

Good morning, I'm Betty Griffin from the Northville Public Library, and I'm here to interview for the Oral History Project. A copy of this tape will be given to you and to the Northville Historical Society and to the Northville Public Library. Would you like to introduce yourself, please?

My name is Elsie Bailey. I was born on June 20 in 1907 in Lister, Pennsylvania. My mother's name was Amelia Chapel Hanson. My father's name was John Hanford Hanson. Was that enough?

(Yes, and when did you leave Altoona?)

We left Altoona in 1927.

(And at that time you were a bride?)

And I was a bride. I left Altoona as a seventeen-year-old bride and came to Detroit.

(And your husband's name was?)

My husband's name is William Charles Bailey.

(And would you like to tell us how you met Bill Bailey?)

Well, I was going to dances when I was fifteen, sixteen years old, and my husband came to the – to Altoona--as an exhibition dancer with another partner. They traveled all over different states. And he came to the Orpheon Theater and had an exhibition there, and the owner of the largest ballroom in Pennsylvania – Danceland – came to him and asked if he would like to put on an exhibition at his ballroom. And he came the next Wednesday with his partner and gave the exhibition. He asked him if he would like to manage the place, and he let his partner go back home, and he stayed there and managed Danceland. And he had his first dance on St. Patrick's Day in the afternoon – a matinee – and I went to it, and he asked me to dance, and that was where I met him. And as he danced with me, he asked me if I would like to learn some steps and do some exhibition dancing with him.

(Alright, and that eventually led to marriage when you were about seventeen-and-a half years old. And then you were going to start out and tour the country, but you stopped in Detroit. Can you tell us more?)

When we stopped in Detroit to see a cousin of his, and we stayed there about a month. And his cousin's husband worked out at Ford Plant on Northville Road – not the one in Detroit, but the one on – not the one in Northville, but the one, out on Northville Road. So he got Bill a job at the North – at the Ford Plant. So he started working out there, and then we stayed about a year in Detroit, and we finally moved out to Plymouth – I was pregnant with my first daughter – we

moved out to Plymouth in 1928. And we lived there five years. My next daughter was born 1930.

(And their names are?)

The first-born was June Bailey, Slizarski now. And the second daughter is Barbara Dawn Bailey Lewis. And then we moved to – because of the railroad tracks that my husband didn't like – we moved to Northville in 1933.

(And you lived?)

We lived on 132 Randolph Street – no we moved to the house on Fish – next to the fishery. We stayed there probably not quite a year.

(That was on Fairbrook?)

That was on Fairbrook.

(Next to the Fish Hatchery?)

Yes, uh, huh. And then we needed a place large enough to teach, so we moved over to the 132 Randolph Street and into the large white house – ten rooms and two baths. And then our son was born there in 1936.

(And his name?)

William Charles Bailey II. And we didn't stay at Randolph Street very long. Fourteen years.

(After that then, you moved to?)

To East Cady.

(At what number?)

118 East Cady, and we were there forty years.

(Tell me about your dance studio and the house on Randolph Street. What kind of dance did you teach?)

We just taught ballroom dancing like the fox trot and waltz, cha-cha, polka. The two-step would be included in the fox trot. And the mambo and the tango – different ballroom dances.

(Can you remember who some of your students were at that time?)

Well I think all I can remember now would be John and Ruth Burkman, Don and Hazel Severence.

(Did you say they were mostly teenagers who were in your...)

No this class was the adult class. And then we did have another class on another night for the teenagers, and then we had lots of teenagers' different times at the house. And then we taught at the Presbyterian Church for these adult and teenage classes. And then after my little boy, Billy, was born, I took lessons over in Ann Arbor for tap, so I could teach tap. Children would come to the door and say, rap on the door, "Do you teach tap?" And I'd say, "No." but I thought, said to Bill, "I'd like to go and learn tap, so I can teach it because there's so much call for it." So he took me over to Ann Arbor, and I took enough to learn the basic steps, and I started – this was in '40 – this was in '36, 1936. So then I taught tap all those years up until I had to quit – four or five years ago.

