

PEGGY LUCAS TRANSCRIPT

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Interviewer: Damian Macey

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, May 2018

D: This is Damian Macey at the Marshall Public Library for the Friends of the Library Oral History Project. I am here with Peggy Lucas, Peggy is not a Marshall native but spent much of her life in Marshall. She now lives in Terre Haute. Here is Peggy Lucas.

P: Hello, I am Peggy Lucas and I was born in Sanford, Indiana in the country at my home. My parents were John and Mary Vermilion, I had two older brothers and an older sister. We lived in the country during our childhoods and went to St. Mary's Village School, a catholic school. And then went to high school at Fayette High School in New Goshen, Indiana. From there I went to Indiana State Teachers College, now Indiana State University. I majored in education and became a teacher. My first teaching job was in Marshall, IL in 1962. I remember that quite well, I had interviewed at South School when it was still the old school. My godmother taught school over here, Mary Heck. She suggested that I come interview because she knew they had some jobs coming up.

I didn't get that job. Marshall is very good about hiring local people and taking care of their own, which is great. Then I went down to Sullivan and had an interview for a second or third grade job and I told them I would think about it. I really didn't want to drive that far. Well when I got home my mom said I had had a call from Charlie Bush and he said to come over tonight to the board meeting because they had a job for me. We had cookies and lemonade served by Mildred Bush and it was just such a homey atmosphere. They hired me that night and I signed my first contract, it was to teach third grade at South School.

D: Out of curiosity, did you leave the room and they discussed you, I would be surprised if they would hire someone that fast.

P: I may have left, I really can't remember. I don't think I had met the whole board before but they knew I had been offered that other job. So that's how I got my first job.

D: Did you hear anything back from Sullivan.

P: I called them and told them I had accepted another job. So I started then in Marshall, my "big sister" was Anne Kile and we became great friends from that day on. I taught here for four years and then I left for personal reasons and went up into northern Indiana for a change of pace and then I met my husband, Don Smitley. Who was from Marshall. I taught in Riley, IN for two years then I had a chance to come back to Marshall, we were getting married, so I got my same classroom back. Right across the hall from Anne Kile. And there I spent the rest of my 40 years of teaching. At that time both schools were K through 6 then they started to make a change and they put all the sixth grades at North. Then it didn't take too long before south school became K - 2 and north school became 3-6.

So I moved to North School because I stayed with 3rd grade. So I finished my career at North School. There were big difference between North and South. You have probably heard all kinds of stories....that's all I'm going to say.

D: Those first years when you came to Marshall, do you have any memories about how you felt about coming to a new town?

P: Well, of course, I didn't live here at first. Then when I got married I moved here to the east edge of town, I always liked Marshall, its a neat little town. People knew everybody, it was a friendly town, I thought, and had alot to offer for a small town. I remember coming to the library when I lived at the edge of town and I always thought we had a nice library.

D: Where was it located then?

P: Where the meeting room is now, that was the library for several years. Prior to that it was on the second floor of the old city hall. I know through the summer they always had summer reading program and that would be a walk to take the kids to the library.

D: What do you remember about the old South School?

P: I've got a painting of it that Mr. Fred Hayes painted. He was the art teacher then. I remember it had a basement and two floors. Our teacher lounge was a little room in the basement because the building didn't have a lunch room. I am trying to think how many rooms it had. I was never in the old building to teach. It was just a big old brick building. You kinda hated to see that old building go but upkeep was an expense.

D: Going back just a little bit, did you have hobbies as a child?

P: We were country children and dad farmed with our grandpa, he drove a school bus and worked other places too. We walked up to our grandparents house alot, it was just up the road.

D: What was your grandparents names?

P: Orlie and Blanche Vermilion, my other grandparents were gone when I was born. My mother lost her mom when she was only ten years old. And her dad died right before I was born. So I didn't know either one of them. We were in 4-H, as far as at that time. Then we started singing in the choir at church and my sister and I harmonized, mother played a little bit of piano. When we went to high school we were in girls chorus.

But when we were smaller, she thought the boys also needed to be in the group so she gave them piano lessons. But then when they got into high school the coach told them they could either play the piano or play sports. So they gave up piano. My mother played a little piano by ear, and we had a carnival and had a talent show. So my sister and I decided that we would sing Santa La Chia and we thought we did pretty well and some other people thought so too but they didn't think we had entered the contest they thought we were entertainment. So we didn't win.

