

Narrator: Anna Frees Staak, Adis Browder Frees
and Frank Frees
Interview Date: April 21, 1986
Place of Interview: The home of Mrs. Stanley Browder,
located at 8610 Callie, Morton Grove
Interviewer: Yvonne Ryden
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INTRODUCTION

In April 1980, Mrs. Lina Frees died at the age of one hundred while living in California. Her daughter, Mrs. Anna Frees Staak, her son, Frank Frees, and his wife, Mrs. Adis Browder Frees, returned to Morton Grove for the funeral and burial. The three narrators consented to an interview on short notice and recalled life in Morton Grove in the '20s, '30s, and '40s.

Anna Frees Staak moved from Chicago to Morton Grove in 1924 at age 16. Her father had bought a tavern and restaurant known as Frank Frees's Place located at 6230 Lincoln Avenue. This later became the Bringer Inn. Anna recalls helping her parents in the kitchen of the restaurant until 1934 when she and her father took a job at Eitel's in Chicago and rented the tavern out to Feigel's. She was also one of the earliest employees of the Morton Grove Public Library.

Adis Browder Frees was born in Morton Grove and attended the Morton Grove Public School. She and her husband, Frank Frees, have know each other all their lives and in the interview speak of the "exceptional teachers' they had. Adis and Frank recall other activities in town such as ice skating and sledding on the river, swimming in the Poehlmann gravel pit and local baseball. Frank fondly remembers making "scooters" and building automobiles with some of the local boys.

Q: Questions asked by interviewer, Yvonne Ryden.

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

Q: Let's go back a little bit over what you were telling me before we started taping.

You said that you moved to Morton Grove when...

Anna Staak: In 1924. I was sixteen, and my brother was six. We all fell in love with Morton Grove right away. We didn't want to go back to Chicago.

Q: What part of Chicago had you lived in?

Anna Staak: We lived on Larrabee and North Avenue. We had a tavern there.

Q: And when you moved to Morton Grove, your father was in business here?

Anna Staak: Yes, he bought the Bringer Inn on the corner of Lincoln and Fernald.

Frank Frees: 6230 Lincoln Avenue.

Anna Staak: And all the streets were dirt streets, except Ferris Avenue and Lincoln Avenue. I think the population was 700 at the time. It was a real cozy town.

Q: Did you help in the tavern?

Anna Staak: Oh, yes. We cooked clam chowder. We were known for clam chowder, and we had roast beef sandwiches -- hot sandwiches -- and that was our specialty. I helped my mother in the kitchen, so I didn't get around too much because there was a lot of work.

Q: So this was really a restaurant and a tavern. You served hot sandwiches and soup and . . .

Anna Staak: That and beer. Yes, that went with. And there were slot machines. We had nickel ones and quarter ones.

Q: Now how long did you help in the tavern?

Anna Staak: All the time until 1934. Then my father worked for the Eitel's in Chicago, and we rented our tavern to Feigels. My dad worked downtown as bar manager, and I worked in the Chicago World's Fair in '34.

Q: Oh, and what did you do?

Anna Staak: I was cashier in the cafeteria. We had the entertainment of Herr Louie and the Weasel. There were in the main dining room and they had the loudspeaker. I learned all the German songs there.

Q: (laughs) Was that in like the German village?

Anna Staak: No, it was a restaurant there right on the lake. They had a big cafeteria and a barroom in there, and a big dining room, and that's where Herr Louie and the Weasel were. They were always very busy. There was always entertainment. After the fair, of course, I worked downtown. Then I worked for Eitel's in the Field Building. In the restaurant I cashiered there until 1936. Then we came back on the corner, and my father put in a new bar- - a back bar. I think it's still there. We were in business then until '39. But in 1930 my father put in the ice cream parlor. During Prohibition days, he put the ice cream parlor on the corner and we just used the corner store then. We lived in the back. My folks had a home on Callie Avenue. They build that home, and we moved in there in '29.

Q: I see

Anna Staak: Ron and Anni Henrici have it today.

Q: Was it the address on Callie?

Anna Staak: 8638 Callie.

