

Marjorie Peterson

Interviewed by Jean Seager
For Midway Village Museum
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Marge Peterson: My name is Marjorie Peterson.

Jean Seager: And are you married?

MP: Yes I am.

JS: And your husband's name?

MP: My husband's name is John.

JS: And do you have children?

MP: Yes. I have two sons and a daughter.

JS: And what are their names?

MP: We have our oldest son is Tom, and the middle son whom no one ever knows we have is Jim, and the youngest one is their sister Jane.

JS: And your older son is in Cheap Trick.

MP: Yes he is.

JS: He's a member of that. And where do you work or volunteer?

MP: I volunteer at the Museum Center. It's the only volunteering really I've done for many years.

JS: The name of the Museum? Midway Village?

MP: Midway Village. They used to call it just RMC, Rockford Museum Center. I always have to stop and think that it's Midway Village and Museum Center.

JS: And how long have you been here?

MP: I was here when they opened in 1974 so I think I was probably working here in 1973 to get ready for the opening.

JS: What did you do before that? Were you employed?

MP: Oh I've employed at various things throughout the years. The last thing I was employed at before I came to the Museum was the Spring Creek school librarian and before that I've been a secretary and typist, all kinds of things like that.

JS: Where are you from?

MP: I was born in Kankakee, Illinois. Came to Rockford when I was four years old.

JS: And why did you come here? Was your father. . .

MP: My father got a job here and we had lived in, after Kankakee we'd moved back to Fond du Lac where they had gotten married originally. My father moved around a lot with jobs. He was a baker and he was always looking for one that paid him more I suppose. I never really asked him why he moved so much unless I think he just liked it. I think he liked the challenge of a new spot. So they moved back to Fond du Lac and then they moved to Beloit for a very short time and then, then he got a job in Rockford so we moved to Rockford and stayed there ever since.

JS: And you said he's from what country?

MP: He's from Germany. Muhlheim, Germany. He was born there and raised there and he, he learned to be a baker in Cologne, Germany. He grew up without a mother. His father put him in a boarding school home. He always told me he was an orphan but he really wasn't. His father was living. I think he liked to dramatize that part of his life because it was not a very pleasant time in his life I understood. But I think he was in a Lutheran boarding school, he and his older brother, because his mother had died when he was an infant and then they, he was sent as an apprentice to Cologne, Germany to, in the baking trade which is what he learned to be. He was a pastry chef and a master baker and a decorator when he finished with his education which took three years.

JS: Why do you think he came to the United States?

MP: Well, he probably never admitted it really, but I think that he, he wanted to get away. He didn't really have much of a family. He was on his own and I think they were drafting people into the Army in Germany at the time and so he got a job on a ship that traveled between Germany and the United States, East Coast of the United States, and it docked in 1908 and I think that he jumped ship in 1909, illegally, and he never contacted his family for many years. And the only reason I can figure that out is because he would have been arrested, because he jumped ship, and that was illegal for him to do that. And he was an illegal immigrant in this country until 1917 when he got his citizenship in Danbury, Connecticut.

JS: Where, that's, on the East Coast you said is where he jumped ship?

MP: Pardon?

JS: On the East Coast of the United States is where he jumped ship?

MP: Yes, yes, he got off in New Jersey, Hoboken, New Jersey.

JS: And how did he get all the way up to Rockford?

MP: He moved around a lot. He wasn't married until he was 34. He came to this country when he was 19 so he had a lot of years to try all kinds of jobs and move around. He went to Minnesota and he was in Chicago and then he was in Connecticut for quite awhile and he just moved back and forth forever wherever he felt like getting a job.

JS: Had he ever been here before, in this country?

MP: In this country, no, he was the only member his family at that time really too.

JS: So he was by himself when he jumped ship?

MP: He was by himself, yes, he was alone.

JS: And did he live on the East Coast for a while before?

MP: Yes I think he lived in New Jersey according to the postcards and things I've seen of his papers. He lived in New Jersey and in the New York area. I don't know about New York City specifically, but he lived in New Jersey I know for some time and back and forth in that area.

JS: Did he know anybody?

MP: There were a lot of foreigners landing in the United States at that time so I think the matter, the fact that he didn't speak English was not a detriment to him then because there were so many foreigners then, on the East Coast particularly, that he didn't have any trouble with that and he was pretty much of a loner. He did his own thing. He was here by himself and he did what he wanted.

JS: Then nobody was here to help him then?

MP: No, no one helped him. He was all alone, learned the language.

JS: He was an only child you said?

MP: No, he had actually, his family history is a little bit fuzzy to me. He had a brother who is two years older, was in the boarding school with him, and I think he had a half brother who was grown and had an auto agency in Cologne and he had two sisters and I've never been really sure if they were full sisters or half-sisters because when he was a child they were married with families. And I got the impression that his mother had been married before and those were either his children before or hers before and these two young boys were the last before she died. So I've never have gotten that figured out.

JS: Did he try to make any contact with them after he left?

MP: After he came to this country, no, he obviously did not. Except that there is a small amount of correspondence, like postcards, from people in Germany which surprised me because he did not contact his family until the 1920s, until after the war was over.

JS: Did your father stay in the baking business?

MP: Yes, he has always been a baker, very hard working baker, and very talented baker. You don't see men like him anymore. Beautiful cake decorator and pastry chef.

JS: Germans are noted for that.

MP: Yes. He was very good at what he did and extremely hard worker. I mean his hours were always terrible, our meals were always at odd hours because he went to work at two in the morning and you know was, came home at two in the afternoon.

JS: Did your mother work with him at all?