So my sister and I did some singing, my sister was the soloist, I didn't want to do solos, I sang harmony with her at soprano. As far as the music I do now, I never had any voice lessons. I did mostly church singing. I never sang any solo, until I began doing what I do now, and then got into some country and blue grass music like I do now. So that was a hobby back then and we sewed alot back then. I started that in 4-H and home ec both. I used to make almost everything I wore, but not anymore.

D: Did you get into the food side of home ec?

P: No, I can cook, but I'm not into experimental cooking. I mainly did good old country cooking like we were raised on. I make my own pie dough, learned that from my mother.

D: You mentioned Indiana State, did you commute to school or live on campus?

P: We commuted, there was a lady in Sanford who worked on campus so we paid her for a ride. My sister went to nursing school, my oldest brother went to college a couple years then went into the Navy, my second brother was also a teacher.

D: Was there a turning point when you decided you wanted to be a teacher?

P: When I was in high school..... well of course, my dad, you didn't have a choice, we were going to go to school, because he had always wanted an education and didn't get it, and so he said his kids were going to have an education...and we all four did go to college. When I was in high school, I always kinda leaned toward teaching and when I had to get more serious about it, we had a elementary school there by the high school and sometimes the teachers had to be gone during the day, and so I would go over sometimes and "babysit" a class for maybe an hour or two. So that kinda helped me decide to go into teaching. My sister wanted me to come into nursing with her, and I told her, no, I didn't want to do that, I want to teach. And then later on she became the school nurse and taught the children some along with being the school nurse.

D: Did you ever think you might like to teach older grades?

P: No, it was always elementary. I tried to think of a subject that I might want to teach, and I thought maybe Home Ec because I did like to sew, but I didn't want to do the cooking part of that so I just stuck with elementary. When I went back to get my masters, I thought, did I want to go into administration? or stay where I am at. I decided I had no desire to go into administration.

D: What grades did you teach?

P: I taught 3rd grade, all but 3 years of my 40 years of teaching. When I left Marshall I taught up in Northern Indiana for one year, third grade, and then I taught two years at Riley, sixth grade one year and the funny thing about when I interviewed for that job, I was living back home with my folks and they said they wouldn't send me clear across the county, but the first job that came up was Riley, across the county, but I took it anyway. Then the second year there, I taught a little bit of everything. That was a real challenge. And they grouped the children ability-wise and it was an interesting but difficult year. And then I came back to Marshall and got my same classroom back. I taught so many years that I

would have new students come in and say that I had taught their parents. So I decided that was enough years to teach.

D: In your 40 years of teaching, there must have been some difficult times and situations.

P: Oh yes, we went through the new math era, none of us liked that, toward the end of my career, the emphasis put on testing was too much, was glad to get away from that.

D: Like the testing for No Child Left Behind?

P: Yes, that's tough too, so hard to understand because you have a variety of children and you hope they all succeed, and they do but they can't all be at the same level.

I've had a lot of good students that have trouble with reading and no matter how hard you try they can't read at a good level. You could read them a test and they could ace it, but reading a test was a problem. Of course we had special reading classes for those kids who needed help.

D: There seems to be a lot of controversy in education now.

P: Right.

D: And this whole thing about dropping cursive writing, what is your opinion of that?

P: I think that idea is ridiculous. How are these boys and girls going to write their names? You know, you had me sign a paper, a signature is a written signature. I know that people have their own individual way of writing when they are adults and that is fine, but they need to be able to put their signature on things and be able to read other people's writing.

D: Do you think that would be a step back?

P: Well, it is to me. That is my opinion too.

D: Peggy, when you were a youngster, did you have chores you had to do?

P: Oh, yes, we had to help with the garden, we helped clean the house, helped with the laundry which we hung outside, had the old style wringer washer.

D: Let's go back to this education topic, when you were teaching, had the computer made an appearance?

P: Yes, just starting basically. We had one computer in our classroom and we had the big floppy disc. About the only thing we did at first was programs on the floppies where you would put it in and there would be a reading program or some math problems they could do. Just before I retired they were beginning to put grades on the computer. Then I got one for myself at home. Then I got hooked. Then I got a Kindle, then I got an iPad. Technology kinda takes over.

D: I'm not trying to get into family history, but you married Don.

P: Yes, I did. We were married for almost 25 years. Then he passed, he had Alzheimers. That was a very sad time.

D: And you were still teaching.

