

Kentwood Historic Preservation Commission  
Oral History Abstract



Oral History # 061-2006

Name of individual (s): Donna K. Barnes with daughter-in-law Jane Barnes

Name of Interviewer: Joyce Thompson

Date: March 10, 2006

Brief summary of individual's importance to Paris Township/Kentwood history:

Although Donna Barnes grew up in Grand Rapids, she served as a teacher in Godwin and Kentwood schools. She played an active role in the Citizens of Kentwood for Consolidation Committee which fought off the transfer of Hamilton Elementary School into the Grand Rapids School District. She also served on the Library Board and worked diligently for the establishment of a Kentwood Library. In 1975-76, she served on the Bicentennial Commission.

**KENTWOOD HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
[KHPC]**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**  
(061-2006)

**Donna K. Barnes**  
**Jane Barnes, daughter-in-law**

**INTERVIEWER: JOYCE THOMPSON**  
**March 10, 2006**

Transcribed by: Sandy de Ryke  
de Ryke Transcriptions, LLC, Sept. 2006  
Edited Version, October, 2006

**KENTWOOD HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION (KHPC)  
ORAL HISTORY**

**Subject:** Donna K. Barnes and her daughter-in-law, Jane Barnes  
**Interviewer:** Joyce A. Thompson  
**Date of Interview:** March 10, 2006  
**Place:** Home of her son, Steven, at 719 Firestone, S.E.

**Transcribed by:** Sandy de Ryke, de Ryke Transcriptions, LLC, October 2006

DB Donna K. Barnes  
JB Jane Barnes  
JT Joyce Thompson

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[I REMOVED CRUTCH WORDS AND FALSE STARTS FROM THIS TRANSCRIPT]

JT: Today is March 10, 2006, and this is the taped oral history of Donna K. Barnes. We are at her son's home, Steven, at 719 Firestone, S.E., in the kitchen/dining room area. Her daughter-in-law, Jane Barnes, is also present. My name is Joyce Thompson. I will be recording this oral history for the Kentwood Historic Preservation Commission. This tape will be transcribed, a copy given to Donna Barnes so she can revise or make any corrections or deletions that she wishes. When Donna is satisfied and the oral history is completed she will be asked to sign a release so it will become part of Kentwood's archives. Is this arrangement satisfactory to you, Donna?

DB: Yes, except the "K". The initial "K", not Kay.

JT: Okay, no problem. What is your name and date of birth, Donna?

DB: Donna Barnes.

JT: Your date of birth?

DB: May 15, 1922.

JT: Okay, thank you. And your age today?

DB: Eighty-three today, I think. Is it, or is it eighty-four today.

JB: I don't know. I'd have to do the math.

JT: And where were you born, Donna?

DB: In Grand Rapids.

JT: And your parents' names.

DB: My mother was Blanche and my father, John Keller.

JT: And where were they born?

DB: She was born in Grand Rapids and he was born on a farm which is no longer farmland or anything, just a little bit east of where we are now.

JT: And you had how many siblings?

DB: One sister.

JT: One sister? Younger or older?

DB: Younger.

JT: And her name?

DB: Dorothy.

JT: And you said she was younger?

DB: Yes.

JT: Okay, so you're the older sister.

DB: Ah, huh. There were just the two of us.

JT: Okay, and how much younger was she?

DB: About three and a half years.

JT: Okay, so you're pretty close. And let's see. How did this birth order affect you? Did you have to take care of sister?

DB: Oh, no. I was really happy that there was another one in the family. We always got along very well and, unfortunately, she passed away a few years ago. So, I was very unhappy about that.

JT: Did you play together?

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: What did you play with?

DB: Well, we played with dolls, of course. And then we played in the back yard running around and doing things like that. My father fixed one of those little pool things and we'd go wading in that and my mother would have fits because she thought we were going to drown ourselves or something like that. We just had fun.

JT: Okay, tell me about your favorite doll. What did it look like?

DB: Oh, she was a big doll.

JT: How big is big?

DB: Big like that (Donna indicated size at about 24 inches high with her hands) when she was sitting up and I would carry her around and kind of hug her and she was my baby.

JT: Was she porcelain head? What kind?

DB: Porcelain head, but a soft body.

JT: Soft body and you had clothes for this doll?

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: A buggy?

DB: Yes, and a buggy.

JT: You did!?

DB: Yes, I did.

JT: Boy, you were styling. Did you have a playhouse?

DB: No, no.

JT: Where did you play?

DB: We played in the back yard. We had a really nice back yard.

JT: Didn't play in your bedroom?

DB: No, not really.

JT: Not really? Okay. I'd like you to remember a sibling-sister moment with Dorothy. What do you remember? What comes to mind? Something special that you shared.