MP: Thad a bakery of their own on Kishwaukee Street in Rockford for a short time when I was a teenager and they also had one on Broadway when I was in first grade so what would I have been? Six or seven. And the really unusual thing about that is that it was on Broadway and 8th St, kitty corner from the furniture store that used to be there and right directly across the street was an apartment building with a clothing store on the main floor and that belonged to my husband's father. Of course I didn't know him then, I didn't know the family, I didn't know anything about them, but that was rather unusual I thought that he should turn up in my life that much later and it turns out that he was across the street the whole time

JS: Where did you live when you were growing up?

MP: Well when he had the bakery on Broadway we lived in the hotel over it. I can remember having measles and whooping cough in a hotel room because my mother was downstairs helping my father with the bakery. And then we lived in a number of places, several homes in Rockford before they finally purchased a home on 15th Street. And then later one on the west side on Independence Avenue, and then after that they moved out of town. I was grown by that time.

JS: You didn't live in that hotel that whole time?

MP: No, that was just for a short time and then we got an apartment and that worked out a little bit better and I was a little bit older.

JS: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MP: No, I'm an only child.

JS: Were there, was your neighborhood kind of an ethnic area?

MP: Mostly, wherever we lived it was because we lived on the east side of Rockford and at that time the east side of Rockford was predominantly Swedish. So there is a lot of Swedish immigrants and people with accents and people whose parents had come from overseas. So that was, it wasn't unusual to be an immigrant or to be from another country. There were a lot of people around us that were, not many German people that I remember in our area, but an awful lot of Swedish people.

JS: Did they . . . well no, your mother is not German?

MP: Her father was German.

JS: Okay. Did they speak German in your home?

MP: No. My father never spoke German. My mother could understand it and she could say a few phrases if she wanted to because her father was German but no, he never spoke German. He of course was 35 when I was born so he'd been in this country a long time and he didn't really, although he had a lot of German friends when he was younger after he was married, he really didn't hang out with a lot of German young men like he did younger. So no, he never made any point of speaking German at home. He taught me a few German songs and that was about it. He didn't make any. . .

JS: So English was your first language?

MP: English was my language and it was his also. In fact I didn't realize he had an accent. I mean it didn't mean anything to me because I was so used to hearing him.

JS: Why do you suppose that was that he didn't speak any German?

MP: I don't think he was around any German people actually. When we lived on the east side of Rockford we were surrounded by Swedish people, or Irish in some instances, mostly Swedish, Norwegian, Swedish, whatever they were there were Scandinavians and he didn't have anybody to speak German with.

JS: He didn't encourage you to learn the German?

MP: No he didn't and I'm kind of sorry about that. I think it would've been nice if I had known the language. I can sing maybe one or two songs in German but that's about the extent of it.

JS: The neighborhood language was probably English mixed with Swedish or something like that?

MP: Yeah and then there are a couple different kinds of German languages too. There's high German and low German and since he was from the Cologne area I think his German was high German. I noticed that when I went over there that there was a

different, two different languages. It surprised me because I never heard him say anything about it. But figuring out where he had come from I figured that he'd spoken high German.

JS: How much school did your father complete?

MP: Well in those days they went through what would be the equivalent of eighth grade here, although I think they did it in fewer years because he was 14 when they apprenticed him and he was through school at that time, just short of 14, but he had evidently an extremely good education. It was a Lutheran boarding school and I think that they really worked with them and he always knew Opera and classics and he was very versed in literature and he was really quite intelligent and he did take some classes in the United States later on when he was in Connecticut. I found some of his school papers and in addition to studying for his citizenship I think he also went to a school and took a lot of classes too.

JS: So you think he probably had a pretty good attitude toward school?

MP: Yes he enjoyed the fact that I was good in school and that I could read real well because he was a reader. He'd love to read and that part was fine except it's funny that when it got to the point where I was old enough to get out of school and go on with my life, he was not one who advocated a girl having higher education, that I should get married. And I think that's a foreign influence. He didn't push it but I think that was his attitude and my mother was the one who pushed the idea of, you know, extra education going on to school but he never pushed it and I was kind of surprised by that when I thought about it later.

JS: Did you go to private school or public school?

MP: I went to Rockford public schools. I graduated from West High School. I went to the Rockford High School until I was a senior and my folks have moved by that time. For the first time they had moved from the East side to the West side, so my final year was on the West side so I ended up graduating from West High School even though I had spent all my life in the East side schools like Lincoln Junior High and Brown School which is long gone. And. . .

JS: How did you feel about that?

MP: I didn't really think too much about it. I had friends in the neighborhood I live in over there and by that time I was 14 or 15 and it didn't bother me too much, except it came up surprisingly much later, after I married John and all his friends were Swedish and came from the East side and had all graduated from East High School and graduating from West High School seem like almost I was from another planet. It was kind of funny. It's funny now but at the time it really irritated me. I was just a foreigner as far as they were concerned. You know Swedish people were very strange about the other side of the

river. Oh yes, I had a really good friend, my dearest, lifelong friend that lived in the neighborhood and I grew up with. I was in her wedding, she was in my wedding, I was in two of her weddings, and her mother always hesitated to let her come over and spend the night with me after we moved to the West side. She sort of regarded it as Indian territory I think or something. They really were, now those people were Swedes and they were from the old country and they still spoke Swedish and so on and so I was surrounded by people like that. So that was kind of interesting

JS: Did you go to church? Were you churchgoing people?

MP: My friend was and the church was right behind our house. A little old Lutheran church and she was Lutheran and so she went and so I went with her.

JS: But not your family.

