

Narrator: Sylvia Engel
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Place of Interview: Narrator's home, located at
9403 Shermer Road, Morton Grove
Interviewer: Yvonne Ryden
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INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Engel has been an organist at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Niles since 1954. She began giving piano lessons in our community earlier than that.

Sylvia still makes her home in the farmhouse her grandparents moved into after their marriage in 1882. This farm had been bought earlier by her great-grandfather.

The house has been enlarged twice. There is still a farmyard behind the house with several out-buildings -- chicken-and-pig house, small barn, pump house and a summer kitchen. In the interview Sylvia tells about how her home came to be in Morton Grove when the village boundaries were extended westward in the fifties.

SE: Sylvia Engel

Q: Question asked by interviewer, Yvonne Ryden

PART I

February 19, 1988

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

Q: Sylvia, would you begin?

SE: My great-great-grandfather and grandmother, the first couple on my father's maternal side were Ludwig Krueger and his wife, Kate, nee Steil. They came from Hanover in 1844 and went to St. Louis where their daughter, Maria Krueger, was born. He was a brewmaster and was sent over to America by some beer company. I don't know the story of how they came to Maine Township, but their farm was on Shermer Road where the fire station and gas station are now and it went west. [This is just south of the Harlem Avenue and Shermer Road intersection.] I don't know exactly how many acres it was, but I think around sixty. They bought it through the Homestead Act, I believe. Their daughter never did speak English as they always lived in German settlements.

Maria married Herman Schwinge in 1863 and lived on this farm until around 1869 when he bought another farm on Milwaukee Avenue, Golf and Greenwood. This is now part of Golf Mill Shopping Center and where Toys 'R Us is and the buildings were around where the Ford Motor Company is now. [This is north of Church Street on the east side of Milwaukee Avenue.] They moved here to be closer to the school of East Maine District 63 which was right across from St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. They had five children: Kate Engel Geweke, 1863;

Anna Engel, 1864; John, 1866; Mary Engel Ruesch, 1868; and Henry, 1870. Herman Schwinge had come over around 1857 to go to his sister in Glenview, who was married to Herman Rugen, the owner of Rugen's Stores. Herman Schwinge was also from Hanover.

My father's paternal grandfather was Christopher Engel, who came here in 1852. In a few years he sent for his fiancée in Germany who was Dorothy Lubbert. They came from Mecklenberg. They settled on the North corner of Shermer and Harlem where St. Luke's United Church of Christ is now. There was a small red house that was used for meetings before the new church was built. That house is where Henry Engel was born in 1857. There were eight children in that family. This family also moved to Milwaukee Avenue, and their farm was where Golf Mill Theater is and the Pancake House. [This is now on the west side of Milwaukee Avenue near Maryland Avenue.] Christopher Engel donated part of the land where St. Matthew's Luther Church. It was built in 1897.

Q: Now you're talking about that old church that you can see on Milwaukee Avenue?

SE: Yes. Christopher Engel and Henry Engel were founders of St. Matthew's Church. That would be my grandfather and great-grandfather. Christopher Engel came over on a sailboat, and it took one month. He was a carpenter.

Q: How do you know that he came on a sailboat? Is this a family story that you're telling?

SE: I found it. [laughs] Henry Engel -- now that would be my grandfather -- married

Anna Schwinge in 1882 and moved to the farm at 9403 Shermer Road, Morton Grove, which was owned by her father at that time. It was fifty-five acres.

Q: Was the house on one edge of that fifty-five acres?

SE: The house was in the middle. The farm crossed Shermer. It began on Harlem Avenue on the east and went to Oriole Street on the west. He had bought it from a Hoffman family. Peter Hoffman was a coroner and Cook County sheriff, and it was his father that owned this, and he was born in this house, but I don't know what year. [laughs] The farm was bought from the Hoffman family. The house was one room, which is my dining room. The living room, bedrooms were added later, probably around 1885, '86, and the kitchen was added in 1899.

Q: Do you think a part of what you're calling the dining room could have been the kitchen? It must have been like one big room.

SE: Everything. They said there was a little room hanging on in the back. I don't know if they cooked in that or something. That was it. I have no pictures, so I can't prove it. They had four children. Rose was born in 1883, George in 1885, Laura in 1887 and Herbert was born 1890, but he died when he was three years old. My grandfather, Henry Engel, died suddenly in September 1914. Then George took over the farm. They raised grains for the animals, corn, potatoes, which were sold in Chicago. They were always horses, cows, geese, chickens, ducks and pigs. They would have boys come from Chicago and work in the summer.

Q: I've heard of that from other people, too. The Lochners did that.

