

ELIZABETH GAZLAY

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My name is Elizabeth Gazlay and I live in Northville, Michigan.

Let's start this morning with you telling me a little about your personal biography. Where were you born?

I was born in Benzonia, Michigan, and I lived there until I was two years old. Then, we moved to Cadillac, Michigan. I stayed there for two years, and when I was five years old, we moved to Detroit, Michigan, right close to the Redford Golf Course, and I started kindergarten and went through all my education in that same community. I graduated from Redford High School in 1937.

And then you went off to college?

Correct.

And do you want to say anything about where you went to college? What you studied to be when you grew up?

I went to Olivet College and I majored in child psychiatry and child development. I also decided, because it was more a time, than I needed a job, right away, to start teaching rather than continuing school.

But you are not originally from the Northville area, do you have any early childhood memories of Northville?

Well, because I lived in the Northwest section of Detroit, we came out to Cass Benton Park for picnics and to visit the fish hatchery.

Do you have special memories about either of those places?

Not particularly. Also, during that time, Edward Hines Park developed and I can remember coming out to play tennis on the tennis courts and climbing up on what later became beer hill.

And that was in the 1930's?

'30's.

When did you first move to Northville?

We moved to Northville in 1950.

And you've lived at the same house at 221 South Rogers for the entire time?

Correct.

What was the city of Northville like when you first moved here?

One of the reasons we moved here was, it was still a small community, there was only one school, and our children went to school with the doctors and the lawyers, but the farmers and the ditch-diggers too. Then later, there was the Catholic school and the Lutheran school, but our first two older children went to school with the same children, basically from kindergarten to High school. Our younger family, which was born after we moved to Northville, lived during the time that the companies were moving people in and out, so while they had some friends throughout school, they also experienced...

So at the time you moved to Northville, it was a much smaller community than it is today?

Yes, it was a very small community. There were no subdivisions at all. In fact, my husband looked for over a year for a place to rent, and there were just no houses available, and there were hardly any for sale, and so we bought this house as soon as it was available.

What were some of the first activities you became involved in when you first moved to Northville?

I was room mother for the first grade class. I participated in PTA. Later, both my husband and I worked on curriculum study committees for the school, because it was a growing community and the school system hadn't progressed as fast as the community needed it. Then soon afterwards, I became involved in the co-op nursery when our younger son was three years old.

That would have been in what year?

1954-55

And the co-op nursery was then about how old?

Well it started, I think in the late forties.

And your initial involvement was as a parent?

Yes.

And what did you do as far as being involved?

Well, I had two children and so I served on the board, and I was at one time, treasurer, and then I was also president for a year.

That was as a parent?

As a parent, which to me, was very interesting because I feel I had a lot easier time as a teacher than some of the gals I taught with, because I had worked at it from the parent angle and knew what some of the problems would be with a boy who was administered by the parents.

So when did you start as a teacher?

I started in 1958, I guess.

And how long did you teach?

Until 1981.

So quite a few years?

Yes, and I saw a lot of changes.

So did you have some things you wanted to say about the co-op?

Well, it was organized in the late forties by Sherry Meyer, who was looking for playmates for her children because she lived out on 8 mile, and there weren't close neighbors. And it's still active, so it was one of the oldest.

It's forty years old now.

Basically. Early days, it was sponsored by the PTA, who paid 15 dollars a month for two rooms in a Presbyterian church. I think the first teacher was Ann Chizmar, who was a former kindergarten teacher, who had taken time out to have a family. Other early teachers were Jeanne Langtree, Mary Connely, Pat Har, Joyce Skipper, and Marion Petra. During the '60's and '70's, the list included Ray Diver, ... , Stephe Rider, and myself. Northville Co-op preschool was one of the earliest in the state and is still in operation. Michigan, Maryland, and California were the leaders of the movement. Co-operative nurseries are a non-profit organization and were organized to give three and four year olds a preschool experience. They were administered by a board made up of the parents who took care of renting the building, purchasing the equipment, and hiring the teachers. Because parents were interested in the best for their kids, our equipment was much better than the average nursery. Northville co-op was very fortunate in its formative years, because that was the time when Northville State Hospital and Hawthorne Center were opening. And young families of resident psychiatrists and other professionals served on our board. These people knew exactly what was best for young children and so went up very high standards for the school. The nursery not only provided many experiences for kids that were not available in our homes, I know I sent my children there to fingerpaint, waterplay, and all the messy things, also to use the large expensive materials, such as hollow blocks, building planks, jumping boards, a work bench with real tools. It provided an outlet for many mothers who were new to the community and were away from their families. Many whose husbands were working odd hours and or going to school. Women were pretty much stuck at home with small children,