MP: My mother and father would go at the usual holiday, you know, Christmas, Easter, that kind of thing and her parents were the same but the school [church sic.] was right there so both of us were confirmed in a Lutheran church and my father had been Lutheran, had been raised in a Lutheran boarding school, so, you know, it was fine with him

JS: Did you go to college?

MP: I went one year, a year after I got out of high school. I worked for a year and then I went for one year at the University of Mississippi

JS: Oh. Where's that . . .

MP: Oxford.

JS: And you didn't stay?

MP: No I didn't stay. I thought it was, well it was

JS: That's a long ways from Rockford.

MP: Yes. It was during the war and if you go to a school like that, at the time it had the reputation of being the country club of the South. And I went there because I had a friend who was a professor there. He had later, he was teaching there, he and his wife were teaching there. And he had been the coach in the Rockford Park District and my friends and I played tennis and I played on his tennis team and he said, you should go to my school if you want to go to a college. You should go there because the out of state costs are not bad and my wife and I will be there and we'll look out for you and it would be a good experience for you. So I thought, okay. So I worked for a year and saved enough money and my folks paid for my tuition, I paid for my clothes and stuff and I went sailing off to the University of Mississippi in Oxford.

It was an education but not necessarily a school education. It was an education being in a different part of the country, . . .

JS: A different culture.

MP: A totally different culture. And being around girls whose fathers had been the governor of the state and they all came from mansions, a lot of them came from great wealth. And they also thought that I was the first nice Yankee they've ever met which I thought was hilarious. And I said, well you should come back to my town because there's a lot of them here like me. It was very interesting and they could never understand where Rockford was. It's near Chicago, you know, you can figure that out. That's all they could ever figure. So it was really an education to be there not for the schooling that I got, which wasn't all that great because I didn't specialize in anything. I didn't know why I was there really. And the war was on and everybody else was, my girlfriends were working in factories and you know in offices and going to Washington, DC and working there and I just felt like, these girls are just worried about if they're going to get married and that's all they're interested in and I thought that was kind of boring so I never went back.

JS: What was your first job then?

MP: I had an interesting first job. I don't even know why they hired me I was only 17. I had just graduated from high school. I was the proofreader for Bannon Printing Company and it was fun. I enjoyed it. I was right up at the machines, that's when they had the big linotype machines like the ones we've got in the [Midway] Village, or similar anyway, where they handset the type and then they also had a big linotype machine, but they also handset a lot of their type too. And I worked right up, you know, with the guys and it was really fun. I learned to set type and I learned to read backwards. I can't do it anymore but for a, really a relative kid, and then they had an office where they would, if I didn't have anything else to do I'd go down and type form letters you know. We didn't have places, you know, copy machines, and if they sent out form letters for the printing company, we just sat there and typed them all. So that's how you learn to be a really good typist is sitting to write form letters. And I worked in the press collating their stuff because they did a lot of programs and receipt books and stuff for churches and things like that and it had to be collated and so I would, when I didn't have anything else to do I would go back and work in that department. That was fun too so. That was a really cool job. I really enjoyed that but I left after a year to go to school and I didn't go back there.

JS: How did your parents, how did they like you working there?

MP: Oh they thought it was fine. You know anybody bringing in a paycheck at that time that was kind of, nobody had a whole lot of money then.

JS: Now you said you went back to school. What kind of school did you go to? College?

MP: That was the school I went to, yeah. I did go to Business College later on. After I went to, left Oxford my folks had moved to Hot Springs, Arkansas because my mother had really bad rheumatism and they had the Hot Springs there and that really helped her a lot so they moved there. They had left Rockford. I never went back home to that house after I got out of college. I went to Hot Springs and stayed there for a few months through the summer and then they decided to move back to Rockford so I went back with them. But while I was in Hot Springs I went to Business College there. My mother didn't know what to do with me so she said, you got to do something. So I went to a business college there and met a friend that I have to this day. She still is in Arkansas and I go visit her. I haven't lately but . . .

JS: Why did they move back?

MP: I really don't remember why they moved back, whether it was my father's job or she figured that she was well enough to move. I really don't know. But they moved back and I went back with them and then I got a job at Barber Colman and that was during the war. That was interesting, boring but interesting because we typed all of the bills that went out from Barber Colman. They were hand typed and it's funny because we have a lot of ephemera from Barber Colman here [at the museum], and a lot of the newspapers that those factories were put out every month, and I was flipping through one when it came in as a part of our collection and lo and behold, there's a picture of me in the office! I didn't know they took it. There I am sitting typing. We typed all of those bills by hand and it just boggles the mind to think of it now.

JS: Let's talk about your friends and your family, your community a little bit. Did you have a lot of friends when you are living in Rockford?

MP: I had, yeah, I had one or two special friends and I had neighborhood friends, both sides of the river I did because I grew up on one side and I had friends from there and from school. And then when I moved to the west side I had a couple of really good friends who lived close by in the neighborhood. And the tennis courts, which were, Lewis Lemon School is now, that's Sunset Park, and I lived a block from that and so they had tennis courts there and all the neighborhood kids, young people, would go there and play tennis and that's how I got involved in that. You had your own net, you rolled the court, and you made your own lines. Yeah. It was a clay court. It was really fun.

JS: Did the kids tend to, just to be friends with people of like ethnic backgrounds?

MP: Not ever that I recall, no. I was friends with the girls that lived in my neighborhood, the children that lived close by, and they had Swedish parents most of them. And no one ever said anything, we never paid any, the children never paid any attention to it that I know of.

JS: There was no ethnic fighting?

MP: No.

JS: How did you meet your friends?

