

East Brandywine Township Oral History Project

Interviewer(s): Alexandria Proko

Interviewee: Carol Sinex-Schmidt

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Carol: My name is Carol Sinex-Schmidt.

Allie: So, I know that we talked a lot with your sister (Elsie Tarr), and we got a lot of information about your guys' childhood. At the same time, because of your age difference, the two of you had almost entirely different experiences. Did you want to talk about that? She grew up in Darby, and you really grew up here.

Carol: I've been thinking about this, and I think our parents having grown up in the city sort of brought a different element to the people that were already in East Brandywine who were farmers and here for generations.

Allie: That's true.

Carol: I remember my mother saying that if you hadn't been here for two or three generations, you didn't fit in. I think because, at that time, there weren't any new developments. It was all farms. My mother's family thought we were going to the wilderness, to go to Lyndell from Philadelphia. They couldn't figure out what she would do all day and thought that she would be so bored. Well, Mom found out very quickly that it was quite the opposite. She got involved in things. I think they brought a different perspective. For example, my mother went to business school and worked in a corporation. No one out here had done that. Not for very long, because then Dad was in the Army. But, that would have been very different from a lot of the other mothers here.

Allie: Right.

Carol: My dad did grow up on a farm in Glenolden, believe it or not. So, he had a little of that. East Brandywine at that time was all Republican. There might have been a handful of Democrats in the township. They were very conservative. My dad on the other hand had been around Unions and so forth, and his attitude was that Unions were wonderful and he was a gung-ho Democrat. But, he came into an area that was really the opposite.

Allie: Wow.

Carol: I was a year old or maybe a little over a year old when we moved here. I didn't have that perspective, and I didn't have family around or grandparents. They were all in the city. At that time, when you didn't have the bypass or anything, we thought it was a big deal. People here didn't go into the city, and people in the city don't go here.

Allie: In some ways, I feel like that still hasn't changed as much as we think it has. It's sort of a trek. It's still an experience to go to Philly, unless you're working there. We're not as rural as we were, but in some ways we're still a small town. That same mentality, which is interesting.

Carol: I think people come out here because they like this environment. I remember when they started putting in a lot of developments, people would complain about tractors on the road being slow. It was like, well, yeah. You're in the country. That's the reality.

Allie: What drew your family out here? Was the store the reason?

Carol: My Dad was the manager for an American store in a Polish neighborhood in Philadelphia, which later became ACME.

Allie: The food store?

Carol: Yeah. He managed it and his brother-in-law did sales of some sort. In his route he saw the Lyndell Store. He told my dad to look into it, since it was for sale. It wound up being the perfect

situation, because the post office was also there, so he became the postmaster. If you were the postmaster, you had benefits from the government and paid vacation and all of those other benefits that he wouldn't have had as a self-employed store owner.

Allie: Oh, ok.

Carol: We went on a number of trips—postmaster conventions. We went to Hawaii. The postmasters would have these conventions and while you still had to pay, it was a better deal than if you'd gone on your own. In the beginning, people would still buy all their groceries from the store. As time went on, there were chain stores opening up and so he could see that he needed to make changes. He changed it to more of a deli and then built the campground. Sadly, the current owners changed the store to an apartment, which is sad as my dad said it was the longest store in continuous operation. As a side note, the deed to the store said he owned half the Brooklyn Bridge (Lyndell was originally named Brooklyn). He had a lot of fun telling people that.

Allie: When Cropper's came in, did that worry him? Was it a competition?

Carol: I don't think it was that way. There was enough separation. I never heard that.

Allie: When your mom came out here, was she already at that time not working?

Carol: She wasn't working. She was an artist, so she did a lot of paintings. She was very active with church. She'd help out in the store. It was open 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and Dad had to be down there earlier to get the mail. They would deliver it to the store. Looking back, I see how much he worked. You were open six days a week. Of course, you were not open on Sunday. No one was open on Sunday. And at that time there were "Blue Laws" that you were not legally allowed to be open on Sundays.

Allie: Chick-fil-A style.

Laughter

Carol: Exactly! For six days a week, he was open 7 to 7. He would go down there earlier for the mail delivery and sort the mail and open the store. When he had the campground, he would do that after the store. There were a lot of hours spent working.

Allie: One of things I wondered about the store, is if he had someone managing? When you all went somewhere, did he just close, or was somebody in charge for him?

Carol: He had a couple of women that worked for him so that if he did go away, they would fill in and take care of things. He didn't have any kind of manager or anything. Too small.

Allie: I was curious if there were any brands in particular that you remember liking that are still around or even those that aren't still around? Was there a popular food or beverage? Or a new commodity?

Carol: I don't think so. A lot of the people had their own gardens and canned food. My mother never canned.

Cynette walked in and showed a photo of the store back in the day.

Allie: Oh, that's neat! For the record, there's a photograph of the store and the shelves in the background with some cereal and the prices shown. Post's Bran Flakes are twenty-two cents, which is incredible. Quaker Wheat is thirteen cents. Cream of Wheat, thirty-three cents. Kix cereal, I see that back there. It's all close to five dollars now, per box.

Carol: Right. He had a butcher block in the back. He would butcher some things. If you used a smaller amount, he would just buy it. I wanted that butcher block so bad. I had ideas of what I'd do with it, but he sold it.

