

## TRANSCRIPT

Interview with **Edna Summers Smith**, by E. Van Tuyl, for the Bridgeport Public Library Oral History Project: “Bridgeport Working: Voices from the 20th Century,” January, 1998.

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History Center, Bridgeport Public Library  
Oral History Project: "Bridgeport Working: Voices from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century"  
Interview with Edna Summers Smith (ES), by E. Van Tuyl (I), January 30, 1998.

**Introduction: Family Life, Early Working Life**

I: I'd just like to start out by asking you to state your name, your age and where you were born --if you're willing to.

ES: Edna Summers Smith and I was born in 1913 in December. A long time ago and I lived in Bridgeport. I've lived in Bridgeport now--.  
Well, one place I lived in, one apartment I lived in twenty-eight years, in one apartment on the East End. I guess I've been in Bridgeport since --or thirty-nine, I guess, nineteen thirty-nine.

I: So you know a lot about the city. A lot of changes.

ES: Oh, yes. There has been a lot of changes. Good but it's getting bad now. But I like Bridgeport. I've been to other cities and stuff, but I'm glad to come on back home. This is home.

I: This is home?

ES: This is home, yes.

I: Well, why don't you tell me first about what you were mentioning before so we know somewhat of your background. Where you were born or where you were living when you were a child and how many people were in your family?

ES: I lived at 60 New Haven Avenue in Milford and that's right across--.  
Well, I don't know about it now but it was right across the street from Rosenbaum's School. That was a very exclusive, rich man's college. Nobody went there unless they had money. It was Jewish mostly because it was called Rosenbaum's. Now it's called Milford Prep. But you didn't go there--. I knew one person that was going there.

‘Course, I was a kid, but I heard my parents then talk about it. Ben Burney. He used to be a big band leader. His son went there. No black went there. They only worked there and we were right on the highway and the trolleys used to stop right in front of our house and I'd see the people get off the buses, black people, get off the buses, off the trolley and walk up the hill. They were going up there to work. They weren't going to school. They were chambermaids and so forth and so on. And once a year or twice a year they'd have like parents' day and that was something to see. These big limousines would come with the chauffeurs and that's when they wore raccoon coats and it was quite a spectacle, but that's where I was born. I guess the house still stands there. It was a little, tiny house and our back yard ran into the chief of police's back yard. The name was Mar. And we played together, Katherine and Doris. We didn't play too much but he was the chief of police and his son was the captain or something in the police and that was our neighbor. That's all the neighbors we had. A little store across the street, but that's it.

I: So the neighborhood wasn't as developed then as it is now?

ES: No, no. In fact, I went by the house here about five years ago and didn't even find the house. Didn't know it was there. It's so small. It was a ten-room house when I lived in it so it looks like it's gotten smaller and smaller. And there was a factory beside it.

I: Oh, what was that?

ES: Steel. Edgeworth Steel or--. Some kind of a steel factory. And that was adjacent to our property. And then of course, Saint Mary's Church was on the corner. I don't think that's there anymore. It used to be a big Catholic Church. Saint Mary's. Right there on the corner.

But you see, we weren't allowed out of the yard. We were allowed to go across the street and up the street to school and they timed us. It took a half-hour from our house to school, Central School, and a half-hour back and if you weren't back within a certain time we were questioned. I remember one day; it was in the summertime. We were playing shadow tag and running along, going to school, running along, but somehow or other I was late for school and I got there at one o'clock. Well, I must have got there about ten minutes past one and they couldn't figure out where I had lost the time. I had to come home and get a spanking. Oh yeah, because it was to school and home.

I: Now, who made up the rules? Was it your parents who timed you?

ES: My mother, my mother.

I: She was pretty strict about that kind of thing?

ES: About everything. Everything. She didn't give you an inch on anything. We even--. The house was cleaned from top to bottom every week; even the cellar stairs was scrubbed.

I: Oh, my goodness.

ES: Yes, and that was my job. Cellar stairs was scrubbed down. You know, the whole house was cleaned and everything. But the stairs leading down to the cellar had to be scrubbed every Saturday.

I: So how many brothers and sisters did you have at that point?

ES: I had, let's see, four. Two brothers, and a sister. There were four of us.

I: So, you were there living in the house in Milford. And what did your parents do?

ES: As I say, my father was a plasterer by trade and my mother was a housewife. But she had studied piano when she was a young girl. In fact, she gave a recital in Milford Town Hall when she was about fourteen or fifteen and they were so proud of that. I guess they thought she was going to be a concert pianist but she never made it. Not with all them kids. But my father was a plasterer. As I say, his father was a mason contractor, one of the first ones in Bridgeport or Connecticut, I guess. A black man. So he got his trade from his father.

I: Now, did they contract themselves out to different builders, or how did they get work?

ES: I think he [unclear] jobs out. And he had Italian men working for him. Just my father was the only black person. But he had men working for him and, as I said, he had this old horse, Daisy. He made a good living. My grandmother did take in a little laundry for a while, but she was a cook. She was a very good cook. Used to be a tearoom in Stratford Center called Priscilla Tea Room. The building is still there. You'll see a yellow house with little, tiny, yellow windows. That used to be Priscilla Tea Room. Now that was a tearoom where people with means would come and have lunch or dinner in Stratford and she was the cook there for years.

I: I bet she was a wonderful cook. Now these are your father's parents you're talking about?

ES: My father's parents, yes. Now my mother's mother, after she got--. I remember her working at Columbia Records because she used to catch the trolley in front of our house and grandma, I think she must have been like a maid or something in Columbia Records because she

worked there for years until she had a stroke. Both grandmothers had strokes and died.

I: She traveled from Milford to Bridgeport to work at Columbia Records?

ES: Yes. All of them worked and my grandfather, he drove a wagon for a grocery store. My maternal grandfather. What's his name? I can't think now. Platt. Platt's Grocery Store. I think it was Platt's. But he worked for them for years. And he was superintendent of the Sunday school and things. We always had, as I say--. My grandmother in Stratford always had somebody come into the house and my grandfather, in Milford, as I say was superintendent of the Sunday school and stuff and he always brought us somebody on Sunday for dinner. We very seldom had Sunday dinner without some minister or something at the dinner table. It was a tradition.

I: So you were regular churchgoers?

ES: Oh yes, yes.

I: And which church did you go to in Milford?

ES: Milford Baptist. The First Baptist Church in Milford. Still affiliated with Stratford Baptist. Now, Stratford Baptist stands on land that my grandfather helped buy. He didn't go to church, but as I say, he was a contractor and they wanted to buy this land and it was five men. He was one of the men that gave money for the land that the church bought. The church stands on that land now.

I: Wonderful.