DB: Oh, let's see. The time we sneaked out to the kitchen.

JT: Okay, this is a story. Keep going. You sneaked out to the kitchen.

DB: My mother finished baking some very nice cookies and I said, "Let's take some," and she said, "Do you think we should?" and I said, "Yes." So, we piled up on this plate and went out in the yard and when she came in, she asked "Where did all those cookies go?" "I know who did it, I know who did it." And she said, "You're going to be sick to your stomach for doing all of that," and she was right.

JT: Mother's usually are. What kind of cookies were they?

DB: Oh, kind of a, just a regular cookie. She didn't put stuff in it like some people put chocolate chips in and everything. I don't think they had chocolate chips back then.

JT: So, whose idea was it to sneak those cookies? Yours or Dorothy's?

DB: Probably me.

JT: The older sister did it. Okay, tell me about the occupation of your parents. What did your father do for a living?

DB: Well, my father, I think he was very fortunate according to the period of time when jobs were so scarce. He worked on the railroad.

JT: Okay, what did he do?

DB: He was working as a -- riding in the car -- where they, which is it? See, I can't remember all that stuff either.

JB: When we had that little lantern thing on the caboose.

JT: Was he a conductor?

DB: No, he wasn't a conductor, but it was where they put in all the stuff that they were sending -- if people had things that they were sending away or wanted them to be delivered to Detroit or to Lansing or someplace like that, that's what he was doing, that type of thing.

JT: He always worked for the railroad?

DB: Ah, huh. Well, he was a brakeman for a while. Ya, he always did and he was a very, I have to say for my father he was a very smart man in everything and he was very insistent that I not stop at the end of high school or anything like that.

JT: He wanted you to continue your education.

DB: Absolutely.

JT: Good. And your mother, what was her occupation?

DB: She just stayed at home, worked at home.

JT: That was very typical back then.

DB: Yes, very much so.

JT: Absolutely, what memory comes to mind about your father? When I say "your father", you think, what memory?

DB: He was from a larger family and he was the youngest, he was the boy. And, the thing I always remember is like clockwork, every weekend we had to drive to see one of the sisters and drive out to see them and have dinner there, and, of course, this was on a farm and everything and we got stuffed to the gills with good food and everything. And that was always good. We would always go to see one or the other and the other for years.

JT: So, you had an opportunity to play with your cousins.

DB: Well, yes, but there weren't as many cousins as you might have thought.

JT: Really?

DB: Ya, ah, huh.

JT: But, you had an opportunity to play outside.

DB: Yes, play outside, because one of them, as I said, was on a farm. Then, ultimately, I can't think of the name of the town. It's terrible to get old.

JB: You mentioned Hastings.

DB: Hastings, ya, that's right, we were there some of the time.

JT: So very strong family ties.

DB: Yes, yes, very much so. He was very much that way.

JT: And, when I say "mother", what memory comes to mind of mom, your mom?

DB: She was such a good person and she had worked before she was married and had a -- I can't even remember what it was, just a nice job, and she always used to think about how she would love to go to work again and, but she said, "I do have my work here with you kids."

JT: Oh, taking care of a family is a full-time job, right?

DB: Ya.

JT: So, okay, that is mom and dad's memory. And, when I say your "sister", what memory comes to mind of your sister?

DB: Oh, I loved my sister a lot and we did a lot together and she got married and moved to Lansing and then one of the saddest things was that she got ill and she passed away. She'd been married for several years. She just -- and that was it.

JT: What age was she when she died?

DB: She was about in her 50s.

JT: Oh, very young. Okay. All right, your family home. Where was your family home?

DB: The first one?

JT: Ah, huh.

DB: I hate to say it -- I just hate to say it when I think about it. It was on Delaware off --

JT: Okay, on Delaware, in Grand Rapids.

DB: Yes. When I think about that -- did I have you take me down there? No, maybe I --

JB: Maybe Marcia (Donna's daughter).

DB: It made me feel umph! inside because it was such a nice place. Well, of course, and when you consider where we are now, obviously, it was awfully close to downtown. It was close to Madison School because I went there. After a while, then my dad said, "Well, we should be moving someplace else," and then that's when he went out and we ended up on Union Boulevard.

JT: Union Boulevard you spent more time there, correct?

DB: Yes, ah, huh.

JT: All right, tell me how this house looked.

DB: Oh, it looked very nice. It was on a corner, the boulevard was there with the trees and everything in between and it faced out onto Griggs, but we were numbered up on Union, our number was Union Boulevard. And, that was very nice because -- that was the time we found Clifford R., Dick. He was next door, the next-door neighbor there was the

three boys and, unfortunately, he is no longer here, but his brother Ed is still living. He's in East Grand Rapids. Did you go with me that time or was it just? Yes, when we went out there just to say hello.