Allie: You mentioned the soda as well. There was a discussion about recycling the bottles. Was that Coca Cola?

Carol: No, it probably would have been Royal Crown, which was popular at the time.

Allie: Was that a national company?

Carol: Yes. There was certainly Coke. I mean, I was never a soda drinker, so that's not something that comes to mind. My mother tended to be more nutritional. We had a lot of salads.

Allie: Well, think about the whole idea of eating organic. A lot of the farms did use pesticides and things that we now would shrivel up and be disgusted by, but I think a lot of people were naturally healthier because they did live on a farm and grow their own stuff, or at least had access to fresh produce. It really sounds like it was a treat to get a soda, for most people. You know, we've heard stories of when they were kids, and they would go down to the luncheonette to get a soda.

Carol: Yeah! It wasn't something you had around the house.

Allie: Now, kids have it in their lunchboxes every day.

Carol: Right.

Cynette: Even with my kids, it was a treat when we went out.

Allie: The same for me. We never had it around.

Carol: My kids either. For some families, that's a routine.

Allie: I'm sorry to focus on food so much, but we haven't talked about it much and it's just anthropologically interesting to me. People's daily eating habits. What was breakfast? Did you pack lunch, or go somewhere for lunch?

Carol: Yeah. Well, my dad was a Mess Sergeant in the Army, so he liked to cook. And having lived in a Polish neighborhood too, he'd make things like galumpkis and pierogies. People around here wouldn't have had it. He enjoyed being somewhat inventive.

Cynette: How about his homemade soups?

Carol: Yeah, that was another thing. Whatever was leftover. You didn't have barbeque grills, and most people would use the fireplace. So, out behind the house there was a stone fireplace and that's what you'd cook on. We would have clams and things. We had a lot of good times that way.

Allie: So people didn't have barbeque grills?

Carol: They didn't exist, I don't think. At that time.

Cynette: Pop made that big slab of metal.

Carol: That was much later.

Allie: I don't know the origin, but I guess I've just assumed that people had grills. I don't know when that became a thing. It's interesting to hear.

Carol: The fireplace that I remember had a grill on it. But not these freestanding propane grills.

Allie: I should look that up. How did cookouts work? Did everyone just bring things?

Carol: Well, they would cook on the grill of the fireplace. It was fun. It might be hamburgers or hotdogs or chicken. Those kinds of things.

Allie: How about lunch for school? Did you brown bag?

Carol: Oh, yeah. You'd always have a brown bag. You were surprised that we could walk down to the luncheonette.

Allie: Yeah!

Carol: That wasn't something you could do regularly. Once in a blue moon kind of thing.

Allie: But you were allowed to leave school? At all ages, you could walk out of the building?

Carol: Yeah.

Allie: Was there an age limit where that was a freedom? Some kids mentioned they'd just go home.

Carol: I think it did depend where you lived. I went to first grade at Hopewell School, which is at the corner of Rock Raymond Road and Hopewell Road. There were people who lived close to it, so maybe they did. It would have been too far for me. I couldn't have walked home from there. Just eating out in general was not done as much as we do today. It was a special treat. The big thing on Sunday's was to go for a ride. That's what you did. I remember we would go to Trainer's, which was this well-known restaurant—near Norristown. You'd take the backroads and enjoy the scenery, have dinner and come back.

Allie: How about that?

Carol: That was entertainment.

Allie: Were there local restaurants that people frequented?

Carol: Not too many.

Allie: There's still not.

Laughter

Cynette: The 1960s. That's when the first grill came out.

Allie: That's kind of late!

Carol: Yeah, it is!

Cynette: It was Weber who started it.

Carol: It's even known today as the best. Somebody made a fortune. Like I said though, you didn't go out to eat much. It was pretty unusual. You might go to a church dinner.

Allie: Was that frequent?

Carol: My dad was in charge of cooking the women's dinner. I don't know if it was for Mother's Day or what. The men would cook it and serve it to the women. I remember a funny story was that he couldn't find a potato masher, so he used a baseball bat. He was a character.

Laughter

Carol: Yup! That's how he mashed the potatoes for that. The men would gather in the kitchen to make it.

Allie: This was at Hopewell Church?

Carol: Yep.

Cynette: Did you not go out often because there were so few restaurants?

Carol: I don't know if it was that, or that it was an unnecessary expense. You wouldn't hesitate today to go out. I'll still be of the mentality that we shouldn't spend the money. There was the Ingleside Diner. At one time in Downingtown there was this one hotel, but it was gone before I was old enough to remember.

Cynette: Was the Coffee Cup there?

Carol: It was there later, and it was just breakfast and lunch. More of a working man's place. In Exton there was Dick Thomas' Drive-In. That's where you went after school for fries and Coke. The drive-in was across the street.

Cynette: It wasn't as far down as Aldi's, but in there.

Carol: Not as far as Downingtown, but closer that way. Down the street then was the drive-in. It was a very popular place. That's where you went to the movies more than anything.

Allie: As a kid, did you go without your parents? Did they drop you off there? Since it was a drive-in, did you need to be with your family and sit in the car?

Carol: It would be a family thing, or for teenagers. It was a carload of friends that would go. There was a concession stand, or you'd bring food. Picnics, so to speak.

Allie: And they were okay with that? You bringing food?

Carol: Yeah.

Allie: They try to get you now, for a twenty-dollar soda.

