

FOLIO

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C O N T E N T S

This book contains the following order of inter-views:

Maryellen Roth

Book 16

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V. 16

Mrs. Maryellen Roth at 4309 So. Halsted Street, Chicago March 4, 1971

Q. I was in your area. Did you grow up here?

A. Yes, I grew up here. We came from Hammond, Indiana in 1922.

Q. What was it that brought you folks in this neighborhood?--..

A. Well my father was a butcher over at Armour's and Swifts.

Q. Did he have a job before he came over here, or did he come here looking for work?

A. He came here as a young fellow, only 20 years old and found a job, he worked for G. H. Hammond Packing Company out in Hammond, Indiana and he came up here in Chicago and worked up here at Armour's all these years.

Q. What department was he in, do you recall?

A. In the slaughter.

Q. Would that be hogs or cattle?

A. Cattle, he was a floorsman.

Q. A floorsman is a very tough job in the cattle department.

A. Well he worked up to that, it must have been a long time before he got to be a floorsman. He was fairly young when he went to work. He came from Detroit, Michigan to Hammond as a floorsman.

Q. I see! He learned his trade very young.

A. Very young, hun uh!

Q. That was a very hard job as I recall it.

A. Yes, it was. I recall some of the effects that worked on him. It was hard on the back. It was stooping all day, and it effected their back.

Q. Yes; I remember a floorsman whose fingers all sort of wore away from holding the hides.

A. That's right, the one hand was awful from holding and hanging on and pulling. So we lived right here in this neighborhood after we came here.

Q. All those years. But when did you move here to Halsted Street? We are living in this flat 41 years.

Q. 41 years -- 41 years. Well that would have been about 1930? Just as the depression was getting a good start.

A. That's right.

Q. Do you recall those depression years?

A. The depression was terrible, but we made out. It seemed as though things weren't high and you could really make out.

Q. Your father was working at the time?

A. No, my father was retired then.

Q. Oh! already he was retired. I see.

A. My father was 78 years old.

Q. Oh! my dear lady. I would never have guessed that at all.

A. I had three brothers. My brothers became butchers too. One

went to Cincinnati and the other went to New York, and the other one left the butcher trade and went on the Railroad.

Q. Well it is certainly interesting that you've been a family of meat workers. You, yourself have you ever worked in the industry?

A. No, I never did. Lots of women did work, some of the older ones. I know years ago all the girls that lived around here worked in those days. You had to work so you went over to the Yards and worked in the Canning factories, Armour's, Swift, Hammond & Co. had factories.

Q. They canned their meats.

A. Oh yes.

Q. Do you remember how much the wages were?

A. I can remember my father only made 50 cents an hour, that was in broken time.

Q. That would have been about when?

A. In 1900.

Q. In 1900, so you do remember back to very early times?

A. That's right, and they had slack season. They didn't have steady times then.

Q. So you had a layoff period, didn't you?

A. We certainly did.

Q. What kind of work did your father do during that period when it was slack?

A . He just didn't do anything. There wasn't anything to do, not then. There wasn't work like it was today. You can go here and there and have an extra job. You didn't have it them days.

Q . You were sort of planted here and you could walk to work?

A . Everybody walked to work, they walked over the viaducts and crossed.

Q . I'm interested in this neighborhood. Practically everybody here I suppose has some connection with the Stockyards. It seems like everybody went over here even to the young girls coming out of school, you know, they went over in the offices and worked for the different packinghouses. Do you have any idea how many people used to work over there in the great days? Oh I can't imagine, it was tremendous.

It certainly was a far cry from those days now, the place is so barren and deserted.

A . That's right. Well back when it was slow our girls on Sunday would walk over the viaducts and look at the cattle and that is where we spent our time.

Q . That was your amusement, right? That was before shows.

A . Well we didn't have no shows around here.

Q . Well this whole neighborhood -- was the city always built out this far or did you come when it was still a little settlement

A. It was built out when I came here.

Q. Well how about the physical conditions. Were the streets all paved and the sidewalks all in?

A. Yes, they were. There was quite a few of them. Of course, the main streets weren't, they were cedared blocks them days.

Q. Huh! that was the first step out of the mud.

A . Yes, yes.

Q. I've seen pictures of old times here when the streets were muddy.

A . Yes, that's right.

Q. And the sidewalks were made of wood -- wood -- huh uh.

A. Up on stilts, that's right.

Q. Along this neighborhood, along Halsted Street, people tell me was a lot of saloons here in those days.

A . There were, yes there were. From 47th Street to 43rd Street on Halsted Street there was a couple of saloons, two or three. There was one, two, three, four, five and on Root Street was a row of them.