Q: So it would be just north of here.

Anna Staak: Yes, three houses up that way across Capulina. They bought the home from my mother in 1971. Then, in the '30s, it was during the hard times, everyone brought old clothing into our other store on Lincoln Avenue next door to the ice cream parlor.

Q: Now that would be next door north on Lincoln.

Anna Staak: Yes, on Lincoln. And people came who needed clothing or needed help . . .

Q: People from Morton Grove?

Anna Staak: ... from Morton Grove. Oh, yes, we had quite a few. Everybody brought clothes and whatever. Even some pieces of furniture.

Q: Was it like trading?

Anna Staak: They gave the people clothing. They needed children's clothing and adult's clothing.

Q: Who ran that?

Anna Staak: Well, I don't know. The mayor was in there, and I forget who the organized it. I remember Mr. Harrer was in there, but he was an elderly man. It was in our store, and then I worked at Petrolager, too, and helped my folks out.

Q: By helping your folks out, you mean you brought home money?

Anna Staak: I brought my money home, yes. Because it was hard times, and people didn't have too much money to come and spend in the ice cream parlor, either.
(laughs)

Q: What did you call that store next to your ice cream...?

Anna Staak: We just called our ice cream parlor Frank Frees's Place, and that store was just used for that purpose.

Q: But the store next door, you called it the relief station?

Anna Staak: Just a relief station, yes.

Q: Was there food in the relief station?

Anna Staak: No, no. We had no food in there. Just clothing and blankets and whatever anybody needed.

Q: As you said, sometimes there was furniture.

Anna Staak: And sometimes pieces of furniture. There was no name on it.

Q: Do you remember how long that store was in existence?

Anna Staak: No, not too long. I think a year or so. That's about all. And then John Waters put a milk dairy in there, and they had that a very short time because people in town, milkmen especially, got together, and they didn't want it in there.

Q: The milkmen, meaning the men that had the routes that came to your house?

Anna Staak: Yes, they didn't want it there, so John Waters left it. And then in '34 when repeal came, my father put the ice cream parlor in that store. In '33, he put the tavern back into business there on the corner. And then I had the ice cream parlor next door. I ran that for a year. Then my dad got the job at Eitel's in '34, so we worked there. We rented the whole thing out. And then Feigels had no use for the ice cream parlor so my father put it in the Hydrox ice cream storage. I don't know what he got for that.

Q: In other words, it became a storage place for Hydrox?

Anna Staak: No, they took it back in their factory. Feigels used the whole two places. Then we came back in '36 and we were in there until '39. And Hunnells took it first, didn't they, after that? And then Dad sold it after that to Platz.

Frank Frees: It was 1940.

Anna Staak: 1940, yes. After we came back, Feigels then went on to where Hoss's building is on Lincoln Avenue. They went into business there. In '40, my father sold the property. Then we moved back to our home.

Q: To your home on Callie?

Anna Staak: Yes. We were there until 1971. My father died in 1955. So we saw Morton Grove grow. All the streets were paved. We had an old barn standing on the corner in the back where the kids used to play.

Q: Where? In the back of what?

Anna Staak: In the back of Bringer Inn.

Q: Was that always the name that it had -- Bringer Inn?

Anna Staak: No, when my father was there, it was called Frank's Place. Wasn't it?
Frank Frees's Place. Yes. And Frank was the one who went to school here.

Q: Well, then why don't we have him . . .

Anna Staak: Yes, you have him talk now.

Q: We are going to continue taping at this point by talking with Adis Browder Frees
and Frank Frees who are here again, visiting from California. They live in
Arcadia. Would you begin, Adis, by telling us about your childhood?

Adis Frees: Well, I don't know where to begin.

Q: At the beginning. Where were you born?

Adis Frees: Well, I was born on Callie Avenue in Fink's house. I thing I was born
upstairs. It was a story. And, I don't know how long I lived there -- not
very long. Then we moved into my mother's cottage on Lehigh. That belonged to
her folks. We called it the cottage.

Q: Where about on Lehigh would that have been? Would it have been near where the train station is?

Frank Frees: Further up.

