

THE HOBOKEN HISTORIC MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: DORIS McLAUGHLAN

INTERVIEWER: DORIS CHINA

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DC: Doris, I'd just like you to give us
your full name, if you would.

DM: Doris McLaughlan.

DC: Doris McLaughlan. And you were born and
raised in Hoboken. Frances is your sister.

DM: Right. I was born and raised in
Hoboken. I went through the Hoboken school system. We went
to #8 School, we went to Brandt and then we went on to
Demarest.

DC: You're not twins, are you?

DM: No.

DC: A couple years' difference?

DM: She's the youngest, I'm the oldest. I don't like to admit it, but I have to.

We had a very nice life growing up here. There were a lot of things for us to do at that time. We went to school dances, we went to proms, senior plays they put on. So our life was very full. The only thing I regret is I didn't go on to college. I graduated and got my first job, which was in Hoboken, also. Then I went to General Foods, which was in Hoboken. That was my last job. I raised my children here; they went through the school system, also. I have two boys. They both went to St. Ann's, then they went on to Xavier High School in New York. Then one went up to Holy Cross, and the other one went to St. Peter's. Finally, the oldest one went from Holy Cross to St. Peter's, also. So they're both graduates of St. Peter's, but they don't live in Hoboken and now they miss it. They say there's so much going on right now, in Hoboken, with the restaurants. In fact, on Saturday night, at 8:00, the stores would be closed, the streets would be empty. It was an altogether different society at that time, and you never locked your doors. You never had to worry.

Crime wasn't -- there was nothing like that. You'd leave the door open. You had neighbors coming over and things like that.

I'm ahead of myself. I moved here, on Bloomfield Street. We bought our first house in Hoboken, my husband and I, and we lived at 937 Bloomfield Street. We sold that, and now we're in Marine View.

DC: Are you and your sister the only members of your family still in Hoboken?

DM: We're the only ones left. My father was one of nine children, and most of them moved out of Hoboken. Now, believe it or not, their children are coming back to Hoboken. I worked in New York. My job took me to New York all the time, and I worked there for fifteen years, at CT Corporation. I retired when I was seventy-one, so I just retired. I should say seventy-and-a-half, because I'm seventy-one right now. The commute was great. I walked to the avenue, the bus was always there. I never had to worry about that. That's why, I guess, I could stay so long, working; because the transportation was great. And that's it.

DC: What do you remember about your parents, when you were a child, about your parents and relatives and --

DM: Well, it seemed like, when we were growing up, we all lived in practically the same house. My grandmother lived downstairs, we were on one floor, and my aunt and uncle lived upstairs. Then, next door -- My grandfather owned a lot of property, so they lived next door and we lived across the way. Eventually, everyone moved out of Hoboken and we were really the only ones left.

Let's see. What else can I think about my childhood?

DC: How did you feel when they did that? Did you feel like they were making a mistake?

DM: The only thing is -- In fact, when she moved out, I got married and I moved upstairs. That's before we bought the house. So we were still there. We were still there, when my grandmother had passed away. That's when I think the family breaks up; when your parents and grandparents are deceased, and you don't have that feeling anymore, of family. Because everybody has their own family

-- at least when you had a grandmother you went to see them at Christmas and holidays, and everybody came. But once everybody moves, it changes a lot of things. Then you're with your family.

I married a fellow from Hoboken. It seemed like, at that time, you mostly married people from Hoboken.

DC: Did you get married in one of the Hoboken churches?

DM: Yes. St. Ann's is our church. No, I got married in St. Francis. That's right. My mother got married in St. Francis and I got married in St. Francis. But then when I moved up to Bloomfield Street, my son was starting St. Ann's. Because her mother-in-law was the cook for St. Ann's. She cooked for the priest for twenty-five years. That's my sister's -- Frances's mother-in-law. So I don't know. They were going to church there, and we switched over. But that's how come I became more involved in St. Ann's. I worked in Hoboken for Mayo Lynch. The architects, they were in Hoboken. I worked for them. Then I went to General Foods, I worked for -- that was my first job -- and we got paid once a month and I was always broke. A good thing Mom was home.

DC: What about your kids? They don't live in Hoboken?

DM: No. One lives on Staten Island, and one lives in south Jersey. So they moved out. One became a New York policeman and graduated from college. That's what he became, a New York policeman. He wound up being a sergeant and was a detective, and he was hurt on the job. He went on disability. He had two more years to go, for the twenty years, so now he's a Mr. Mom, he's staying at home.

DC: Do his children come to Hoboken?

DM: Yes. They come to Hoboken. They like it.

DC: What do you miss?

So that's about it. But you know, in our day, we always had ice-cream halls. The kids don't have that feeling like we had.

DC: They have McDonald's.

DM: Yes. We didn't have that. When you were dating, you went to ice-cream parlors. I think it was a better life. We did ice skating, we used to go up to ice skate up here. Where is that? That park in North Bergen. What else did we do? Roller skating. We did all that. Johnny-on-the-Pony, we played with the boys. We used to play touch football. We were active in things like that. But even your first dates, it was always an ice-cream parlor. And I think my first date we did a little better. We went to Journal Square, and they took us for Chinese food first. We went to the movies, and then we went to a pizza parlor. Well, in those days, it was two pictures, so it was long. So that was my first date.

DC: There weren't that many places to eat.

DM: Right. In our day, I think we were stricter. Even with the lipstick. I couldn't wear lipstick until I was sixteen. My sister had it a little easier. And on my first date, I had to be chaperoned with another -- my cousin and I, we double-dated.

DC: How old were you?

DM: I think sixteen. See. So, I'm telling you, it was nice. We thought it was hard, but when you look back, they did the right thing. I think they did anyway. It turned out all right, so --

DC: You felt safe here. That's nice.