MP: My friends? They were neighbors. They were in school with me, schoolmates or neighbors and, children spend a lot of time outside of the house in those days. You didn't make play dates, you went out in the neighborhood and found somebody to play with. So you had a wide circle of friends, maybe for several blocks around you that you knew from your school days and I went to Brown School, which was a neighborhood grade school, so all those children lived in that area, so that was, everybody would get together under the streetlight at night and play games which is not done any more.

JS: How do you feel your, I'm going to speak to you about your father since he's German. How did you feel that they accepted, your father accepted American culture?

MP: Mostly I think he accepted it. You like living here. I think he liked being out of Germany although he's very proud of his country. As Germans are, they're very nationalistic and of course he came from the Germany well before Hitler. It was "Hoch the Kaiser," he used to say, you know, "Hail the Kaiser." And I should read more of German history to find out when the Kaiser exactly came in because I know there wasn't much of a Germany before the Kaiser. So he always talked about the Kaiser. He knew nothing about what came after that. But he was very proud of his country because he considered them to be intellectually superior, most Germans have that attitude, they are superior to other people. They let you know about it and he didn't hesitate to let you know but he never downgraded the United States in any way.

JS: Was he opened to new ways that things are done in the United States?

MP: Oh I think he was because he was so young when he came here and then he had a lot of friends and he belonged to, he belonged to German clubs when he lived in Connecticut, when he was getting his citizenship. I noticed that he belonged to what is called a Turnverein and he was very athletic and he was a gymnast which is what a Turnverein kind of is and he was a gymnast and he was a good swimmer and a diver. And so he had a big circle of friends when he lived out east and I think most of them were probably German. That's how we met them but he never cared much one way or the other. It didn't matter to him. If they were there, fine, if they weren't that's fine.

JS: Did he bring any of the traditions from Germany that you had in your home?

MP: Not that I know of, no, he didn't.

JS: Did you ever disagree with your parents about the things you wanted to do, or where you wanted to go, or music to listen to?

MP: No. I don't think anybody did in those days. We didn't have an awful lot of money, no one did. So most of the things you did were done close to home or through church or

school or your neighborhood, your close neighborhood, and I don't think they had any reason to worry about me at all.

JS: Were you embarrassed that he was different?

MP: No, I don't recall that at all. I think that's because so many of my friends had foreign parents.

JS: Okay. So you really weren't different.

MP: No I don't think so. He just was a different nationality but nobody really paid much attention to that either.

JS: How about customs or superstitions? Did he bring any of that to this country? Or celebrations?

MP: No, because he was raised without a family. He came here without a family home background and he came from an institutional background.

JS: How long was he schooled there?

MP: Well, he was an apprenticed when he was 14 until he was 17 and that was three years of apprenticeship and he, and it was tough. He said this man was tough on them. He'd smack them around if he thought they didn't do something right.

JS: What about boarding school though?

MP: The boarding school was also tough. He didn't have too many happy memories of that either.

JS: When did he start there?

MP: I think he was a lonely child to begin with. He didn't have too many happy memories of it that's all I can think about there.

JS: You think he was pretty young when he went there?

MP: Yes, he was a year and a half.

JS: When he went to boarding school?

MP: Well it was a home, a boarding school and a home for children because his father couldn't take care of him. His mother was dead and the sisters lived in Cologne and they were married and they obviously couldn't or didn't take him either. The one letter that I read that was translated for me, I have a lot of his correspondence. It's very difficult to translate in that old German handwriting and there was a gentleman here at the Museum a

number of years ago who had been born in Germany and he offered to translate a few of my papers so I did get a few letters translated which was nice and some of his documents so I knew what they were, but he didn't have time to do too much. He was not well so he did what he could and I appreciated that and I never have had tried to have anybody translate the rest of them.

JS: Did your dad think it was important that you remember your roots, that you were . . . ?

MP: He never made a point of it.

JS: Were you interested in finding out about your dad's?

MP: I've done a lot in trying to find out about him.

JS: As a child though did you?

MP: As a child I didn't care, I wasn't interested, no, uh uh. And my mother had a German background and her family was more interesting to me because they had roots back in the United States, her mother's family had roots way back to the 1700s in the United States. So to me that was more interesting than the German side. I never knew them. I never knew my grandparents on either side. I didn't have any grandparents on either side.

JS: How about your children are they interested in their roots?

MP: Yeah, I think they are. I don't think my daughter is as interested in it as, she would be interested if I presented it to her, but she's not interested in pursuing it. My middle son is very interested and I have done some things with him and I think my older son would be too if he weren't so busy doing other things. But I have tried to look up some stuff and help do some background. I need to do more but I haven't gotten around to it.

JS: Have they ever gone back for a visit? Your parents, . . .

MP: Have they what?

JS: . . . did they ever go back to Germany for a visit?

MP: No. I've been in Germany with my daughter and Tom lived there for awhile. Both Jim and Tom have traveled to Germany and Tom lived there for almost 2 years and, I'm trying to think, no, other than just being a tourist no one really ever looked up his family there or went to anyplace he had lived except Cologne.

JS: You didn't when you are there?

MP: No I didn't really have much of a chance. He told me where the bakery would have been in Cologne right around the corner from the big cathedral but we were between trains and Germans are notoriously unfriendly to Americans anyways, especially if they

ask directions and they don't want to be bothered with you, and I didn't have a whole lot of time, so no, I didn't. He had told me where to go and what to do and, he had a phenomenal memory for streets and locations. He could remember everything that everywhere, but he never said anything about it that I didn't go look up anything. It didn't seem to bother him. He just told me if I wanted to go see it I could. But he never showed any interest.

JS: Did he live to be quite old?