ES: So that's what they remembered him by. And my grandmother was president of the missionaries for over thirty-one years at the Stratford Baptist Church and they used to have strawberry festivals. My

grandfather didn't go to church, but he never refused them the use of his property or anything. So we had big property there in Stratford and they used to have the strawberry festivals and the peach festivals and stuff. Whatever the church wanted to have. He never comes down stairs to see anybody, but they were perfectly welcome on his property. So my grandmother did what she wanted to do and he did what he wanted to do. He stayed upstairs and she had the house. And one uncle, my Uncle Elmer, he went to war. The oldest-- Well, my father was the oldest and they had two boys and my Uncle Elmer, he went off to war. I can remember him coming home.

I: That was which war?

ES: World War I. My brother was in World War II. I lost him about five years ago. He had a beautiful voice. He sang at-- My brother Russell. He sang at Governor Baldwin's inauguration.

I: Oh.

ES: Oh, oh, yes. He was quite a singer.

I: A lot of musical talent you have--.

ES: Yes, yes. He sang. He had a beautiful voice anyway, but he was in Stratford. I think he was going to school then in Stratford High School. And, of course, when Baldwin was inaugurated, at the inauguration, my brother sang. And the first time my father heard him sing, he went to a Slovak wedding because we were all surrounded by Slovaks over there in Stratford. No black, you know. And one of the neighbors got married and of course, they're all [unclear] and everything and when this girl got married she asked my brother to sing at her wedding and he--. So my father went to the wedding, too. And that was the first time and he was so proud. He said, "I never

heard him sing." And he said, "He sang the Lord's Prayer" and he said, "Oh, that was beautiful." And that was the first and the last time that I think my father went to church and heard anybody sing.

- I: Now, you mentioned something earlier to me before we started the tape, that your mother's family had Native American roots. Could you tell us a little bit about that for the record?
- ES: Well, I know for the record they were in Milford between Woodmont and Milford. Her mother was a black woman and her father was a native Indian. She was about seven years old she told me, before she ever ate off of a glass plate. I don't know--. I'm trying to think of the people's name that she worked for. It begins with a 'B'. They had an ice business. What is those people's names? She worked for them. You know, to get the meals. And the lady used to put her on a box so she could reach the sink and wash these dishes in turn and in exchange for our meals. And she said that the first time she ate off of a glass plate was from these people when they let her eat there. And she used to go every day and wash the dishes and she'd eat. But, my great, great grandfather, he never did a day's work in his life. He didn't do anything but fish and trap. And that's what you ate. He brought home skins and stuff like that and they made it the best they could.
- I: And then when she got older she went to school there in that part of Connecticut? She met your father there?
- ES: She met my grandfather. He came up from Virginia. What he was doing--. I guess slavery was over or something. He wasn't a slave but he had come up from down south and she met him and they got married. There was a seventeen-year difference in their ages and that



was always a bone of contention. She used to think that she was so much younger than him, that she would outlive him and this thing and that. And they used to have a few words about that. And when they were having a few words, they would call each other by their first names. Now if they were really at it, he'd call, "Now, Laura [name]." And she'd say, "Now Alexander Taylor." And those was hard words and you'd know that they were really mad at each other when got through that.

I: Oh, boy.

ES: We used to laugh about that. "Alexander." And he was so proud of his name. His name was Alexander Robert Bray. A.R.B. and he wanted that on everything. Our door had A.R.B. Alexander Robert Bray. Don't miss it. I had a good childhood. Plenty to eat. Plenty of food. And she was a sweet grandmother. We used to talk about church. My mother always used to buy out of the catalogues. Our clothes. Because she didn't go to the store or nothing. But we always had nice clothes and Sunday we'd go to Sunday school and Mama would dress us up. I wore blue hair ribbons. My sister wore pink ones. Whatever it was we wore, we had these hair ribbons and we'd get dressed and everything in our clothes and we had to come downstairs to the kitchen where my grandmother was cooking Sunday dinner and let her see us before we went to the church and she made such a big thing over it. You couldn't tell us nothing because there was her grandchildren, all dressed up, ready for church. She'd have us turn around so she could look at us and she'd make so much commotion over us. That did us a world of good.

I: And then, what were the schools like? You went to school there?

ES: Center School in Milford. It was all right. I didn't have no trouble. I remember we had one man, one man teacher and I was sitting with my fingers like that across my face and he said something to the teacher and they laughed but I had no trouble with the school. Well, it wasn't segregated. We all went to school at the same time. Like, I said the chief of police children in the back. We all went to school at the same time so I guess we didn't have no trouble. Not that I know of.

I: And then you mentioned earlier that your father moved the family for a while to New York?

ES: To Long Island. They had a building boom around '29. We went to Long Island and we stayed there until I was about fifteen or sixteen when we came back with my grandmother. Well, the Depression came and he found that he couldn't swing it like he had been doing so he figured, "Well, I'll bring them back to their mother." And, as I said, my grandmother's door was always wide open so when he, because we didn't know anything about it, he contacted her and told her how things were with him and so forth. When we knew anything, one Sunday morning there was a great big truck there.

I: Oh, my goodness. That was a shock.

ES: Yes and they moved us bag and baggage one Sunday afternoon and that's how we got back to Connecticut.

I: And you moved back to your maternal grandmother's or--?

ES: Yes. Maternal grandmother. That's where my mother died. My mother died in '35, but that's what Pop did. He brought us back. Of course, he didn't stay there. He continued to stay in Long Island and work. He worked three days a week or two days a week or something like that. And, of course, they didn't have no unemployment, you

know. So he couldn't feed us, couldn't pay the light bill or nothing like that so we came on back in and I was supposed to start high school that September. We moved here, --we moved in around July. In August and September they were making plans for me to go back to school and my mother up and died. She died the seventh or eighth of October and they said to me, "You know, you're going to have get yourself a job because you're the next to the oldest."

I: That was a big responsibility. What did you do?

ES: I went out and did a day's work. I got a mother's helper job. And I worked and I worked and I worked and I supported myself. I've worked all my life.

I: So you weren't able to go back to school?

ES: No, I really wasn't able to go back to school. I read a lot and I learned a lot. But, I never went back to school. And after a while, you get sort of to the place where you figure "Well, I made it this far." I went to work in this factory.

I: Where was that?

ES: I worked in domestic. And I had full responsibility. I know one woman--. I worked for a family. I won't give their name. But they were a problem family. They didn't have as much as people thought they had, but I worked for them. Her mother-in-law one-day was there and she said to her, "She's so efficient. You'd better hold onto her because she can do everything." And she said, "I know she can, I know she can." She said, "Well, you hold onto her." They didn't know I heard them, but I heard them. That's what I did. And then I got married. I was working domestic when I got married.

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**Part 2: Married Life, Working for General Electric, Church, Neighborhood**

ES: ...I was working domestic when I got married.

I: How did you meet your husband? Were you still living in your family's house, in your grandmother's house?