JT: This house, was it a two-story home?

DB: Two-story.

JT: Two-story home?

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: And the best place for you in that house was where?

DB: Well, I had a room to myself for a while. It looked out in the front and that was nice.

JT: Oh, you liked that. That was your bedroom?

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: What was in that bedroom?

DB: Oh, a very nice bedroom and some nice furniture and me.

JT: I was going for "you had a bed", what else did you have?

DB: Yes, I had a dresser and a closet that I loaded with clothes.

JT: No desk?

DB: Um, did I have a desk in there? I had a desk someplace, but I don't recall.

JT: Okay, that's okay. All right, did you have chores to do when you were living on Union?

DB: Yes, I had to do the dishes. Sometimes I had to wash them and dry them, sometimes I just dried them. And, as I got older my mother let me do a little bit of cooking and that kind of thing, just nothing fancy.

JT: Do you remember the first thing you cooked?

DB: No.

JT: Were you close to your neighbors?

DB: Yes, very close to my neighbor.

JT: I will come to that. I think you married one of them.

DB: Yes.

JT: All right, let's go back to your favorite toys as a child, other than dolls. Do you have anything else?

DB: No, I loved books. I was a heavy book reader. I still am.

JT: Well, considering your profession, yes, I can understand that. So, you liked books. Did you have any favorite foods as a child?

DB: Food?

JT: Ah, huh.

DB: Oh, not particularly, I don't think.

JT: Your mother didn't cook anything special that you liked?

DB: Well, I think I liked everything that she cooked.

JB: Wasn't she German?

DB: Yes, German from the family. My grandfather came from Germany.

JT: No special German --

DB: Well, if there was I don't remember anything.

JT: Okay. Tell me where you went to school as an elementary student.

DB: That was Dickinson.

JT: Dickinson?

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: What was Dickinson like back then?

DB: Oh, it was a beautiful school. It was relatively new and oh, I don't know, a couple years ago I think I drove by it. I mean, it still looked all right.

JT: But, you were then when it was very new.

DB: Very new, ah, huh.

JT: Big classes?

DB: No, just nice-sized classes.

JT: Did you have a favorite teacher?

DB: Yes, I think it was Mrs. Vandenberg, if I recall correctly.

JT: And why did you like her?

DB: Oh, she was always very nice and she wanted us to always have our work done and she would go around to see and I got good marks from her, but I think it was because I did do the work. I was kind of a study bug.

JT: I think you liked school.

DB: Yes, very much so, or I wouldn't have ended up teaching, would I?

JT: No. Tell me your favorite subjects in grade school.

DB: In grade school well, it would be English. I enjoyed the art class, but I'm not at all artistic.

JT: Did they diagram sentences back then? Do you remember that?

DB: Let's see. I don't remember.

JT: I just wondered. I just thought of that. How did you get to school?

DB: Walked.

JT: You walked? How far was that?

DB: Oh, probably four or five blocks.

JT: That's a long distance.

DB: It really wasn't.

JT: It is a long distance. But, you walked with Dorothy?

DB: See, I went to school before she did. Ya, and when she started, yes, I did walk with her. And, oh, I had a couple of friends that, as they walked by I would catch up with them. But, today I wouldn't think about walking in a lot of places. Then, why no problem whatsoever.

JT: Did you go home for lunch?

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: What did mom serve you?

DB: Oh sometimes leftovers.

JT: No problem there.

DB: And sometimes a sandwich if that's what I wanted.

JT: All right, I was just curious. So, obviously, you were a good student.

DB: Yes, I was. I hate to say that, but --

JT: No, that's okay. I have a lot of people who said they weren't. And, so where did you go after Dickinson?

DB: Then I went to Burton Junior High and that was relatively new at that time. Oh, gosh, a beautiful school.

JT: And that's a distance away, wasn't it?

DB: Yes.

JT: How did you get there?

DB: Well, some of the time I walked from home, but then some of the time I got a ride from my folks.

JT: How was your middle school different from your elementary school?

DB: That we changed classes.

JT: Oh, ya, changed classes.

DB: We had different teachers.

JT: And they gave you more to do.

DB: Yes, right.

JT: Favorite subjects then?

DB: Oh, always English was my favorite subject. I can't help it.

JT: Did you have gym back then?

DB: We had gym, yes, and I wasn't a gym lover. I went to all the classes and everything and did what I was supposed to do, but it wasn't a favorite.

JT: I understand. So, did you have a favorite teacher at that point in time?