SE: Yes. George Engel married Louise Kath on April 28, 1917. They had been in school together and the choir at church. George served as organist for 24 years at St. Matthew's Church. He also was in the choir for many years. At home, they had an organ which you pumped with your feet. My mother, Louise Kath's parents both were born in Germany. They came from Schleswig-Holstein. Her mother was Fredericka Jaacks and she was about thirteen when she came over to this country with her parents and her family. Her father, my mother's father, was Ehler Kath, and he came to America with his parents about 1873. He was about seven years old.

My mother's grandparents, Christian and Anna Kath, lived on a farm on Milwaukee Avenue, Niles, since about 1891. That farm is now in Maryhill Cemetery. Louise's own parents were married about 1888 and started farming in what is now Chicago around Belmont Avenue. In fact, she was born there. It wasn't Chicago then yet. [laughs] in 1898, they had a fire in their rented house, and the house burned. The grandparents then built a house for them across on the east side of Milwaukee Avenue across from their old farm.

Q: The one that's near Maryhill.

SE: Maryhill's on one side, and they built a house for them on the other side of the street. So they moved out here about 1899. There were six children -- Christ, Louise Engel, Anna Engel Wetterman, Ehler, Jr., Rika Engel Suefke, and John. All great-grandparents -- all great-great and great- grandparents are buried at St. Matthew's Cemetery, Shermer Road, south of Dempster in Niles, except for Henry and Anna Engel who are at Ridgewood. St. Matthew's Cemetery has been there for years.

When George and Louise were married in 1917, his mother, Anna Engel, and her two daughters, Rose and Laura, had another house built for themselves which now is 9421 Shermer Road. At that time they put running water in both houses, hot water heat with radiators. Also, they put another room in the basement over there, and had to dig under the living room and bedroom. That's where the boiler was put in.

Q: Well, when they added things that needed to have space, then they had to excavate for a basement.

SE: Also, they put in an acetylene light pipes which I guess would be like a gas light -- led to both houses.

Q: It wasn't electricity.

SE: No -- not yet. We were served with electric light in 1925. My father and William Mueller, who was a neighbor on Golf Road, went together and had the electric line brought down to Shermer Road. It had to come from Waukegan Road. And that way we got our electricity. It was in 1925. The gas line went past on Shermer Road to Northbrook in 1928, so then we had gas stoves. My mother had a kerosene stove before, besides using a cook stove. She always had a lot of people to cook for. There had been an ice storm some years before 1920, and all the telephone wires were down. She cooked dinners for the telephone workers as they were putting up the new lines, and they also kept their horses in our barn. In the 1920s, the WPA worked along Shermer Road and they would come in here for sandwiches as long as they worked at this end of Shermer.

I was born November 16, 1920, in this house. My sister, Mary, was born February 27, 1928, also here. My mother had Dr. Louise Klehm from Skokie. In those years, it was called Niles Center.

Q: Dr. Louis Klehm. She's famous.

SE: You know of her.

Q: I've heard the name, yes.

SE: She was our doctor. In the 1920s my father raised truck garden crops like pickles and onions, carrots parsnips, beans. But they always had some grain and corn for the animals. They would need extra help to pull onions and pick pickles. My dad would go to the end of the car line at Devon and Milwaukee Avenue with the truck and bring Polish help to work. They would have coffee and bread before going out to the fields, and then lunch between 9:00 and 9:30, dinner at 12 noon, and another lunch at 3 p.m. They were taken back around 5 p.m. We used the summer kitchen from about June to September. My mother would fix the dinner plates for each and hand them out the door. Then they would sit out in front on the lawn and eat their dinners, and coffee was made in a big enamel coffee pot. Now the summer kitchen was a separate building right off of the back door of the house.

Q: It's very close. It had nothing in there but a stove or did it have more?

SE: It had a stove, the sink, cabinets.

Q: But no table and chairs?

SE: Yes, table, benches.

Q: You could eat out there because it would have been cooler out there than it was in here.

SE: Oh, sure. It would keep your house clean because you would have all the cooking, canning and work out there.

Q: You also mentioned that you gave the Polish workers who came a lot of good meals.

SE: They had to be fed all the time. We had hired man who lived here all year round. His name was Louis Lockman, and he came to this farm in 1917 when he was twenty-one. He had worked at about three farms around Milwaukee Avenue before coming here. His family lived in Glenview, and he lived here until 1983 when he had to go to Bethany Terrace Home in Morton Grove. He always took care of the lawns and garden.

Q: Where did he sleep?

SE: Upstairs. There's two bedrooms upstairs, front and back, and he always had the back room. So he was there all that time. [laughs]

Q: Is he still living?

SE: No, he died. He was -- gee, how old was he -- in the nineties.

Q: He would have been quite elderly.