because they assisted only a couple days a month, they had little time for themselves. Another advantage to the co-op was being able to participate with your child. Parent co-operative preschools have been credited with grass-roots education for parents in service training for knowing children broaden one's prospective of the community. This is one of the things that people felt was really important because at that time there weren't any "classes in parenting" and the sort of literature that's around people, when they suddenly have children. I have noticed in Northville many co-operative mothers and fathers have been active in the Northville schools in such things as participating in enrichment programs, sharing their talents, or specialties with the rest of the children. During its lifetime, the co-op has made several moves. In 1962, when the church space was no longer available, they moved to Scout Hall on Cady Street. I remember the shock when they found out that the rent was going to be one hundred dollars a month, instead of fifteen. Children-size lockers had to be built and George McDaniels did an excellent job, the outside play equipment had to be set up, and thanks to Thompson Gravel, owned by Alda and her husband Charlie, he had sand for the box, materials for the concrete, and equipment to move large sewer tiles. Then money had to be raised to build a fire escape from the second floor, because nursery school is licensed by the state, you were inspected annually. We always passed with flying colors, I remember a glowing report from the Wayne County Inspection say that we had probably the best facilities and equipment and program in the State. Some of the people who served as presidents and board members were Aldas Arnson, Marylin McDaniels, Pat Wright, Joann D..., Sharon de Alexander, Peggy Meyers, Mary Jane Brugeman, March Davis, and Jean de Haus. Interesting sidelight, Sherry Meyer, who started the nursery, this year has a great granddaughter by the name of Valerie in the nursery school, her granddaughter, Debbie Meyers, had been in school along with her brother Matt, back in the earlier days. One of the changes that I noticed during the years, was the difference between family activities. The early times it seems that most preschool attention was given to the child by the mother, and as over the years, we had a lot more father participation, in fact, the last few years I taught, we had two or three fathers who were the working parents, they had jobs that it was easier for them to leave than for the mothers, and this provided a very interesting program. The thing that surprised me was that I anticipated all the little boys to be gathering around, but it was the girls who spent the time with the working fathers. Most of them handled it pretty well, but a couple of them were acting a little surprised.

When the parents were involved, what did they go in as, teacher assistants?

Yes. The way that the nursery saved money was to have the assistant teachers be the parents, and it really helped the program a lot, different people brought in different ideas and it was very interesting.

So how many students would there be in any given, in any given year?

We were limited to 32. That is included with one teacher and four assisting mothers. So the child to parent ratio was very good. It got to be very popular as a community group, during the '60's,

we went to five day sections, with one meeting Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and another on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and then the last year, I taught in '81, they started a toddler group which was for eighteen months to three years old. And they meet for just an hour and a half, but it was very interesting. Among other things, we had a little Chinese girl in the group and it was very interesting to see how she picked up the language from the other children.

So she had come here originally from China?

They were speaking Chinese in the home. The mother was Chinese and the father was not. He had met her in Hong Kong I believe, when he was doing missionary work and he was very interested that the children learned the Chinese language because that was what was spoken in the home. And then they spoke it otherwise.

Okay, let's go back to the session, you said back in the 60's, they went for five day sessions, so prior to that it was just three days a week?

Uh huh, and it was sort of a standard joke, with the families who were longstanding, they enrolled their new babies the day they were born.

That was the next thing I was going to ask you. Aside from the group, and aside from the community, was there a long waiting list?

Until other private nurseries came. The Lutheran school started one, and then the little red schoolhouse and then there were some commercial ones that came in.

