

MARY ANN STEPP TRANSCRIPT

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Damian Macey Interviewer

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, August 2016

D: I am in the living room of Mary Ann Stepp in Marshall. I would like to introduce you to Mary Ann.

MA: Hello, I was born in Union Hospital in Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1942, I don't mind saying that. My parents are Helen Coldren Moore and Basil Moore. I had one sister, Susan, she is two years younger and is married to Paul , also from Marshall. My husband is Terry Stepp who was born in Marshall also. We lived upstairs at the Moore Funeral Home which my family owned. I was away a few years but most of my life I have been in Marshall. There were other children in our neighborhood that we played with, we had a wonderful time. I don't think the neighborhood has changed too much. Although when I was young, across the street was Krock's grocery store, their daughter was Carole Ann. And on the corner was Mead Dunkel's nursing home. That's where Kirchner's is now. And the Catholic Church was across the street to the south. Susan and I spent a lot of time at Smitley's who lived behind us on 5th Street. And behind them was Dr. Frank and Clarene Illyes, my mom's sister, and their children, Bob, Jane, Margaret and Barbara.

D: Mary Ann, some people have the feeling that they could never live in a funeral home, did you ever have that feeling?

MA: That's a good question, no it never bothered me, it was all I ever knew. My parents bought the funeral home when I was very young, I don't remember ever living anyplace else. We were living there when Susan was born. Those were the days when people would come for visitation and just sit and stay, and many times it was for two days. When we were younger, mother and daddy would just have us sit on the steps, where we could see people and when we got older we would stay upstairs. Often times other children would come and we would go upstairs but we always had to remember to not be too loud. If we got too loud mother or daddy would flip the light switch and that was our signal that we needed to quiet down. And in those days, we only had one bathroom upstairs and sometimes people would have to come upstairs to the bathroom, that sounds terrible now, but that is the way it was then.

D: Did people ever venture upstairs out of curiosity?

MA: I don't know that that happened. The hallway up there went straight to the bathroom so we could have the other doors closed. And then we added on to the funeral home they added a bathroom downstairs, I don't remember when that was, late 50's I think.

D: I remember at that time, going back any years, a lot of visitations would take place in the private home. The funeral director would set up and take the body to the home. Did your dad do that much?

MA: I remember daddy talking about that, before he came to Marshall, he worked at a funeral home in ?, Ed Hancock was the funeral director, and I remember him talking about that, I think they even prepared the body in the home, and had the visitation there. And it's possible that he did that in Marshall.

D: Did you have some chores or jobs you and your sister did at the funeral home?

MA: Yes, we did. Before they added on to the funeral home, the chapel was also used to display caskets for sale. So the caskets had to be moved from the "big room". And Susan and I had to set up chairs. And carry in flowers, and then put the chairs away. Mother and daddy would be the ones to place the flowers. As we got older, we would answer the door. We were not allowed to answer the phone until our teen years because at that time the funeral home also had the ambulance service. They couldn't take the chance that a child would answer the phone and not get the right information. So before we were allowed to answer the phone, daddy would put us through some practices calls. We would have to ask who was calling, and what the specific address was, and write it down... I think those were the main questions.

D: I guess this might be a good time to talk a little about your mother and dad. I knew them well, they were such wonderful people. And your dad was always so personable, great to be in that profession, your mother was a wonderful musician. Tell us a little something about them.

MA: I am really proud of my parents. Daddy was born in Mt Vernon. He started school there, when his dad died when he was sixteen and he quit school at that time to help support his mother. Then his mother remarried and moved to Flora and he went back to school and got his high school diploma. Then he went to mortuary school in St Louis. He did some odd jobs, like making shirts, he operated a cleaning business, and worked for Mr. Hancock at the funeral home. And he was working for Mr. Baugh at the funeral home here in Marshall when Mr. Baugh suddenly passed away. And then he purchased the funeral home, somewhere around 1944. I don't know the exact year.

D: Your dad was in Rotary Club and I got to know him there. And I believe he told me that he had a dry cleaning business here in Marshall.

MA: He did, and I don't know exactly know the sequence of all that. I wish I did, but I don't.

D: I think he said it was upstairs on the south side of Archer Avenue. About where Nancy's Gallery is now.

MA: I remember it was upstairs but I don't know the exact location. When mother and daddy where married in 1938, my mother was the second to the oldest of six children. Six weeks after they were married, her mother passed away, she had tuberculosis and in those days that was incurable. And I don't know for how many years she had lived in a little house behind the family home because since tb was contagious that's the way she had to live. That's just what they did in those days. Then two years later mother's father passed away. They were Harry and Anna Coldren. Harry Coldren was the sheriff at one time. So somewhere along in their mother and daddy moved into the

family home.

Mother's sister were Rosamond, she was the older one who never married, Clarene Illyes, Anne Zschau, Emma Jean Fritcher, and there was one brother, Harry who was nicknamed Bill, he lived away most of his life, he was in the service and then married Dorothy and they lived in Maryland. They lived there most of their lives. They did come back here for a few years and lived in the house where Damian and Eleanor Macey now live. So mother and daddy lived for several years in the home on Vine Street with, I think, Rose, Anne and Emma Jean. And then he bought the funeral home and we were there till daddy retired sometime in the 60's, I don't know the exact year. And then Ed Pearce bought the funeral home. Mother and daddy were active in Rotary, in the First Methodist Church. He always did programs on Abraham Lincoln, he was a story teller, told mostly funny stories about Mr. Lincoln, he did a lot of travelling to do those Lincoln stories.