Cynette: You'd go in your pajamas.

Carol: Yeah, you'd take the kids and they'd fall asleep.

Allie: Was there a popular candy to get there? I'm a Twizzler person.

Carol: I don't know about the drive-in as much as in the store. You had penny candy. I'm not a big sweets person.

Allie: How about breakfast? Was it a bowl of cereal in the morning?

Carol: It would be eggs and bacon.

Allie: So your parents were up and would make that for you in the morning?

Carol: Yeah.

Allie: That's nice.

Carol: You'd take a bag lunch and have dinner when you came home.

Cynette: Did they offer lunches in school?

Allie: There was no cafeteria, right?

Carol: Right, yeah. Not at all. It was funny, I was thinking about the luncheonette. I don't remember going to get sandwiches to take for lunch or anything. It goes back to having the store though, too. Dad would make them for us. Dad made the hoagies.

Allie: That sets you apart from the upbringing of almost every kid in East Brandywine. They didn't have a store where they could walk downstairs and order a hoagie. It was a different thing for you. That's neat. As far as chores and stuff, was it shop-oriented?

Carol: I didn't feel like I did much around the store. I remember one time making a hoagie for someone and Dad said 'What are you doing? There goes all my profit!' I put too much meat on the hoagie! I guess I helped out some, but I don't remember too much. As times changed, he moved more towards the deli. He had hoagies and sandwiches. I know I helped some, but nothing significant. My sister and I joked about how we pumped gas from the time that we were kids because the gas pumps were there. At the time, women didn't do that, and so we knew how before a lot of women around here did. Just one of those things.

Cynette: Do you know how much it was per gallon?

Carol: No idea.

Allie: Did men feel weird that you pumped their gas? There were so many stringent gender roles, which I'm sure you could elaborate on.

Carol: I don't remember it being an issue. It may have been that they pumped it themselves. Maybe we pumped the gas if it was a woman.

Allie: Going off of the gender roles, what are some things that maybe we haven't touched on in any of our former discussions?

Carol: A couple of little side stories. One of the owners of the store many years before put oil wells up in the field across the creek and was trying to sell stock in the wells, saying he was getting oil out of the wells (I have a photo of the wells). It turns out he was pumping the oil out of the basement of the store to try to get investors. Another fun side story was that the Greenfields, who owned a lot of real estate in Philadelphia, raised Weimaraner's. They were also friends with actress Grace Kelly's family. He needed someone to take care of the mama dog while he was away, and so we took care of it and were given one of the pups in return. Another pup in the litter was given to Grace Kelly as a wedding gift when she married the Prince of Monaco, so of course I named the dog Prince! Also, I was thinking about high school last night. You had two choices of which classes to take and that was Business or Academic. That was it.

Allie: What was Academic?

Carol: Academic meant that you were going to go to college. Oh! I guess I should say that there was a tech.

Allie: I had Tech-Ed, which was engineering and woodworking sort of projects, and then Home Economics was your sewing and cooking; however, everyone had to take both.

Carol: There wasn't flexibility in the choice of classes. You were Business or Academic, and that was it. As Elsie said, we were never encouraged to go to college. Not that we were discouraged, we weren't. My family didn't think about whether it was important. Most women then were either going to be a teacher, nurse or homemaker. Possibly starting in secretarial kind of work, but rarely. You didn't think too much about it unless you were going to college to be a teacher or a nurse.

Allie: Wow.

Carol: I wasn't interested in those, so I took Business.

Allie: What were you learning in there?

Carol: Shorthand, which nobody uses today.

Allie: Is that cursive? Is it even a form of writing? I'll be embarrassed if it's not.

Laughter

Carol: Shorthand is a form of writing. You would not recognize it unless you'd taken shorthand.

Allie: Oh! The abbreviations?

Carol: Yes. At that time, if somebody wanted to do a letter, they would dictate to the secretary who would take it down in shorthand and then type it up.

Allie: I've seen that, but it's very confusing.

Carol: Bookkeeping, typing, and then there were the standards. P.O.D.—that was Problems of Democracy. English, you had to do English. History. We had a wonderful teacher, Mr. Caskey. He taught Problems of Democracy. He would encourage people to think through things. If you came up with an opinion, he'd ask why and ask for the facts. It was encouraging, but so were my parents that way.

Allie: You found it reassuring.

Carol: Yeah! I think a lot of the things I remember from the '60s. For example, the assassination of John Kennedy. That was a really significant thing. I remember being in high school and them coming over the loudspeaker and telling us that the President had been shot. Things like that didn't happen. It was the first time I can remember the high school being totally silent. Everyone was so stunned. Some people got down with their rosaries and started praying. They dismissed us. It was a life changing thing.

Allie: This was Downingtown?

Carol: Yes, at the high school.

Allie: So, the fact that people pulled their rosaries out leads me to believe it was a religious community. Would you say that?

Carol: I don't know that it was religious. I think the assassination of the President was just so profound. Kennedy was adored. Of course, the attitude from many in this area would not have been in admiration of Kennedy because he was a Democrat and he was Catholic. That was shocking at the time. When he was running for office, there were concerns about whether the Pope would be running the country.

Allie: Really?

Carol: That was a big issue. If the Pope was going to dictate what the United States was like.

Allie: I never knew anything about Catholicism and the election.

