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09 Interview with Dorothea Parker

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Interview with Dorothea Parker

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Reference: Dorothea Parker, interview by James A. Jones (Downingtown, September 16, 1996).

Dorothea Parker was born in Riggtown on May 26, 1921. She lived there until she married at the beginning of World War II, when she moved to Downingtown. She has lived there ever since, but she has kept in touch with her childhood friends from Riggtown. The interview was held in the living room of Ms. Parker's home near Downingtown. Jim Jones (JJ) and Dorothea Parker (DP) were the only participants. There is also a transcript of a brief follow-up interview conducted by telephone at the end of this file.

[begin interview: Tape opens with JJ repeating an answer to an earlier question]

JJ: Between 1936 and 1944, the house at 500ENS was owned by William E. Carey (Jr), who was your "Uncle Willie." [change of subject] Charles (Carey, her cousin and Richard's son) talked about when he put in the bathroom after the war, and it made me wonder when the other houses [in Riggtown] got their plumbing.

DP: In the very beginning, you had the outside toilets back in the yard.

JJ: When you were a child, did you have outside toilets?

DP: No.

JJ: When were you born?

DP: 1921. May 26.

JJ: So they already had an indoor bathroom at your house. That means that Charles' house got it fairly late.

DP: His house had an indoor bathroom also.

JJ: Well, help me understand this, because it's not clear [to me].

He talked about how the back porch was enclosed, but said that when he got home from the war, he put in a regular bathroom.

DP: It wasn't really an outhouse. There was a toilet and a sink; it had everything. On both sides, because it was a double house.

JJ: It was in there where your porch would be. Is that where it was located?

DP: I wouldn't say it was the back porch. It was enclosed, like an outside kitchen. [we looked at a photo of Charles and Uncle Willie the back of the house] That's the enclosed back porch, and down here is where Grandpop had his shop. [He was a woodturner.]

[discussion of objects J found buried in back of 392ENS, including bricks that may have been the base of an outhouse.]

JJ: ... but your house had indoor plumbing earlier than mine.

DP: So did 500, 502, 504 and 506 [East Niels Street]. They were all the same. That was Uncle Dick's, next was Hamiltons in 504, and then the next was Smiley's, Fillmore Smileys in 506.

JJ: That is interesting, because those four houses were built by someone else than the rest of the block. I wonder if they put in better plumbing from the get-go, whereas everybody else had to add theirs [indoor bathroom] later on.

DP: Well, later on they put in a tub and all that kind of thing.

JJ: Well, I guess the bathroom [in 500ENS] was upstairs in the back. Was it already there when you were a child?

DP: I guess they put that in when I was about fifteen [around 1936].

JJ: In your household, there was you, your mother Gertrude, who was born a Carey, but was at least briefly married to somebody named Work ...

DP: She was married for five years and they lived up on High Street. My father was a barber. He worked for Gus Troutman, who had a shop on Market Street.

JJ: What was your father's first name?

DP: William.

JJ: William Work

DP: His shop was near the Farmers & Mechanics Building [corner of High and Market].

JJ: Did your grandfather live in the house when you were a child?

DP: When I was little, after my mother and father separated, I lived with my grandfather and my grandmother. My grandmother died shortly after we moved in with them [July 20, 1926]. And then [there was] my Aunt Florence, who was crippled, and Uncle Willie. Uncle Willie never married, and neither did Aunt Florence. My grandfather died in 1936 ...

[interruption when I present Charles R. Carey's genealogy. D offered to provide names of brothers of Robert E. and William J. Carey. I declined, but should take her up on it.]

JJ: John Carey lived on Linden Street, and I know there were Careys on Church Street, and there must have been more.

DP: On Price Street. Robert moved to Price Street.

[more discussion]

DP: The Truitts, Katie's mother and father, they had three children: Dollie, Kate and Nathan. Kate and Nathan went with some of the relatives. Nathan went down to New Jersey with Alonzo Brosius. That was his uncle. And Kate moved in with the Gauses.