Adis Frees: It's a little bit further up. Not very far.

Frank Frees: They moved that house from on the Bell and Gossett property.

Q: It had been where Bell and Gossett . . .

Frank Frees: No, Bell and Gossett moved that home from Lehigh to their property where they're on Austin Avenue.

Q: That house is still standing then?

Adis Frees: No, they took it down for some manufacturing that's gone in there now. So, we didn't see any of this because we've been gone so long.

Q: How long have you been gone?

Adis Frees: Thirty-eight years.

Q: Oh. That's a long time.

Adis Frees: And we lived there until my mother died. I don't know. I was about five And then I moved over on Fernald Avenue and lived with my grandmother until I got married and moved to California.

Q: You moved to California right after you were married?

Adis Frees: Yes (pauses)

Frank Frees: (chuckles) . . . you moved to 8544 Fernald Avenue and you lived with your grandmother there all through your -- you were 22 when we got married.

Adis Frees: Correct.

Q: So you went to the original Morton Grove School? I don't mean the original rural school over on the corner of Waukegan and Beckwith, but I mean the building that's now the city hall?

Adis Frees: Yes.

Frank Frees: Morton Grove School had a portable on that property where the village hall is now.

Q: I see.

Frank Frees: Didn't your dad go to that portable?

Adis Frees: No, honey, he never went there.

Frank Frees: He went to Golf . . .

Adis Frees: . . . the one out on, what was it -- Waukegan Road?

Frank Frees: Yes.

Adis Frees: At the old school there.

Q: That old school is in the process of being remodeled so that you will recognize less and less of it, too. It's hard to see where the original...

Adis Frees: It's a store now or something, isn't it?

Q: It was a mirror and glass shop, but now it's become sort of a wedding consultant shop with flowers and photographer and gifts and so on.

Frank Frees: Yes, but when I went over there, they had the portable still standing in the back there. We didn't use it for anything much, but they had the portable there, and they built this four-room school at that time with a basement, wasn't it?

Anna Staak: And the auditorium.

Frank Frees: No, no, that wasn't on there yet.

Adis Frees: That came later.

Frank Frees: They just had the four-room school when we went there. And, we had the partitions sliding from one room to the other so we could make an auditorium out of the classrooms.

Anna Staak: Oh, I remember now.

Q: So you could be all together if necessary.

Frank Frees: For any occasion, like the Boy Scouts used to put on a program there, well, around Christmas time. They usually did that. And then the Chamber of Commerce of Morton Grove gave all us kids gifts, you know. We had whatever we wanted to choose. I know I got a pair of skis. And then there were books they gave us and all kinds of things we could get at Christmas time. And Miss Christopherson was our first and second grade teacher, wasn't she. We had two grades in each classroom -- first and second. And we were in second grade.

Q: Was that true throughout the whole school through eighth grade?

Frank Frees: Two grades to a room.

Q: Do you remember any of your teachers?

Frank Frees: Well, Miss Christopherson was our first and second grade teacher. Our third and fourth grade teacher was Miss Murray. Our fifth and sixth grade

teacher, well, we started to split at that time. Mrs. Schneider was taking one, and Miss Fowler was taking one. Miss Carlson came in then, and she was teaching (pauses) sixth.

Q: Amazing that you can recall their names.

Frank Frees: Oh, yes . . .

Anna Frees: Isn't that wonderful? I can't remember half of them.

Frank Frees: . . . wonderful teachers.

Q: They were all wonderful teachers?

Frank Frees: All wonderful teachers.

Anna Staak: They had a good education.

Adis Frees: Yes, we did. We had exceptional teachers.

Q: Have you known each other, then . . .

Anna Frees: All their lives.

Frank Frees: From second grade.

Adis Frees: (laughs) Yes, we went through school and we went to the same church.