Carol: See, that's things that I took for granted.

Allie: You look at it today, and everyone thanks God in their speech. You don't think anything of it. Why was it so weird for someone who was outwardly Catholic to be President? What was the history before?

Carol: I think before, it'd been Protestant. There'd never been a Catholic President before. I suspect—I'd have to research—that when the Irish came in there was a divide between Catholics and Protestants. My family was Irish-Protestant, and my mother was told, 'Now remember, you are lace curtain Irish. You are not shanty Irish.'

Allie: Oh!

Carol: What that meant, was that if you were Protestant, you were higher-class. Fancier. Not that that was the case, but it was the belief. The shanty Irish were the Catholics. Usually poor and didn't have the manners. That was the perception, not saying that was the case. There were the Nativist Riots in Philadelphia. That happened when the Irish were immigrating after the potato famine. The people here said that they were taking their jobs. Sound familiar to any recent history?

Laughter

Carol: The reaction was to be anti-Catholic and anti-Irish. Mostly Catholic. What happened during the Nativist Riots—my great, great, great-grandfather was in the City Militia at the time and they had to protect the Catholic churches because they were trying to burn them down.

Allie: What is the City Militia?

Carol: Sort of like a National Guard. Voluntary. It was actually called Bible Riots too, because that was the start of reading the Bible in school. There was a Priest who said it was fine and nobody objected to it, but that they wanted them to use Catholic Bibles. That's what got things going. I

suspect that was a carryover with Kennedy. His father was Irish. I had a lot of friends who lived in Johnstown, and they were Italian. My friends, probably most of them, were Catholic.

Allie: I was going to ask about that. My mom went to the high school and it seems most were Italian.

Carol: Yeah. That was pretty much true for me too. The Catholic church has changed so dramatically since then. That was a time when my friends weren't even allowed in my church—you couldn't go to a Protestant church, you'd be struck dead. Even for sometimes things like weddings, you didn't dare. They couldn't come for the youth group. It was far more greatly divided. I'm not sure where that blame lies necessarily, probably on both sides. I knew my Catholic friends couldn't eat meat on Friday. Their traditions and practices were very different. Protestant vs. Catholic. The way the church ran was different. Our ministers were almost one of us. They were married, they had children, and made mistakes.

Allie: Catholicism is not that way, even now.

Carol: Yes. You know all about that.

Allie: Yeah.

Carol: I think some of that started with Kennedy. There was a feeling of them being different. That was part of it. He was so well-loved after he was elected. People lost that fear of him being Catholic. He was charismatic and you couldn't help but love him. He was a powerful person, and someone you wanted to hear talk. He was good-looking and his wife was beautiful.

Allie: Did females look up to her? I know there was such focus on her. When I see photos, she seems more reserved so I can't gauge how she was.

Carol: I think she was certainly intelligent. In later years, she worked as an editor or something. She was certainly fashion-conscious and, as a beautiful woman, she pulled that off so gracefully. They made a great couple. It was referred to as the time of Camelot. It was sort of this fairytale time. I'm sure not everyone agreed, but I did feel that way. For him to be assassinated was so terribly sad. The whole world mourned. He was well-liked all over the world. He went to speak in Germany, he said 'I am one of you.' That's the way he was. That's why people just mourned everywhere for him.

Allie: They felt like they knew him?

Carol: Yeah, I think so. No one so far has brought up the '60s. That isn't old history, so I don't know how much you want to know about that.

Allie: In the scheme of history though, it really isn't new history either. We sometimes think of it as not old, but it's still history. That is interesting for me to hear all of that. It sounds like a lot of the folks around here seemed removed from a lot of this.

Carol: When I was in high school, Kennedy was shot, and the Vietnam War was going on. Early on, you were drafted if you didn't go to college. The guys who were going to college were safe for then. Then, it was you were drafted if you weren't married. So then, there was sort of a rush to get married, I'd think. Then, if you had children. At that point in time, everybody was going to Vietnam. It was really an awful time. You knew all of your friends were going to war. Of course, they knew that in WWII as well. In East Brandywine, Larry Piersol died in Vietnam and (can't remember his first name) Van Lew died in Vietnam. There may have been a couple of others that I'm not familiar with. It was a tough time knowing that. What made it worse was the attitude of the government that if you were opposed to the war, you were therefore unpatriotic.

Allie: Oh, wow.

Carol: People like me, who were opposed to the war. There was this divide and conquer attitude by Nixon. He said that if you oppose the war, then you're not a patriot for the United States. In reality, that wasn't the case at all. We just didn't want all of our sons and fathers and brothers dying for what we saw as a purposeless war. Which, as it turned out, it was. The '60s were just full of a lot of political things. The Women's Movement started, and there again, things changed. Initially it was because of the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment). When I was right out of high school, you'd get treated any way that you wanted to get treated by men. It never occurred to you that you could object. It just didn't. You didn't realize that you had the right to not be mistreated by men. I remember working at a butchering company and I worked in the office. I remember literally running around the desk, being chased. You didn't think you had the right to have anything different. You tried to be coy and do whatever else you could to try to avoid it, but that was the way it was.

Allie: Now, when you say mistreated, are you talking about sexual harassment?

Carol: I can't say that in the workplace I experienced actual sexual harassment, but the attitudes were more that women didn't have many rights. They didn't speak up and had little rights when it came to marriages and divorces. Again, I wasn't affected by that.