JJ: Okay. There was only one reference to the Gauses [in the archives that I consulted]. Everyone else called her Kate Truitt, or Katie May.

DP: Yes, Katie May. Her name was Truitt. They were from over in Red Lion, near Kennett Square.

JJ: When the rest of the family left the area and moved to New Jersey, she stayed with the Gause family?

DP: No, there was only one who moved down to New Jersey with the Brosius, and that was Nathan. They sort of raised him. Katie went with her aunt and uncle, and they lived over in Kennett. One person who I have not been able to trace was Walter Truitt, her [Katie's] father.

JJ: I don't know anything about him, but I've got another Walter (Carey) on my list. Do you know anything about him?

DP: He was the oldest child of William E. Carey and Katie May. He was their first child, and he died in an automobile accident. I guess maybe he owned one of the first automobiles. It overturned when he was visiting his sister down in Broomall. He was traveling up and somehow it flipped over. Maybe it was a convertible ... I guess they were all convertibles back then.

JJ: Any idea how old he was when he died?

DP: He was young.

[discussion of D's information on the Carey family tree, compiled for her application to the Daughters of the American Revolution]

JJ: [reading from D's materials] Walter Carey was born 1884/07/20; Florence Carey was born 1885/10/24; William E. Carey 1887/01/25; Mary Carey 1888/10/04; Isabelle D. Carey 1890/07/18; Harry D. Carey 1892/05/05; Helen Carey 1894/06/03; Gertrude R. Carey 1897/07/12; and Richard C. Carey 1900/06/13. Whew! That was another big Riggtown family.

DP: There were eight children.

JJ: You gave me a name that I didn't have before ... you also gave me William Work's name.

DP: William Vanderbilt Work.

JJ: Prior to the marriage of Katie May Truitt and William E. Carey (Sr), she lived at her aunt and uncle's house, William B. Gause ...

[gap]

DP: [showing a photograph] That was Katie May, my grandmother.

DP: Phoebe was the sister of Matilda Paxson ... and Phoebe and William Gause didn't have children. Phoebe was the second wife of William Gause.

[gap]

JJ: What do you remember about growing up in Riggtown? Do you even think of yourself as a Riggtowner?

DP: Now I do. Maybe at one time, I didn't. The village itself was made up of all Irish. Surprisingly, three of the girls became nuns--Katherine Finnegan, shortly after her mother died. And not too far from there--it really wasn't Riggtown--Agnes Barry. And up the street on Niels Street, Dorothy Joyce, up near the alley [in the 200 block of East Niels Street].

JJ: I hadn't heard about that. I'm interested in whatever you can tell me about the women of Riggtown. I've already heard about some of the things that the boys did together--playing ball, building bonfires, etc. Did girls form relationships the way the boys did?

DP: I think they were like sisters. The Smileys and myself were very close, [even] to this day. They had six girls and one boy.

JJ: Can you name them?

DP: Ann, Martha, Marie, Phyllis, Catherine, Christine and Buddy.

JJ: Which one or ones did you play with?

DP: Christine, and Catherine. Catherine was a year older than me, and Christine was a year younger.

JJ: What did you when you were kids? You didn't play baseball, I'd guess.

DP: We played with dolls and baby coaches. Christine had a beautiful coach. It was a sort of wicker ... she still has it to this day.

JJ: Where did you get baby coaches?

DP: They were like Christmas gifts. We really weren't real poor; we got Christmas gifts and stuff.

JJ: So it was "store-bought" stuff. People weren't making them for their kids.

DP: I thought we were pretty well off.

JJ: You're one of the first people to say that. Most people say they were poor, but we worked hard and we got by.

DP: That's true.

JJ: Then how come you say you weren't poor.

DP: Because I was an only child in my family, and I was probably spoiled, that's why. [laughter] The Smiley family had six girls girls. I know that some of the younger ones got hand-me-downs.

JJ: Where did Mr. Smiley work?

DP: Mr. Smiley had a garage, right up there next to his house. [discussion to establish that this was the same place where Smitty's Body Shop is located today]

JJ: Did Mrs. Smiley work?

