped one another. When the river would come up we would just help one another. It was like a big close family.

S: How often did the river come up and flood?

D: When I was eleven or twelve was the first one I remember. It was our job to carry our clothes over into my uncle's house. The river floods more often now than it used to.

S: Do you still have family that lives there?

D: I have an aunt...her husband moved her to the hill before he passed away. And I've got a cousin down there. There isn't much left down there anymore.

S: Do you know how York happened to be settled?

D: My grandmother has talked about that but I don't remember much about that. Far back as I can remember is the ferry. I remember our truck pulled onto it and the chickens ended up in the river. Poor things drown in their coops. That was the last I can remember of the ferry.

S: This is the ferry at York, not the Darwin Ferry?

D: Yes

S: What did you do for leisure activities and fun when you were a child?

D: We played games, us girls had a clubhouse, we played house, we had bicycles we put the pieces together ourselves, we had a little go-cart, things kids today would not think of doing. There wasn't really any place to "hang out", all we had was two bars in York.

S: Two taverns in a little town like York?

D: Yeah, there was actually three of them. Some guy from here came down and built one but it didn't last long.

S: You had some out of town visitors then?

D: We had friends from Kansas that would drive down on Saturday nights and then drive all the way back home. They had kids and they would hang out with us until the bars closed then they would drive back home.

S: Was it kind of a "rough" place?

D: Yes, it was, it's gone now, it burned down.

S: How many kids were in your school room when you were in the one room school?

D: We had about eight grades. I would say there was about 30 of us. That's a lot of kids on one room. I remember my first teacher, Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Frances. I will never forget Mrs. Frances.

S: Was the school heated by a coal stove?

D: Yes

S: Who maintained the fire?

D: I think her husband did. When he would bring her to teacher, he would take care of the stove. Then of course when we went to West York, they had bathrooms. They had heat down in the basement, it was a two story school.

S: Did you have brothers and sisters?

D: I had two sisters. One of them still lives in West Union. They lost their home this last flood, they bought another place in West Union and my other sister lives in Robinson.

S: So you decided to move to Florida?

D: The kid's father, he went down there to look for a job. And he sent for me. I had never been away from home so I didn't know if I could handle it, but I went. We stayed there for about a year. It was a nice place, Pensacola, but I was ready to come home. Then we moved several places after I came back.

S: Places around here?

D: Well, I lived in Hammond, Indiana, one of my kids were born there. And I had one born in Sullivan, the other two were born in Terre Haute.

S: When and where were you married?

D: I was married in Chicago, a judge married us in 1968.

S: So you weren't too long out of high school.

D: No, and that was my second marriage. That was my kids' father.

S: You said you worked at TRW.

D: I worked 36 years at TRW. And I couldn't wait to get out. It was a long 36 years.

S: What kind of work did you do?

D: I worked on the line that made air conditioning parts. Over the years they had all kinds of things, one thing would go out and they would bring in something else. We made heaters when I first started, then I did coil winding, and as those changed, we had to make different parts. I worked with IBM parts for a while. When I quit, we were making airbag component parts.

S: When did you retire?

D: December 31, 2011. Day of freedom for me !!

S: What modern conveniences have affected you most ?

D: My first TV. I was in the fifth grade before we got a TV. After that it was probably a power mower because I mowed the whole neighborhood, I loved to mow. We lived together. I mowed grandpa's and grandma's too. Then the next convenience would be a bathroom. I was a freshman in high school before we got the bathroom. Dad went to work for the state and made more money then so we could afford.

S: Did you have running water?

D: Yes, we had running water for the kitchen sink. Mom would have that but we just didn't get a bathroom till later. I was scared of the dark so it was great to not have to go out to the outhouse in the dark. Dad had run electricity out to the outhouse so we had a light, that was a "biggie". We had well water which is still there. My nephew put a fishing cabin on the property and the well is still there.

S: Speaking of the river, did you fish?

D: My dad and my uncles did. My uncle, Herb Pinkston, sold fish down there. And my Uncle Howard, he helped. The guys all squirrel hunted. We always had plenty of that. Mom always had a huge garden. She would fill the cellar. One year we counted 350 jars. Thank God for that cellar. I wished I had paid more attention to her when she was doing all this. We helped her but my heart just wasn't in it.

S: That was all hard work.

D: I could can green beans but nothing else turned out very good, so I didn't try it again.

S: People used to come from Marshall and Terre Haute to buy fish, didn't they?

D: Yes, my uncle sold a lot of fish. He had one guy who came a long way for the caviar. All those eggs, I don't know how anybody ate those.

S: You never tasted them?

D: No, they didn't look good to me. I don't remember where that guy came from but it was far away.

S: Well, those eggs are considered a delicacy by some people.

D: Yeah, my job was to help wash the fish, we had double sinks so we washed them twice to make sure they were good and clean. Then my aunt would wrap them in paper.

S: Were these carp?

D: They got so that they were going to start throwing the carp back. Carp are so bony. Mom had a fit so they saved the carp for her and she canned it. We made fish patties out of it and loaves. It was good.

S: Any national historical events stand out in your mind?

D: I guess the first one would be the Vietnam War. My first boyfriend joined the service and that was scary. And a friend, knowing that they were there was scary. And President Kennedy's assassination, I was in junior high school and that hit hard. We were real democrats back then. You didn't talk about anybody but democrats.

S: Anything else come to mind?

D: I can't think of anything.

S: How was Hutsonville High School?

D: Yes, I liked Hutsonville.

S: You rode a school bus, I assume.

D: Yes, I rode the bus.

S: Now they are talking about consolidating with Palestine. Is that an issue?

D: Yeah, but I don't understand because there is just part of it and then our part goes there, I guess they are eliminating one of them. I don't understand how they are doing that.

York isn't what it used to be, it's like a big (inaudible).

S: Is there a West York?

D: There are so many people have bought land, because of the high water people don't want to live down there. People are coming from like Chicago and buying the lots and they put their campers on it for summer, they bring four wheelers. And so many homes have burned down and they just let the lots go and it gets like a forest. There is one nice place in town and that's my nephew's place. But mostly it's bad down there. And my aunt is the only, Aunt Kathy and Wayne Schwartz, are the only two left down from when I grew up. I guess the Clark boys are still there. Then as you go out of town there are a few left.

S: Are these out-of-towners that come down?

D: They come from everywhere. The land is cheap and they can fish. It just makes me sick do drive down through there anymore. It was so neat back when I grew up, everybody kept their yards mowed and you didn't see trash anywhere. Of course it doesn't help with the river coming up, now most of them are waiting for FEMA to buy them out. I don't think that is ever going to happen. The flood waters gets higher every time there is a flood. Used to you could track it and you could tell who was going to get it first but anymore you can't tell. This last flood we had, it ruined my sister's house, it was one of the places on higher ground but it got it. It had beautiful hardwood floors but they were ruined and there was black mold in the basement.

S: Is there a West York?

D: This is York,

S: I know, but it there a West York?

D: Yeah, it's just a few miles over the hill. It's just about as bad. People come from everywhere to

get cheap land.

S: I think that about covers it.

D: I enjoyed doing this.