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Joanne Conners interview for a Wright State University History Course

Cynthia Spangler

Joanne Conners

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Joe Ann Connors

C.S. Where did you go to high school?

J.C. Randolph High School, Englewood, Ohio. It's now called, let me think a minute here, it's no longer called Randolph. It's still in the Northmont system, but it's called O.R. Edginton. It's up on 48 between Englewood and Union.

C.S. What kind of neighborhood did you grow up in?

J.C. Mostly, a farm type community. The homes were, it was on Old Salem Road, which is now part of Clayton. And, farms, farm, woods, fields.

C.S. What year did you graduate?

J.C. 1950.

C.S. What did you do for fun back then?

J.C. Where we grew up there were not things like drug stores. There was a corner grocery store, at the corner of Old Salem and 48. That was sort of a hang out. The proprietor there sold of course, soda pop and chips. That sort of thing. We did come into Dayton once in a while to see movies. Of course, there were football games. But and uh, back then we had what we called slumber parties, I'm not sure what they call them now, sleep overs, I think. Slumber parties, we did a lot of that. Although none of us lived close to each other, to our friends, we managed to get together and do things.

C.S. What sort of things did you do on dates?

J.C. Movies, I can't remember which ones, but I know we did movies, uh, there were dances at our high school. Of course in the summer, sort of just what kids do now, we just hung out. We did. There was up above Englewood Dam there was a restaurant called Shaw's. And we hung out a lot there. There was also a place, uh, it's where Bolt's Sports Bar is now, near Englewood, called the Morgan House. That was a real big deal because you could just get gigantic sundaes, shakes, hamburgers, uh, banana splits. That was a real big specialty and it well known back then. But, during the summer we did a lot, at least my group did, we did a lot of going over to Miller's Grove swimming. We would all get together in a group and go and often there was a friend out north of Union. Sylvia lived on a real farm community and we spent a lot of time out there and there was a group of six/seven of us girls who would stay out there. Her mother even allowed us to even spend part of a week and we would hop in Sylvia's jeep and just go on over to Miller's Grove.

C.S. Where did you go to see movies?

J.C. Loew's and Keith's, probably more at Loew's than any place. The movie theaters back then were beautiful. It's too bad when I go into them nowadays, it seems they are so... nothing compared to what we had then. Thick carpet and beautiful draperies and it's sort of too bad they're gone. They were just beautiful.

C.S. Where did you like to shop?

J.C. There, of course, Rike's, everybody went to Rike's. But also, at the time it would have been called Elder Johnson's which went on then to become Elder-Beerman's. In fact, that was my first, other than babysitting, that type of thing, my first job was at Elder Johnson's. And it amazes me because we had to, before we were allowed to go onto the selling floor, to do that type of thing, we had to have two weeks of very intensive instruction on how to do our job properly, how to treat customers. I think it is too bad, that nowadays that companies cannot take the time to train the young people how customers should be treated. That stayed with me all my life, I, the customer comes first, even if the customer's wrong, they're still right.

C.S. A lot of people have talked about coming into town to shop. That was a big deal? They talked about gloves and hats and all that.

J.C. I, just because of the way I am, I probably wasn't into that as much as, but yes, we did dress up. We didn't come in slacks or shorts. We did usually wear dresses and uh, and during part of that time was when the long skirts were in fashion. I still do, I love the long skirts and we did wear them back then. I think things I remember too about downtown, I loved McCroy's. You'd walk in there and it would smell so good. It did, it was a neat place to shop too. Another thing, and I know in the Dayton paper not too long ago, they talked about, had an article written about Gene Barry, the disc jockey. He was so popular with us. When we had these slumber parties we'd always call Gene and he'd play songs for us and he was just like part of us too.

C.S. Glenna mentioned going down to the place with the window and you could see him?

J.C. Yes, yes and also at the Van Cleve Hotel, which is no longer there, Saturday mornings they had, it was a type of teen club, and I think perhaps it was sponsored by Rike's. But I cannot remember the name, I know it was for teens, but you could go there and they would usually have some kind of entertainment. It was just fun. For some reason back then we used to even go over and sit in the lobby of the Biltmore often when we were waiting for someone downtown. We felt comfortable in these kinds of places. Which I'm not so sure the kids do anymore. They just don't seem to do that. And they were beautiful places, but we respected them. It wasn't like it is now (laughs). Also I can remember, and I think it is because of my interest in art, I forget how it happened. When I was either in the ninth or tenth grade the Dayton Art Institute would allow so many students from a school to come on Saturdays and spend the day with instructors and we'd take a lunch. To this day that is one of my favorite places to go. Kids seem to have, or think they have so much freedom now but, maybe it's because there is so many more kids now that people sometimes resent if they're hanging out or being someplace or being noisy and all. Maybe it's because there weren't so many of us, but there were not the problems with adults and kids in public places like there is nowadays. The adults seemed just to accept us and not complain because we were there. But I think it is a matter of just more people.