SE: Yes. He was born in 1895. The threshing machine would come once a year, and the neighbors around would come and help. Then, you cooked all day. [laughs]

Q: I bet you did. [laughs]

SE: Usually there would be roast beef, pork roast, as a rule, apple pie because at that time the apples would be ripe, and we had a lot of apple trees here. They also would have lunch at nine and three and a sandwich. The sandwich was usually in the morning, and coffee cake or a sweet roll in the afternoon. The threshers usually were William Kreft and later William Clavey until the combines came around, and that was John Ritter. Later in the fall we would have a corn shredder come and form a stack outside, it would be blown into the barn to fill it up beside the hay. I think it would make it warmer, too, all around it. That didn't take as much help. Then it would be butchering pigs in winter. Edward and Chester Steil usually helped for that. They lived on Washington Street -- and sausage would usually be made after the butchering.

Q: Did your mother or your father make the sausage?

SE: My mother did, but they would all help. My dad would cut up all the meat and that -- he would do all that. As long as I remember, we had a tractor; and I think it was called a Fordson. Also a truck used to take the loads into Chicago. My

dad would get up around 2 a.m. and go to South Water Market. I think he went to Strube's Produce. We always had two horses, and there would be certain jobs he would do with them. He always cut hay and raked with them. Also cultivating the crops. The car was a black Model T. He bought a new truck in 1928, which was a Model A, and also a car in 1929 which again was a model A. My Uncle Adolf Wetterman had a Ford dealership in Arlington Heights, and they were bought through him. My dad also raised geese and ducks to have for Thanksgiving and Christmas. I am still using pillows from their feathers.

Q: That's the truth? How nice!

SE: Marion was baptized on Palm Sunday, April, 1928. On Monday evening, my dad went bowling, stopped at Tagtmeier's store on Milwaukee Avenue and bought a package of matches. He put them in the summer kitchen, and we don't know if mice nibbled the matches or what happened -- but around 2 a.m. Louie woke up and saw flickering on his wall upstairs. He came down and woke everyone up, and the summer kitchen was burning. It had two rooms. One room had a chimney and they cooked in it, and one had the table, sink and cupboards. My dad let the dog out of the back hall here and tried to call the fire department -- the telephone was right there -- but the wires were already burnt, and also the electric wires. He had to go to his mother's house, wake them up, call Morton Grove Fire Department. We all went over to her house then.

Q: To your grandmother's house.

SE: Yes. They also called Glenview Fire Department. They had more hoses with them than Morton Grove did. But they couldn't use the electric pump because the electric was all out. But we had a cistern and a dug well, and I remember my dad saying, "When the well was dry, the fire was out." It burned the back hall, two windows, and in the kitchen, in the kitchen and the kitchen door. Neighbors had come already by that time and taken furniture out of the house.

Q: But the house didn't burn.

SE: The house didn't burn, no.

Q: But they were being foresighted to take it out.

SE: Yes. Oh, sure. The summer kitchen was rebuilt the same year with only one room this time.

Q: Was it smaller?

SE: I think it was smaller, because it didn't have that extra room in the back. But again, it had a sink, a stove and cupboards were built in, a bench for the men to sit on.

Q: Now, we've been talking about this farm here which is on Shermer and quite a bit north of Dempster. It's really closer to Golf Road, isn't it?

SE: It's about one mile, I would say, from Dempster. Two blocks south of Golf.

Q: When I've been talking to other people, they were telling me that there was a large onion farm at the corner of Harlem and Dempster.

SE: Yes, that's right. It was August Geweke's farm, and their family, I believe, were here a long time, I don't know how long. And across the street was William Geweke -- that was Harlem and Dempster, just on the other corner.

Q: On the south side.

SE: They were both Gewekes, and they were across the street from one another. They all farmed there.

Q: They pretty much raised onions.

SE: Yes, onions and pickles, things like that.

Q: And you mentioned they're some relationship to your family.

SE: William Geweke was married to my dad's Aunt Kate, who was a Schwinge. And August Geweke's two daughters, Alma and Amanda, were married to my uncles, John and Ehler Kath.

Q: I see. Twice related. And you mentioned your sister now lives . . .

SE: My sister lives in the home where William and Kate Geweke lived on the northwest corner of Fernald and Capulina.

Q: What is your sister's name?

SE: My sister's name is Marion Nykolayko, and she and Gordon have lived there since they were married in 1948.

Q: Did she buy the house or did she inherit it?

SE: My dad inherited the house, and then, of course, my sister inherited it [laughs] from him.

Q: Were there any other farm families around here?

SE: Oh sure. William Mueller was our neighbor. Our farms ran together in -- what should I say -- the western part of our farm, next to that was William Mueller's, and our grandfathers already were neighbors. They were there a long time. So, the way their farm ran, their house was situated facing Gold Road, while ours was here, so. . .

Q: Facing Shermer. Let's go on then. You continue.

SE: Okay, well now I'm starting with the Depression. The Depression came in the 1930s. I remember the Morton Grove Bank closed, and we had some savings accounts there. Also a safe deposit box. When they could get at the box, they went to the Glenview Bank for a box, and I still have the same box today. The Glenview Bank stayed open -- it never closed.

