

Florence Selle Juern
Oral History Interview
February 5, 1990

Narrator: Florence Selle Juern
Date of Interview: February 5, 1990
Place of Interview: Narrator's home, located at 8604 Fernald,
Morton Grove
Interviewer: Yvonne Ryden
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Duration: 20 minutes

INTRODUCTION

Florence and her mother lived in several states until her uncle, her mother's brother, persuaded them to move to Evanston. Upon her mother's remarriage to Ferdinand Wilke in 1925, Florence moved to Niles, to a farmhouse at 7424 Dempster Street.

Florence first met Arthur Juern at the Morton Grove train station as they rode to work in the Loop.

Arthur Juern is remembered as the first door-to-door mail carrier in Morton Grove when the village had 1,200 residents. There were two deliveries daily.

Florence has been a loving caregiver during much of her adult life. She raised two sons. She cared for her husband and her mother. Now she is a grandmother and great-grandmother who still finds time to enjoy many activities and some traveling.

FJ: Florence Selle Juern

Q: Question asked by interviewer, Yvonne Ryden

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

Q: Today is February 5, 1990, and I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself. Be sure and name all the names.

FJ: My name is Florence Selle Juern, and I was born in Kansas. Then when I was little I moved to Joplin, Missouri, then to Oklahoma where my father built us a home. Then the war broke out and we had to go to Virginia where my father worked in the ship yards. That was in 1918, I suppose. Maybe it was 1917 because we lived there awhile and then he passed away in the flu epidemic in 1918. Then we moved back to Oklahoma.

Q: Just you and your mother?

FJ: My mother and I, and I remember the day the armistice was signed. I remember that so well because we went to Commerce and they were pulling the Kaiser down the street. By then my mother had taken in a schoolteacher as a boarder, but we still couldn't manage with the money, so then we had to move back to Kansas with my grandmother and my grandfather on the farm.

Q: How old were you now at that point?

FJ: I was probably seven and a half. Then my uncle—my mother's brother—was a sailor and he was stationed at Great Lakes. He became engaged to a lady, a girl from Evanston, and before they were married, he wanted her to meet his mother and father in Kansas. So they came out to Kansas to visit us and they

persuaded my mother and me to come to Evanston. I don't remember getting there, but I remember my uncle meeting us and I rode on the "L" and we lived with this new aunt's mother and father on Main Street in Evanston. I started school. I don't remember going to school before. But I must have gone to first grade someplace because I started second grade in Evanston at the Lutheran school. While we were living in Evanston, my mother worked for Tinker Toys and she was a maid at the Library Plaza Hotel, which is probably the Orrington Hotel now.

Q: No, it's not but it's...I don't know if it's still there, but it was kitty-corner. The Library Plaza Hotel was south of Church Street on the east side of Orrington.

FJ: Then she worked as a dressmaker where they just made clothing wholesale. And then in 1925, she met my stepfather and got married, but I was still able to finish eighth grade in Evanston. I do have to say, my stepsister took me every morning to Evanston and picked me up from school.

Q: Was this just for a year?

FJ: The year. When my mother married, she married Ferdinand Wilke. And the farm was on Dempster Street, 7424 Dempster Street and the home is still there. Then it was all just farm. It was his farm and then next to it was the Schroeder's Nursery. It was a huge nursery.

Q: To the west?

FJ: To the west.

Q: What did your stepfather raise on his farm?

FJ: Pickles, cucumbers, onions, corn

Q: Tomatoes?

FJ: Tomatoes. Probably.

Q: So your mother, in 1925, your mother married Mr. Wilke.

FJ: Ferdinand Wilke.

Q: And he was a widower with children?

FJ: He had two girls and two boys.

Q: Their names were?

FJ: Mildred was sixteen, she was a little older than I, and Chester was a year and a half younger than I. Earl was maybe two and a half years younger than I, and Harriet was four, I believe.

Q: A baby practically.

