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Constance Plisek interview for Wright State University History Course 485

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Constance Plisek

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I chose Connie Plisek because of her knowledge of Miamisburg and her desire for everyone to know what a great town Miamisburg is. She shared that and gave a few other tidbits of information along the way.

It did take Connie some time to warm up to the interview process and start giving more than one line answers. But when she did warm up, she gave some great information. One part that she really got into talking about was where you went for everyday items such as groceries and clothes. She said,

“Well, most everything like you needed hardware you went to Star City anything, nut, bolts, screws, hardware. If we needed lumber we went up to Wagner Woods in Dayton. Star City cleaners was still the cleaners. Grocery stores, there were still a lot of little stores around still when I was a little kid like elementary school. *Where were they?* There was one on Third Street called Bashford’s we used to go to all the time. Andy’s Supermarkert over by Mark Twain, we went there a lot because it was by Mom’s school. *What’s there now?* It’s empty now, the post office had it for a while. *Oh, okay, yeah.* But that was Andy’s super markert and he would let you have bones for your dog. [Laughs] Even when you were a little kid. And then like in high school there was Krogers at the shopping center and we would go to Woody’s in West Carrollton. *So when did Krogers, when was it built?* I think it must have come with the shopping center which was in the early 60’s. *So that whole strip was built in the 60’s?* Yeah. *Clothes wise that type of thing?* There was a clothing store in the shopping center. There was a Penny’s downtown. There was a fabric store at the shopping center and shoe store. I can

remember buying shoes downtown Miamisburg from the Schneider's. Not Hank Schneider, but another Schneider branch. And the Maryann shop in the Market Square Building was where you bought a dress."

Another part I think she enjoyed was at the end of the interview, she mentioned her house. I asked her to talk about her house knowing how proud of it she is. She said, "It's my divorce house. I have scraped wall paper off of every wall in this house. I have refurnished the wood work, installed some carpet. Hung some odd painting on the walls. Painted a giant sun in my hallway. This has been my house and it has a lot of my personality in it, I think. And it's just a warm, cozy place to be. I like living downtown; I can walk to restaurants and stores. I can walk to work if I want. I can walk to a high school football game. I can walk to the Dairy Queen! I like my house!"

Connie is a person who is proud of who she is, and proud of where she came from. It was fun for me watching her remember things and smile. Her responses to the "good life" questions did not surprise me. She has always lived her life the way she has wanted to, take it or leave it. I think that's what I admire the most about her and why I wanted to interview her.

Transcript for Connie Plisek

This is Katherine Gutshall with Connie Plisek in her living room in her house in Miamisburg. Why don't you tell me about your family? Do you have any kids?

I have two kids. I am divorced with two children eighteen and twenty-one.

Are your parents still alive?

Yes, both of them and I have a sister.

What did your parents do?

My mother was a teacher my father was the director of maintenance for a nursing home.

What grade did your Mom teach?

She taught first grade and then she was demoted to kindergarten.

When you were in school, in elementary school, did you enjoy it, or did you not enjoy it?

I didn't like it very well. Wasn't my favorite thing to do?

Was there anything about school that you did like?

Reading. I liked reading, but I was always ahead of everybody so it was hard to have the discussions.

What books do you remember as a kid?

I read all the biographies in the Mound school library. 'Cause I was nosy.

Was there anybody that you remember in particular?

Some kid gave me a rough time because I was reading about a black guy, but I couldn't figure out why he was giving me a rough time until I went home and asked my Mom. And she told me, "Because he was an idiot, prejudice."

How did being in the same school system as your Mom affect you?

It's really hard. Every time you do anything wrong they know before you get home. They call each other. It was also odd because I knew the teachers on a social basis. So I knew them at home as "Jan" and at school as "Mrs." It's strange.

High school, what was it like?

High school was pretty cool because we were the first group in the open space school. And so it was disorganized.

Why did they do that, do you remember why?

It was a 70's learning thing like Montessori stuff was big and it was supposed to be the way. So instead of having boring English, your English was divided into like, what did they have, comedy, tragedy and things like that. So you would like reading something. It was kind of whole language in a way. But they didn't train the teachers to do it right, so..

How was the school laid out?

End pods were all open, and then they had just ah, bulletin boards on feet that you could pull around, the middle pod was open, languages and businesses, shop class, typing they had rooms in their pods, and band. But there weren't any walls like in the section where you had social studies so you could see the class over there where the cute boy was. That wasn't [inaudible].