Q: During the Depression?

SE: Yes. That was a good one. Also my Aunt Rose became ill and had an operation in the summer of 1930. She was at St. Francis Hospital in Evanston. She was better for a while, but it was stomach cancer, and she died January 7, 1931 -- forty-eight years old.

Also, in the 1930s there was a milk strike, and people came from Morton Grove to look for milk. We had one family coming for milk since 1920 from Evanston. I guess my dad bought more cows and we were getting more customers. We had families from Morton Grove, Glenview, Wilmette, Chicago, Evanston, neighbors around us -- it was just private and they had to pick it up themselves. I have some names from the Morton Grove customers -- the Huschers, Fuhrs, Art Wuest, Rudolph Husen, Eckhardt, Reverend Heidtke, George Kaiser, Andrew Yehl. Those were all customers at one time or another from Morton Grove.

My mother always had made butter from cream that was left over, and we sold eggs sometimes. So even with the Depression, we never starved. Also, my mother canned a lot -- pickles, beets, tomatoes, cherries, tomato jelly -- jelly from whatever was around like apples, grapes. I remember loads of sweet corn that were taken to the market, and the notice that they couldn't sell it, and it was dumped. That was through the Depression. We also grew sweet corn and sold to a lot of stands around Morton Grove and Glenview. At that time they would come and get it -- sell in their stands.

Then in 1933, Aunt Laura became ill. They took her to St. Francis Hospital and tapped her. She had trouble breathing. She came back home but wasn't well. They had nurses taking care of her, and she died April 27, 1933. It was cancer of the liver -- she was forty-six years old. My grandma was alone in the house,

so I would go over and sleep in her house and eat breakfast there. I didn't have my clothes there, but I just would go over every night. Then one morning in October 1935, she said she didn't feel well. My dad got a practical nurse to stay with her, but that night she had a stroke and went into a coma and the next day she died, October 24, 1935. So the three of them all died '31, '33, '35.

Q: And that's in the house to the north.

SE: Yes. She was seventy-one years old. After May 1936, the house was rented to Dr. Frank Weege and Lena. She was my mother's cousin. They lived there until she died in 1960, and he died in 1963. Lena's sister, Lillie Boettger, moved in with them in 1944, and she worked for Dr. Samuel Collin in Glenview, a dentist, for fifteen years. He had also started a practice in Morton Grove at one time, but he stayed in Glenview at last, and that's where she worked. She stayed there and had a boarder who just slept there. She didn't cook for them. She stayed until April 1983, when she was ill and went to a niece in Marietta, Georgia. She died in June 1986 -- ninety-one years. Dr. Weege had been a high school gym teacher at Carl Schurz and Crane High Schools and he retired at 65 in 1936. And that was when they moved out here. Now he also was a homeopathic doctor -- that's where he got his doctor title.

Q: I see. Did he practice such medicine?

SE: Locally yes -- privately. Although he took over Dr. Donald Gladish's practice during the War when Dr. Gladish went to the service.

Q: I see. But he actually had his license?

SE: Yes. He had a license. It was just his high school teaching was the main thing, but he did this on the side.

Now, I've got about school. Marion and I both went to St. Matthew's Lutheran School on Milwaukee Avenue. It is still operating in the same place. It's been remodeled since [laughs], but the building was built in 1923, and they had classes with the principal and lower grades teachers in 1924. My teachers were: Anna Winter, first grade; Martha Sievert, second and third grade; Ella Gifford, fourth grade; Walter Busse, fifth to eighth grade. Marion had Esther Bach and George Sander. It was two rooms -- a hall downstairs with a stage to have entertainments and things, and it was built of brick.

Q: Now this is on the west side of Milwaukee Avenue.

SE: Right.

Q: And the frame church still stands.

SE: Yes, but the new one is facing Maryland Avenue.

Q: Across the street on the east side of Milwaukee Avenue, there was also a school.

SE: That was District 63 School where my folks went.

Q: Now that has just been remodeled as a jewelry shop.

SE: I know. Now it's a jewelry store, but before this it had been remodeled into two new apartments. There was one section for each.

Q: In other words, it had been a two-room school remodeled into two new apartments, and now it's owned by the jewelry store.

SE: Yes. It's remodeled. Sure looks different. Our pastor, Pastor Julius Toepel, came to St. Matthew's in 1903 and stayed fifty years. He confirmed my mother, 1904, he married my parents 1917, baptized myself, 1920, and Marion, 1928, confirmed both of us in 1934 and '41, married Marion and Gordon Nykolayko on November 13, 1948, and baptized their first two children, Ann and Jim. He died in 1953. [laughs] Wasn't that something?

Q: Isn't that a long life? Now when you were confirmed, was that an occasion for a big family party?

SE: Oh, yes. Sure, yes. At the home. You usually had a dinner, and then they would stay for supper.

Q: All right.