Allie: Right.

Carol: An important part that I didn't mention were Civil Rights. That was going on. Because my father had the point of view that he did, his friends did as well. His best friend was a man named Norman Piersol, and they lived in Glenmoore. He started this thing where he'd have dinner with black families in Coatesville and share meals together, getting to know one another. That was the atmosphere that I grew up in. In high school, we had a club of some kind, and we had some money because of a treasury that we wanted to figure out how to use. Someone suggested the roller rink.

Allie: Caln?

Carol: At the time, West Whiteland Fire Company had a roller rink that would sit right where Rino's is. That's where it was. There were a couple of black girls in the club, and they said they weren't allowed in there because they were black. All of a sudden, I realized that when you would go to the roller rink, you would pay your money and get a card that would say you were a member of the West Whiteland Fire Company. That's how they would keep blacks out. You'd only become a member if you were white. I often think now that I wish I'd done something then, and I didn't.

Allie: In the moment though, you probably were shocked first because you didn't even know that kind of racism.

Carol: Yeah. You know, everyone always talks about the good old days. Well, if you were a black person in those "good old days," they weren't great. Not at all. It's all in the perspective. We can paint this picture of East Brandywine and talk about the farms and how great everything was, and that might have been true, if you were white.

Allie: Wow.

Cynette: Was it the same for you, Allie?

Allie: No, not at all. I grew up where if anyone said anything, it came from the mouth of a grandparent and got repeated by a kid who really didn't understand what they were saying. I feel that as kids, we really didn't see racism. We're seeing it more as adults, my generation. It's almost a resurgence of hatred. We really didn't really grow up with that in the '90s or early 2000s. We couldn't relate to it. In some ways, maybe you couldn't either. It's this thing happening in front of you and you couldn't understand it because it wasn't what you knew.

Carol: Yeah, exactly.

Allie: It's interesting though, that despite the years between, Joan (Stanford) had mentioned that little boy in school and the teacher tied him to a chair. She thought it was because he was misbehaving, but she later admitted that she didn't know if it was behavioral or racial.

Carol: Yeah, it was really interesting. She realized it later as she told the story too. When I was a kid, we went on a trip to Florida, and I remember seeing the "Whites Only" entrances. At restaurants or in bathrooms and water fountains. I was so shocked by it because it didn't exist here. But, it was existing here, it just wasn't as blatant and so I wasn't aware.

Allie: Right. There wasn't signage, but maybe sort of this unspoken barrier.

Carol: Yeah. The other thing was when I'd gone down to Virginia and Martin Luther King had been shot. That was really frightening because I was driving on I-95 and the National Guard was stationed at every exit. The riots and so forth. It was scary. All of those things happening in a row made for a very turbulent time.

Allie: You were older for this, right? In high school? Were you noticing conversations among parents or other students? I know in your own home it wasn't something that was brought up, but I didn't know if maybe you were hearing things from your peers? Were you around people who had similar views as you?

Carol: I was around more like-minded people. Was my background different from many of the farmers in the area? Yes. I can't really compare to people who were really involved politically. I wasn't to that degree. When I see, for example, the Me Too Movement? I'm so thrilled about it, because women are feeling that they can speak up and acknowledge that isn't how they should be treated. I find that exciting, that women have a voice.

Allie: Going off of what you'd mentioned earlier, it's interesting how not that much has changed in terms of women and the relationship we have with men. We're in 2018 and we're still fighting for equal pay and certain rights. In the scheme of things, we've shattered some of the walls, but I don't think we've hit the ceiling.

Carol: The number of CEOs is small compared to men. There's still the income ratio. I read one time, and this would be before me, but when there were men tellers in banks? They were well-paid. When women started taking on those jobs, the pay dropped. I also heard something the other day about after WWII, one of the problems for men returning from the war, was that when women went into the workplace, they were making less money so the companies were loving it.

Allie: The companies didn't want to give men their jobs back, right?

Carol: Exactly.

Allie: They could pay women less, and women still wanted the jobs.

Carol: The more things change, the more they stay the same. It's somewhat true. We've made some strides. In WWII, those men were sent in for the duration of the war. I had a good friend who has since died, but he was in Europe for five years. He was taken out of high school to go. He was there until the end of the war. In Vietnam, they went for a year. There were some advantages that way. My ex-husband was in Vietnam before we were married. He was there for a year. He went on R and R—they called it rest and recreation. He went to Malaysia. That wouldn't have happened in WWII, you didn't have that kind of thing. The men were returning after a year. They might have stayed in the military or might not have.

Allie: Oh, okay. When you brought up roller skating and the West Whiteland Fire Company, I wanted to be sure to also bring up East Brandywine Fire Company. I know that you have a history there. Did you want to touch on that?

Carol: My husband was in the fire company.

Allie: What was his name?

Carol: John Schmidt. During the day, there's never anyone home to fight fires, if a call came in. My friend Linda Thomas—she worked for us and we had our business here at home in Guthriesville so we volunteered.

Allie: What was that?

Carol: We had Trade Talk. It was an advertising publication.

Allie: I know of that, but didn't know it was you. That's cool.