ES: Yes. Then they used to have the little clubs down the South End and stuff and he was a dancer. He tap danced. Him and his buddy. They used to dance. Oh, they could dance, dance, dance. And every year they would go to Canada, he and his buddy. I went to some dance or something and I met him. That's how I met him and we got married.

I: So were they vaudeville performers?

ES: Yes, like vaudeville performers, yes. And he worked in a garage here on Fairfield Avenue. It was called the Blue Ribbon Garage. That's where he worked for years. Benny. The garage is gone and Benny is gone, I know, but he worked there, at Benny's garage --the Blue Ribbon Garage on Fairfield Avenue. And then in September they would go on the road show and they would go to Canada and they would make big money. In fact, they had two women, they was young. And one of them is Bishop Moan, that's the bishop with the church there on the corner, the big church on the corner of Stratford Avenue and --. His niece was one of the girls that used to dance, too.

I: My goodness.

ES: Yes, Betty. She's dead. Been dead for years. But they were dancers and that's how I met him.

I: But he was here living in Bridgeport and you were, at that time, in Stratford?

ES: Oh yes, yes.

I: So at some point you had gone from Milford down to Stratford? Then you met him when he performed in Stratford or somewhere around here?

ES: I met him when he performed in Bridgeport. Not in Stratford. In Bridgeport.

I: So you were able to go to neighboring towns when you were off?

ES: No, not me.

I: How did you get to the performance? Was it--?

ES: Well, I used to be--. Three or four of us used to be housemaids and on Thursdays, on our day off we'd get together and we go here and go there. It was Daisy, and Marty. There were four or five of us and we'd go in a group.

I: What was your social life like back then when you were pretty much an adult? At that point you were back in Stratford, living in your family's house. You said you were working. Did you belong to the church? Did you make friends from the neighborhood, or--?

ES: Oh yes. I belonged to the church, I was in the missionaries, the fashion shows and my grandmother was a big missionary. And I had called--. We lived on the top of the hill in Stratford. Still have the family homestead. Do you know where Holy Name church is? Top of the hill there. That's the family homestead. Can you imagine walking from there down to Avon Park, past Saint Michael's Cemetery, carrying clothes and food? That's what we did. I had to do that, too.

- I: For your missionary work?
- ES: Yes. Missionary work. And then in them days we used to sell dinners at the church. I guess dinners weren't that high but there'd be fifty people come for dinner and they had to be served so I was one of the waitresses. When they got ready to give a fashion show I was one of the models.
- I: Now what were these fashion shows all about?
- ES: Clothes. The latest styles.
- I: Through the church, or--?
- ES: For the church. To raise money for the church.
- I: Now, your granddaughter told me that you've always been interested in fashion. Is that one of the places you started to get interested or were able to show your talents?
- ES: Well, I like clothes and I was able to get them, you know. It might take me six or seven weeks to get something, but I would get it. I like clothes. I like nice things. I like nice things.
- I: When you married your husband, you settled here in Bridgeport?
- ES: Yes. We moved down to the South End.
- I: What year?
- ES: I don't even know what year it was. I know I was down there in 1939 when we had the hurricane. [1938?]
- I: So it was in the 1930's?
- ES: Yes, in the '30's. We lived with his mother.
- I: How was that?
- ES: Good because she was a lovely lady. I could do no wrong. She was nice to me. She didn't do much housework, but she was nice. She was in the church, too. She was in Bethel Church. That's a Methodist

Church and they would come--. They'd go to church all day Sunday and Monday they would hash over what went on Sunday and they would come to her house. Well, now she could have been up there doing some work or something but they would sit talking. This was during the Depression and the minister would come by, too.

Reverend Collins. And he'd come by and they'd have probably, homemade biscuits and coffee and they'd sit sometime from ten o'clock to two o'clock in the afternoon, just talking bible, talking church and everything. And nothing getting done.

I: She wasn't accustomed to scrubbing the cellar stairs, I take it?

ES: No, not at all, not at all. And I'd say, "My God, you were in church all day Sunday and all day Monday. So that's how it was with that. As I say, she was good to me. And then she'd fry good chicken. Fried chicken was Sunday morning breakfast. I'd never had anything like that in my life, you know? Fried chicken for breakfast?"

I: Now where did she come from?

ES: From Georgia.

I: So she had come up from the South.

ES: Yes. She was from Georgia. My husband was from Georgia. My husband was born down there in Birmingham. He was a little kid when he came up here. They were southerners.

I: Then where were you both working when you got married?

ES: As I said, he was at the garage. I was in domestic work.

I: I have heard, or you've told me before, that you worked at GE. Did you do other jobs before that?

ES: No, just domestic. I didn't do anything else that I know of. How I got into GE, I wasn't looking for no job.

I: How did that happen? Tell us about that.

ES: Two girls from Milford came. My sister, older sister and a friend of hers. Because the war had broke out and they were looking for help. They lived in Milford and they wanted to know where the GE was so they came to my house for me to take them over to the GE so they could get a job. I went with them to show them where the GE was. They was all gung-ho, you know, -- war effort -- gonna make some money --and I sat there with them. Of course they was being hired. So the woman at the desk, she says, "How about you? Wouldn't you like a job?" I said, "No, I don't want no job. I said I brought them over--." I said, "No. I'm not looking for a job." She said, "Wouldn't you like to help the war effort?" "I don't have my birth certificate. Blah, blah, blah." You know. My sister says, "She was born in Milford and I'll get her birth certificate when I get off the bus tonight." "Oh," she said, "Bring your birth certificate Friday and you can get hired. We do need your birth certificate. Who's this?" I said, "That's my sister." She said, "Oh, that's no problem. You come Friday and you got a job." We got outside and she said, "Give me fifty cents for to get your birth certificate." I said, "I don't want no job." "Yes you do, yes you do." So, I said to the girl at the desk, "If I bring my birth certificate, will you give me a job with them?" She says, "Possibly, yes." You know that didn't happen. So Friday came and it was raining cats and dogs. I said, "Well, this is a good excuse for not going." So I fooled around and fooled around. Got up early because I always get up early. I figured I'd use the rain for an excuse and something said, "Go on over." So I went over and I was hired. Of course, I didn't get a job with them.



- I: What did you do?
- ES: I did assembly work.
- I: Was that for munitions or something like that?
- ES: No, no. I never got on the war effort that I thought I was. I worked on switches. I worked on every kind of switches you got in this room. Just about that GE made. We made switches for everybody. Wall switches, light switches, all kind of switches, but they used to go under different names. It would be GE, Waring, Schick. We'd probably make five switches and four of them was another manufacturer and one would be GE.
- I: Oh, I always suspected that. Interesting. Now what did your sister do? Or was it two of your sisters?
- ES: No, one sister and one friend. They were in the war effort. They were over there on bazookas. They was over there on Seaview Avenue. They were really in the war effort. But I stayed in one room seventeen years in the one room. I never was transferred out. I did work downstairs for a while on the "B" floor and then a job opened up on the "C" floor. And you could transfer. You could ask for a transfer and I asked for a transfer and the foreman he got hurt. His feelings was hurt because I had asked to get out--. I didn't have anything against him, but I figured it was better for me to go upstairs. To tell you the truth, there was a bunch of black girls working and where I was, was all white and I thought it would be so nice to work with my own kind. So I applied for a job upstairs and I got it upstairs. But Monty, he was so nice. He was a strapping man. And he felt so bad. He said, "You leaving me?" And I said, "Well, Monty, I have nothing against you, but I want to go upstairs with them colored girls upstairs."