SE: In the 1940s we also had Henry and Willard Ahrens to work for us. They were in their teens and lived on the northwest corner of Golf and Waukegan Roads. There was a little brick house on that corner, and that's where their family lived. And they were from a large family -- there were fourteen in their family. They would walk over every day through the summer.

In World War I, my dad and Louis were called, but my dad was farming and was exempt -- and Louie had some other reason for being exempt -- I don't remember.

My mother's brother, Ehler Kath, Jr., was drafted but he was only in training in Georgia before the Armistice was signed. During the Second World War, we had no one of our family in the service. The way it affected us would be sugar, meat, shoes, gas and tire rationing.

Q: World War II we're talking about.

SE: This is World War II now. But we always had some of our own meat, butter and extra gas for using on the farm. We had a tank in the ground and could pump our own -- we were allotted extra for tractors and trucks. I think that was Marland Oil Company that would come around and bring us the gas. I remember Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. We were visiting friends, Emily and Alma Gatzke in Skokie, when we heard of the air raid.

This is about shopping now. My mother never went shopping -- not grocery shopping.

Q: [laughs] Well, she had to have some things.

SE: We had Rugen's Store delivering once a week. They would come on one day for the order and bring it on another. They were from Glenview. Then, in the 1920s, William Tagtmeier started a store on Milwaukee Avenue. It would be in Golf Mill Shopping Center now. He also delivered and would come [laughs] once a week, too. So she'd always have these two people come. During summer we would call the butcher in Morton Grove every morning for the meat, and they delivered the same

day. I think first it was Levernier and then Mike. Now I don't know if you're acquainted with either of them.

Q: I haven't heard those names.

SE: Also the Morton Grove baker -- that was Mr. Flateau -- came around every day -- bread, sweet rolls, cakes, eclairs. He ran the Morton Grove Bakery Shop on Fernald Avenue.

Q: Do you think the building is still there?

SE: No, the building is gone now. There's an empty space -- they want to build apartments on it. That's where it was. Besides this, my mother baked about five loaves of bread every week, and we would bake coffee cake and another cake every Saturday. The delivering all stopped after gas rationing in 1942. They had to cut it down. I think Rugen's still would come one week, take your order for the next week and that would be once a week.

For clothes shopping, I remember going to the end of the car line at Devon and Milwaukee Avenue and going to Wieboldt's on Milwaukee Avenue. Later we would go to the Wieboldt's store in Evanston. Then all the shopping centers were built closer to us. Also, we would have Sears catalogues to buy from. When I was a little girl, I remember being taken to Lincoln Park on the street car.

Q: What street car?

SE: I don't know. I thought we always went to Milwaukee Avenue.

Q: Milwaukee down to Devon maybe.

SE: Somehow. Yes, Milwaukee and Devon it was, but I don't know where we went to connect. My dad bought a new Ford car in 1941, and Warren Long was the salesman. He taught myself and my sister to drive. That's when I got my license -- in 1941. And then I would go and do a lot of the shopping if we had to go to the baker and the butcher. In the 1950s the builders were coming closer to Harlem Avenue. In 1954, Harris Builders bought thirty-six acres along Golf Road and Harlem, all the way along our farm.

Q: From you?

SE: No, that wasn't ours. That was owned by Schmelzers whose farmhouse and barns were on Waukegan Road where Kraft Company is now. They owned this all along here. It bordered our farm all along the north. Then the builder, Harris, came to my father. If my father would sell, Harris would put bigger sewers and water pipes in as he was building. I forgot to say that in 1940 Harlem Avenue was put through from Shermer to Glenview. It wasn't through before. It stopped at Shermer. They bought the land where it went through so that took one acre of our farm for the western half of Harlem Avenue. The deal to sell the fifty acres to Harris Builders was signed around January 1955. My dad kept two acres with two houses and garage. He had a stroke in June 1954 but was able to run his tractor that summer. It affected his left side, and that was the last year we farmed. Then the cows and horses were all sold. We did have a few chickens for some years yet. My father died on October 7, 1955 -- he was seventy years old.

The big barn was taken down in 1956. The builder started on Shermer, and those houses were up when my dad died. Then they worked west with the sewer and water and the streets. The houses between Shermer and Harlem -- on this side -- were the last to be built. That was probably 1957 already by that time. We went from Des Plaines Rural Route to a Morton Grove house number address. My mother lived until August 1961 and she died suddenly. She was seventy-one years old.

Q: By suddenly, did she have a heart attack perhaps?

SE: Yes. Overnight.

Q: A great way to go.

SE: Yes, I agree. I really do. Shermer Road was once called Telegraph Road. It was stone and gravel first, and then blacktop. In 1931, it was paved to Northbrook. I have pictures of the traffic jam in front of our house when Curtis-Wright Airport was dedicated October 20, 1929. Traffic was all blocked up. The next year, August 1930, I have a picture of a traffic jam in front of our house for the national air races at that airport. After a while, it became the Glenview Naval Airport. About 1985, they upgraded our road, and they put new curbs and sidewalks all along Shermer, and we had sidewalks for the first time. I didn't have sidewalks before that.