At what point did they realize that this wasn't going to work?

I think it must have been in the late 70's, early 80's. *How long was that then?* I'm thinking they gave it a six year try.

Now, from what I remember, the high school was build without a gym. Was it because of time constraints or what?

I think it was money. I don't know. But it was great because I didn't have to take gym. (Laughs) We were sophomores and at first they would bus us back downtown to gym. But then they discovered that would take... Between changing clothes and busing we have five minutes of gym and so we just got it like exempted – our whole class because it's a state requirement. We were all exempted from it. It was nice because I hated it.

Now the Mound, and the work that was at the Mound. Were there any rumors or stuff like that went around because of it?

You never knew what your friend's dads did. They might work at the Mound but that's all you knew. And even they didn't know. So well, his college degree is in math, but they didn't know what he did on a day to day basis. It was always rumored that that was where they made a part of the triggering mechanism for the atomic warhead. *Which one?* The one they finally dropped. *Both of them?* Both of them, yeah. That's where they worked out the triggering, but who knows. I think that was too late for that to have happened. *When did the Mound come into existence? Do you remember?* I think it

started just before World War II so I don't see how it could have been up and running in time to... I don't know.

Back to your family, kind of pets did you have as a kid.

We always had cats and a dog, a Springer spaniel. *Which ones do you remember the most?* My favorite was Frisky. He was a brown and white male that was around like when I was little. *Cat?* No, he was a springer. *Okay.* He was a dog. My cat that I remember the most was the cat that I got when I was six and I buried her when I was pregnant with Jess. So she lived to be almost nineteen. Her name was princess. *It was a good age.* Uh-huh.

Let's see, Miamisburg when you were a little girl, what was it like?

Well, it was a good place to grow up. It was pretty much a small town but close enough to big towns. But, it was also... There was no other race other than Caucasian so it was a little narrow in some ways. It was a safe, good community.

What was there to do?

[Inaudible] pool. Big old Olympic size pool in the summer. I had a creek behind my house. That's what I did the most. Hung out in the creek, collected fossils, threw rocks at the boy that lived next door. There wasn't any kind of like activity center, or anything, no Burg center.

Where were everyday things done like groceries, dry cleaning, hardware and that type of stuff purchased and bought?

Well, most everything like you needed hardware you went to Star City anything, nut, bolts, screws, hardware. If we needed lumber we went up to Wagner Woods in Dayton. Star City cleaners was still the cleaners. Grocery stores, there were still a lot of little stores around still when I was a little kid like elementary school. *Where were they?* There was one on Third Street called Bashford's we used to go to all the time. Andy's Supermarkert over by Mark Twain, we went there a lot because it was by Mom's school. *What's there now?* It's empty now; the post office had it for a while. *Oh, okay, yeah.* But that was Andy's super markert and he would let you have bones for your dog. [Laughs] Even when you were a little kid. And then like in high school there was Krogers at the shopping center and we would go to Woody's in West Carrollton. *So when did Krogers, when was it built?* I think it must have come with the shopping center which was in the early 60's. *So that whole strip was built in the 60's?* Yeah. *Clothes wise that type of thing?* There was a clothing store in the shopping center. There was a Penny's downtown. There was a fabric store at the shopping center and shoe store. I can remember buying shoes downtown Miamisburg from the Schneider's. Not Hank Schneider, but another Schneider branch. And the Maryann shop in the Market Square Building was where you bought a dress. *Good dresses or everyday?* Dresses like that

you would probably wear to church but you could wear at... In those days you wore dresses everyday. So, they were that kind not froo-froo but...

You were talking about the pool. How did it come into existence?

Pool was a WPA project. My mother remembers roller-skating in the pool before it was filled with water. And the slope that went from like six feet down to the twelve feet thing – steep! *Pretty good and steep.* Pretty good and steep. And everyone came to the Miamisburg pool. People from Centerville and West Carrollton. It was “the” pool to come to. It was warm. We had our own... Miamisburg had it’s own power plant right next to it. So they used the water that was heated, for the turbines, by the turbines to heat the pool. So, it was pretty nice.

Back in high school, what did you for fun, on dates and whatnot?