C.S. What fashions were popular?

J.C. The long skirts, poodle skirts, for a while there, ballet slippers, everyone wore ballet slippers. They were comfortable. Of course then, in high school, we all had to have a school sweater. People in the band had school sweaters with the band symbol representing them, ones in sports, and like wise. So that was a big deal to wear a school sweater. And I can remember pleated skirts, white pleated skirts, very impractical. But we wore our white pleated skirts and our green school sweaters.

C.S. What kind of music did you listen to?

J.C. Whatever Gene Barry was playing and I can't even remember. Uh, let me think, I had some real favorites. I can't think of any.

C.S. But you were into rock and roll? A lot of people mentioned the Big Bands. Was that still popular?

J.C. Yes, and that was when I was talking about the Van Cleve and Rike's and all, they would bring in the Big Bands for us to listen to on Saturdays. That was great. We had Big Band, but we had the real jazzy stuff too.

C.S. What did you do for entertainment at home?

J.C. Because of the area I grew up in was the woods and fields I spent much much time outside. We did play board games, Parcheesi, that type of thing, but more than anything I can just remember times outside. Just being out. There weren't restrictions on myself or my brothers and sisters about; no one seemed to worry about us just roaming, which was really great when I look back on it. Any more people have to be so concerned about. We roamed the fields and woods and just down to the river. No one ever thought about anything bad happening to us, we were just able to spend a lot of time outside. And my grandfather's farm adjoined our property and he was a well-known truck farmer and I spent a lot of time with him on the farm. Oh, going back to music, Frank Sinatra. He was so, he, there will never be anyone else to my notion who did what he could do with music. Many of my friends felt that way. He would come on the radio on Wednesday evenings and I know I would have given up absolutely anything to be able... I did not miss Wednesday with Frank. And I collected pictures, anything about him. I still have them; I still have a lot of Sinatra. But, he was wonderful. Probably the same way that people in another generation felt about Elvis and all. He did make the girls swoon (laughs).

C.S. What about TV? Do you remember people getting the first TV?

J.C. I can sort of remember when my family got the first television, I was a probably a junior or senior, I'm not positive about that. But to this day, television doesn't interest me. I do not watch it. An even then when everyone else was so enthralled with it, I didn't see what the big deal was. And I still don't. I know that probably that really pops out but. I don't watch television, and when I tell people this they look at me and they think she means that she watches it once in a while. I don't watch television. If it's on when I go into someone's house of

course I'm not going to tell them to turn it off, but that doesn't matter to me. But to me, I still like radio, always did and newspaper and periodicals. I just don't watch television; I'm probably one of the few people in the world who don't.

C.S. What about cards? Everyone I've talked to said playing cards was a big deal.

J.C. It was a big deal, but not with me. Just like with television, I don't like cards, I can't stand to play cards. People played lots of cards.

C.S. Well, the next one you kind of answered already, but what did you do on summer breaks or vacations? You worked with your grandfather?

J.C. Yes, that and I can remember my grandfather and grandmother would set up a market on the street. It was along St. Clair there along the library, where the library is. Almost, but not every Saturday, but many many Saturdays I would go with them and I would stay with them part of the time, but often I went into the library and at that time we went down stairs to a lower level is where... I just loved that, sitting there and reading.

C.S. Was the library the building it is now?

J.C. No, its in the same place, but it's not, there is a difference now. It would have been the old building. And another thing that was, that we thought was just wonderful where I grew up was the bookmobile would come and park at the corner of Old Salem and Garber Road and all of us in the vicinity we were just enthralled with the bookmobile.

C.S. I just had one more question. Who were your role models? Do you remember who you looked up to?

J.C. A couple teachers, one was Alberta Braumbaugh and in fact she used to, when we'd do a lot of our summer slumber parties and all she would come and stay if Sylvia's parents were not going to be there. She and her husband both, they were just almost like family. The superintendent of our school, Mr. Edgington, he's the man that Randolph, that they changed the name to. He was a wonderful man, and I can remember he was very, very strict, and when he threw that book down on his desk (in effect shut up), we were quiet. But we really respected him. He was a great teacher. Maybe because my school was small we became very involved with the teachers and Chad Raush, you've probably heard of him, he lives in Kettering now, he was the a biology teacher at Randolph also he was a coach for the boys there. He went on to become superintendent for Kettering schools, I believe, and became involved even with the state of Ohio. He was one of the finest people I can think of, I don't know what other words, but he was so good with his students. Really, just made you love to learn. I'm sure there were other people besides teachers. I had an excellent relationship with my parents. They were just great. And my grandparents, really just the people I associated with day to day. They were my role models. I think my grandfather had much to do with my love of gardening and all. And the way he farmed would seem so strange to people nowadays

because it was done with the horses but he would have the plow and a large flat wood piece that we kids rode on. It was called a drag. And it smoothed out the lumps in the field and all, but things are so different. It worked back then. He was able to raise much much good food.