Q: Before we talk about you, I would like to just clarify the address. Most of the time this house got mail from the Des Plaines Post Office?

SE: Until 1955.

Q: So it was not part of Morton Grove then?

SE: No. It was unincorporated.

Q: Unincorporated Maine Township.

SE: Right. It was also called East Maine, like in the paper sometimes it would be referred to as East Maine.

Q: Which it is. You can't get much further east and stay in Maine Township. But what then did it actually mean? For example, when you had the fire, you called the Morton Grove Fire Department.

SE: That was a rule -- I mean, they took care all over.

Q: They came because it was volunteer.

SE: Yes, it was volunteer.

Q: Did you have to pay them, do you suppose?

SE: I don't remember.

Q: And then, when did you actually become part of incorporated Morton Grove?

SE: 1956.

Q: When Harris Builder wanted to put it inside of an incorporated village.

SE: He wanted to join Morton Grove. Because he had to get the water and the sewer.

Q: From Morton Grove.

SE: Sure. So that had to be Morton Grove.

Q: And at that point you became part of Morton Grove. Had you thought of yourself as part of Morton Grove up until then?

SE: Not really. I mean . . . we just thought we were close as county, that's all.

[laughs]

Q: You went to church in Niles. You say you did some of your shopping at Rugen's in Glenview. You went down to Milwaukee and Devon which is certainly part of Chicago.

SE: That was Chicago, yes. No, we were just country. Our two houses were the first houses on Golf Road. There was nothing around us -- it was all empty. And the next farm was that big one on the hill when you go around the bend there.

Q: There is another house that was here.

SE: Yes.

Q: I wanted to clarify that because it's an interesting part of the history of Morton Grove.

SE: And we had trouble getting our mail changed from Des Plaines to Morton Grove. We didn't get any mail for a couple of days, and we called the Des Plaines post office and they said, "Oh, it's being sent to Morton Grove." Called Morton Grove, they didn't have any of our mail. So it took about at least three days to get it cleared up before we got our mail from the right place.

Q: When you first started getting your mail from Morton Grove and you were the only homes around, was it like a rural delivery? Did you have a box out on the road?

SE: No, not from Morton Grove. We had to choose a number, and we chose a number compared to the houses across the street. Like it's 9400 right across from me, so we took 9403, like that.

Q: And once you had a street address they delivered your mail right to a mailbox on the house?

SE: Yes.

Q: Well, when you were in the Des Plaines mail district, did you have a box then? You must have.

SE: Oh sure, we had a box across the street -- because the mailman would come from Golf Road, and . . .

Q: He would come down from the north.

SE: He left it then.

Q: Now, let's talk about you.

SE: We bought a piano in 1934, and I took piano lessons from Mrs. Alma Bodfors. She and her son had a piano studio in Evanston. They also had a studio in Rockford. On Thursday they would travel on Golf Road to Evanston and stop here for my lesson. And they charged \$2.50 for an hour.

Q: That's a lot at that time, I think.

SE: It probably was at that time. Anyway, it was for an hour.

Q: You were fourteen? And there had been no piano here before that.

SE: No. my grandma had the organ, and that was all we had.

Q: Had you tried on the organ?

SE: Oh, yes. And I was always interested in music.

Q: And you liked it?

SE: Yes.

Q: Good. Go on.

SE: They were connected with the Sherwood Music School in Chicago, and I received my diploma from that school. I took lessons about nine years. I started teaching around 1950. In 1954, the principal of our school -- which was Kurt Rode --was leaving and going to Bensenville Zion Lutheran School. He had been the organist at St. Matthew's, so the officers came to me and asked if I would play.

Q: That's when you became the organist?

SE: I started in July 1954, and I am still playing this year, which is thirty-four years.

Q: That's wonderful.

SE: Do you know who Evelyn Heidtke is? I took organ lessons from Evelyn Heidtke. She's the organist in Morton Grove at Jerusalem Lutheran Church.

Q: And her father was the pastor of that church for what -- fifty years there, too, I think?

SE: Yes. She was teaching at Concordia River Forest at that time and would meet me once a week at the church. I took lessons about five years in the old church. St. Matthew's built a new church in 1963, and we have an Allen organ with two keyboards and pedal board. I have always had help from the teachers who taught at our school, and we would change off every other Sunday. I also accompany the choir at practice and for service. Through the years I have played for many weddings and funerals [laughs].

Q: I bet you have.