Q. Oh Root Street was a congregation! The Forty-Second and Root Street. And in those days, I suppose, they were really coming in with their cattle from the Western ranges.

Did you recall scenes of that sort?

A. No, I didn't see that. They came in trains at night time. Well the cowboys then lived in little hotels around here, rooming houses while they were selling their steers, I suppose. Well that was not in my time, it-was before my time because what I can remember -- they came in on the trains.

Q. Oh, I see. Well do you have any idea why this neighborhood is called Canaryville?

A. Yes, because this was kind of like an island here and there was a lot of canaries here.

Q. Canaries!

A. Canary birds,

Q. Oh, really that is the explanation.

A. Yes, that is, huh uh!

Q. It was like an island, now tell me what you meant by that?

A. Well see from 39th Street there was a canal, or whatever you called that, a creek, a bubbling creek that was on 39th Street and there was like an island, like prairies all around here and this was just a little settlement -- that was why it was called Canary Island.

A. I see. I had a theory it was because that they all, the ladies were having Canary birds in their houses, but I'm wrong. That was just too much imagination.

Q. What attracted so many Irish people here?

A. Well, I think the packinghouse.

Q. There was work of course.

A. There was work all right. Well in those days Ashland Avenue was the other side of the Yards in the packing plant. That's what we call Back of the Yards. This was Canaryville and that's Back of the Yards.

Q. And were you people here more or less first and then that settlement grew up, or were they already here?

A. That grew up quite awhile before my time.

Q. I suppose while the packinghouse was building and it was attracting land developers and all that. Well the history of the industry here has been one of many efforts by the workers to organize and build unions and have bargaining rights.

A. That's right.

I suppose you remember hearing about those things from your earlier days.

A. I should -- Mr. Lane was my uncle.

Q. Dennis Lane was your uncle?

A. Dennis Lane was my uncle.

Q. Oh I should say, my gracious. How did that come about. what was his connection, through your mother?

A. Through my mother.

Q. I see, and perhaps you'd like to explain who Dennis Lane was?

A. Dennis Lane was Secretary-Treasurer of the International Union at the time.

Q. At the time of the great 1921 strike?

A. That's right.

Q. And Mr. Gorman was one of the Vice Presidents? Not the 1921 strike -- yes, it was.

A. Yes, yes, you're right.

Q. Mr. Gorman was one of the young men coming up.

A. That's right, that's right.

Q. Do you remember about the 1904 strike?

A. Yes, I remember that too.

Q. I wonder if you can tell me what sort, I guess what is your recollection about that period.

A. Well I know it was pretty rough at that time.

Q. You were a little girl then.

A. I was just a little girl going to school.

Q. What was the strike like. Have you any recollections?

A. I know my father and Mr. Lane and my brothers were out of work.

Q. So it was really rough. That was back in the early 1900 period -- 1924.

A. Oh! 1924.

Q. You don't remember much about 1904.

A. 1904, yes that's what I remember -- 1904. That was a great strike, I think it was Mr. Donnelly with the union.

Q. Michael Donnelly!

A. Michael Donnelly was in the union. I have a picture of him too.

Q. You have!

A. Yes, I have.

Q. Well before I go I'd like very much to see that picture.

A. O.K.

Q. Was there sort of' like choosing of sides between packinghouse workers then or were they all pretty much of in the union? Was there a big group of non-strikers?

A. Well; No, that's when they brought in the colored people.

Q. Huh uh you recall that.

A. Yes.

Q. I suppose that upset everyone very much. How do you know about bringing in the colored people. What do you recall about that?

A. Well I know they brought them in, they parked them over in the Yards. They brought them over by trains. Yes, they brought them right from the South.

Q. And I suppose there was a good deal of hostility afterwards, after the strike was all over, people were angry at each other.

A. Oh yes, that was for a good many years.

Q. Did the Irish and the Polish get along, or was there a certain amount of friction between those two groups?

A. Well they seem to get along pretty good.

Q. The Irish were pretty much on this side of the Yards and the Polish were on the other side.

A. That's right. This side is Irish and German and the Polish and Lithuanians and all them are over on that side.

Q. And the job was the place where the people met, and everybody walked back and forth to work -- carrying their lunch bucket under their arm.

A. That's right. And it was 10 long hours a day, back in those days and overtime -- when they were busy they had overtime.