FJ: A little girl. But she didn't live at home. She lived with her mother's mother and father right in town in Morton Grove. The grandma and grandpa's name was Fielweber, which is an old-timer name in Morton Grove. Then I graduated from school in Evanston. I was confirmed in Evanston and then I went to high school in Des Plaines. It was in the heart of Des Plaines. I went there two years to high school and then I went to Columbia Business College for a year, and right after graduating from business college, I started working in the Loop at—at that time—it was Central Illinois Bank and Trust Company—I think the name was. That's where I met my husband. He was working at the Board of Trade, and we'd meet on the train.

Q: So you came from the same Morton Grove train stop. Is that the idea?

FJ: Yes.

Q: And you were still living on the farm that was on Dempster Street?

FJ: Yes. But then in winter it was too difficult to get from there to the train because I'd always have to walk. So then I lived with my stepfather's sister in Rogers Park.

Q: I see. So that you could take the "L" right down.

FJ: I took the "L" and she, the cousin there, is the one that got me the job at that bank, so I worked at the bank with her. Then in 1932, Art and I were married.

Q: Well, wait. You met him on the train. We want to get this whole thing.

FJ: Actually, he picked me up [laughter].

Q: You better explain that.

FJ: He had all of his friends from Morton Grove and I was always alone. I knew no one, and he'd catch up with me and walk with me to the bank.

Q: So he really became a friend first?

FJ: Yes. That's a better way to say it [laughter].

Q: And then you worked together at the bank and you were married in ...?

FJ: 1932. Then Ronald was born in 1934, and then we lived at 8612 Fernald Avenue and then my second son John was born in 1942.

Q: Did they go to the Lutheran school?

FJ: At that time we had no Lutheran school for Ron.

Q: Is that when it had been burned or what? There was a time that there was no Lutheran school?

FJ: There was no Lutheran school at that time. So he went to a public school until sixth grade. And then our school consolidated with two other Lutheran

schools and then Ron went to seventh and eighth grade at our Lutheran school and he graduated from here.

Q: Which is just a half a block away.

FJ: Yes, but John went to all eight grades at the Lutheran school.

Q: Where did they go to high school?

FJ: Niles. Ron went to Niles East. Well, John went to Niles East, too. John lives in Milwaukee and Ron lives just two houses away. Ron is a tool and die maker. At one time he had his own business but he gave it up and he works at General Metals in Lincolnshire. He's very happy with his work. He's a good tool and die maker.

Q: Do your sons have children now?

FJ: Ron had two girls, four grandchildren.

Q: So you're a great-grandmother?

FJ: So I have four great-grandchildren and expecting the fifth great-grandchild.

Q: How wonderful! And John?

FJ: John had five children, but Jennifer was severely handicapped, so she passed away at the age of eleven.

Q: Now, was that one of his children?

FJ: Yes. He had Alica. Alica will be twenty-two. She's graduated from Marquette, Chris will be a junior at Marquette, Jeremy will graduate from Lutheran high school in May, and then there was Jennifer who was severely handicapped, and then Tammy, who is eleven.

Q: And what does John do?

FJ: John is a Christian psychologist. He had his Ph.D.

Q: Is he a counselor?

FJ: For school, well, anything. Anything and everything. He has a beautiful office. In fact, he has three offices in Milwaukee.

Q: We want to get back and be sure we talk a lot about your husband because he was unique.

FJ: At that time he worked at the Board of Trade and then there was the Depression, and so his job was phased out. Then he drove a cab.

Q: In Morton Grove?

FJ: In Morton Grove. And then this mail carrier position opened up. Daily house-to-house mail delivery had started. And at that time, when he finally got this position—forty-two city blocks—and the population, I'm sure, as twelve hundred.

Q: So he was the ...?

FJ: He was the first mailman in Morton Grove, and he made the route twice a day.

Q: Isn't that amazing?

FJ: At that time, the postmistress was Miss Dilg and the post office was on the corner of Lincoln and Ferris.

Q: I guess that's that big building that everyone has pictured in their mind but which sadly was taken down.

FJ: Yes. Now it's condominiums. Then in 1953 is when he suffered a stroke and he had high blood pressure. But at that time, you had high blood pressure. They didn't give the medication like they do now. He lost all of his capabilities.

Q: How sad.

FJ: He couldn't walk or talk or do anything. Gradually he was able to get back walking with difficulty.

Q: So he had a stroke in 1953 and you nursed him how long?