DM: Yes.

So what else did we do?

DC: Do you have any memories of particular events in Hoboken, of any time --

DM: I think we had -- in Hoboken it was an anniversary -- I don't know what year it was -- they cut Blackpool Street, and they even -- they had little tables that you bought pasta -- and all that. They had events -- I'm trying to think of all the events. Then a lot of times, when the ships came in, we went on the piers. We were invited on the piers when the ships came in. One time we were invited by Maxwell House, when the ships were coming in.

DC: Was that when they were still the working waterfront?

DM: Yes. This was later on. Maxwell House wasn't in existence then.

DC: Oh, you mean the tall ships.

DM: Yes. But that's about it. And we never went after a certain point -- we weren't allowed to go out of our area, really. We were restricted.

DC: As small as Hoboken is.

DM: Yes, we weren't allowed. So we never even went up to Castle Point until later on. But my mother took us to movies. You remember your mother doing those things. Then they used to give you dishes on Wednesday night.

DC: At the movies?

DM: Yes. You used to make a set. That's what I'm going back to. That was the Fabian. Then they had the U.S. The Fabian also had entertainment.

DC: Oh. Live entertainment?

DM: Yes. You tried out. I forget what they called it now. It would be like on a Wednesday night, I guess when people --

DC: You mean like a talent show?

DM: Yes. They had that. Then if we wanted to go to New York -- My mom used to take us to Macy's -- we always went by PATH -- and Macy's was a big thing at that time. So that would be the department store.

DC: What about stores in Hoboken?

DM: There were a lot of stores in Hoboken. Let's see. There was Henry's for, like, gifts. There was the shoe store. I think it was Adams Bootery. I remember there were two jewelry stores. One was Kramer's, and there was another jewelry store on Fifth Street, on either corner.

DC: Did the people in Hoboken do a lot of their shopping in town?

DM: It was in town, also. So you did everything on First Street -- They used to have Three Brothers, or something like that, like men's clothes and things like that. Of course, you always had the bakeries, and you always had fresh bread. And before you always had butchers, you never went to a supermarket for your meat, you always went to your own butchers.

DC: Did you have the neighborhood butcher that you went to --

DM: -- all the time. You even went to the same pizza parlor all the time, so that was it. And remember, in our time, when I was going to school, we didn't have cars, so we walked all over. If somebody had a car, we'd all pile in. We used to go to Hiram's or Callahan's for hotdogs, so that was our big treat.

DC: Where was that? In Jersey City?

DM: No, that was up in Fort Lee, around there, around the George Washington Bridge, around there.

DC: Oh, a big trip.

DM: That was our trip.

So that was about it. You dated, you went to high-school dances and so forth. That's about it.

DC: Actually, I want to ask you, too -- I did ask Frances that, but we're sitting in Demarest School on election day --

DM: No, this is Brandt.

DC: Brandt School. I'm sorry.

DM: Which was #2. This is Brandt.

DC: I mix the two up.

DM: Stevens only went up to the Ninth Grade, and when I went it was all girls.

DC: Right. And Demarest was the high school.

DM: The high school. And Rue, which was #1, was for the boys. We were separated at that time. Then we met up again --

DC: The boys and girls were separated?

DM: Separated. This was an all-girls' school, Brandt, and Rue was there for the boys, and we'd meet up at the ninth grade, in Demarest.

DC: So from kindergarten to 8th?

DM: No, we went to sixth. Then seventh to ninth, and graduated here. This was like the middle school.

DC: Yes.

DM: You didn't know. We were separated.

DC: How did you feel about that? Was that fun? Did it make it more exciting?

DM: No, I don't think we were even aware of it. We just accepted it, because your cousins went and all that. So it wasn't any big deal.

DC: Frances said you've been doing this for a long time, working the elections.

DM: A long time. A long time.

DC: Politics is a busy thing in Hoboken.

DM: Yes. So we got hooked on doing this, and I like doing it.

DC: It's fun. Because I know I enjoy seeing you every election.

DM: I'm trying to think about the schools. Frances, you didn't tell her that we separated, when we came here. We went to girls' school, and boys'. She didn't know that.

FB: Yes, we went to Brandt, but this was a girls' school. And Rue, that's #1, the one on Garden

Street, Third and Garden, that was the boys' school. And then we all went to Demarest.

DM: We met up again. Did she tell you she was a majorette? Yes, she was a majorette.

FB: I was the first girl president of a class in high school.

DC: That's a distinction.

DM: Did you tell her you were the president of St. Ann's for your children? No, she wants to know about your children. I talked about my children.

FB: I was the first woman president for the St. Ann's parent-teacher's guild. I was also president of Sacred Heart Alumni, when my daughter went there. Then I was also president of St. Mary's Hospital.

DC: The auxiliary?

FB: The auxiliary, yes. We were both past presidents.

DC: How come neither of you ever got into politics in the city?

FB: No, no.

DM: I think her husband might have got interested.

FB: Maybe my husband.

DM: But he passed away too young.

FB: Too young. Possibly him. No, we're not interested in politics. No.

DM: We also belong to our church. We were always active with our children. We was class mothers, all the way through. So, you know, we did it for our children, also. And they went through Catholic school.

FB: All the way through.

DM: All the way through. Even college was the Jesuits. Yes. So they had their education. See, we weren't brought up on it, we went to public school. So I liked the public school also, I'm not knocking it, but at that time, we wanted our children brought up through the education.

DC: Sounds good. Well, is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

DM: No. Probably, when we leave, we'll have a lot of things to --

DC: Well, thanks so much. I really appreciate it.

DM: All right.