Q. Did they get paid extra for overtime. Do you remember or was that just more hours?

A. Just more hours -- yes, and I'm sure that things were very tiring.

Q. Work was hard then.

A. Oh, it was. They didn't have all that modern equipment things then.

Q. Did you children use to get over there and go through the Stockyard plants and packinghouses.

- A. Yes, we used to. That was one of our pleasures going over and visiting it and go in with the crowd of people you know, and a lot of times we would see our fathers and brothers working.
- Q. That's a nice father. What is your own personal impression of that work place. Here you were a kid walking through there and looking at your father and all that. Was it an unpleasant place?
- A. Oh I don't know, I wouldn't want him to work any place else.
- A. Did you work anywhere those days?
- A. No.
- Q. When you grew up?
- A. No, I never worked over there. I worked for the Kroger Grocery co. in Cincinnati, Ohio after I was about 18 or 19 years old.
- Q. You just left home and went down there?
- A. No, we moved down there with the whole family. Yes, the whole family moved down there. Just my mother, father, and one brother and I were down there for about 5 years, and we came back.
- Q. I see!
- A. Then we came right back here.
- Q. Back at the old stamping grounds?
- A. That's where I worked for Kroger Grocery Company. Yes that's their headquarters -- Cincinnati, Ohio.

Q. Your father was a cattle butcher. What were your brothers -- what kind of work did they do there?

A. My brothers were cattle butchers too!

Q. Did they work for the same company in the same place with their father?

A. No, they worked in different places. They had slack seasons. they didn't have steady work. When the slack season came you got laid off and maybe sometimes would work 10 hours a week. I remember one time my father -- one week there was a slack season and he made \$6.50 a week for a week's pay, with over-time.

Q. Could you always be sure of getting your job back at the same place when the business picked up again?

A. No, you didn't have that, they hired over then.

Q. You came back as a new person then saying will you please hire me .

A. Yes, yes, that's right.

Q. And so then you might find yourself working one year at Hammonds and then the next year at Swifts, and the next year at Armours, and you never accumulated any vacation service or anything like that.

A. That's right, nothing like that. They never got that until Altschuler.

Yes, that was in 1919 or 1920 about that time. That was another great organizing period, wasn't it?

A. That was.

Q.- Do you have any special recollections about that period. Was there excitement that came down to you kids? you were almost a grown lady then, weren't you?

A. Yes, yes.

Q. But your recollection to that period would be even sharper?.

A. Well, I know they had better times.

Q. Well I'm thinking about how they went about making their union. Were you had an uncle that was one of the head man of the union. Well the union always was, had been for a good many years you know. It wasn't very strong, and it seemed from then on it began to build up. Did you go to any of the meetings and things that they had?

A. No I never did.

Q. I thought maybe because of your uncle's connection.

A. No, we never did.

9. So I'm interested in the way that the Stockyards and the Packinghouses that were sort of a melting place for all the different nationalities came to work here. Would you say that on the whole, the people got along, or were there certain rivalrys, dislikes and what have you?

- A. *I guess there were dislikes. They didn't have no fighting or anything like that. Well there was a big race riot, that was 1917 -- 1919 I believe it was.*
- Q. *Was it after the war?*
- A. *Yes, it was.*
- Q. *After the war?*
- A. *Yes, I think it was after the war.*
- Q. *I wonder if you have much recollection about how it came about and how it would be here at the place where sort of like two faces looking at each other?*
- A. *Well I would like to say that it started over on the beach and of course in those days why the Negroes use to come over on the "L" and the Streetcar -- Kenwood -- yes, huh uh! and of course they did come over, but never was there any walking through here.*
- Q. *The elevated used to come through here.*
- A. *Yes, it used to be right down that Root Street where the old Bank Building is and went around into the Yards. I remember that race riot -- you could hear the shooting from over East.*
- Q. *Oh; my gracious.*
- A. *It was terrible the boys were still in service when that happened. They hadn't come back from the war yet, I had two brothers in service at that time too.*

- Q. Well I am wondering if you can recall much about the period after that 1921 strike -- that happened in the winter when the union has lost out? You remember any of the consequences? What happened to the people, like your own father and, brothers?
- A. Oh they worked, they had better times but it never was 100% you know.
- Q. Yes, yes, I thought that a lot of the people had been hired back and they were hard hit.
- A. It was, it was, because they had laundries, colored people come in you know. They kept them on.
- Q. So they kept them and so the other people didn't get back.
- A. That's right.
- Q. And gradually more and more colored came over and worked over here, Yes it was sort-of the same-pattern that history was repeating itself, The Irish people came in from Ireland back in she earlier days, the 1880's and 1890's. When did your people come over from Ireland?
- A. My folks weren't from Ireland, they were from America.
- Q. I really meant your grandparents.
- A. My father was born in 1867.
- Q. So they probably came over in the 40's or 50's in the potato famine. You've heard tales about the potato famine in Ireland?
- A. Yes, I did, So they came and settled in Detroit and then my father came out here to Hammond. I think he got married when

he was 20 years old and worked here all the time.