MP: Yes, in fact I was trying to figure out when he died. Isn't that terrible! I don't remember. It was in the early 1980s I think, he was 91 when he died.

JS: Do you have relatives there yet that you have any contact with?

MP: I think there probably are. He had a brother and the two sisters and they had two daughters that I know of that he has a picture of, the nieces. And a brother who had children but I've never been able to trace them back and I never have found, his mother is a total mystery to me, so I know the town he was born in and what her name was and I know that a little research would bring that information out but I haven't looked it up.

JS: And none of them have come to the states to visit?

MP: a lot of. . . It's funny because my father always claimed that his name was unusual and there was nobody in the United States from his family here so ergo no one had that name C-O-M-M-E-R.

JS: I guess that's something we didn't even talk about. What was your name before you were married?

MP: Yeah, his name. His name was Commer, Heinrich Joseph Theodore Commer, always mispronounced, always misspelled. I was glad to get Peterson, that's much easier. I don't know why it's so hard for people to understand what it is but it is. But there were a lot of names like that in the phone book when I went through Germany in Cologne. But I never looked any of them up and they should have done what Rick Nielsen always said. He says "hey you, just get on the phone and you say what you want in English and they'll go find someone who speaks English and they'll put them on the phone." Well I never had the nerve to do that so I never did it.

JS: Did your parents, or you, encourage other members of your family, of his family, to come to this country?

MP: No he did not really connect with his family. He didn't connect with any of them as far as I've been able to tell until after World War I. He sent a food package in the early 1920s to his sister and I have letters from her from 1920 before that and then it stops abruptly and the only thing that I can remember my mother saying about that, because that was, that was before I was born that he sent the food package and there must've been

some communication after that because I understood from her that the family suddenly decided that here was this rich American and they could send all their children here and have him educate them and they didn't go for that because he said they never did anything for me when I was a child so that was the end of it and I never heard anything more about it and I never asked. So I don't know what happened but he cut off all communication again and that's all in the 1920s.

JS: And there was never anything more after that?

MP: No, nothing in all of their papers that I ever see again and those letters were translated for me by this gentleman. So this is the first time, and his father in the meantime had passed away, and the one sister really gave him "what for" for letting dear old dad die, you know, without letting him know where you were. And the only thing I can figure is that he never let them know because he was afraid he'd be prosecuted for, because he was really, you know, illegal and they would prosecute him for leaving his job on the ship and jumping ship. So I think that's why he never contacted them and I think he didn't really care.

JS: Do you think he was angry with his family there, resentful?

MP: I just don't, he might have been slightly resentful, but he didn't really act that way. You just acted like he wasn't interested, that they weren't interested in him and he really had his own life. He made his own life.

JS: When did he get his citizenship?

MP: In 1917 in Danbury, Connecticut.

JS: Was he excited about that?

MP: I don't know, he never said. He never said anything about it. He was promptly taken into the Army shortly after that, which is of course what he tried to avoid when he left Germany.

JS: So he was in the service?

MP: Yes he was. For eight months he was in the service. In fact he was, he was. . . what do you call it when they let them go?. . . out of Camp Grant, because he had enlisted in Chicago. He was then living in Chicago and he had a lot of friends in Chicago and he went into the Army, in fact he was he didn't enlist he was conscripted into the Army, he was drafted into the Army. He was in the Army for eight months and then he was put out at Camp Grant, he has his papers from Camp Grant and I think it's really rather interesting that he was a baker and evidently, the only thing I can figure is because he was German they probably figured they didn't want him near food, so they put him in the cavalry. There was cavalry in Camp Grant which I wasn't aware of and my mother thought that was the funniest thing because she was raised in the country and she loved

horses and she knew all about horses and she said, "He doesn't know one end of the horse from the other except to bet on them. But they put him in the cavalry?" She never got over that.

JS: Did he like being in the cavalry?

MP: Well he wasn't in there long enough to really matter, I guess. I think he was a sergeant for about two months but he was kind of cocky. He didn't submit to authority real well. He'd been on his own a long time and I don't think the Army with his cup of tea.

JS: He wasn't in the German army though?

MP: Oh no. That's what's . . .

JS: I mean earlier.

MP: No, he left Germany when he was 19, so he escaped the draft over there evidently.

JS: And he got in on it here.

MP: He got in on it here which I think was a kind of retribution after all.

JS: But only for eight months?

MP: Well the war was over. He was conscripted in late 1917 and the war was over early in 1918 so he was only in there for eight months. And of course anybody who came out of Chicago was taken out of the army in Camp Grant which seems kind of funny because he didn't have anything to do with Rockford at the time, I don't know.

JS: Did he stay in Rockford then?

MP: No, no. He went back to Chicago and then he went, well he must've gone to Fond du Lac because that's where he and my mother were married and then they moved to Kankakee where I was born and then they moved back to Fond du Lac until I was four and then they migrated here.

JS: Why do you suppose when they got here, he stayed here?

MP: I don't know. Maybe because by that time I was a little kid, you know, four years old and was going to kindergarten, and maybe he liked the town, and maybe he liked the jobs. I don't know. I never asked and he never said.

JS: Did he die in this, living here?

MP: Yes.

JS: And your mother also?

MP: Yes.

JS: Did they ever talk about, well your mother wasn't from Germany, but your father ever talk about moving back there?

MP: No. He never even acted interested in going back to visit. Never made any effort whatever. Even when he knew I was going he didn't, you know, didn't act like, oh gee I wish I could go. Cause he was old by then. He never showed any particular interest in it. He was interested in the history of the country and he could talk about it but he didn't act like he cared if he went there or not. Which is kind of curious really, but that's the way he was.