Carol: Yeah, we started it. There was something similar in Virginia when my husband and I got married and we thought it would be good in this area. It was! It was very good. We eventually sold it. But we had our business here with offices downstairs. It seemed like common sense to be a firefighter; however, there were no other women firefighters in Chester County. There was a full page of pictures of me in the Daily Local as a firefighter, because I was one of the first women to actually be a firefighter here. There was a pressure on me where I felt like because of that, I couldn't not do something.

Allie: Right.

Carol: It was considered unusual.

Cynette: I remember as kids, the fire whistle would go off at the township building. Now, you don't hear it. So, you'd hear the fire whistle go off and I'd see my mom and dad and run down the street with their gear and stuff.

Allie: You kept your gear here?

Carol: Yeah, I think we did.

Cynette: I remember you carrying your boots. That house is actually right up here on 322. (Referring to a photograph in the paper)

Carol: I can't remember the name of the street before it. It's a short distance up the road from the township building.

Allie: So, you could hear the fire whistle? Now we only know because we hear the trucks.

Cynette: There was a monitor and so when Station 49 would get called to a fire, it would go off.

Carol: You still remember it's 49, don't you?

Cynette: Yeah, yeah. I always remembered 49.

Carol: There was a fire whistle on top of what was called Frazer's Feed Store at the time, which is behind Joe Burns Beverage. That burnt down. There was a fire whistle on top of that and it really was the whistle that alerted you to go down there. You ran down.

Allie: Was it the same building?

Carol: Yes. Really, that fire company isn't that old as far as fire companies go. We were good friends with Brent Follwieler who was the chief at the time. He was a doctor at Brandywine. He was an anesthesiologist there, and he lived closer to West Brandywine, but was a really nice guy. The one funny thing that you'll appreciate is that I remember after these pictures in the paper, somebody

from the Ladies Auxiliary said that they'd been serving all these meals and didn't get their picture in the paper. She was mad. I wasn't that involved in the auxiliary to tell you the truth, it just didn't interest me much.

Allie: Oh gosh!

Carol: They were a little peeved, which I guess I can understand.

Allie: There's a bit of a difference though. As much as that does qualify them as a member, you were the one putting yourself in a risky position that a lot of other women were not. That was a statement regardless of whether you meant for it to be. That's why you got a highlight. Rather than doing the traditional meal-making and representing the stereotypical role of a woman, you were acknowledging that you were just as capable as any guy could be.

Carol: I didn't do it for awfully long, just a couple of years. But I drove a truck and I remember the hardest thing to me was the field fires. Carrying the water tanks on your back, was to me, one of the biggest challenges. Of course, there weren't as many calls then as there would be today.

Allie: At the time, was it also EMS?

Carol: Actually, they started it under Brent. When they started the whole EMT program, which was really new at the time, John was involved.

Cynette: I was an EMT.

Allie: Were you?

Carol: Yeah, Cynette had the training as well. I mean, prior to that it was fires only. I didn't know about it when I lived in Lyndell.

Allie: Would East Brandywine be the company to go to Lyndell at the time? Was it Glenmoore?

Carol: You're sort of between each there. I don't know. I mean, we were in East Brandywine Township.

Allie: Maybe it was then. I know even now, if there's a call down by Dowlin Forge Road, despite the fact that Minquas is closer, East Brandywine is still first due.

Carol: I can remember that being an issue. Like Cynette said, there were the monitors.

Allie: Was it like a police scanner box?

Carol: Yes, right.

Allie: They have pager radios now. Different beeps represent different things too. Did you have that?

Carol: Well, on the monitor they would say, "Station 49, you have an accident at blah, blah, blah."

Cynette: A lot of people liked to hear what everybody else was doing too.

Allie: Oh, I know. It's like watching television. First, my brother will hear the tone and he'll say, "Oh, it's an accident with an entrapment." I sit there and I'm just trying to understand how he knows that before anyone from the County talks over the radio.

Cynette: Is this your brother?

Allie: Yes, he runs with the fire company. It's interesting how they know though.

Carol: Yes. The EMS part of it started around that time. I didn't get involved in that, but John did. When I was pregnant with my son, I stopped firefighting. I remember at Exton Mall they had an expo going on, and it was of women who were doing nontraditional jobs. They asked me to go as a firefighter. It was just a little table. I'll never forget though that there was a guy who said, "Women can't eat smoke like men can." I was like, "Alright, so we have different lungs." You know? So ridiculous. There were a lot of people who were threatened by the idea of a woman firefighter.

Allie: I get it. I'm a wedding and event planner, and if I hand a guy my card to network, they'll still ask if it's my company and if I own it. What I'm doing is predominantly a female-driven industry, and they're still surprised. It still baffles them. I've had men ask me who does my accounting and books, who my boss is, etc. My name is on the name of the company. Then they'll ask me if I had an education. I tell them I have a college degree.

Carol: I pretty much ran our company, to a large degree. It was a partnership between my husband and I, but I had a significant part. When we split up, he was immediately hired in a management position and I went to a secretarial position. I didn't go back to school until I was 68—Immaculata—and graduated with my degree. At the time, neither of us had a degree though, but he didn't need it. They saw that he ran his own company, but I wasn't given the same courtesy. In reality, it was a partnership and probably a little more of the management was me, he did the sales part.

Allie: Yes. In some companies, women do prefer to have a more hands-off role, but at least it's a decision they make and not one that someone puts on them.