I want to go upstairs and work with them." He said, "Go ahead, but I thought we were treating you alright down here." I said, "You were, but let me go upstairs." I said, "If I don't like it I'll come back down. Okay?" He said, "Okay." But I never went back down at all. But I stayed there. I went there in 1943 and I come out in 1971.

I: So you were there for --.

ES: I was there for a long time.

I: And what was the work environment like when you were there? You started out; it was during the war so there was lots of activity. But then, later on, did it change very much?

ES: Not much, no.

I: Who were some of your coworkers? You must have had some interesting coworkers from all over.

ES: Well, I'd see some once in a while. I had one girl, an Italian girl. She was sweet. Kay Bonovich or something like that. And I bumped into her about a year ago in Stop and Shop. She was thin like you. And this heavy-set woman come up and hugged me and I said, "Who the devil is this?" And it was Kay. But she was so nice. We worked in a group. We worked on a dial, five girls. I was the last girl on the dial. I took the trays off the thing and everything. That was one of them. And there was Nancy Saltas [Soltis?] and I see one now. Marcel. I don't know what Marcel's name is but she's a gray-haired white girl. They're all white. Marcel. And I still see them. And there's an Italian girl, Loretta. And I sit and talk with Loretta down at the terminal, you know. She's back and forth. But I didn't have any trouble with--. I only missed three days in all of those years.

I: Wow. In all of those years. You were a very good worker.

ES: Well, I had Michelle's [granddaughter] mother come home, of course I was working, but she came home from school. She went to Roosevelt School. She was little. And she had a bad sores --she had a cold. So once a month I took the day off to be with her. I didn't do anything. That was her day. But when I come home from work that night she had this cold. So I said, "Mommy's not going to work tomorrow. She'll stay home and take care of you." "Okay, Mommy." So I did. I got up. She felt pretty good. I got up and went downstairs and made her breakfast for her and everything and I was downstairs making her breakfast and I got so sick. I could hardly get back upstairs. I lived in the village then. Marina Village on Broad Street when they had just built them. And I went upstairs to--. Not on Broad Street. I lived in Marina Village over on Iranistan Avenue. Why did I say on Broad Street? I was nowhere near Broad Street. I used to live there when I first got married, on Broad Street. But when they built the project over there on Iranistan Avenue--.

I: So could you tell us a little bit about that? So by the time you were working at GE, you had children, or just once child?

ES: Just one child.

I: Your daughter. And you and your husband were working in what part of the city?

ES: He was a long distance truck driver. He drove from Providence to New York, nights. He was always on the road. I practically raised her by myself. He was thirteen or fourteen years on the road driving nights. One of these big trailers. But it was safer then than what it is now. These trailers. I'm afraid of them now.

I: Everybody is.

ES: But you never heard of any accidents or anything like that. But he drove--. There used to be a factory on Harrison Street that manufactured clothes and he'd pick up his truck from Providence--. Levine's it was called. The Levine's Coat Factory. And he'd bring his truck from Providence. They call it a hanger. And he's stop at Levine's and they'd pack that truck from Levine's Coat Factory and they locked those doors and those doors were not unlocked until they reached the terminal in New York. And that's what he did for thirteen or fourteen years.

I: You were living in--?

ES: Marina Village then. My daughter was going to Bassick. [High School]

I: And you said that was a project? [housing project]

ES: Yes, it was. One of the first ones that was built. It was very, very nice. Very nice.

I: And then did you have to apply to live there or how did you--?

ES: Where we lived, there was row type houses and they built--. Yes, you had to apply for them. Because they were supposed to be middle income, or low income. I know we barely squeaked by because when my daughter graduated from high school and my husband and I had separated, I wasn't eligible anymore so I had to move. That's how come I got over to the East Side. Yes, they put you out. They gave you a certain length of time to stay, but after you were over the income you had to get out, but I guess they get all kind that comes in there now. So, it was uneventful. I liked the people and as I say, I worked. I was in the GE and I worked and come home and take care what I had to do, locked my doors and that was it.

I: That sounds like quite a bit though. You were saying that you've always worked and clearly you were working while you had a child. Did you ever worry about coordinating your work and raising your child and how to arrange schedules and things like that?

ES: Oh, yes. I used to have a headache every Saturday night. A migraine headache. Because I had--. I'm a person, I like routine. You know, I say, "I want to do this, I want to do that." See, my husband never would. Still partying. And Saturday night was our night to go out and have a good time. Well, I had clothes to wash and a child to take care of, the house to clean and cooking and by six-thirty Saturday I was up to here and I would get this blinding, blinding headache. Trying to get everything all cut and dried. And then, on top of that, sometimes he would invite people in that I didn't know anything about and he would come--. Some of his friends, they used to play records, jazz. And about five -thirty sometimes, he would come with four or five guys. Well, the spaghetti or whatever I had went because sometimes I used to cook two kinds of meat. In fact, I still do. On Sunday I roast two kinds of meat. So how I did my dinner. I had the meat and then I would cook vegetables to go with the meat, but the meat was already cooked so all I had to do was slice the meat along with the gravy and that's what I always did. And, he always knew there was something there to eat. And the fellows knew there was something there to eat, too. So, sometime my Sunday dinner was gone Saturday night. I've always had things planned like, you know.

I: You had to be very organized.

ES: Yes and I'm still that way. Like, my family says that they want this and they want that. Something. Some little thing. Go ask Aunt Edna.

She'll have it and two to one, it was a button or a pin or anything, they'd call me, I got it. I call myself a packrat, but they say, "Whatever you need. If you can't find it no place, call Aunt Edna. She'll have it."

I: Sounds like our department at the library a little bit.

ES: So I'd have it. Yes.

I: While you were at GE, you stayed there for quite some time, but did other workers come and go or were there some that worked with you for a long time because--?

ES: Some of them girls worked for a long time with me. On the dial we worked five years of us on the dial. And the foreman--. I've got pictures of the foreman, when the foreman left. It was Mr. Kelly, John Kelly. Then it was Louie. I can't think of Louie's last name. He was a foreman. There's one black woman in Stratford. The girl who used to give me a ride every day, Mary Wright, she's still living. She's on Fifth Street. She worked there as long as I did. In fact, she retired a year before me. Belle Ward. Mrs. Ward. She lives on Masarik[?] Avenue in Stratford. They worked there at GE just as long as I did.