JS: Did, do you encourage your children to learn more about their ancestry?

MP: Well they know I'm interested and they kind of depend on me to tell them about it but as I say my middle son is interested. They haven't shown any real, well they've got families, and they're busy and they just haven't gotten into it. I think you get to a certain age and you do get more interested in it. And they kind of know that I've listed things and done some along the lines, so they're probably depending on me to finish it. I better hurry I guess.

JS: You said, you mentioned your husband was Swedish?

MP: Yes, his mother, his mother was an immigrant. His mother was, well she was little when she came over here, four or five years old. So she, Dan said she was too young to qualify because he didn't know anything about her and she had a sister and. . . I think it's curious. I looked up the ship's records for her father. He came here, like a lot of people came, first leaving the family behind and got settled and then brought the family over. He evidently left his wife and family behind and brought the oldest daughter with him who was only six. I've never been able to figure that one out. Until he went back to Sweden and stayed there for awhile. They had another child and then they all came back to the United States. And then I think one boy was born here and one daughter died. I don't know, you know. So her family was Swedish and my, her husband . . . who was Swedish in that . . .? Oh his father was Swedish, his mother was English, that's right, it was. Okay, his father was from Sweden so there's Swedish on both sides, half Swedish on both sides.

JS: Where did you meet him?

MP: My husband? It's strange. I knew everybody he knew in school. We had friends who were our friends but we didn't know one another. And as I said, his family had a store right across from our bakery, although he didn't hang around there. They had a home in Linden Ave. He stayed home. I was living over the bakery. He wasn't, at the time. A little difference in the economic family life, at that time. But he was a friend of all of my

friends which is kind of interesting and he was a real good friend of the young man that my best friend from childhood, that had lived near me that we'd gone to church together, married. And so he wasn't, hadn't quite gotten his wings yet when he was training to be a pilot so he wasn't home for the wedding but I was in her wedding. I was her maid of honor. And his other two friends, one of his friends was marrying my friend and the other friend was best man so they were all there except for him. But when they came home on leave a couple months later then he was home. And so they said "Hey," my girlfriend's husband said "Hey, we'd like to introduce you to Blanche's friend and we could go out." And he said, famous last words, he said "Oh I don't know. I've met some of her friends." And her husband said "No, no, look here look at the wedding picture. Look, you're gonna like this one." So that's how it turned out. I thought that was kind of curious it ended up that we knew the same people all our lives but we didn't know one another, till that point.

JS: And how long have you been married?

MP: Oh goodness. We've been married since, oh geez, since 1949. What is it? 53 years, 55 years? Something like that. Anyway since 1949. Because we didn't marry until after he'd been out of the service and had gone to school. He went back to college as most young men did in those days and I moved back to Hot Springs and I didn't see him for two or three years till we got back together again and got married.

JS: And then you lived in Rockford?

MP: Always lived in Rockford. His family has always lived here. He wouldn't think of living anywhere else. Typical Swedish background, no this is where they live.

JS: What did he, what occupation did he have?

MP: He was a salesman. He worked for Morton Salt, Miles salt and then he worked for Lebovitch Brothers when he retired from Lebovitch Brothers.

JS: So, your children are all grown now and you have a lot of grandchildren?

MP: I have five granddaughters and one baby grandson. He came along to kind of interrupt the flow there. So they range from 25 down to three months.

JS: What do you hope for their future, your grandchildren's future?

MP: Oh my goodness, it's hard to know what children's futures are going to be like these days. It's just moving so much faster than I can keep track of and I feel very old compared to them. I don't know, I don't really know.

JS: How do you feel about the current debate that's going on in this country about immigration?

MP: It's hard to know what to feel about it. You feel sorry for them in a lot of ways and yet you feel that our country has let us down by not paying more attention to, to them. And they feel angry at their country that they don't do more for their own people. I think that's really a shame. I don't know how they can live with themselves when they know that they have their own people leaving their borders to go somewhere else because it's better for them there. Isn't that sad? I think that's really sad. I don't know how it's going to be solved. It's going to be a big mess. I know it will be. It's never going to make everybody happy. There's nothing we can do now to remedy the harm that's been done.

JS: There are many countries that people are coming too. It's not just the Mexican community but a lot of other countries too.

MP: Oh yeah. I think it's interesting to what's happening in Europe. The people who are causing so much trouble over there recently, like in England, I suppose, and they have such an open policy too, and they've always been so friendly to people. When my daughter and I were there twice, two or three times that I've been there, we were always amazed at how many Indians there were, everywhere in the stores, in the restaurants. They were, all the workers were Indians because they had the right to come into England and be citizens, I don't know about the other people that have come there recently, the Taliban and all those people. Why do they come to a country if they don't like the way the country is run? I'm sorry, but I don't understand that and then make trouble for the people who live there? That just seems to me to be an anomaly in some ways. I don't know. But the immigration problem, I'm so old it won't be solved in my lifetime, I'm sure. But it's going to be a mess. No matter what they do they're going to make people unhappy, no matter what they do. And of course they're immigrants. My father was an immigrant, you can't, what you say? I don't know how many people came into the country the way my father did or whether they ever became citizens, I really don't know.

JS: Did he talk about, you mentioned he jumped ship. Did he talk about that incident when he did that?

MP: Yes, he, I think in the back of his mind he probably was thinking he might come to the United States and visit and then, they would let them off the ship you know when they were in port. And also, as I said, he was a very independent and a very feisty young man and I think he, his story is he had a fight with somebody on board and he just decided he wasn't going to go back so he just wore all his clothes off and took all his papers that they always carry with them. Europeans are very much into carrying all their ID papers with them and he just never went back to the ship and so every time it came into port he made sure that he wasn't anywhere around.