DB: Probably, but I couldn't tell you who anymore. I can't remember their names.

JT: All right. What did you wear when you went to school?

DB: Dresses.

JT: Dresses? No pants?

DB: No.

JT: They weren't allowed, were they?

DB: No, not then.

JT: Skirts, blouses?

DB: Ya, a skirt and blouse, ya, something like that.

JT: Long skirt?

DB: Long? No, not real long. Not then. They were below my knees. They weren't short skirts or anything.

JT: Okay, all right. How did you wear your hair?

DB: Well, let's see. When was it that they let me have a perm? That was a little bit later on.

JT: That was a big thing, though.

DB: Oh, it was very big, yes.

JT: Oh, yes! I can remember my mother talking about that. So, when did you wear your first pair of nylons? Was that in high school?

DB: Oh, yes. It was probably in high school.

JT: Which leads me to my next question: Where was high school?

DB: South High School.

JT: South High School.

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: You didn't walk there, did you?

DB: Ah, yes.

JT: No bus service or anything like that.

DB: No, no, no.

JT: Okay, all right. So, what was that favorite subject in high school?

DB: Still English.

JT: What did you like about English?

DB: I don't know. I just liked it, the words and what you could do with them and if you wanted to write a story, what word would you use?

JT: So, you liked to compose.

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: How about poetry? Were you a good poet?

DB: No.

JT: No?

DB: No, no.

JT: Just the stories.

DB: Yes.

JT: You liked the story part. Were you a comic book fan?

DB: No.

JT: Books still.

DB: Books, books, books, books. I have to tell you this one because this is funny.

JT: Okay.

DB: I had a library card and went to the library and got some books, a couple of books.

JT: The main library?

DB: At the school.

JT: At the school, okay. The school library.

DB: When I was at Dickinson. And I came home and I read both books right, just like that. And I got up and I started off and my mother said, "Where are you going?" and I said, "I'm going to take the books back," and she said, "Well, you can't do that," and I said, "Well, I've read them I'm going to do it." I walked back and took them in and she said, "Why are you bringing these books?" and I said, "I've read them and I would like some more." "Well, we don't do it that way. You take them out for a certain part of the week," but I said, "I've read them already and I want to read more because I like to read!" "Well, we can make an exception, I guess." She let me go and take more books.

JT: Well, you were in grade school. You must have been devastated that you couldn't have more books.

DB: To this day I'm a reader.

JT: Hey, that's good, that's good. So, no comic books. Do you remember a favorite book?

DB: No, I can't tell you anymore. They were all favorites, practically.

JT: All right. When you look back on your family years on Union, now you told me every Saturday you went to visit relatives on the farm. Was there anything else that you did for recreation with your family?

DB: Well, I guess I played with the kids in the neighborhood, that kind of thing. As I got a little bit older, why I had friends and we'd go to one another's houses.

JT: I'm talking about your family. Did your family go on vacations? Did your family --

DB: It was all family-oriented.

JT: Okay, all family-oriented.

JB: Did your dad take you on train rides?

DB: Well, yes, my father, he worked on the railroad and every once in a while he would say, "Well, do you want to go today?" He went between Grand Rapids and Detroit and so that was fine. It was a roundtrip as they say, down and back, and he would take me on the train and I would go in the car with him and ride along. That was fun. Then we'd stop at Lansing or some other place and then he'd say, "Well, you can look out now. Be careful, don't jump out. We are going to start up again," and that kind of thing.

JT: Did you have to take a lunch?

DB: Yes, we took a lunch.

JT: So, you had time with dad. That was cool.

DB: Yes, it was fun. He was such a good dad.

JT: Sometimes, that's good. Tell me, when you went on that train ride did you see a lot of countryside, did you see a lot of built-up city next to the tracks, or was it basically open?

DB: Basically, open, yes, back then. As you got toward the cities, like toward Lansing why we would see the homes.

JT: Well, I wonder what it looks like now today.

DB: I don't know. I don't think I'll ride the train. I don't think they even take it there.

JT: Okay, Clifford R. Barnes, your husband. You met him because he lived next door, correct?

DB: Correct.

JT: Okay, where was your first date?

DB: Well, when he came back from being overseas in World War II, I knew he was coming back. At that time we were living in another place and not next door to them or anything. And, holy smokes, I think the day after he got in there -- bam! bam! bam! on the door where we lived and there he was. He said, "Here I am!"

JT: I have just a thought. Did he go to school with you?

DB: He was, I think, two years younger than I was, so we didn't.

JT: You were the "older" woman.

DB: Ya, the older woman.

JT: I got it.

DB: We went to the same school, but not together.

JT: Not together. So, you met your husband because he was next door. And you married when?