SE: I have. I should have counted them up. In 1962, a school board member came to me and asked if I would board a teacher from St. Matthew's Lutheran School. My mother had died in 1961, and this was in 1962 now. So between 1962 and 1975, I boarded five teachers. In 1976, my Uncle Bernard Suefke died. As my Aunt Rika Suefke had had a stroke in 1971 which affected her left side, and she wore a brace on her left leg, she couldn't stay alone in their apartment. She moved in with me in January 1976, and was here until July 1985, when she went into Oakton Pavilion, Des Plaines. She is still living and 91 years old. Bernard Suefke and Ed Mat ran the Parkview Cleaners at 6149 Lincoln Avenue in Morton Grove for a lot of years -- I don't know how long.

Q: Now Sylvia, you've mentioned about how you have been a church organist. I would like for you to talk about the fact that you have been a piano teacher for a number of years. When did you start?

SE: I think I started around 1950. I'm not exactly sure of the date -- but it was in the '50s at least. And Marlene Wilke was my first student. They lived on the corner of Dempster and Harlem. At that time they were running the farm which now is a shopping center, where the Morton Grove Theater is and those stores.

Q: That was their farm?

SE: No, they didn't own it, but they were renting it. She was my first pupil anyway, I know that. [laughs]

Q: Over the years, say during one winter, what would have been the most number of students?

SE: The most I would have had, I think, would have been about twenty, because that's all I could get in after school -- about four a night. Because it would get too late otherwise.

Q: Through the baby boom, you had lots.

SE: A lot. When the people moved out here and there were more children. But now there aren't that many anymore. I have about eight right now, but at one time I had about twenty.

Q: That's wonderful. You've given me a very good interview. I really appreciate it, and I thank you so much.

TAPE ONE, SIDE A ENDS

PART II

June 21, 1988

TAPE ONE, SIDE B

Q: Good morning. I'm back at the home of Sylvia Engel, because I want her to tell us something about this lovely farm home, the farmhouse which has been in her family for a number of years. She's going to tell us how the house grew. Sylvia, would you give us the address and begin?

SE: Okay. This is 9403 Shermer Road, Morton Grove. My grandparents were married in 1882, and they moved onto this farm which was around fifty-five acres. There was one house on it, and they only had one room. I don't know the age of it -- I have no idea when it was built -- but it was not a log cabin. As their family grew, they added parts to it.

Q: But before you begin with that, tell about the original one room.

SE: Oh, this one room has been made into my dining room which is a large room about nineteen by thirteen, and when they put other parts of the house on, they added a bay window and a built-in china closet, and another big window -- so it is very nice that way. It changed very much.

Q: Why don't you tell us now how the house was enlarged bit by bit.

SE: As the family grew they added the part to the north which would be a living room, bedrooms, and then they added two bedrooms upstairs -- and closets, of course. I

don't know the date when that was put on, but the kitchen part was added in 1899. And when they did that, they put the bay window and everything into the dining room, and made it just one big room.

Q: Then would one of the other rooms in the first addition, would that have been the kitchen?

SE: It was everything.

Q: Did the big room remain the kitchen when they added on?

SE: Yes. I'm sure it remained the kitchen. It's just what I was told, I don't know, and I have no pictures of how it originally was.

Q: Now, when they added this second addition, this became the kitchen. This is a huge, lovely big kitchen.

SE: Well, it was like a farm kitchen. They always had lots of help to feed, and there was a pantry and a washroom added. The washroom was for the men who came in. And there was a pump from the rain water cistern, and that's where they would wash their hands, and there was a place to hang their clothes. In the pantry, there was always a separate sink, and that was where all the open shelves were, and everything was kept in there.

Q: In your previous interview you mentioned when different utilities came into the house. The first thing was probably the telephone.

SE: The telephone was the first thing that was put in. I don't know exactly the date, but I know they had one in 1914. So I would say whenever the telephone company started in Morton Grove was probably the year that they had phones here.

Q: I see. Even though you weren't in incorporated Morton Grove, your phone service came through Morton Grove.

SE: The phone service always came from Morton Grove.

Q: Even though the mail came from Des Plaines.

SE: Yes. Our mail route was the end of the Des Plaines route because we were the end of Maine Township here.

Q: All right, now about the kitchen.

SE: First my mother had a big cook stove, one of those cook stoves with the chimney right out of the kitchen and I slightly remember it -- I know it was gray and white. And she also had a kerosene stove which they would use in summer because they didn't want to have all this heat in the cook stove for cooking. And I can remember that slightly.

Q: In this kitchen as we're sitting now, where would the kerosene stove have been?

SE: The kerosene stove then was in the corner, and the cookstove was here because the chimney was right there.

Q: So they were almost side by side.

SE: Yes, they were side by side. And as we would move out to the summer kitchen in summer, the kerosene stove would be moved out there to be used.

Q: So then in the summertime your mother never used the kitchen for cooking.

SE: No. From June until about September, we would cook in the summer kitchen.

Q: Do you remember what year gas was brought in?