Q. Do you have some photographs of your father?

A. I wouldn't know where to look for it.

Q. I wonder if there are any other things that you recall that you would like to tell us about. I am so much interested in and, of course, the Stockyards and the Packinghouses and and relationship of the city and the people and the communities to the industry. Where do all these people work now that used to work in the Stockyards a generation ago? What is the place that most of these people work now?

A. Well, I think they work around in the different places. I think a lot of them work in the Loop and in the different industries, like Carpenters and Bricklayers.

Q. There's no great industry that the people of Canarville work in any more?

A. No; oh no, they've been dispersed. They still live here but work at other places.

Q. Have you heard about far away places that they go sometimes to work?

A. No.

Q. So many of the new industries are grown up around the outskirts of the city way out in the suburbs.

A. That's right, huh uh! They all go out. I think a lot of them are in the Building Trade too.

Q. So because a great many of these young men instead of going to the Packinghouse to get their work, the old men worked in the Packinghouse and the young man got in the Building Trade.

A. That's right,

Q. That's interesting, yes. Is there a specialty in the Building Trade that they (Irish Boys) have going into, do you suppose? I know we always think of Swedes as Painters and Carpenters, and I just sort of wondered if there was an Irish equal for that.

A. I think there's a lot of Bricklayers.

Q. Is St. Patricks Day a big day around here?

A. Yes, it is.

Q. How do they celebrate St. Patricks Day.

A. Well the Church, they generally have a parade and then they have a play every year. They give a play for St. Patricks Day.

Q. A new play that the neighbors just write themselves.

A. The children at school.

Q. I see! Have you been back to Ireland ever?

A. I never was there.

Q. Well you've never made a trip or anything.

A. No like I said, my father was Irish and my mother was German and French. So our grandfather died when we were real young and my grandmother lived a good many years.

Q. You really didn't feel Irish -- you really didn't get that flavor of the old sod and all that.

A. No, we didn't.

Q. I had the pleasure of visiting Ireland last summer.

A. Oh, did you,

Q. Yes, I was there for about 10 days or so and travelled around by car to all the lovely places. What did your own husband do, Mrs. Roth?

A. My husband was a radiator man.

Q. Oh! this was his shop down there. I see -- that's why you are living above it. All those years the other guys were working over there he was growing up the radiators and then the automobiles were already breaking down.

A. That's right, they needed a lot of radiators back in those days. Why radiators were more trouble then than they are today because they had different tubes and cords, you know.

Q. It rusted out.

A. It rusted out and they froze, They didn't have anti-freeze and busted so there was a lot of work to that.

- Q. Technologically advantage changes now are putting that into like the cooper trades -- disappearing almost.
- A. That's right.
- Q. Well I've certainly enjoyed this chat with you and if there are any other things that come to your mind to tell tales about those days.
- A. Oh, what else.
- Q. I think about the depression-- I would sort of like to hear about, how people were getting on here.
- A. Oh; I see. It was rough here, it was really rough but we made out naturally. You just done without and stayed at home and fixed what you had.
- Q. How did the people get their groceries if they weren't working.
- A. Well I guess a lot of them had to have credit.
- Q. Did people get a little bit of work or were they just totally out of work for a long period of time.
- A. They did a little bit of work.
- Q. They get a little here and a little there.
- A. I know it was rough for us, but we made out. You lived on what you had until things picked up. A lot of times my husband used to say to me "why don't you take a ride downtown and look around in the stores," and I would say "what for", why should I go down there and tease myself.

Q. All right then -- that's very interesting.

A. That's my brother. David Anderson. (She shows photo)

Q. That's your youngest brother.

A. My youngest brother before he started to work here.

Q. What kind of work did he do there, do you recall.

A. No.

Q. So you've had your youngest brother in the Curing Dept. and all the other brothers were butchers in the Beef Kill Dept. Did they stay there all their careers or did they finally get away from it.

A. The one stayed with it but my oldest brother went on the Railroad, and my youngest brother worked for Armour & Co., he was sent to New York and he had charge of the plant in the Killing Dept.

Q. I see, so some of them finally were taken into the Management side.

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. Foremen, and all that.

A. But he started out here I think after the war. He started with Armour & Co. and he worked for Armour all them years. Of course, he is retired now. He lives in Germantown, N.Y.

Q. Oh; I see! Well, all right then thanks.