Carol: Right. In my case, I'd have preferred the management position. I'd have liked to earn what my husband was earning. He was earning a whole heck of a lot more than me.

Allie: I'm going back in time here, but were there schools around here for women to become secretaries? That was a thing, right? Specific schools for those skills?

Carol: When I was in school, the main one was Goldie—Beacom. I think it's still in existence. Down near Delaware or something. In history books, I've read that there were some smaller ones. It was probably a two-year program, more of an associate's degree. I don't know if it was a degree or a certificate, as far as what they called it.

Allie: That was a curiosity, and if I'm being totally honest, it's because I've started to watch *Mad Men*.

Carol: I've never seen that!

Allie: I started watching it on Netflix, and it's fascinating. It's about the 1950s to the '70s, and I'm currently watching a few years past Kennedy's assassination. It's dramatized, so they are constantly smoking and drinking in the office, which I'll assume isn't the reality. It's set in the city. I have a new outlook on that time period, beyond hippies. As a child, we saw it as this colorful floral time, and it's interesting to see it from a new perspective. It's embarrassing that this is my perspective on that time.

Laughter

Carol: I graduated in '65, so at that point the whole hippie phase came later. We went out drinking, but drugs didn't seem to exist much. If they were, I wasn't aware of it. I don't think there was much of it. Vietnam brought back marijuana. The guys came back and had been smoking it there. That's the reality.

Allie: Oh, wow.

Carol: I did want to mention that when I went to school—I went to Hopewell and then the Guthriesville School—they were building Brandywine Wallace. We had fifth grade in the basement of East Brandywine Baptist Church (that building is now gone) and then sixth grade in the basement of Hopewell Methodist Church. When we went to high school—which is now where STEM is—that was junior and senior high together.

Allie: Fifth grade was in the basement of the church up the road?

Carol: The building has been rebuilt though. Where we went it was on the corner, it was a building that's no longer there. When I went to seventh grade, I was scared to death. I had never had a cafeteria or gym class.

Cynette: That building was my junior high only, where STEM is.

Carol: Right. The next year is when it changed because they had completed the senior high. Here I was, this country bumpkin in seventh grade, going to school with kids up to twelfth grade.

Allie: That is scary. It's scary even to go into high school as a ninth grader and be with older kids.

Carol: Yes, it was really scary. I remember going into a classroom after finally finding my homeroom and trying to hold my tears back.

Cynette: You know East Ward? There used to be Old East Ward. I went to Brandywine Wallace, and then Old East Ward—there was a building there where the playground is. That was sixth grade, and it was a transition into junior high.

Allie: A sixth grade center?

Cynette: Exactly. The building is torn down now. When I went to junior high, it was seventh, eighth, and ninth. The senior high was built, and it was for tenth, eleventh, and twelfth.

Allie: You said there wasn't gym class until high school?

Carol: When we got to the junior high, it was there. I failed gym class. I felt like it was unfair that she failed me. She favored all the girls who were on lacrosse. You had to get showers. You had to march in front of her naked, to prove you'd taken a shower. But my parents wouldn't have thought to defend me. I mean, if a teacher failed you, you deserved it. That was the attitude then. I think I

continued it somewhat, but I was more interested in looking into the whole situation first. Now, there's so much defensiveness from parents.

Allie: There's rarely a meeting just between a teacher and a parent anymore. It's always with the principal and some kind of learning support and counselor. They assume it'll escalate.

Carol: Not a lot of balance.

Allie: I think people do need to take more responsibility, because a lot of kids do lash out. Teachers aren't hitting kids anymore, but they want respect. A lot of people can't handle that.

Carol: We used to have paddles. I was paddled. You'd need to go in front of the class and lean over the desk. The teacher had a big wooden paddle.

Allie: I had a history teacher in eighth grade and a kid lashed out. The teacher looked at him and told him he was lucky they couldn't use paddles anymore. I remember feeling frozen in place. I was a good kid, but even I felt threatened.

Laughter

Carol: I was a good kid, but it was for talking or something.

Allie: They would paddle you for that?

Carol: Oh yeah. It only had to happen to you once to scare you straight.

Allie: I had another teacher, also history, who got mad and took a kid's binder and tossed it out the window into the courtyard. He made the kid go get a janitor to let him into the courtyard to get it. That scared us. We didn't know what he was capable of. To be paddled, I'd be terrified.

Carol: Overall, I had wonderful teachers.

Allie: Any who stood out to you?

Carol: I mentioned Mr. Caskey, who taught Problems of Democracy. Mr. King had an interesting story—he lived in East Brandywine off of Corner Ketch/Lyndell Road. He was a soft-spoken bookkeeping teacher and I admired him. He walked funny, and it turned out that he had been on the Walk of Death in World War II, and he'd lost his toes to frostbite. It was when they marched the prisoners of war. It was winter and a horrendous thing.

Allie: Oh my gosh.

Carol: Billy was his son, I think. I don't remember his daughter's name. I was closer to them in age, so that's how I knew what had happened to him. Miss Laird was a great teacher. She was great fun and made English interesting.

Cynette: Did you have Mrs. Souden, who lived on the corner across from the township building?

Carol: I had her for second grade.

Allie: My grandmother was friends with her.

Carol: I had Mrs. Bennech for first grade.

Allie: At Hopewell?