At this time now, there is not a waiting list?

I do not know what it is. I am not familiar with what is happening now. I know that you have to be a devoted parent because it is a lot of work.

So the possibility exists that...

Oh yes. It's harder for working mothers to participate. Some of them believed in it enough, so that they made other arrangements, or had their husbands come to participate.

You mentioned earlier too, about the people that helped plan the program and everything, something about training parents, did you say in many instances it was valuable to parents to have this kind of training with children?

Yes, there are people who really believed in it for instance, if you have a child who is really having problems separating from its mother, our program was flexible enough so there was no reason why that mother couldn't come and sit in a corner and not really function, but just let the child really know it was there until they were ready to be left, and a lot seeing your children with other children gives you a whole new prospective, especially if you haven't had that kind of contact before.

In this program, if you only needed four parents as teacher assistants, there was something that parents of the other children would also be involved in, or did you rotate the assistants?

Yes, part of the requirement was they divided the number of days in the month with the parents, and the scheduling chairman arranged the work days, and you had to work as part.

And then this parent board that you talked about earlier, they would be the ones that set that up...

Well, each person in the co-op had jobs, there was equipment chairman and the scheduling chairman, and then most everybody recruited people, most everybody did other jobs aside from their assisting. There was a lady who did the sewing, repaired the aprons and the dress up clothes.

So then people aimed toward their own particular specialty?

Yes.

You also mentioned when you were talking about setting up playground equipment that, is that the equipment that is still there, there is still playground equipment still back behind the scout building?

Yes, they did not move that big playhouse, I don't think they moved material, because when they moved from Scout Hall, they went to Main Street School, and there was a small playground from the Kindergarten left there. At that time, they built a new pirate ship, but they didn't move the other equipment. That was another problem that the nursery school had, when the city decided to rent the Scout Hall to business. They had to move to Main Street School, but had to rent space by the square foot, and had to rent it twelve months a year, instead of the nine and a half, which also made a problem, and when the board of education decided to rent out Main Street School, they moved the co-op to Morraine. And now that Morraine is opening, they're going to have to move to Cooke School.

So they have been in Morraine for five years now?

I don't think it's been five years, well maybe it has.

And they'll be moving to Cooke this fall?

Yes.

So that's an ongoing problem. Does the changing in rental fees affect the cost to parents?

Yes, and the other thing that has been a problem. Since there are so many Headstart programs and other nurseries, the co-op is being licensed under the same problems and since they started having suits against other schools, it's been very hard for the co-ops to have insurance, and my own feeling is that the co-op should be in a different category, because you aren't going to have

child abuse while the parents are there. Well, there will be several parents there and it will be unlikely.

Would you say that because they are using parent assistance and parent volunteer work, the cost of the co-op is still less than private?

Oh absolutely, because there isn't any profit involved. When you work on this thing, for instance, we had fathers repair equipment that others would toss.

Is there anything else about the preschool that you would like to discuss?

No, I don't think so.

Earlier in this discussion, you talked a little about working on the public schools curriculum studies. What exactly did you do on that?

They divided it into committees, one were about building the high school specifically. I worked on a program for the gifted, and we did a lot of research and they had people come out and talk to us a big long report.

When would that have been?

Probably in the fifties.

Do you have any other community organizations that you would like to talk about?

Well, I think a one time, when they weren't combined, we belonged to three or four PTA's. Because of the way our children were spread out. So we have been active in community affairs.  
.....

I'm not sure, I know that there is a coordinating council for them. I assume that each school, whether it is a PTA or a parent school organization. I don't know.

Well, that's another thing that we can talk about in regards to the school, you talked about when you came here in 1950, all of the schools were on Main Street, but by the time your children graduated from high school... there were all these schools all over, so they didn't end up going to a school a few blocks away.

Our children all went to the close school. I don't know when they started bussing.

But by the time they went to high school, they went to the new high school?

The new high school and Amerman and Main Street, Morraine and Silver Springs came later as the subdivision came.

So do you have any other things from the community that you would like to discuss?

No.

Well in that case, I would like to thank you very much for giving us your time.