JS: No one ever came after him?

MP: Well, if they did they didn't find him. He made sure of that. He said when the ship came into port and you were supposed to be on that ship you stayed out of sight so, that's all I know about that.

JS: I think that's about it unless, is there, some other things you want to talk about we didn't cover?

MP: No. I don't really feel like I'm much of a daughter of an immigrant because he never really acted much like one.

JS: He's had an unusual background.

MP: Well I suppose, yes, I never thought of it that way.

JS: Have you told your children all the stories about him?

MP: Probably not. He was a great talker. He was a wonderful grandfather and especially to my sons because they were the first ones. And they spent, my mother and father both spent a lot of time with the boys. Not so much with Jane, she came along a little bit later. And they had two sets of wonderful grandparents. John's grandparents only lived a couple blocks away and my grandparents were in and out of town and lived here and then would leave for a while and then come back. And they really spent a lot of time with my children. I think they had a wonderful, wonderful life because of that. I always think that that's why they've turned out so well because they always had somebody, you know besides us. And my parents were the people who took them fishing and took them on trips and John's parents were the kind who kept them at home and fed them and took care of them, you know, but they never took them anywhere. But my folks were always on picnics and taking them fishing and stuff I learned to hate because they always did that with me. I can't tell you how many forest preserves I've spent weekends in.

JS: Your parents did that?

MP: My mother and father loved to go. My father would fish and my mother would pack a lunch and we'd go to the forest preserve, oh deliver me, I don't care to do that. I don't like it anymore no.

JS: Did you at the time?

MP: I don't think I knew anything any different at the time and lots of times my mother would take, and it's interesting that my mother drove, which was unusual for ladies of that age because a lot of my friend's mothers didn't drive, didn't drive a car. And she was very independent and she drove and so she would take us out to the park, into the forest preserve, my girlfriends and I and let us run around and climb the hills and do whatever we wanted to do and I never thought anything about that until a couple of years ago one of those friends came back from Ohio to visit me, in her 80s, she drove here, bless her sweet heart, and she commented .She said "I always remember, I loved your mother because she would take us out to the park," and I thought my mother would be so pleased because to me that was, "uh" [sound of dismay] you know. They thought it was wonderful because she said "Well you know my mother didn't drive." And I thought

about it and I thought, yeah that's right they didn't. Very few women, people's mothers drove but my mother did.

JS: It was your mother that did this more so than your father? Took you out there?

MP: Well together they did, but she took, with the girls you know, she would take us but when my boys were born it was my mother and father would take the boys and take them fishing and come back with 8,000,000 pounds of fish that none of us could eat because they'd go to those ponds where you pay for them, you know, you pay to catch the fish. They have a lot of those around. You don't know that? Okay well they know it. And so they would and I would say "Why do you let them touch so many?" "Well they were having fun," my mother would say.

JS: Good memories up there.

MP: Oh yes. They have wonderful memories of their grandparents and I really appreciated that because I know how many ladies, women raised their children with nobody in town to help them and it's real hard. It's very hard. My daughter-in-laws have done that and are doing it. When I could help I did. I'm too old now to do much but the one daughter that has the, my 25 year old granddaughter, I spent a lot of time with them. They live in Georgia and I went and helped a lot there, and spent a lot of time with them.

JS: Do your children live in town?

MP: Jane the daughter lives here. The two boys, one lives in Tennessee, one lives in Georgia.

JS: Well thank you. I think we got a lot of . . .

MP: Oh you're very welcome. I don't know that you found out anything real. . .

JS: It was very interesting.

MP: Well my father lived in Chicago for quite a while, off and on. And one of the things that always struck me funny was the pronunciation of Goethe Street. Now most people in Chicago call it Gothe or whatever they can come up with because they don't know and he used to get irritated. "It's Gerta," he'd say. You know how the Germans have that guttural sound. And then my name I noticed was misspelled. Well it's spelled the way you would spell some people's names. On my birth announcements it's MARGERY because he went out and had a birth announcements printed for my mother and she was horrified because that was not the way she wanted it spelled. She wanted it MARJORIE. There's something about Germans and J. They don't get that letter in their alphabet, That's not, Maora, he would call me. He couldn't get that and I got to be a joke that they would refer to. My mother would call me Maora just because it was, because that's what he said, "Well that's not the way, it should be, Maora, because it had a J in it." I don't know what that is about the German language but that threw him for a loop. I had a real swell time when I went to

get a passport a number of years later because my name was spelled incorrectly according to them and I had to go back to school records in the Rockford school system and prove to them that when I was enrolled in school I was enrolled with my name spelled MARJORIE or they wouldn't accept my, wouldn't give me a passport. So that was interesting. And of course he hated Minnesota. He worked up there one time. What is that real cold place in Minnesota? Not Bemidji, there's another place you always hear about.

JS: Duluth?

MP: No there's, maybe it's not Minnesota maybe it's another one of those like North Dakota or something like that.

JS: Fargo?

MP: Fargo! North Dakota. He evidently worked there once and he just, he couldn't wait to get out of there. He spent a winter there and he never got over it, how horrified he was over how cold it was there. He also worked in the circus for awhile. He bopped around a lot. I think he probably was just a roustabout. I don't think he did any baking for them or anything, he just did it for fun I think. And I unfortunately did not question him enough about all the places that he went. He never went west, which I think is kind of interesting. He would've been a good candidate for going to California or someplace like that. But he stayed pretty much in the East and the Midwest.

JS: Did he talk about his time at the circus?