I: Would you drive to work or take the transportation? Take the bus?

ES: No, the bus. In them days they had two bus lines there. They had the Gray Line and they had the CR and L. And the Gray Line used to come by GE. Used to come in from Fairfield. And that's the bus that we would take and that would take us from downtown. Well, it would come in from Fairfield. And there was a driver on there. Larry, a white fellow. Of course, they was all white. But Larry was a very nice driver and at the end of the day--. Well, I used to work from

seven to three-thirty and sometimes there would be five buses out there and they would be jammed.

I: I'll bet. How many people worked there?

ES: Well, I don't know. I was in the very last building, way down at the end. Almost down to Hillside Homes. Well, they called it Hillside Homes then. Now it's the Bridgeport Community something or other. But it was Hillside Homes then. And I worked in that last building down there. But there must have been ten thousand, had to be. There was three shifts. Big cafeteria. Soda machines and everything. But, it was all right. I looked at some of my pay envelopes here a couple of months ago. Well, a couple of years ago I found my pay envelopes. Twenty-six dollars for a full forty hour week. Can you imagine?

I: Well, there's been a lot of inflation since then.

ES: I looked at it and I said, "What?" Twenty-six dollars. Oh, my God. I worked all week long. And I was glad to get it.

I: Now, was that considered good pay?

ES: It must have been.

I: You really liked the work when you stayed all those years or did you ever think about going to some other factory or another place of employment.

ES: No, because it was on the bus line. It was convenient. It was on the bus line. I'd get on the bus and get off at the corner. That more or less kind of kept me there, too. I know a lot of people went to Brass [Bridgeport Brass] and stuff like that but you had to change buses and this thing and that thing and as I say, I like things to run smooth so I stayed there. I was making good money when I left. I mean we didn't

stay at twenty-six dollars. I worked piecework all the time. I always worked piecework and I made my money.

I: Did they provide training for you over the years for new technologies and things like that? New products?

ES: Well, yes. Engineers would come in and show. But they didn't retrain you or anything. You picked it up. The engineers would show you how. This was all assembly, you know. The engineers would show how to do this thing and that thing. I know one of the engineers, they were timing us. That rate was on piece work and they were always trying to get more and more and more out of you and this we was on this machine, as I say, a dial. And this Philips engineer, he come in and he was watching. He was going to retire. And the thing was going. Like this. Just about this size. Everybody had a section to put in and he was watching me with his stopwatch so I said something to him. Something about the work, you know. So he says, "Just keep on doing what you're doing." Okay. Writing and writing and writing. So after a while I said something else. He said, "Well, I'm the engineer." [interruption, second side of tape] I said, "I know you are." So I kept on working and he's standing there. And then something happened and then he asked me a question. He wanted me to tell him something. I made believe I didn't hear him. I never answered him.

I: Oh, you were telling him something about a problem before and--?

ES: Yes, and he told me that he was the engineer. So I said, "Yes, I know you are." So when something went wrong, something that he didn't understand, he wanted me to iron it out for him and tell him what to do and so forth and so on, I made believe I didn't hear him. I sat right there just like a mummy, working and working and working and



didn't answer him. He got the message. He walked away. But see, before that, he used to be like a stock chaser and stuff and he was very, very nice. And then when he got a little promotion and he got the time study guy and it was determined to cut these jobs. We were making on the hour about five hundred of these switches an hour, so if he could get it up to six hundred, that would be a feather in his cap, but I was trying to explain something to him and he says, "Well, I'm the engineer on this job." I said, "Yes, I know you are." So when he asked me a question again, I never answered him. I sat there like a bump on a log. I don't hear you.

History Center, Bridgeport Public Library  
Oral History Project: "Bridgeport Working: Voices from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century"  
Interview with Edna Summers Smith (ES), by E. Van Tuyl (I), January 30, 1998.

**Part 3: The Union at General Electric, Husband's Work with the  
Teamsters and the City of Bridgeport**

- I: Now when you were at GE all those years, were you a member of a union?
- ES: Oh, yes.
- I: And can you tell us a little bit about that?
- ES: I got out of the union. I was in the union--. Because my husband was a staunch union man and the first strike we had and out there in the snow in February. Plowing around. Walking around in that snow. And he said, "You have to go, you have to support the union, you have to support the union." I went along with him and everything was going, you know. There was no money, or nothing. Because whenever this union used to go out there was always a big retroactive, you. And he was telling me, "Oh, you're going to get all that back money." We didn't get nothing. We used to get profit sharing.
- I: Was that later on. In the 1940's you even did the profit sharing?
- ES: That was the first strike they ever had. First two years I was there I got thirty-seven dollars from profit sharing which was very good.
- I: That's more than a week's pay.
- ES: Yes, and if they had kept that up, but the union pulled us out on a strike and everything and the union was asking for, I think, ten or eleven cents and the company was only willing to give us nine so we was out over ten weeks. Then they said, after all this hullabaloo, they

decided, the company said, "We'll give you whatever you would like." I can't remember now what it was but they said, "We will give it to you but we'll take the profit sharing." And the stupid union said, "Okay." They gave us two cents more and took away the profit sharing. Well, I couldn't see that. We lost. They claimed we gained. We didn't gain nothing. How did you gain when somebody's taking something away from you?

I: What year was that?

ES: I don't remember what year it was, but it was early.

I: In the forties?

ES: Oh, yes. It was in the forties. It had to be. Was it after the war? I don't know when it was I know that kind of got me. I stayed in the union then and then I guess, maybe five or six years later they were talking strike again and Carey was the president of the union and he kept strutting into GE and threatening the GE. And he says, "I owe them a strike. I'm going to pull my people out, because I owe the GE a strike." And they was all getting set for the strike and they voted him a raise. I think a ten thousand-dollar raise. Now he made the motion and he had one of his buddies stand up in the meeting and second the motion. And it went through and he got his ten thousand-dollar raise and the next Monday he's going to pull us out onto the street. And I said to him, "Never get a ten thousand dollar raise and have me out here walking on the sidewalk again like I did the last time." I got out of the union. That was it for me. So, no I wasn't going to go ahead with it no more. But I do think they do need the unions and stuff but not like that.