DP: No, Mrs. Smiley did not. I guess the Depression wasn't too good, and he didn't make out too well at the garage business, so he went to work for Schramms. So did William E. Carey.

JJ: Later on, so did Jack Harvey. Schramm's showed up a lot in my interviews.

[discussion of Charlotte Harvey. D didn't know her, but knew the family name Baum.]

DP: You live in the Gincley's house?

JJ: Actually, I live next door. Levi and Helen Gincley lived Next door to me in 392 East Niels Street. [I produced a list of residents of each house in Riggtown.]

DP: I'd love to walk through the old house again [500ENS].

JJ: That's where Joe Mingione lives. [discussion about arranging A visit]

DP: [responding to the price paid by Mingione for the house] Oh my word! Do you know how much he sold that house to Big Jum (Earl Harvey)? He was a good friend of Uncle Willie's. Uncle Willie sold the house to him for, I think, \$1200.

JJ: The deed only showed \$1.00, which was the transfer fee. Now Earl Harvey was related to Jack Harvey and Gertrude Ferrier, and Helen Gincley?

DP: He was Jack's uncle.

[D commented on how much work I'd done already, so I gave a long-winded explanation of how I got involved in the project]

DP: Do you know Paul Rodebaugh?

JJ: Only by reputation. I have his telephone number, but I've delayed in calling him until I had some real questions for him, because it sounds like everyone contacts him about local history.

DP: He gives lectures on the cemetery you mentioned [Friends Burial Society cemetery] and he might be interested in your work.

JJ: Well, that gives me a reason to contact him.

[tape stops and then restarts as we look at some of D's pictures]

DP: This was his brother-in-law, who was married to Grandpop's sister Harriet. Grandpop worked at Baldwin's planing mill, which was up there in the alley near the Keystone Tag building, but nearer to Lacey Street. He had an accident when he was in his late forties or fifties, and he lost his fingers. He had one thumb--part of a thumb--and two fingers. He was really discouraged about that for a long time.

JJ: Could he still work with his tools?

DP: I don't think he worked for a long time. Then my grandmother died (Katie May). I don't know who it was that knew he was talented--he was a wood turner--but Francis and Deborah Brinton were antique dealers. In fact, Francis donated a lot of that furniture up at the Historical Society. I think he was responsible for rehabilitating Grandpop. Grandpop got interested and built a bed for a lathe in the outside cellar, and he got so he could work with what he had left. Mr. Brinton would give him antiques to repair or parts to make. Also, he referred him to [sounds like] Okie and Stockwell ...

JJ: These were antique dealers?

DP: They were all antique dealers around West Chester. And all during the Depression, Grandpop worked and earned enough money, so we did not go on welfare. The only people who I know went on welfare were the Ferriers and the Holstons.

JJ: Isabelle and Ben [Holston] were your relatives.

DP: Ben was a painter. They were the only ones--all those other Irish people were too proud to ask for help, so they eked along with what they had. Grandpop was one of them.

JJ: How did they "eke along"? You were old enough during the Depression to remember it. What kind of things did people do to get along?

DP: They were resourceful enough. Some of them had gardens, and they did the things up so they would have things through the winter.

JJ: Your family was good at gardening, from what I hear. Would you say that more people had gardens than didn't?

DP: I'm sure they did. I'm sure everyone had a "patch." They called [gardens] "a patch."

JJ: Was there anything along the railroad that was worth scavenging? I saw a newspaper article about people in the 1890s who scavenged coal from along the railroad on the north side of town.

DP: I don't know, but they probably did. I know we had a coal stove, and you could use wood in there too. John worked over at the roundhouse for a certain time--did you see his obituary?

[discussion of John Carey's obituary and the difficulty of deciphering old documents]

JJ: [new subject] Voting ... I only thought of this recently, but I realize that it is an important question. Did people vote, and if they did, then how did they vote?