SE: Yes. Our gas -- let's see now -- we got our electric service in 1925, and then the gas main happened to go by on Shermer Road to Northbrook, so then we were hooked up in 1928.

Q: So then you had all your utilities but water.

SE: Oh, we always had water.

Q: Well, did you have city water?

SE: Oh, no, we didn't have city water. We had our own well and a pump, and that pump would pump for two houses here, because my grandmother's house was just north and that was all added when that house was built. First, they had a gasoline pump before electricity came. But then, as electricity came through, then the pump was made into electric motor -- that was well used -- oh, I don't know what year

I turned over to Morton Grove water, but it was very good water. I liked it.

[laughs] It was a drilled well.

Q: Well, so you really preferred the well water.

SE: Yes, I did. But my pump broke and it was cheaper to put in the village water.

So, I've had it now at least five or six years -- I'm not exactly sure.

Q: Now your pantry has been remodeled.

SE: Yes.

Q: Was there a smaller doorway?

SE: Yes. The pantry had one door, and as we had the cabinets made, the carpenter cut out like an arch, and it made it very nice, lighter.

Q: Yes, it is. Was that the only remodeling that you had to have done at that time.

SE: Yes, that's all.

Q: What year was that?

SE: 1960 we had the cabinets made, and it was a carpenter from Morton Grove that made them. He made them in his basement, I believe, and then brought them over.

[laughs]

Q: To back up again, starting from the original house which you said was owned by a family named Hoffman. Your grandparents bought it?

SE: Yes. Grandparents bought the farm from a Hoffman, I don't remember his first name.

Q: Well, there must have been a lot of Hoffmans around, because someone told me there was a Hoffman Farm up near Waukegan.

SE: Oh, yea. Where Kraft's are now. That was the Hoffman farm. There was a big barn and a big house where more families lived. They owned the land all along our farm from Golf Road. There were thirty-six acres that they owned down here, but they didn't usually farm it in the last years anymore. My dad even had farmed it sometimes. Cut the hay and that. I remember the Hoffman family that lived on Waukegan Road. I did meet some of those people. There were three girls and a boy. John was the boy's name. After they sold to Kraft, they bought a house in Golf.

Q: There's a living room and a bedroom connected by what would be a small bedroom in the additions.

SE: Yes. A little room.

Q: What year was that built?

SE: I don't know exactly. I just feel after their family was getting larger -- my dad was born 1885. So I figure it was around that time -- 1886 maybe that they added the other rooms. I would think.

Q: So when we look at this house, we are to think that the original farmhouse that stood on this property is now your good-sized dining room. And subsequently there was an addition of a living room and a bedroom with two bedrooms up.

SE: Yes, two bedrooms upstairs and closets.

Q: And then another second addition would have been the great big kitchen which almost doubled the size.

SE: This kitchen's about sixteen by twelve plus the two little rooms.

Q: Yes. And you still have the washroom that was used.

SE: Yes. I keep my cleaning supplies in there. [laughs]

Q: I can see why. It's a lovely room. In our other interview you mentioned your grandmother's house.

SE: Oh, my grandmother's house was built in 1917 when my parents were married. My grandmother and two aunts moved over to that house when my parents were married. And that's the time they put in the water, they put in the boilers, the heat, radiators, everything was put in -- they even had acetylene light at that time.

It was like a gas light, I believe, and there were pipes to all the rooms in both of our houses.

Q: So this house was modernized at the time that house was being built.

SE: Yes, they put all that in.

Q: This year we're experiencing a terrible drought. The farmers are likening it or being reminded of the drought in the 1930s. Would you tell us how the drought affected your family in those years?

SE: Well, I can remember that we had dust storms in the spring already when the seeds were sown. They were talking about the seeds of the farmer next to us being blown into our field, and the corn didn't do very well. What did come up later in was attacked by chinch bugs. That was the year the chinch bugs first came. And the grain was very light and not a very good crop. That also had the chinch bugs in it. Anyhow, the oats and everything wasn't good at all.

Q: Now what year was this?

SE: 1934. And I remember my dad later on planting buckwheat so he would have grain to feed the animals. That did well later on. It was the earlier crops, the corn and the oats and all that that was affected by the drought. It was a bad year all the way around.

Q: Was it just the year of 1934?

SE: That's the main year that I remember that it was bad.

Q: Tell me about the chinch bugs.

SE: Well, the chinch bugs were little black bugs, and they would go right up the stalk of corn. You could see just how they started from the end of the field and would work themselves in further and you could just see how the corn would shrivel.

Q: Do we have chinch bugs now?

SE: I haven't really seen any, but I don't have corn here right now. [laughs]

Q: I've never heard of them.

SE: I haven't seen any. I don't know what happened to them, but I don't think they are around as much as they were in those years. I don't know.

Q: Well maybe after DDT was developed, it may be that.

SE: Yes. It was a certain time that they were here. It was very bad.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B ENDS