(You have stopped teaching tap only five years ago?)

Yep.

(That's amazing. Where were you teaching it in recent years?)

Right there at East Cady. Oh yeah, and over at Randolph Street too. I taught it – I started over there because that was where the demand was. And then we moved over to East Cady, and I kept right on – lots of students. I want you to look at that album.

(I saw them, yes, lots of good publicity too.)

Lots of good dancers. A lot of them entertained many places, and my girls – two girls – the oldest and youngest were entertaining out all the time. Barbara never entertained too much. And then my boy Billy, he taught, he did exhibition, he entertained too quite a bit.

(Alright, and when was John born?)

John was born in 1941.

(And Racina?)

Racina was born in 1943.

(And then you said William Charles Jr. was born in 1936?)

1936. Then when he got married, he had another William Charles, the III, but he passed away when he was, before he was eighteen years old – with spinal meningitis.

(Alright, when you taught dancing, was that an era when everybody got very dressed up and wore white gloves and so forth? No.)

No, not in ballroom dancing. It was just to learn the steps.

(Just ordinary people. Then where could these people go for, out for an evening to dance?)

Well, we went ever since we were in Detroit, we went to the Graystone and the Arcadia and the Vanity. I was trying to think of that the other day. And, oh many other places, I can't think of any more. And Walled Lake. From the time we moved out this way, we went to Walled Lake an awful lot to dance, and out to Whitmore Lake, they had a dance floor down there. It wasn't a big ballroom.

(Alright, what about – do you remember Westwood as a place to dance?)

I don't know that I ever went there.

(Alright, did you ever go to Jefferson Beach?)

Yes, (to dance?) Yes.

(What about Eastwood Park?)

Yes, we've been there maybe several times. We didn't go to those places as much as we did there in Detroit.

(So, was your house on Cady large enough to accommodate classes?)

We had – we had the – it was ten rooms, two bath house. And the first three –

(Was that on Cady or Randolph?)

Well, this was both places – they had the three rooms that we used for teaching. The three rooms in East Cady were right in the front, as you come in the door, the three rooms all together with the room at the end – a small room- with a piano. We taught mostly by record in our ballroom lessons. My tap I played piano for.

(Did you? Well you certainly kept you skills up for a long time.)

I haven't touched the piano now in ten months. More than that.

(So you must have had your piano – you must have learned in Altoona?)

Well, my mother was a piano teacher, so I got my start from here. And I, at thirteen years old, I even composed a whole march. You can look at it later on. And now I couldn't do that at all. I've lost a lot.

(Well, that's part of growing older, isn't it? Did you give dance recitals then?)

Not recitals – never gave recitals, but we just entertained a lot. And there really was a call for it – children to ask to dance, we'd get up and entertain.

(You showed me some things in your scrapbook here about appearances by different people and saying that the Baileys will dance. So you must have done a fair amount of exhibition ballroom dancing over the years.)

Exhibition dancing – yes – much. Oh yes, for sixty years that’s about all we – and I raised a family of seven, you know, five children and ourselves. And had three meals a day for them all the time, washings and ironings for all them, teaching on the side, exhibition work on the side, teaching at night. Even after that, we’d get ready and go out nine, ten o’clock over to Walled Lake.

(To dance, you must have loved it.)

I did – yeah, a lotta fun then. I often think back, how did we do it all.

(Well, you were a woman ahead of your time. You were a career women when there weren’t very many career women. You must have really enjoyed doing that.)

We did.

(But – your husband always worked at what we might call a bread and butter job. He, you said, he was at the Ford Plant on Northville Road?)

At the Ford Plant for fourteen years.

(Not on Main Street?)

No, no – on Northville Road. It isn’t a Ford Plant anymore. But it was for all these years up until – I think it changed probably within the last couple years.

(He was there for sixteen years, you said?)

Yes, he went from there to Burroughs. Then he retired from Burroughs.

(Do you recall what year he retired?)