We did a lot of driving around, cruised Frisch’s, cruised out on 741 that was on like a loop you know. All get in a car. Gas was thirty cents a gallon. And everybody would pile in a car and we had our eight track tapes real loud and playing Edgar Winter and that sort of rock and roll. Cruise out to Frisch’s and drive and see who was out at Frisch’s. They had the carhops still then at that Frisch’s in the back. So you would see who was hanging there, who was hanging out at Ron’s when it was at twelfth and Central it was a big teenage hangout and Cassano’s. Went to all the boy’s gymnastics meets. *Why?* Because I was dating a gymnast and boys looked cute. I went to, we would go, football games that was a Friday night thing. And then the Mall opened. *When did it open?* Right before I went to high school. People were content to just go walk around the Mall. [Laughs] It was cool. They had lockers for your coat. It became a little social hub thing. And at that time there was none of the outgrown around it. So you would drive through the country and Boom! you were at the Mall. It was pretty cool.

Where you when the train wreck happened?

When the phosphorus train wreck happened I was at home, my children were toddlers my daughter was just bring toilet trained, my son was just ready to go into kindergarten. And I was just at home. My mother was one of the last people. She went across the bridge and the police closed the bridge. And she was like “Oh! Something’s up!” The bridge right near where it happened, what’s currently the Ray Bell Bridge. *She went to went to the west side?* She was coming from Germantown side over and they closed. *From the west to the east.* Um-hum. And so she called me and said, “I don’t know what’s going on but something’s up. They closed the bridge.” And then it was on all the news. We just grabbed, I grabbed my laundry in a clothes basket because I had a child being potty trained and I went to my parents’ house. My husband was at work. We hooked up the camper to the car and drove to a friends house in Lebanon and stayed there over night in a camper. *Did they advise you to leave that that point?* Yes. *Because where you were living?* We were in, we were in the like zone two. The, we were, if you went in a straight line from where it happened we were pretty well even with it and the wind prevails that way. Everytime... When we got back in the house, the next day, we had

the news on, and it burst into smoke again. And within seconds our house was engulfed. So it came right at us every time it happened. *So when you left*, When we left it was through the smoke. I put a towel over the baby's head when we walked out of the house. *Did your parents have to leave too?* It was not around their house and they were in a "didn't have to" but did leave but came back that night. But she said it was really weird because they weren't letting you back in. But someone in front of them threatened a guard and they all get through. They were like council members, trashmen, they weren't like military guards. *How long did you have to stay out of your house? You came home the next day, right?* Yeah, we came home the next day and we left again and came home again four hours later. The next time we could go over to Mom's. It wasn't as bad throughout town. *So they didn't have a permanent "You couldn't stay there."* They did on some areas, but we weren't. We were the first night but not the second night. *So it was whenever it burst into flames again or smoke or whatever it was.* Yeah. Whenever it would flare up real bad. *How long did that go on?* Weeks? People that lived near it were evacuated for several weeks. Evidently phosphorus is not an easy thing to get rid of. It burns when exposed to air. *Did you get any compensation for it?* Yeah, we did. We took part in the class action suit and we got 500 hundred dollars for each adult and 350 for each kid. *What did you with the money?* I bought a sewing machine. My kids bought a Playstation or a Nitendo and a TV, they each bought a TV for their bedroom. And I bought a TV. Katie wasn't sure where it came from. She didn't remember. She thought it was from this one day when we saw this one guy knock a crossing guard off and that's why she got 300 hundred dollars. [Laughs] *What year was the phosphorus fire?* Ew... 86, 87, 88? *Not sure.* Katie was born in ...

(Interview stopped due to interruption.)

Okay, you've worked the Miamisburg Historical Society. What are some of the interesting things you have learned through that?

I really enjoyed the day I was working on the collection that belonged to the former chief of police. And there were the little notebooks that he carried in his shirt pocket where he wrote down what was happening. And there were the same things that as happens now, a car wreck, a drunk, whatever. But the way he wrote about it, it just was really neat to read it. It was more personalize you know, like at Mary's house Bob did this and that. That was pretty cool. I thought it was really interesting to hear that there were, that there are supposedly Klu Klux Klan records in the Peerless Mill's wall. That was pretty neat. I also read a letter that a girl wrote during the 1913 flood. And their house wasn't in the flood, but with marshall law, she was describing what it was like to have troops come and demand all your blankets and all your horses and all that stuff. So that was pretty interesting to read. Her talking about losing people. I do think that it's neat that Miamisburg is preserving historic downtown and stuff. Hopefully the archives will get done. *You remember the year of the Sheriff's police, officer's book?* He was the turn of the century, he was 1900 to 1920. *The last name was Daily?* Pretty sure.