DB: When did we get married, Jane, do you remember?

JB: It's on the sheet.

DB: Is it on here?

JT: Is it on December 20, 1947? That is correct?

DB: Ah, huh, ya. Yes. I'd better look at those, hadn't I?

JT: And you lived where at first?

DB: You mean right when we were married?

JT: Ah, huh.

DB: I had been on the corner at Union Boulevard. His folks were next door and his grandma had a small house next to that, and she passed away and we moved into the small house and stayed there until we got thinking and decided where we would like to go.

JT: Were you working at that time?

DB: No.

JT: Okay.

DB: I don't think I was. Was I, or was I teaching then?

JT: In 1947 --

DB: Forty-seven, ya. I was --

JT: You were teaching.

DB: At Godwin, ya.

JT: Right. What did your husband do for a living?

DB: Well, it was Barnes Construction Company, so he was right with that.

JT: Oh. He went into the family business.

DB: Ah, huh, ya.

JT: What did he do?

DB: You do what everybody does right at the beginning, I guess. Went out and, what was he doing, Jane?

JB: I don't know. He went to work.

JT: Did he build houses, or commercial?

DB: They were building mostly commercial things.

JB: He built the Old Kent Banks in town.

JT: Oh, he did? Okay.

JB: It's actually C. D. Barnes Associates, but there is a Barnes Construction too.

JT: I was trying to find out what he built. That's what I was going for.

JB: Ferris -- some of the buildings at Ferris, didn't he build?

DB: Yes.

JB: Some of the buildings downtown.

DB: You're remembering that very well. Calling that to my attention, yes, I know.

JT: So, Steve was your first child, correct?

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: And when was he born?

JB: Nineteen forty-nine.

JT: Nineteen forty-nine. A couple years later and Marcia your daughter was --

DB: That was 1952, I think, wasn't it, Jane?

JT: Right. So, you're still teaching.

DB: Ah, was I then?

JT: Nineteen forty-four to '49.

DB: No, I had a time out.

JT: Time out, ya. Well, we'll get to those two. Well, you have a boy and a girl to keep you busy. Now, I want you to think of a best memory that you have of raising your family. Can you give me one of those?

DB: That's some of the family that I raised over there. It's a picture of them.

JT: Think of Steve and Marcia when they were little and growing up. What comes to mind?

DB: Steve was pretty nice. Ya, he was, and when Marcia was born that fascinated him that, you know, there's a sister, oh, there's somebody else, that kind of thing. But, their difference in age, I don't know, did they -- ?

JT: They were pretty close.

DB: Three years apart, I think.

JT: Right.

JB: I always remembered the lake, but that was later.

DB: Yes, that was later. The family had bought and owned an entire lake up north of Cedar Springs/Sand Lake area and we had a place there.

JT: A cottage?

DB: Ah, huh. And that's where all the kids came and played.

JT: So, you're telling me that you remember family times going to the lake.

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: What did you do at the lake?

DB: The kids went in swimming all the time and, of course, we had to go after them when they were young and, as they got older they did their own boating and things like that.

JT: Kids fished?

DB: Yes. Forever and ever.

JT: Did you spend summers there?

DB: Ah, huh, yup. Sometimes spent the whole summer there and would go back to town now and again.

JT: That's nice. Those are good memories. Do you still have that cottage?

DB: Oh, no. It was several years ago, wasn't it Jane?

JT: Well, things change, priorities change too. Okay, the best holiday that you can think of with the family, you, Dick, and the kids.

DB: Well, always Christmas would be one of the best ones. It was fun to see them open their things and sometimes I would just have one or two things out and have other things hidden away and then they'd open and then finally I said, "Oh, I forgot something." That kind of stuff. I think it was fun.

JT: So, Christmas.

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: Okay. And I'd like to leave that topic and I'd like to have you think back. You lived a little bit during the Depression Era. Do you remember anything about the Depression Era from your mom and dad?

DB: Well, as I said, my father had a good job and the thing I remember the most about is my aunt and uncle who had several children. That was on my mother's side and they were just -- it was pathetic, really. And, my father said, "We've got to see that they get along," and so, I don't know it was every week, but maybe every couple of weeks we were sure to go out there and my mother went to the store and bought a lot of stuff.

JT: Food, mostly.

DB: Yes, ah, huh.

JT: Helped them along with food.

DB: Yes, yes. And it was -- I think back on it lots of times and how thankful they were to get the things. They had several children. Ultimately, of course, they worked out of it.

JT: Well, finding jobs was hard too.

DB: Very, very, very difficult, yes.

JT: Food was a big issue.

DB: Yes, yes.

JT: Okay. So, your family wasn't affected.