P: Yes, I was, and it finally came to be that I had to hire help and eventually he had to go to the nursing home. But we had wonderful years together and I still stay in touch with my Marshall family. One brother is still alive and that is Dick. Wonderful family, wonderful life. So then after he died, I stayed on in Marshall to teach but I moved back to Terre Haute. That is when I got into some country dancing with friends but I wasn't into the music yet. Then eventually I met the husband that I am married to now but it was not through the music it was through a nostalgic ballgame. He was into music with some friends I had went to high school with. I went to a nostalgic ballgame where the two teams play each other..and the girlfriend I had in high school was there too and after the ballgame a group of us went to Cracker Barrel and that is where I met him. That's when I got into the music, he taught me how to play a guitar, how to chord, his name is Roy Lucas. It was the first time I had ever touched a guitar, and he said I had to get that church voice out and get a country voice in. Don't pronounce the words so well. So that is how I got into music and we had a band for several years. Then I learned the upright bass and mandolin. We played at Pizza City and around and when I was learning to play I would bring it to school with me and the kids just loved it. I had one student teacher who could sing and we would sing together to the kids and they just loved it.

D: Have you followed any of your former students?

P: You know, I am on Facebook with several of my third grade students. And that has really been fun. I see their families, how they have grown up, and I really enjoy that. In fact, just today, we were at a restaurant eating and the waitress said I looked so familiar to her, and finally it came to her that I was her third grade teacher.

D: That's one thing about new technology, that you can follow students along.

P: I have all my yearbooks from when I started teaching. Then in latter years I took alot of pictures and put them in albums with things likes plays and different things.

D: I'll ask you a question, did you label them with dates and names?

P: I don't have every picture labeled but I have the yearbook picture so that has all the names. Now you know when I'm gone where they will go!! But that's OK its neat to have them now.

D: So you are living in Tere Haute?

P: Yes, I taught my last years while living in Terre Haute.

D: Do you see alot of changes in Marshall now that you have been gone for awhile?

P: Some changes but mostly the same. Still have Friday night band concerts. Kids still run around it and listen to music. Some buildings have changes and some businesses are gone. Walmart came in

and small shops closed up, small towns do change.

D: While living in Terre Haute and being acclimated to a bigger town, do you think you would ever want to come back to Marshall?

P: Well, I would come back to Marshall if it was the convenient thing to do. Our activities that we do are over there now. Had I not gotten remarried and had activities over there, I would have stayed in Marshall. And we did talk about that because I did have a house over here but everything was over there. And he was still working there and our musical activities were there. And my mother lived in Terre Haute after my dad died.

D: Do you sing in church now?

P: Oh, yeah, I cantor at my church all the time, St. Marys Village Church, where I grew up. I went back to that church when I moved to Terre Haute because it was my home church and my mom's home church. I still sing there but we don't have a choir. I didn't sing solos, I always sang alto. When I first went back there we had a small choir and I sang in it, I did not do the cantoring. And I did sing in the choir here in town and for some reason one time I sang with the men. But I didn't do any cantoring back then. Then when I sang in the choir at the Village Church they asked me cantor once in awhile so that is when I started that. I said my music teacher would be proud. I was never insecure when I sang alto but one year the leader decided that he was going to give me the solo part in Away In A Manger, and I got off and I was so embarrassed and I swore I would never sing solo again. I was in several singing groups, my sister and I and four others had a sextet. But no more solos !!

D: It was probably just seeing all those people looking at just you.

P: I did a wedding this weekend, have done lots of funerals but not many weddings.

D: Is there a person in your past that really influenced your path to teaching or anything else?

P: Probably the most important teacher was Sister Cathleen at my grade school. I had her from fifth grade through eighth grade and I loved her dearly. Then when I went to high school probably Mr Carr, our science and math teacher.

D: Did you ever think of music as a major?

P: I didn't because I couldn't sing solo and didn't play any instruments then. In elementary education, I had to take piano, you had to be able to teacher music and art and PE and the extras.

D: When you look back over your life, is there an event that really impacted you?

P: I think probably moon travel, the shuttle, man on the moon, that really amazed me.

D: My mother taught third grade for many many years and I remember later in her life that she worried because she had told her students that the moon would never be reached.

Is there a particular modern convenience that you feel you just could not live without?

P: Oh my, which one? Well, the telephone is one, electricity, air conditioners, refrigerators. I always loved the TV shows about the west and olden times, but I never thought I would want to live then. I like to think of the simplicity, but I would not want to live without air conditioning or running water, or so many other things we have now.

D: If you were on the other side of the "water" and told someone that you live in Marshall, what would tell them about living here?

P: I would tell them that Marshall is a nice friendly little town, its got a good school system.

D: Well, thank you so much, Peggy, its been delightful talking to you.

P: Its been fun talking about times past.