Frank Frees: Let's see, Miss Fowler came -- well, we had her until, gosh darn, she was there . . . when did she start? And Miss Murray, they used to do some pageants at school. We used to get into that. We did some, uh, oh, I remember I was one of the Musketeers at the time. My mother had to make a costume out of oilcloth for boots and all that kind of stuff. We had hats. And we put that on in this classroom where they separated the walls and we had a stage. (laughs) I can remember one time, though -- this was always great when the Boy Scouts put on this thing. They were really great. They'd all do some kind of slapstick comedy, you know. Gabe Tierney was one of the Boy Scouts, and Harry Eisner had a clap board of some kind. They used to slap each other across the back with this. It made a real loud noise, you know. When they'd hit their boards together, they'd clap (laughs), and it'd really be something. They had a washtub up there. They got water, and I don't know what all they were doing, (laughs) but they really had a ball up there. They'd all do kinds of crazy things. Of course, later, then, when Miss Fowler came, well, then we started putting on different things. We did a -- how did she do that one thing one time? Where we were like puppets. They had a frame around us, and then we did little recitations on Mr. Tooth and who else was involved with it?

Adis Frees: That was a health program we did.

Frank Frees: Miss Fowler started that. Then pretty soon we got into doing more fancy stuff. We got into chorus line things . . .

Adis Frees: They took that program to the Art Institute.

Anna Staak: Yes, yes, the health . . .

Frank Frees: I don't think we went with that. I think we went with the golf thing.

I don't remember that program (laughs) I can't think of what the program was, but we had a lot of chorus people. When did you do the dance of the flying veils or . . .? (laughter)

Anna Staak: Seven veils, huh?

Adis Frees: No, it was, I don't know what you call it. (pauses) It was like a ballet, you know, and naturally we didn't have ballet costumes or something. You had these, like you'd take about three yards of material and you'd gather it together at the shoulder, and you'd just have a place for your head. And then she taught us to dance in a . . .

Q: Gracefully.

Adis Frees: Yes. Anyhow, it was very professional.

Frank Frees: Some of the things we did around that time -- why, naturally in the wintertime, ice skating was our biggest thing. We used to do a lot of ice skating. Of course, in the summertime, we used to go through Poehlmann's greenhouses. That was always the big thing.

Q: You used to do what with greenhouses?

Frank Frees: Walk though them. Well, we'd play around in them, like you do any place. You'd find something to do. Of course, we didn't break any windows, but we did go through there. In the wintertime, we used to skate at the railroad crossing at Dempster Street on the north side. That used to be a frozen river. We could skate all the way to Golf or Glenview on the river in those days.

Anna Staak: Yes, we skated.

Frank Frees: And, well, there was a lot of men that used to be around that . . . Bill Fires (?), Gabel family, White family.

Anna Staak: Jonas.

Frank Frees: Jonas. And then, of course, there was Hobo Island, which we called it, and was on the southwest side. Hobo Island was the real place for us in the wintertime. It had a high hill, and we could sled down there and ski down there.

Q: Was it really an island?

Frank Frees: Yes, there was a small little projection, you might say, that was in there.

Q: And where exactly was it?

Frank Frees: It was in St. Paul's Forest Preserve. But that's on the southwest side of the tracks in the river. Of course, we had a lot of experiences later when they made that the Chicago Canal for the sewage system. Why, then the river didn't freeze over too much. It froze over on the banks, but there was always a wet place in the middle. And coming down the hill sometimes, we'd go a little bit further than we should, and somehow we a lost a sled in the river. And then we'd have to go fish it out of the water and get back on it again. We did all kinds of things. It was great. Hobo Island was really great. We had a great time.

Anna Staak: We used to skate in back of the railroad station. The fire department would flood that pond there in the winter. There was a big floodlight up there. The when it was frozen, we'd skate on there. In the summer, it was a baseball diamond. Yes. And then we'd go into the station and warm up where the stove was. Of course, then they started to flood the back of the public school, too.

Anna Staak: Yes. For skating.

Q: What did you do in the summertime for fun?

Frank Frees: Well, in the summertime for fun, we went swimming in Lake Michigan, of course. Everybody piled over to Evanston. The early years we weren't able to get to any place except play baseball. That's about all we had was to play baseball. And some of the lots on Fernald Avenue we could play ball in. We did a lot of bike riding, of course, and a lot of roller skating. We used to skate to Skokie, which was Niles Center.