DB: No.

JT: I'd like you to remember about World War II and I always ask this question. What comes to mind, what do you remember at that point in time?

DB: What a terrible thing to have happened and who in the family was going to have to go out, if anyone did.

JT: Did anybody?

DB: Did, did they?

JB: Dick did.

DB: Yes.

JT: Your husband?

DB: Ya.

JT: Remember? That's right. What did he do in the war?

DB: Well, he was aboard ship and I can't remember what he did do, he was aboard ship.

JT: In the Navy?

JB: The Navy.

JT: Because you remember you married him after he came back.

DB: Ya, I married him afterwards, yes.

JT: Right, exactly. Do you remember any shortages that affected you?

DB: Not that I can think of. I mean, I know there were shortages on food and things of that sort, but --

JT: Nothing that affected you?

DB: No.

JT: Okay. I'd like to talk to you about your work experience, your first job. Can you tell me about your first job?

DB: What was the first job, Jane, was it teaching?

JB: Well, after college.

DB: Well, ya.

JB: I don't know if you did anything before then.

DB: My first job.

JT: It had to be at, was that the college? I'd like you to stop and tell me about college. Where did you go to college?

DB: Well, you can see right here on the thing where I went. I went to Junior College for two years, then I went down to Western and I wanted to teach so I got my teaching certificate there.

JT: From Western. How was Western different from J. C., Junior College?

DB: Oh, totally different, because J. C. was a small school at that time. Much smaller than it is now. Western, I was there with friends. We had a room that we shared and we walked to class, which was okay. I enjoyed it at Western and, gradually, they were enlarging it and I guess today it's a pretty good size.

JT: Absolutely, so you graduated with a teaching degree in English?

DB: Yes.

JT: And, your first job -- let's go back to that -- was where?

DB: At Godwin.

JT: At Godwin. You got your first teaching job at Godwin. What did you do?

DB: Well, I tried to teach a little English. At that time it was kind of a class where they had a couple of kinds of things. I can't remember what it was now. It was a little bit different, but I wanted to teach English. I did teach a little bit of history, but English was my strong thing that I wanted to do.

JT: So, you taught how to write stories?

DB: Yes.

JB: Probably diagrammed sentence too.

DB: Oh, yes, we had to do things like that.

JT: It was a big thing back then.

DB: Diagramming sentences.

JB: She worked on the year book too.

DB: That's the kind of thing that I loved doing was when we did the year book. They'd get together things and we'd go over it and I'd okay some of the stuff and some I'd say, "No, that can't go in." And it just went together nicely. I enjoyed it.

JT: So, you taught upper English, like tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades.

JB: They dedicated a year book to her one year.

DB: What Jane?

JB: They dedicated the year book to you one year.

DB: But, that was in a different school system.

JB: Godwin, ya.

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: Not Godwin, was it?

JB: Ya, both Godwin and Kentwood.

JT: Godwin, boy. Really? Godwin too?

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: So, then you were very active. Oh, yes, Wolverines, absolutely. That is you? I'm looking at this beautiful picture here.

DB: That was then.

JT: A dark-haired woman.

DB: Yes, yes.

JT: Ah, cool. From Godwin. So, you worked on the year book.

DB: Yes, I worked with them and everything, yes, definitely.

JT: What did you do when you worked on a year book?

DB: Well, you just kind of check things out and have you got the things that are supposed to go in the year book? Do you have the pictures of everybody? And, when the cameraman came, or the fellow came to take pictures, I had to be sure that everybody was there and I warned them the day before to be sure that they had their hair right and all the rest of this kind of stuff.

JT: A lot of organization, Donna.

DB: Ya, I loved it. I really did.

JT: Well, I can see that.

JB: Tell her about the Godwin Girls.

DB: The what?

JB: Your Godwin Girls.

JT: Tell me about this. This sounds like a story, "The Godwin Girls."

DB: Well, there's a group of them and I don't know if they're still in existence, but when was it, a year or so ago that they called and they wanted me to get together with them and we did.

JB: These were her students.

JT: Your former students?!

DB: Yes.

JT: Okay, that's cool.

DB: It was fun. And I hear from different ones now and again. They'll call me or something.

JT: That's good. It makes you feel good.

DB: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

JT: So, from Godwin you went -- you had a little bit of time off raising your family?

DB: Right.

JT: You went back to work where?

DB: Kentwood.

JT: At Kentwood. Kentwood High?

DB: Well, ya, but I got really into something else there too with a guidance director and pretty soon we were in that and I was doing that in the guidance area.

JT: They let you stop teaching English and then they --

DB: Well, for a while I was teaching two classes and then that cut it all out and I was doing all that.