MP: Not really. I didn't ask him, unfortunately.

JS: I would think that would be something that you?

MP: Yeah I would think that would be interesting too. Dumb me, I didn't ask him. But the part about the Chicago street pronunciation, that really irritated him that they couldn't pronounce it correctly. I can't really think of anything else. What else I was talking about before that you wanted to hear about? I wish I had questioned him more. When he was at the end before he died, he was in the nursing home, he was out at River Bluff and I would get him talking because that would keep him happy and he loved to talk and he started, he did give me a long soliloquy on all the places he had been and I didn't have a tape recorder, I didn't write it down and I regret now that I don't remember all that he said. I know he was all over the place and it was just fun for him he had no ties, he had no wife. He had nobody.

JS: Do you think he felt like talking about it then, rather than when he was younger?

MP: Oh yes, he talked about it any time you ask him. It's just nobody ever asked. Unfortunately, as we all found out later nobody asked. I think my boys, he was wild, he told them wild shaggy dog stories. He loved to tell us jokes, long involved jokes which of course they thought was a lot of fun and when they got a little bit older they had tape

recorders and they taped him one time. I wish I still had the tape. And they taped him telling one of these long involved stories of his and then they played it back for him. He was horrified that he had an accent. He did not know how he sounded and he was old then and he had never occurred to him that he didn't sound like all the people that he talked to. He thought he sounded the same. And of course he had a German accent, not a real strong one, but a German accent. And he later, we had a friend who was a friend of Tom's, and she spoke German to him because she thought "Oh this is interesting." She was from Germany. And he speaks German with some kind of an accent, she said, because he'd been gone so long and he hadn't spoken in German to anyone in so long that he really didn't speak very good German anymore. She was horrified too, she said "well he doesn't speak very good German. He speaks with some kind of a funny accent," she said. Which I thought was interesting. I didn't notice it, but she did. So that's all I can think of.

JS: Okay. Thank you.

MP: Okay.

JS: Tell a little bit about your son Tom who's a musician. How did your father react to that? Did he enjoy the fact that he was involved with music?

MP: Well of course both my mother and father were so fond of him and so close to him. They couldn't understand exactly what it was he was doing but whatever it was if he was doing it, it was fine with them and they were going to participate as much as possible. So if he played anywhere locally, which usually would have been the Sinnissippi band shell that would later on, when they first started of course he played places like that because they were just starting out. And he went to, he and my mother would go to Sinnissippi Park and they take their blanket and they'd spread it out and they'd get all ready and the first time they were scheduled to play there somebody, he was kind of wandering around and they were setting up on the stage and nothing was going on and he didn't see any of the members of the band around so he walked over to one of the roadies and said "Well when is the band going to go on or when is it going to appear?" and this kid looked at my father up and down and he said "Well you know dad, it ain't Beethoven." My father thought that was the funniest thing he ever, he wasn't insulted at all, he just thought it was hilarious. He told everybody that story. He just thought that was a real good one. They didn't really understand what he did, but as long as he was doing and it was fine with them and they would show up as much as possible anyplace that he would play that they could go.

JS: They would go out of the city?

MP: They would go and see him and so, they were very proud of him and they didn't understand what the heck it was he was doing, but whatever it was if he was doing it that was just fine with them.

JS: Well they became so famous that.

MP: He never really lived to see that. No, that was way past his time. He was old by that time. And I think he appreciated what he was doing but he didn't really get to see him anymore. He was in a nursing home for quite a long time. And he was crippled and he had a stroke and he was crippled after. He stayed alert and sharp to the very end though. He was always, he never got hazy in his mind or anything like that so, that part was good. I could still talk to him. My mother was not. But he was still in his right mind at the end. But I don't think really at that point he really understood what Tom was doing. He understood it when he played in the park and did the little things that he did.

JS: He was high school age or a little beyond that, your son?

MP: Well he was a union musician when he was 14. He started when he went into high school. Gosh I can't even remember years anymore, 1950, 19 what did he was, 18, 68, 1968 he graduated. He was heavily into music then and then they went on from there. He was in different bands. They had their own band and then they started with another one and of course the big musician in town in that genre was Rick Nielsen and his family had the music store on 7th St and Tom took lessons there. And he took lessons there for a year with one of the teachers that Rick's father employed. He actually was a barber I think and he just taught guitar on the side. And so he taught Tom the music that he wanted to play. He let him play what he wanted to play and then taught him how to play that and then when he got about a year, it took them about a year, and he said "You go on and do your own thing now," he said, "I taught you all I know." So he did. He went out and started a little band of his own that his father called the Tom-Paul-Larrys because it was Tom, Paul, and Larry and they didn't have a name and Tom says "We're not going to call our band that." So his father said "Well I think Tompaullarry's a real good name." And they played their first gig, if you can call it, on the lower side of what is not there anymore, the 10th Ave. pool. Did you ever remember that? That's way before your time. Anyway there is a big public swimming pool on 10th Ave off of 7th St, in that area, and it was aboveground so you went to the dressing rooms on the main floor and the pool was above ground. So when you were at the pool you looked out over into the park and their first playing date was in the little park below the pool. So everybody gathered, dripping water on the drums as I can remember from their suits, you know leaning over watching the band play. the Tom-Paul-Larrys played their first gig at the 10th Ave. pool.

JS: Was your father or mother musical? Do you think that's where Tom picked it up?

MP: Not really that I know of, no. My father was interested in music but he was not a musician at all and my mother had one brother who was musical and played something, I forget what. But no, I don't know that he got any musical talent from either one of us. All the other members of the band did get musical talent from their families but not Tom. He did that all on his own.