Q: Were the streets paved in Morton Grove?

Frank Frees: Yes, there were sidewalks going though the back of, well, they used to call it Hank Trausch's corner there. But there were sidewalks all the way over to Oakton Street that you could skate on then.

Anna Staak: The street got paved, I think, in '25, '26.

Frank Frees: Of course, in later years, when Poehlmann's was dismantled, they had a big hole that they had used for spraying their roses and flowers. They used it as a water hole [to aerate the well water]. Well, that used to freeze over then. We used to skate there, and we swam there in the summertime, too. It was about a block from Lincoln Avenue on Austin Avenue.

Q: What happened to that hole?

Frank Frees: Well, I imagine they must have pumped it out, and they probably filled it in. On of the fellows that used to be in town here, his name was Warren Schmidt. He used to swim in there, too. He cut his foot there one time. He got an infection in it, and the doctor told him not to ride his bicycle, and he got out and did it anyway. He got an infection and he died.

Q: Oh.

Frank Frees: Died at a young age -- Warren Schmidt. [In 1933]

Anna Staak: He was a young boy. They used to play a lot in our barn...

Frank Frees: That was the only casualty we had. Of course, then in the summertime, well, yes, we had the barn and then I used to make a lot of skateboards [called "scooters" then] and automobiles we built out of the old apple boxes and things like that.

Anna Staak: Carry the boards up into the attic.

Frank Frees: Well, we did that later. Then, we got into the Model T's -- the Sonne boys and Sid Denley (laughs), got into building Model T's.

Q: Did you ever work in Morton Grove?

Frank Frees: Yes, I worked for Bill Tamminga for a while. Of course, I worked at my dad's tavern. But later, why, I worked for Bill Tamminga as a painter for a year. Then I went to a screw factory in Chicago. Fellow by the name of Mr. Overton ran the Safety Socket Screw Company. I worked there for a while, and then I went to Bell and Gossett. I worked at Bell and Gossett as a tool maker. I left there in '47.

Q: Do you have any memory of Austin Avenue being wooded?

Anna Staak: Yes.

Frank Frees: Yes, when we used to go to Morton Grove School, why, Capulina went that far as a paved street, it was Georgiana was the street. And then School Street had not come quite through yet. It just came to the school. And the house on the northeast corner, which belonged to Cornelius "Corny" Dig at one time, was moved by Bill Kiersht down Capulina, which we watched. They used rollers, of course, and ropes to pull this, as the team of horses pulled that thing all the way on its setting there. They built the house. Then the street was put in later, and Capulina had not gone though yet back of the school to Austin. That was all wooded area yet. Fisher Woods.

Anna Staak: Fisher Woods, yes.

Frank Frees: And then, of course, they built the houses on the other side of those woods. They got those there first. Then Austin Avenue got put in.

Q: At this point, Anna Staak is going to talk to us about the early days actually the beginning of the Morton Grove Library. All right?

Anna Staak: Well, it started as a volunteer library. People brought books. There were volunteer workers. It was upstairs at the fire station.¹ As far as I know, and then did they go down to Frank's after that? I know it was at Tad's.

Frank Frees: I thought it started out at Frank's first.

¹ Although the narrators had trouble recalling the sequence of sites used for housing the library, the facts are the first library was at 6100 Lincoln (now Tad's TV Repair). The second location was Frank's Department Store at 6244 Lincoln, and the third site used was on the second floor of the fire station. The library then moved into its own building in 1952 at 6140 Lincoln Avenue.

Adis Frees: I think that, too.

Frank Frees: It started out Frank's first with volunteers.

Anna Staak: Volunteers. Yes, I think there was Lily Dilg and Lily Kaiser and
Gretchen Loutsch, Marvillia Krakora . . .

Q: Now were these board members or the volunteers?

Anna Staak: Well, they were volunteers. They did the work and then they were also
board members. They worked in the library and did these things. Then they went
to Tad's place, and then . . .

Q: Was that an empty store that they rented?