- I: Now what did you do during that first strike? Was it hard to make ends meet and--?
- ES: Well, my husband was working. And he kept on telling me, "Oh, you're going to get a retroactive and we can catch up on all the bills and everything." It was a good thing I could stretch a dollar because we didn't get anything. We didn't get anything. The when we get through it and didn't get anything he said, "You all had a lousy union."
- I: What union was in where he was working?
- ES: The Teamsters. I think it's the Teamsters Union. One ninety-one right around the corner here. It's one ninety-one. That's where he belonged. So he was strictly a union man.
- I: So was he working here in Bridgeport also at the time?
- ES: No, no. He was still on the road. He didn't come off the road until--. Well he had a couple of accidents and things didn't look like they were going to reinstate him. He had had a bad accident. He didn't get hurt but there was damage to the truck and it was the second time and so they told him to go home and that they would send for him and they never did. So then he got a job with the city and drove a garbage truck for the schools. Picking up papers and stuff after school and he worked for the city until the time he died.
- I: So he was a civil servant as well?
- ES: Oh yes. So that's the story of my life.

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Oral History Project: "Bridgeport Working: Voices from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century"  
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**Part 4: Work Environment at General Electric, Changing Populations  
in Bridgeport, Living on the East End, Hurricane of 1938**

ES: Oh yes. So that's the story of my life.

I: Now wait a wait a minute. When you were at work, I'd like to know more. I'm sure you were very busy working most of the time you were there, but you mentioned there was a cafeteria. Did you socialize with your coworkers at all? Did you ever see them outside of work or mainly just at work?

ES: No. Well, we used to have like a--. Once a year they have a picnic up in a --. And we'd all go. They bused us there to the place. And everybody goes. The foremen go and this thing and that thing. And that's once a year in August. I go. I don't go now without having a ride but they used to have that and we socialized in that. We'd play games. We'd get there a ten o'clock and you ate all day long. They'd start you off with coffee and a doughnut or something, as soon as you got there. That would be ten o'clock. At eleven o'clock they would serve clam chowder. One o'clock hamburgers and hotdogs. Then we'd go in a big room and they'd play bingo and this thing and that thing and auction off. You'd win prizes. And then we'd stay in there until about four o'clock. Four o'clock you'd come back out. Liver and bacon. Roast beef. All of that. Corn on the cob. Around six o'clock it was something else. Watermelon or something else. You ate all day long. But it was all free. Every year they'd have it. They still

have it. I don't know what this place is. It takes about an hour. It's outside of Meriden. We said, "Why don't you go someplace else?" But they still do that and once a year they have a dinner for all the retirees to come. Stuff like that. But no, I never socialized too much. Those kinds of things but when we have lunch and we was all sitting around together, there was a bunch here and a bunch there and we were all eating at the same time, you know. One of the Slovak girls was bringing cookies and somebody else something. I'd bring in something and we'd pass it all around and everything. It was a congenial crowd.

- I: Did you ever feel that--? At least nowadays we read about all these people during the First and Second World Wars coming sometimes from Europe or other countries or more recent immigrants to cities like Bridgeport for manufacturing jobs. Did you ever feel that you had learned about other countries --or cultures that you had contact with where you might not usually have had contact maybe if you hadn't gone to work in that kind of environment but were a resident in Bridgeport?
- ES: Well, I would have probably come in contact but I'd met a lot of Pennsylvanians, you know I've come in contact with. You know, people from Pennsylvania. They were nice. They were hard working. But they were here to make the dollar. They were very pleasant but they were here for the duration, as they say. And when things went down they went on back to Pennsylvania. But when I say Marcel. She's still here but she's from Pennsylvania and they have a different work ethic than what we do. They are strictly business. They came here to make the dollar and they made the dollar. They went home

and bought their property and stuff and that's that. And a lot of the black ones did too. A lot of the young ones, black women, came up from down south. Some of them was just out of high school and I couldn't understand how their parents could let them come to a strange place with strangers they had never laid eyes on. There was one woman. She had about five girls living in her house. She lives on – over there -- and Laurel Avenue and she didn't know them from Adam. And those girls came in and lived with her, I guess, five and six years and they were young. Some of them got out of hand and some didn't. But, I couldn't see letting my child come that far from home.

- I: There were a lot of black people also working at GE during that time –or during the war time?
- ES: Oh yes. There was quite a few. And they was mostly from down south. There wasn't like the West Indians and Haitians that's in here now. Of course, I don't know many of the Haitians, but I know quite a few Jamaicans. They weren't here. They must have come in later on. But there's quite a few of them now.
- I: Do you think a lot of those people stayed? The ones that came up from the south?
- ES: Oh yes. They're here running things. Trying to run the churches and stuff.
- I: Oh. So they came in and took over the community.
- ES: Yes. They come in and took over.
- I: Now you said after you left the Village [Marina Village] where you and your husband and daughter had lived, that you moved to your house on the East Side.

ES: Yes.

I: Can you tell us a little bit about that neighborhood? What it was like then and what's happened since then?

ES: It was a nice neighborhood. There was--. Right off of Stratford Avenue. We had a big market on the corner. My landlady was Italian. Very nice. And in the next house there was a big store, Puritan Market. They were Italian and they had apartments upstairs. There were two white families living upstairs. My landlady, she's Italian, I'm on this side. No problem whatsoever. Across the street was a store and a Jewish guy, he had a novelty store and stuff like--. I mean, he had a business but he had his stuff stored in there in the garage. Beautiful. No problem whatsoever. But my golly, go by there now. The drugs came in, you know. In fact that's why I moved because they shot through my windows. They'd stand out in front of my house selling and I would go to the door and say, "Get away from my door." And they'd give me a bad --like look at me. They wouldn't say nothing. They was, most of them, West Indian and Jamaicans. And it got unbearable. There was one young Italian fellow, kid --he was a kid, and he was out there selling. They would line up in front of my house. I had a gate --a nice gate and everything, but by that time the landlady had moved and she went to Shelton. But she still rented the house out. So I stayed on one side and this other black family moved on the other side. And one comes in our yard and they got a gate and --I said, "You don't come in there in this yard. You see that fence out there? You see that gate? You don't open that gate." So this Italian, Tito, he was out there so clean and nice and everything and Tito would be out there selling as hard as he could sell. The most



with Jamaicans. But Tito was cute. I'd go downtown all the time and go in this place and go in that place. I would go downtown and he'd see me when I left. And I'd get off the bus on the corner of Orange Street and walk down Newfield Avenue, but the firehouse was there too, then. And he'd look up and he'd see me. He'd say, "Oh, oh. Here she is. She's back, she's back." That's all he'd say. "She's back." And he'd move and go on down further. But these other birds, they wouldn't move. They would be buying, you know. And I heard this Tito talking one day something about going to Harding School [high school]. Going to Harding in September. So you could see how young he was. He said that in September he would be going to Harding. I said to myself, "My God. And he's out there." And that's been six or seven years now. And now I go through the street. Sometime I just walk. Take a little walk and the house is empty. It's been rented, empty. I went by this summer and they had card tables out there and they was sitting in the yard playing cards. I don't know if they're drug dealers or what they are, but they were in the front yard like they own it. Looked like a war zone in there.

I: When would you say the neighborhood started to change? Did businesses leave or--? You mentioned you had several businesses across the street and things were pretty orderly.