JT: They needed a guidance counselor and --

DB: Right, so the two of us were guiding.

JB: She was my guidance counselor, actually.

JT: Right! Okay, Jane, all right. Well, obviously, things turned out well here.

JB: Ya, right.

JT: How was it different teaching back then as opposed to teaching now? Was it different or not?

DB: I really don't know, but I think back then that we insisted upon more things being done certain ways and, I don't know. Do you Jane?

JB: Ya, we were respectful and --

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: You had small classes?

DB: Ah, not necessarily. If they could, we kept them small, but sometimes you can't.

JT: So, you were teaching in the early '60s at the high school, Kentwood High School , correct.

DB: Ya, ah, huh.

JT: When it was a high school.

JB: First, Crestwood Middle School.

JT: Exactly, okay. You were active in the Kentwood community too. I see here, "Member of Citizens of Kentwood for Consolidation Committee." How did that happen? Did you get talked into this?

DB: I don't know, did I, Jane, or what?

JB: She was the woman behind the man who was.

DB: How did that happen? How does one become that?

JT: Tell me the story, Donna.

DB: Oh, I don't know. That was the one where I wanted us to become Kentwood?

JB: They were trying to take Hamilton into the City of Grand Rapids. They wanted Hamilton Elementary, which they actually did. Then it came back.

DB: Ya, I don't know. What did I do? Growl?

JB: Well, Dick was on the board of whatever.

JT: Her husband?

JB: Ya, and they just petitioned and got everybody excited about a Kentwood school system and not going into Grand Rapids, which is that whole notebook right there.

JT: Oh, my, ya. So, you were part of a committee that made this possible, that's what you're saying, way back then. There were some people that were opposed to this.

DB: Oh, yes, there always are.

JT: You had to do a lot of debating, huh?

DB: Well, I don't know, did we do a lot of it Jane or just -- ?

JB: Ya, it went all the way, I think, to the Supreme Court of Michigan.

DB: Oh, gosh, I'd forgotten that.

JB: Getting Hamilton back and staying separate from Grand Rapids, and --

JT: I'm glad we did that.

JB: They were all right in the thick of all of that.

JT: So, from that committee you went to the Library Board, correct?

DB: Ya.

JT: And, how did that come about? You got asked to join this, or heard about it? Tell me about this.

DB: Well, I think we decided we wanted a library out here, didn't we? We kind of just figured out some plans and how do we go about it.

JB: I wasn't around then, so --

DB: Well, we had to get the land for it and don't ask me where we got that either, now. Where is it?

JB: That's a picture from the library. Her name is on the plaque at the bottom there.

DB: You can see how far down I am.

JT: So, then, where did you meet when you were talking about all of this?

DB: There was a need for us to have our own library, why should we hike ourselves into Grand Rapids?

JT: Exactly, but where did you talk about it, where did you meet to talk about this?

DB: Oh, I don't know.

JB: You had a lot of meetings at your house.

DB: That's right, we did. I'd forgotten about that, ya.

JT: So, in other words, the concerned group of citizens who wanted this and you had to go through channels to get this done.

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: I see. So, 1975 is when this library became --

JB: The library.

JT: I get it, okay. Because of your efforts we now have a library. Thank you. And then, Bicentennial Commission member in '75 and '76.

DB: Correct.

JT: So, you kept going on this, didn't you?

DB: I guess so.

JT: What did you do for that committee?

DB: Well, what did we do?

JB: I don't remember.

DB: Well, I think we just decided that we needed to have some sort of a get-together on that too, but I really can't recall.

JT: Okay.

DB: That's terrible.

JT: Okay.

DB: We're almost at the bottom of the page here.

JT: We're getting there. Don't worry. Hobbies. Did you have any hobbies?

DB: Playing the piano.

JT: Playing the piano.

DB: Not as well as I used to, that's for sure.

JT: Where did you learn how to do this?

DB: Because I started lessons when I was about six years old. My mother decided that -- mother and father said, "You've got to learn to play a piano or something." She had one and I just took piano lessons forever, it seemed like.

JT: Did you go to somebody's home for this?

DB: No, they came to my house.

JT: Oh, they came to your house. How about Dorothy? Did she play too?

DB: Yes, but not as much. She kind of said, "Phitt" with it.

JT: You liked it.

DB: Oh, I loved it. And I still have a piano.

JT: Are you a classical lover of music?

DB: Ya.

JT: Okay, you like that, all right.

DB: But, that doesn't mean that I don't like the other kind of music either.

JT: True, true, but you like classics. Well, that stands to reason if you like certain books, it goes together. Very, very true. All right, I have to know what you would say to describe yourself, Donna. Tell me about those adjectives that you would use to describe Donna Barnes.