Anna Staak: Yes, it was a vacant store at the time. I think that's when they built
the two rooms of the library first. I don't know when that was. I started there
in 1950. One side was the children's side, and one side was for adults. They had
a fireplace and round table with books on it and four red leather chairs.

Q: It sounds lovely.

Anna Staak: It was. It was very homey. And people used to come in and sit down and
read. Look for something and then they'd read a little bit about it, and then
they'd take the book out.

Q: At this point, you must have been buying books. More than getting donations.

Anna Staak: Oh, yes, by that time, they were purchasing books. Oh, yes. We got stacks of them, and we cataloged them. Eleanor Peters and I worked there.

Q: You mentioned that you had shorter hours than we have now.

Anna Staak: Yes, we worked from 12:000 to 5:00. And then Friday nights until 9:00.

Q: Friday night is the one weeknight that the library is closed now.

Anna Staak: Oh, really. Well, that was the night we were open until 9:00. And Saturdays from noon to five. Those were the regular hours.

Q: When you put the flag up, did that mean the library was open?

Anna Staak: Oh, yes. Then everybody knew it was open. (laughs) Little children would come and put the flag up, and then we'd say the Pledge of Allegiance.
(laughs)

Q: How nice.

Anna Staak: There was about four or five little ones. They came every day. It was kind of nice.

Q: So when you stopped working at the library, it was still the original two rooms?

Anna Staak: Yes it was, yes.

Q: And a basement you mentioned.

Anna Staak: The basement was there. And they were contemplating making that the children's library, because we were getting short spaced for all the adult books.

Q: I don't know if it's in the same part, but that is where the children are now.

Anna Staak: Yes.

Q: It's a lovely children's room.

Anna Staak: I didn't even go over there. Myra Aggen worked there after I did.

Frank Frees: Who else was there? You said you trained somebody.

Anna Staak: Oh, Alice Heppner I trained. She came in, too.

Q: Alice is still there on a part-time basis, and we're delighted to have her.

Anna Staak: She's still there, yes. And she's, I guess, delighted with her job, too.

She enjoys it. We were in her company the other night. So we've known her for all of her childhood, too. (laughs) Knew her parents. Yes, we knew everybody's parents.

Q: Have any other Morton Grove people moved out to California that you know of?

Frank Frees: Oh, yes. (laughs) Oh, gosh.

Anna Staak: Yes, let's see now.

Frank Frees: Art Robinson, who used to be the city clerk, lives in Newhall, California. Mrs. Banzer,² who is the widow of Jack Banzer who had the barbershop on Fernald Avenue here in Joe Hoss's building. And who else?

Anna Staak: Henry.

Frank Frees: Henry White, who used to live on Capulina, didn't he?

Anna Staak: Yes. Marvillia Krakora. They live in San Diego.

Frank Frees: My gosh. Her name was French. Marvillia French Krakora.

Q: There was a family named French that owned a paint store on Dempster. Would she have been ...?

Frank Frees: No, that's not the same French.³

Anna Staak: Oh, that was Warren French. Warren had the paint store, yes.

² Mrs. Banzer and Mrs. Robinson were sisters.

³ Warren, Peggy and Marvillia were the children of Guy French.

Frank Frees: Well, he lives in Arizona now.

Anna Staak: Yes, he lives in Arizona now. Also Peggy.

Addis Frees: Don't forget Harry and Myrtle.

Frank Frees: Harry and Myrtle White live in Monrovia.

Adis Frees: And Florence.

Frank Frees: Florence Huscher Raft who lives in Rancho Santa Fe.

Q: So a lot of Morton Grove people have . . .

Frank Frees: Gebels were there. I don't know if they're surviving. Gabels -- they used to live on School Street. Sigels. We don't have any Sigels now.

Q: Do you see any of these people?

Adis Frees: We see Marvillia.

Anna Staak: And we see Henry and Myrtle White. We all live in a very close area, about a mile apart. Three, five blocks apart. Well, we don't see Elsie Banzer.

Frank Frees: We haven't seen her for quite a while. We used to see her quite often.

Anna Staak: We use to see them years ago. I don't know who else.

(Doorbell rings - interview ends)

TAPE ONE, SIDE A ENDS