Carol: Hopewell School was Mrs. Bennech, and then Guthriesville was Mrs. Souden and Mrs. Ferguson.

Allie: Someone mentioned Mrs. Mertz.

Carol: She came later. Cynette had her. In fact, my friend Linda and I were talking about that. We met in second grade and have stayed friends ever since. She has a great memory. We were going over our teachers and she remembered someone else. I don't remember.

Allie: Is she still local?

Carol: She lives in Honey Brook and works in Crop's now. I saw her last night.

Cynette: She's like a second mom to me.

Carol: Julie Schroder bought Trade Talk from us. I met Julie through the National Organization of Women. The organization started out great, but as time went by it was going divergent ways that caused me to lose interest. I was a member of the West Chester Business and Professional Women's club. With a lot of help, I started the Greater Downingtown Business and Professional Women's club. I was the first president of that. At the time, it was a vibrant organization with a good membership and programs. As with many of those kinds of organizations, I don't know how many members are there anymore. It's like the VFW, that prior to television and social media, those served as your social community.

Allie: Yes.

Carol: My dad was a member of the Grand Tall Cedars.

Allie: What was that?

Carol: I think it's a part of the Mason's. They met in Coatesville. He was in the Rotary too. I think the Rotary is having a terrible time getting people.

Cynette: They used to have a big clambake at a farm just past Jeff D'Ambrosio. The man who owned it was a member, and they had everyone over for a clambake there.

Allie: You don't see any of that anymore.

Carol: Just like churches. That used to be a big part of your social life.

Allie: Many people who are my age see it as obligatory rather than a sense of community. I can't speak for everybody, but a lot of people that I know.

Carol: I work at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian. It's a huge church with a staff of thirty-five. There are groups like the Hunger Committee that come in to make casseroles and do wonderful work, but it's not what it was before.

Allie: A lot of organizations are that way.

Cynette: Everything is online now. My daughter had a baby and is online with a group of other young moms. They are going to meet up, but most of their interaction is online.

Allie: It's that way now. I rarely will hear about things through the grapevine. It's from a Google search or seeing that someone else on my Facebook liked something and it showed up on mine. It's great, but also a little depressing. Instead of going out to interact with these people, I'm just reading about their lives.

Cynette: On the other side of that, my daughter just moved and has a baby and is able to connect with people and make new friends.

Allie: It's a blessing and a curse.

Carol: Double-edged sword.

Allie: Is there anything we didn't touch on yet?

Carol: When I was growing up in Lyndell, Marsh Creek didn't exist. To go to Eagle, you'd go through Milford Mills. That changed things geographically, because now if you're in Lyndell you have to go out of your way to go to Eagle. Then, it was more common because it was a straight shot.

Allie: Was Eagle a focal point with reason to go? Unless you live there now, there's not much reason to venture out.

Carol: At that time, there weren't all of the businesses. Although, the Eagle Tavern restaurant was there.

Allie: It's great, they just renovated it.

Carol: I saw that! As a child, I remember delivering food to Boo Boo Hoff's mansion in Milford Mills. It was something else at that time.

Allie: I'll need to get information on that.

Carol: Parry Desmond—his wife is Becky Desmond, did you know her? She was a teacher at Downingtown.

Allie: She was actually my coach for the tennis team growing up.

Carol: Yes. Well, her husband owned the East Branch Citizen. It was a local paper that he started. We worked with Parry on doing some typesetting and things like that. We got to know him pretty well. We didn't know Rebecca quite as well. He had a real interest in Boo Boo Hoff and had written a series of articles in the East Branch Citizen. We would hear stories, but when I was a kid it was a camp for Jewish children. I remember going there and delivering food with my dad.

Allie: The other thing to look into was a school for girls. I can't remember who brought that up, but they said it was local. I wrote it down. On North Guthriesville Road. I never heard anything about it.

Carol: On the right-hand side. I remember hearing that, but I know nothing at all about it. It had to be long before.

Allie: Yeah, neither did I. I don't even know the time period.

Carol: My guess is that in the 1800s there were a lot of private schools. If you're coming from Lyndell on Corner Ketch-Lyndell Road, and I think there was a Lyndell School but it wasn't when I was growing up.

Allie: A schoolhouse? I was on the phone with someone, and she said that there were five schoolhouses and she mentioned Lyndell. I didn't know about a Lyndell school. She also said Guthriesville, Hopewell, Bondsville, and another one. So, where was it?

Carol: You go up the hill and there's a few newer houses on the right. When I say newer, I mean the '50s or '60s. It curves around, and that house actually used to be moved back. It used to sit right on the road. When they bought it, they moved it back. That was Jefferis Road and Corner Ketch. You would continue up, and it was on the right side. It was a private home when I was a kid. I don't know why they did that, considering they had to use churches.

Allie: Yeah.

Carol: Of course, in Bondsville too. I think it was prior to the Historic Commission when they tore down the home that the Irons' lived in.

Allie: Yes, they were telling me about the history of that and how far back it went and I'm not sure how they did it. I was a kid when they did it. I remember it being there. It was still an apartment at the end, right?

Carol: Yeah. I know they rented apartments. I remember her as a bus driver. It could have been at that time for vacation bible school. I think she was a regular bus driver. We'd have to ask her. George Krapf's wife drove the bus for Bible school. They would come around on the bus and pick you up. That was standard, it wasn't unusual.