D: I believe he did programs on Will Rogers also.

MA: Yes

D: He told marvelous stories...

MA: There is a book put together about his Lincoln stories. There was going to be one on Rogers but that didn't come to pass. Daddy passed away in 1999.

A little bit about mother...she grew up in Marshall. As I said, her father was sheriff for several years. At the time that he was sheriff, they lived in the home right by the jail that is gone now. And mother was the ? for the prisoners. When mother graduated from high school she got a two year degree from Indiana State Normal in Terre Haute, and she taught in Marshall. Then when she was married in 1938....at that time married women were not allowed to be teachers in Marshall...so she went to Edgar County and taught music. I heard her say that sometimes she had to ford a creek to get to the country school. She was very good teaching music and I think the children were very calm with her and of course for them that was probably quite a treat (to have music taught). I don't know how often they had music. So mother taught and then I was born in December of 1942.

She was very involved in the funeral home with daddy. She helped with the families, she answered the door, answered the phone and played the organ for funerals. She played beautifully. She also did a lot with music in our church, playing the pipe organ and directing the choir and she was the director of the American Legion Auxiliary Choir. They won some nation awards, I think mostly in the 1950's. It was a wonderful group of women and they were also good friends who made beautiful harmony. Two of her sisters were also in the group, Anne Zschau and Emma Jean Coldren. Those women stayed good friends for all the rest of their lives.

D: You could tell by her expression when she played the piano and organ that she really enjoyed playing.

MA: Yes, I'm sure she had a God-given talent. She often played with no music ...she said she just played what was in her head.

D: And that's a real talent. I think your dad told me once that they actually met at an amusement place where she was performing.

MA: The story I've heard is that she played for Rotary...is that what you mean...

D: And that she played at the old theater. There were no sound tracks on films at that time and someone played the piano.

MA: I'm glad you mentioned that,.....I didn't know that...she may have done that when she was in high school. She graduated from high school in 1929 and I don't know when the silent movies were ...but yes, she did that too.

D: Those were wonderful stories about your parents, it's good to have that, now let's switch gears a little bit.... I understand that you were a teacher for a while.

MA: Yes, after I graduated from high school I went to Indiana State and got a bachelor's degree. I graduated high school in 1961, Terry and I got married in 1963. Terry and I taught in LaGrange, IL for a few years, that's where our son Jeff was born. And then Terry came back to ISU as a residence hall director in the late 60's. That was a pleasant experience, we had an apartment in the residence hall... it was Hendrix Hall. Then our daughter Ellen was born. Then after a couple more years we, came to Marshall and bought our home on Spruce Street. That's where we live now, I think we have lived there 44 years. I taught at south elementary school retiring in 2002, I taught 34 years.

D: What grades did you teach?

MA: When I first started at south school the grades went up through six. And then in later years I just had the lower grades. It was a wonderful teaching career. Mr. Bush was superintendent when I was hired. We had a lot of good teachers and the families and parents were always good to work with. It was a good experience.

D: Do you think it could have been a better experience then than now with what seems to me to be disregard and disrespect for teachers?

MA: Yes, I think it's much more difficult today to be a teacher than when I started in the 70's.

D: Has there been an event or a person in your life that made an large impact on your life?

MA: Well of course my parents were a big influence. Mother had been a teacher, I admired my mother very much. And my dad. But I think the person who had a lot to do with my going to college was Mildred Bush. She was a high school teacher. When I graduated from high school in 1961, there weren't very many girls going on to college. And she always encouraged me to go to college, of course, so did mother and daddy, but I think at that age I think you listen more to someone outside your family.

D: Did she teach business?

MA: Yes, she did.

D: You weren't greatly involved in business...

MA: Well, I took some business classes... in those days girls took shorthand and I was in FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) and I worked half days in Mr. Bush's office when he was superintendent. A lot of students then who had their required classes in were allowed to work half a day. And Mr. Bush was also influential in my going to college.

D: I think he was also a good friend of your father's.

MA: Yes, my parents and the Bush's were good friends.

D: Is there a particular part or event of history that stands out to you during your young life?

MA: You mean during my lifetime?

D: Yes

MA: No, I wish I could think of something.

D: You have seen a lot of changes and like automation in school as such, in your lifetime, what modern conveniences have changed your life?

MA: Well, like my iTunes, we started using computers in school while I was still teaching, the old ones that you had to put the disc in the drive, and of course, that has changed so much. I used to substitute teach and in the elementary schools even the students can work on iPad. And also everyone has cell phones. I am certainly not up to speed on all that but the kids and I do it. If we have trouble with our cell phone or our computer, our grandchildren can help us.

D: They say if you can't program your VCR, ask your grandkids to help.

MA: Right

D: All the class rooms in north and south schools have modern technology today.

MA: Yes, and that's wonderful.

D: When you came back home to Marshall from LaGrange, and you lived in Terre Haute for a while, and then you moved back to Marshall, if you were in another country somewhere and you got to know someone quite well, what would you tell them about Marshall, and why it's a good place to live?

MA: It's a small community, it's a well-kept community, the people are friendly, they are just caring, they care about each other. Our schools are very good, our churches are good, we are a good distance from Terre Haute, Indianapolis, and Champaign if you are looking for more to do. We have very nice homes, I think those are the main attributes I would tell someone.

D: Thank you Mary Ann, it's been a pleasant visiting with you and I especially enjoyed talking to you

about your parents. Thank you taking time to contribute an oral history.