You've worked at the Miamisburg Library for how long?

I've been with the Miamisburg Library for thirteen years. *What do you think has changed the most since you have been there?* I think the biggest change has been the electronic things, the computers. When I first started we still had the card catalog for the patrons. Internet on computers and the modernization of the library. Also the library has videos and DVDs that is a change since I've been there along with CDs. The biggest change in getting information to people. And our card catalog online, and the Internet. *Was it online for you guys when you started?* Yes we were, in house computer. The main brain was downtown and that's all we had was the card catalog. And then after I had been at the library for five years we got the Internet but no pictures. That was kind of interesting. It was all orange letters and it would say, "picture here" but no picture. *How long were the loan periods when you started?* Books have always been three weeks, the whole time I've there. *Fines?* Fines haven't gone up. When we added videos and DVDs they put a dollar fine on those and that stayed the same. And of course they have different loan periods. But they are a new media from when I started. *From when you started now until has there been a change in the clientele that has come into Miamisburg (Library)?* Well, most of our clientele is under the age of 12 and comes in large groups of classes. *What do you mean by that?* Our library is situated near two elementaries and a junior high so we have like close to sixty classes a month. So kids keep up really busy. I do think our usage has increased as the economy gone down. *This past time.* Yeah. And I do think we're getting more handicap people. I've also noticed different demographics. Miamisburg for so long was a town of just Caucasians and now there are African-Americans, and Indians that come and use the library more.

How had Miamisburg changed since you were a child until now?

Some things have changed greatly and some things haven't changed at all. Miamisburg has always had its own personal identity and personality and it's still here quite a bit. It's tripled in size, a lot of new housing, a lot of new businesses. When I was a kid there were no fast food restaurants down here. They were all in Dayton and now they are (here). It's really just grown. But I think it's... My children just graduated from high school recently, and it still has maintained a lot of the feel of community in it. *What were the city limits when you where in junior high and that age?* When I was in grade school the city limits was the bottom of Heincke and 725. But they kind of... But they moved it out and included the Mall area. It was a wise move on the cities part. And now we get the base, the tax base. Other side of the river was just, I don't know what it was on that side. And then, I think it stayed pretty stable north and south. But we've grown to the east.

One question that I'm supposed to ask you is, "What did you consider the good life when you graduated high school?"

You mean the norm of what we would all do? *What did you aspire to live like?* Wow. *Your goals?* I guess I always figured I would have a house and a husband, a kid or two, couple pets. I was never much of a planner you know. I just kind of... I don't think I gave it much thought. I just assumed everyone would just end up having a life like my parents. Maybe not here, you know, everyone goes through that time that you got to get

out of your hometown because it's a terrible place to live. Just to discover every other town's got the same problems and stuff. But I never had a big goal; I didn't want to be a teacher. I'm basically a goalless person. [Laughs] I still don't have one; I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up.

What do you consider the good life now?

I yearn for a car that works right. I think it's a pretty good deal now. People around you that you know and like and love. That's quite adequate for me. Just nice times. I don't aspire to own a mansion or a giant Lexus. I'm pretty happy with my house on Main Street.

Tell me about your house on Main Street.

It's my divorce house. I have scraped wall paper off of every wall in this house. I have refurnished the wood work, installed some carpet. Hung some odd painting on the walls. Painted a giant sun in my hallway. This has been my house and it has a lot of my personality in it, I think. And it's just a warm, cozy place to be. I like living downtown; I can walk to restaurants and stores. I can walk to work if I want. I can walk to a high school football game. I can walk to the Dairy Queen! I like my house! *When you worked at the Historical Society, was there any interesting, fun that you found out about your house?* Yes, we always wondered about our house. We've been up in the attic and part of the floor in the attic is gone. It was finished wood. The kids were always curious to whether or not our house was in the flood because were close to the river. You can see the levy, maybe a block from us. *Hundred feet? Hundred yards?* Hundred yards maybe. And we weren't sure of the age of the house because it wasn't on the deed. And I found a picture of our house in the flood and the water comes up to just below the second story windows. So, we were definitely in the flood and that's why our floor disappeared. But the house is sturdy now and dry. And there is a levy which I pay taxes for.

Thank you for being interviewed.