FJ: Until '67. At that time, of course, I hadn't worked after I was married because at that time you didn't work after you were married and during Depression time. And they Evelynne and I, we did billing for the Bornhoff Dairy. We did that work at home. After Art was a little more able to handle things, he started bronzing baby shoes.

Q: Oh, yes. That was very popular.

FJ: He was very interested in that. I would help him on that sometimes.

Q: So did he do that after his stroke?

FJ: Yes. Then in '67 he had the ... Well, in the meantime he was getting worse on his feet because he had no circulation. He had another operation, and that helped a little bit. But then in '67 he had the heart attack.

Q: But he's remembered as the first door-to-door mailman in Morton Grove. I'm sure they had rural free delivery before that but probably people ...

FJ: Well, they had to go to the post office ...

Q: I was going to say, people had to go up to their boxes, their post office boxes.

FJ: That was quite a thing to get house delivery.

Q: Of course, and twice a day. How unusual.

FJ: The town was a lot different then.

Q: I suppose there must have been more open spaces in some of the places. Huschers Woods, now that's all built up, too. That's the area that's near Austin Avenue and Dempster. Would it be north or south?

FJ: It's south of Dempster. That's all be subdivided or built up since.

Q: Since your husband passed away, what have you been doing to fill all your time?

FJ: Well, probably taking care of my mother.

Q: Oh, that's right. Your mother lived with you until ...

FJ: Until she was 90 she lived at 9130 Menard. It was 1981 when she moved over with me and she had the upstairs. She was in fairly good health until probably two years before she passed away. Then she developed leukemia. I'd have to take her to the hospital to get blood transfusions. It gradually became worse and worse. And then when she was 97, she passed away.

Q: I see. And she was living here with you.

FJ: yes. And before that, we babysat. We babysat for great grandchildren. She enjoyed them.

Q: You said you were babysitting for your grandchildren and your ...

FJ: At first my grandchildren, and then when they got married, then my granddaughter, she started having her babies and so then I'd babysit for them,

especially on New Year's Eve. When the children started to school, then I would keep the babies. Otherwise my hobbies were crocheting.

Q: Knitting?

FJ: Knitting.

Q: You told me you're knitting now for a great-grandchild.

FJ: Well, that's all finished now. Now I'm quilting.

Q: It's nice that babies take nine months. It gives grandmothers time to get everything made. You were telling me that you went to Georgia.

FJ: Oh, I went to Georgia, too. Evelynne said that she was hesitant about talking the plane to Georgia. She said, "I can't make that trip." And so foolishly I said, "Well, if you go, if you decide to go, I'll go along with you as much as I hate to fly, too. I've never been on a plane either." So then she decided to go, so I had to go.

Q: Keep up your end of the bargain.

FJ: Listen, I would just be a nuisance because I had foot surgery, but they insisted I go. Vicki, she was such a doll. They had the wheelchair there for me, and we really had a great time.

Q: Wonderful! And I'm glad you had such a good time.

FJ: We really had a nice time.

Q: And so you go over to the Seniors Club on

FJ: On Thursdays and play pinochle, which is a lot of fun. That's a highlight of our week. Third Tuesday's Grandmother's Club, and I enjoy that because they

always have some little project going or a speaker. The last time we played bunco, which was a lot of fun.

Q: Right. Yes. So you have a good time.

FJ: We have a good time. And maybe Evelynne and I will take a trip to Milwaukee on the bus and maybe John can meet us and show us around. And then if she can tolerate that bus trip, maybe we can go on another trip.

Q: How wonderful!

FJ: A little further.

Q: Yes. Right. Well, I hope the Milwaukee trip is a success.

FJ: I went to Milwaukee at Christmas time, and I've never missed a Christmas Eve. I'd always go to Milwaukee to be with that family for Christmas Eve. So this last Christmas Eve they decided I better not drive. So I went on the Greyhound from the Skokie Swift. It was very nice.

Q: Do you still drive?

FJ: Yes.

Q: All right. Thank you very much.

FJ: You're welcome. It was very enjoyable.

Q: I hope future generations will feel this is worthwhile.

FJ: Okay. I do too.