ES: Moved out yes.

I: When did you start to notice change as a resident there?

ES: Oh, when them birds started coming in there and across the street the Jamaicans opened up like a nightclub or something. From then on. Because there was quite a few white on the street. But gradually people moved, the store closed down. They went out of business.

The firehouse moved. They robbed --well that was before the drugs come in there. But the fire trucks used to go out and leave the doors open. And they went out one day to a fire and they come back and their radio and television was gone so from then on when they used to a fire somebody had to stay behind and close down them doors. And that was way before the drugs and stuff come in. But it's steady going down. And the houses, they're not taking care of the houses now. Just going down. All over Bridgeport is going down. You see all these houses boarded up and everything. It's a shame and there's people that don't have a place to live and every house is boarded up. It's a shame. And downtown here on Main Street. There's nothing downtown either unless you want to eat. If you want to eat it's all right. Used to be Meig's, Howland's, Smith and Murray's.

I: And what were those? Could you elaborate on them?

ES: Howland's was a dry goods store ---clothing store. They had everything. They were what you call--. They're in Stratford now. They just moved.

I: Was that a variety store, or--.

ES: They had everything. Yes. Howland's. What did they call that now? Not Stern's. But Meig's used to be a very fashionable dress store and Smith and Murray's was a dry goods store. They had everything. And then the banks and stuff, you know. Connecticut National, all them banks. And on the corner of State Street there was the Bridgeport Public Market. You'd go in that market and buy anything in the world you wanted. My grandmother used to come all the way from Stratford for tub butter. She liked tub butter and you could get tub butter at the Bridgeport Public Market. So we'd come over and

she'd get these things. Baskets of food and stuff. And then we'd take the trolley and go on back to Stratford. But there was so many stores there on Main Street. Now, I counted. I think there's seven places to eat. You can't even get a pair of stockings on Main Street now. It's terrible. If you don't go to MacDonald's or Dunkin' Donuts, you might as well stay off Main Street. Because there's nothing there, nothing there. You know that big bank on Golden Hill Street –was it Fairfield Avenue –no Golden Hill Street? That bank that's been closed for so long. Remember the bank that used to be there?

I: No. I don't. I haven't lived in Bridgeport that long, but I've seen pictures of it.

ES: Used to be a big bank there and now all the prostitutes are hanging out there. Right across the street there's a food stamp and you'd be surprised at the women. And I've seen a gray-haired woman out there. I don't know what she's doing out there. But, she's one of them. It's run down. Nothing. My girlfriend worked at a beautiful tearoom there on Bank Street. Used to be Jeanette's Tearoom. Very nice. The businessmen and everything used to come in there and have their luncheon and everything. Nothing downtown.

I: What about the people that you said have always been active in your church? In your congregation. And that some of these younger waves of people have come up from other areas and sort of settled into the community. Do they work outside of Bridgeport now, would you say? Is it less of a community-based organization? Are people more spread out?

ES: No, it's a community-based. In the church, every day there's something going on. They have bible studies and they have

community breakfasts and then they have a share plan where you put so much money a month and you get about thirty-five or forty dollars' worth of food for fifteen dollars but you have to come and get it and pick it up. Plan sharing or something like that. And then with the white churches and stuff. There's always something going on. But no, everybody's kind of cooperating but some of the old heads don't want to back down. They don't want the young ones to come in to do much. "Oh, we used to do this and we used to do that." But you do have to change with the times you know.

I: And where do you live now?

ES: I live on Connecticut Avenue, not far from Central. I'm between two churches. So if I don't feel like going to my own, I go across the street and I go roll down to the corner. And there's churches. If we don't get to heaven or something, I don't know why. Because Bridgeport has got more churches than anything else.

I: Oh, it certainly does.

ES: Church, church, church, church, church. They're not building any schools or anything but they got plenty of churches. And some of them I can't understand. You know, they're like little store fronts and stuff. To each his own. Nobody's bothering me. I've made it so far, thank God. I look over my shoulders when I'm going down the street. And I peek out my window to see what's going on. But so far it's been all right.

I: Do you still have family in this area? Besides your granddaughter?

ES: Oh yes. I have four sisters.

I: It's nice to have siblings. Oh great.

ES: Four sisters. And they have children. And a nephew. Yes. We were a big family. We're dwindling, dwindling. But there's still quite a few of us. As I say, I'm the oldest, but I got two sisters, they each got two children. They're grown and they've got children. And I've got my nephew in Milford. Of course, he's a man. My sister, she only had one child and I only had one child. But my brother's got five and they're all grown in New York. My cousin in New Haven, his son. We're cousins. Two sister's children. His son is one of the star basketball players. What's his name? Scotty Burrell. He plays for one of the teams. I don't know.

I: Your family came from this area. Most of them and a lot of them still stayed in the general area.

ES: That's what I'm so sorry about. I said, "Some of you, get out. Go someplace, because you've been here and been here." Scotty, as I said he's a professional basketball player. He did move to South Carolina and he bought his mother and father a house down there next door to him. Of course, we don't get in contact with them that much, but they do go back and forth from Hamden, Connecticut, to North Carolina. Michelle, she was in Detroit and stuff around.

I: That's your granddaughter?

ES: Yes. Michelle is a traveling person. She's getting ready to travel someplace now because she likes to go.

I: How about you? Have you ever wanted to--?

ES: No. First place, I'm afraid of flying. And that stopped everything because if you don't fly you're not getting anywhere.

I: Well, nowadays, I'm afraid that's partly true.

ES: I've been to Washington, stuff like that. Virginia. When my nephew lived there I went down to Fairfax, Virginia.

I: I grew up near there.

ES: Oh, yes? And I liked it very much. I took Michelle [granddaughter] with me because she used to go every place I went. She told me here about a month ago. I went to Canada one time and she stood in the window and she said she cried so hard and she said, "Mama told me, don't let Grandma see you crying" and I said, "I didn't know that you were standing back there crying because you wanted to go with me." I said, "I would have come back and got you." She said, "I know you would." But she said, "Grandma, I cried so hard." She said, "You were going down the street. You and your friend. And Mama said, don't cry. Don't let Mama see you." So I said, "Well, I took you the next year. I took you to Canada."

I: Oh, so you did go on some trips?

ES: Oh, yes. Canada and as I said, Virginia. Every time I went someplace, she went with me.

I: Now, did she live with you, or--?

ES: Yes.

I: When was that?

ES: When I lived on Newfield Avenue and she was going to East Side Middle School but her mother lived --had bought a house on Pearl Harbor Street, but her mother always worked nights. Her mother's an LPN and she always works nights. And so the school bus would pick her up at my house and take her to school and when she'd come from school, they'd drop her off at my house so she's always been around me. When her mother come home from work, she would stop by and

pick her up. When she went to Kolbe [Kolbe Cathedral High School], her skirts and uniforms and stuff, I always did her uniforms and all her mother did was pick her up at night and I'd have her blouses and skirts ready for the next day or something like that.