(And then he died May the tenth, 1988, and you were living in Allen Terrace at that time?)

Yes. We moved there August before that.

(’87. So there must be many people around Northville who remember you.)

Yes, I knew someone, (another name here?)

(Who?)

Orrs – do you know Florence and Seymour Orr?

(No, were they your students?)

Uh, huh. There's another one ...

(Now you must see people who remember you?)

Oh yes. There's people who live here.

(Is that right?)

Yes. Their children took tap from me – lots of 'em.

(So, that gets you involved in costumes then too, doesn't it?)

Well, I always made all my kiddies' costumes. Then the other ladies always furnished their costumes for their children. But we were never on a high scale. We were just small time, you know, not exp ...

(But you might have been the only dance studio in Northville?)

Well, I think we were for many years. But then they started another one across the street from us on East Cady.

(Oh, is that right?)

Yes, and we weren't elaborate in any of our costumes. We just made them so they looked presentable.

(Well, the pictures on the wall of you and your husband as a young couple doing exhibition dancing – your clothes are beautiful, your dress looks like the 1920's.)

Well, that's probably when they were. 1925 we were married, so they're in the 20's.

(Well, they're beautiful. I'm sure you enjoyed.)

I sure did – lots of good years together. Lots of good memories.

(It's nice to be able to continue dancing, and I think that's one activity that you can maintain until you're very up in years.)

Right, that's for sure, as long as you keep your health. Then people like to dance.

(You must like music, then?)

I love it. I've always had – we played piano at home. And my sister had a few kids come in for a combo like a piano and a guitar – different little instruments like that. And my dad played the trumpet. So we always had music.

(Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to tell me about? It certainly was a nice way for your husband to be able to continue his interest in dance by doing it at night – teaching adults ballroom dancing?)

Yes, that was our life. Work in the daytime and go teach in the evening and Saturdays all day for tap, probably. Saturdays – tap I'd have right after school. And then we'd teach ballroom in the evening. And lots and lots and lots of nights we'd go out dancing after. Eight, nine, ten o'clock, we'd go over to dance at the hall, and then we'd get home, and I don't know how the kids ever survived it. Bill had to sit down at the piano, and the grown-ups that came back with us would sing –

(And the children slept through it all?)

They tried – they were there trying to sleep and had to get up and go to school. And I don't know why we ever did it, but I can't see how they put up with it.

(Sounds to me like you were young at heart.)

We were – we always were, I guess, and always will be.

(Well, I really have enjoyed talking to you Elsie.)

I've enjoyed talking with you.

(And I'm sure this will be a valuable addition to the history of Northville during these years. You actually taught on Cady Street until you moved here?)

Uh, huh.

(That's really remarkable.)

Well, you see we moved here in August. But I think we had to quit teaching a year ahead of that because our arthritis was so bad that we lost our balance. We couldn't demonstrate any more. He'd try to lead me, and I'd get off balance. My legs were no good at all. So when you lose your health like that, you have to give up.

(Well it catches up with all of us. Well, this has been very enjoyable, and I appreciate your time.)

(This is two days after our original interview with Elsie, and she has some things that she would like to add to what we said. O.K. Elsie.)

I have mentioned most of our children tap dancing and entertaining, but Jack hadn't taken up tap, but later became a nice ballroom dancer. He was our drummer. His dad got him a set of drums when he was about sixteen, and as he became real good at it, he had a little combo that played for

dance parties Saturday nights. He and his wife Carolyn and family, who are the only close ones to me in Livonia, have taken such wonderful care of me in every way possible – God bless. We've all missed my husband and father, but are happy to know that he's at peace with the Lord. I've been really richly blessed with the Lord's love, and with all my families' and friends' love, and I ask the Lord's blessing on all of them. God bless. Oh, by the way, I've thought of another couple--other prominent couples that were our students – Bee and Art Carlson, Dr. Walter and Velma Belasco, and going back to Florence and Seymour Orr – they met at our studio in 1937 and just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary October, 1988. God bless.

(Alright)