DB: Well, I would have said at one time that I was smart.

JT: And?

DB: I am determined about things that I would do and I like to do things for people and, what else, Jane?

JB: Organized, I think.

DB: Yes, well, maybe I'm slipping in that area. Yes, highly organized. I would say at one time.

JT: Well, it looks as though you had a lot of job highlights. I would say you're *very* organized.

DB: Had to be.

JT: Ah, huh, had to be.

DB: Now, I guess I'm just kind of lazy.

JB: Or, retired.

DB: Retired, thank you. That's a very nice word.

JT: All right, we're almost done here, Donna. Anything I have forgotten? Anything you would like to talk about at this point in time that I have not touched on.

DB: No, I think you touched on about everything --

JT: I thought of something just right now that you probably should tell me about. When you lived there was a special activity you did in the wintertime with your family. Can you tell me about that? I'm talking about your mom, dad --

DB: That we sometimes would go south?

JT: No, I was thinking of something -- you went for rides. Special places.

JB: Was that on 28th Street?

DB: Oh, correct.

JT: Tell me about that. I thought of something there.

DB: Was that way back when, though?

JB: I don't think your parents would have gone with you, just you and the kids.

JT: Oh, it wasn't the parents?

JB: No.

JT: Sleigh rides?

DB: No, just not any parents.

JT: Okay.

DB: It was this -- ya.

JB: Goin' down 28th Street in a horse-drawn sleigh.

JT: You did do that?

DB: Yes.

JT: Really?

DB: That was quite a while back.

JT: Oh, yes, I know that.

DB: Let's see, was it gravel at that time?

JB: Steve remembers gravel on Breton, I don't know.

DB: Okay, ya, I know he said that.

JT: So, this is 28th Street and you're taking a horse and buggy ride down on a sleigh?

DB: At one time 28th was gravel.

JT: Oh, I know, I know. That would not happen today, I know.

JB: No, ha, ha.

DB: I wouldn't want to think about it.

JT: No, no, no. Have we left anything out then?

DB: Oh, one little thing that's kind of cute, when I lived on Twenty-eighth Street.

JT: Okay.

DB: That we lived up high and we could see the train as it passed by. It was close to Breton Road on 28<sup>th</sup> Street and, if I was just outside right at the right time and got out far enough in the back of our barn, I could see as my dad went by and he would wave.

JT: Oh, that is precious.

DB: But, that was in the good old days.

JT: You can't see those trees anymore.

JB: He was wavin' at you.

JT: There must not have been buildings there.

DB: No, there weren't. No, nothing of that.

JT: See, that's why you can't see it nowadays because there are so many buildings.

DB: A lot different now.

JT: Oh, ya. Well, there weren't these houses out here either. Absolutely, all right.

JB: She was kind of instrumental in getting everybody to name the City of Kentwood too.

JT: Aahhh!

JB: She did her letter writing and --

JT: What were the choices? What did people want the city to be named?

DB: Paris was a choice.

JT: Paris, okay.

DB: Paris or Paris Township.

JB: What'd that letter say?

JT: Why was it selected as Kentwood? What was the reasoning there?

JB: Oh, let's see here. Name of Paris, Michigan, she kind of said no to that. She said the name Kentwood associates geographically with Kent County, Kentwood school system, and she just thought it should be the City of Kentwood.

JT: That's a big issue, what to name a community. Okay, so you were part of that too.

DB: Ah, huh.

JT: You had a lot of political interests here.

DB: And now I do nothing.

JT: Well, that's your right and that's a good right. That's okay. Anything else here, Jane?

JB: She's got the Key to the City when they named, you know, --

JT: Oh, this is you.

JB: Ya.

JT: Oh, I see, you got a key to the city.

JB: For her help, we'd just be in the backup, woman behind the scenes for the men when they

JT: Well, that's a nice memory here.

JB: That's Dick in one of the first city meetings.

JT: First city meeting your husband was on top of that. Okay, and 1967, March 6th this was published. Okay.

DB: Goes way back.

JT: Yes, yes. That's almost forty years. Okay, well the last question here -- your advice to children, grandchildren, what would that be?

DB: About what?

JT: Anything you wanted to say.

DB: If they are in school, pay attention to what you are learning. Pay attention to the teachers and get your work done, get it in on time. Just to get the work done and if you need help, come to one of us for your help. We don't know that we can always help you, but this is the way you have to -- but, pay attention to what the teacher said and if you have any questions ask the teacher, get information, and do your work!

JT: Okay, that's a good one to have. All right, we are done, Donna.

DB: Oh, are we? Well, thank you.

JT: Okay, I'm going to stop.

End of interview

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