I: Now, at this point, were you still working at GE?

ES: Yes. I would get home at three-thirty and she would be there. And when I retired, she came permanent. I think I retired on a Thursday and Michelle came in definitely on Friday. She went back to her mother, though. It was handy. As I say, I was by myself. It was the time my husband and I had separated. And she was a lot of company. When she had gym -- I made arrangements for that. Because she was co-captain of the basketball team for Kolbe and it was cheerleading practice and this thing and that thing. And her mother was working. She represented Kolbe up in Hartford when Ella Grasso was governor. She was their representative from Connecticut schools. For one day she was Mrs. Grasso. She sat in Mrs. Grasso's seat.

I: That sounds like fun.

ES: Yes, she was up there. They have it every year. I imagine they still have that government thing for the different high schools. I imagine. You're appointed by your peers and stuff. So one year she landed up there in Hartford. Was governor for a day. So she's done a lot for her little self.

I: So really, besides your own child, you were here on the scene, so to speak, and your daughter and her husband lived in the same city. You were also able to take a hand in raising your granddaughter.

ES: Yes, she was there morning, noon and night.

I: Now, is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about your work experiences or anything about your residency in Bridgeport and some of your experiences here before we conclude? I'd love to hear more.

ES: No.

I: Important things you don't think we've covered?

ES: I don't think so. Did I tell you about the first hurricane I ever saw?

I: No. Oh, please tell me about that.

ES: It was 1939 [Hurricane of 1938?]. I lived down on Broad Street then. I hadn't been married too long. And, oh, Seaside Park used to be beautiful. In fact, her mother [granddaughter's mother] and I used to put her in the carriage and take her down every day to Seaside Park. Me and two other women who had children and we'd put them in the carriage and then we'd go down to the park. And it was beautiful. All the beautiful trees and everything. And in 1939 we had a hurricane. First one I think that they had around this place. And the water came all the way from the park up to Whiting Street and my mother-in-law, an older woman, a churchwoman. "You all better start praying. You better start praying." All you could think about was drowning because of all the water from Seaside Park all the way up the street.

I: That's several blocks inland from the shore.

ES: Yes, yes. And the lady upstairs, she had state children. Raising state children. And the kids came downstairs crying. They were scared. I was scared, too. But I said to the kids, "Don't worry about it, don't worry about it. Everything's going to be alright, everything's going to be alright." But I said to myself, "I hope to God I'm right" you know? But that was a scary time and it tore off trees down--. Seaside hasn't looked the same because they never replaced the trees.



- I: Was your house damaged? Did you have to evacuate?
- ES: No, not quite as far as us. It was a block before us. But they had scared the life out of me and the kids and everything because one more block, it was us. We were right to the railroad and one more block--.
- I: That's a long way up.
- ES: Oh yes. Can you imagine, from Seaside Park? And I said, "Oh my. Alright, alright." And my mother-in-law said, "Yes, when I was down home such and such and such and such." You know, she was making it, "Oh Jesus."
- I: Down home is Georgia? Your mother-in-law?
- ES: Yes, she had these kids scared. And I said, "No, no. Don't worry about it." And the lady who took care of them, she was just as bad as my mother-in-law because she was from down there, too, and they were talking about the floods and stuff they had down there and how this one was swept away and that one was swept away. And then they'd quote the bible and everything. They had these poor kids scared to death. Me, too. That was in 1939. I'll never forget that.
- I: Now, how long did that last?
- ES: Maybe about two days. The water started going down, but the damage was tremendous. So much damage. And then never bothered about it. You know, the trees was blown down and they never bothered about it. And that's why there's so few trees down there now. They should have replaced those trees because it was a beautiful park. You could go down there and nobody would bother you. I'm not going down there now. In fact, I haven't been down there in about twenty years. But, you could walk anytime from South Main Street

with no problem whatsoever. One o'clock at night. Nobody going to bother you. Nobody say anything. Everybody minding their own business. Where they're going to have the ballpark now. Jenkin's Brothers. Water fountains would be going. It was so nice there. The water was just flowing and I'd walk on down the street.

I: What was that neighborhood like? You and your husband first lived there when you had just gotten married. Down near the park.

ES: It was nice.

I: Did a lot of people own houses down there or rented?

ES: They rented. Most of those were rentals. That was during the Depression and most of us, a lot of them was on---. Well, they didn't call it welfare then. I don't know what they called it. But I knew they used to get subsidies. And there was a store or something, way further down the street, I know they used to go for bread and milk every day. And they got a box of food. It was like welfare, but they got a box of food. They got eggs and oleo and stuff like that. But every day you went down to the place and I'd see them coming back with a quart of milk and a loaf of bread, but that was every day. But the neighborhood was quiet and clean, but nobody had any money. I don't think there was any work or anything around. Like I said, my husband was there at the garage and I know he didn't get a fortune but it was a steady job every day he went. But, my mother-in-law, she worked a little bit. Domestic work, you know. And that was that. It was quiet, but now they tell me I wouldn't know the place. It's all tore up, they're going to build a ballpark [Harbor Yard Stadium] or something down there and everybody had to move from down there

and they tell me grass is growing down there where the people used to live.

I: They're starting to build. That's happened just since I've been here and I've been here for two years. And they're still in the process of building the stadium so that will really be different.

ES: It really will. You say you're from down there near McLean?

I: Yes. Arlington.

ES: Arlington. Oh, you're near the cemetery.

I: That's right. Exactly.

ES: I've been there.

I: So you've been to Washington and seen the sights on some of your trips?

ES: Oh, yes. I went to the little cabins where--. Monticello, is it?

I: Yes. Monticello. That's in Charlottesville.

ES: I stayed in Fairfax with my nephew. And McLean, next door, as you know. That's where the Kennedys used to be.

I: Somewhere there. Somewhere around there, yes.

ES: When I went there, I was so surprised. Which I had never seen before. There were so many Chinese people working in the stores. Clerks. Salesgirls, you know. And I had never seen that.

I: Compared to Bridgeport. When was that?

ES: Oh, I don't remember when it was. That was when Michelle was younger.

I: In the seventies, or the eighties?

ES: Oh, no. Earlier than the eighties. Must have been in the seventies.

I: Well, there are a lot of Vietnamese people in that area. A lot of Vietnamese people came to that area in the seventies, of course and

eighties. And Cambodians during the times of turbulence in Southeast Asia. Interesting.

ES: Yes. I was surprised.

I: I guess there really, --at that time in Bridgeport, there were more Hispanics perhaps coming to the city versus other groups from Asia.

ES: There wasn't a lot of Hispanics in '70 either. No, they started coming in around '75, '80. They didn't get here until later. They opened the door.

End of Interview