DP: Oh yes. Grandpop was more or less ward leader down there in the Fifth Ward. I remember one time, there was a man named Pinchot who was the governor of Pennsylvania. A man by the name of Scarlett over in Kennett Square, and he was going around campaigning. And then of course there were certain local politicians; Chambers, for one. He was mayor. He was Tom Chambers' dad, I think.

JJ: So when you grandfather was ward leader, was he a Democrat or a Republic, or wasn't that part of being ward leader?

DP: I don't know. I remember one time, there was a meeting on our

front porch, and all of the people down there listening to this politician.

JJ: How about you? Who was the first president you voted for?

DP: I don't know. Probably Roosevelt. It was war time ...

JJ: ... and nobody wanted to take a chance on messing things up?

DP: He was very, very popular ... NRA and all that. I remember Grandpop listening to all of his speeches on the radio.

JJ: You had a radio in your house?

DP: Oh yes. It was a Philco. I think Uncle Willie had one of the first radios in the whole neighborhood. And Grandpop had the first telephone on the block. He used to charge people 10¢ to make a call.

JJ: Can you remember the telephone number?

DP: 76N [amazed laughter]

JJ: Isn't that amazing? I can still remember my first locker combination from seventh grade. [discussion of the quirks of human memory]

DP: I was telling you about Grandpop doing the woodturning. Also he made baseball bats for the kids in the neighborhood. He would make them out of hickory and ash, because they were the hardest woods. He also made the billy clubs for the police.

JJ: Now, did any of the Riggowners ever encounter the business end of those billy clubs?

DP: Not that I know of. I never heard of anything--maybe after I left there. It was a very good neighborhood; a very close neighborhood.

JJ: That leads me to a question about Riggtown "spirit." Was Riggtown really a special place, or was it just special to the people who lived there? In other words, was there anything about Riggtown that was of interest to people from outside of Riggtown?

DP: We all went to the Normal School. When I first started, the first grade was called the Model School. Then the next year, the college took it over, and it became the Demonstration School. From [grades] one to six, it was wonderful. I loved it. We had music appreciation with Dr. Dan [sounds like] Rossin. They would take all the kids over to the [Philips] Auditorium. We learned all of the instruments in the orchestra.

JJ: Did you get to play them?

DP: [surprised at the question] I didn't. It was a sort of an appreciation class. I really wasn't musically talented, but I

appreciated hearing the music. Also, I think perhaps we had a lot more advantages from one to six than a lot of grade schools.

JJ: That's interesting. Who got to go to the Demonstration School?

DP: All of the people from the south end of town ... the southeast end of town. All of the kids.

JJ: Did they have the choice of going to a regular public school?

DP: They had it divided up. North of wherever the border was, they would go to the High Street School, where the Burger King is [today]. But we loved to have the students come in to teach us. And we had some subjects that most people didn't get until they got up into junior high. We had Egyptian culture, Greek mythology, and we had a terrific art class. William Palmer Lear was our teacher in art. One of our students--I guess he's pretty well known now--was Tom Bostell.

JJ: So you figure that going to the Demonstration School was something special.

DP: It was! We had one girl who stuttered, Phyllis Smiley. So one of the teachers told her sisters and us, "when she starts to stutter, you make her stop. Tell her to take a deep breath and start over." Pretty soon, Phyllis didn't stutter any more.

JJ: When you all went on to high school, how did you make out?

DP: It was really different up there.

JJ: What do you remember that was different about it?

DP: Well, we walked, for one thing, through all kinds of weather. We didn't have buses. There was a lot more people--it was awful crowded.

JJ: How did you walk there? What streets did you follow?

DP: We walked up Niels Street to High Street, and then followed High Street up to Washington Street. That's where the junior high was located.

JJ: So you didn't have to cut across the railroad tracks?

DP: Oh no, that was in the wrong direction.

JJ: Did you ever have to cut across the railroad tracks for anything? What I'm getting at, is what was the relationship between Riggtown and the black community across the tracks?

DP: The only time that I remember going over there, the boys used to have a baseball diamond over there.

JJ: Near where the roundhouse was?

DP: Over near the roundhouse, but the roundhouse was no longer in existence, but some fellows cleared it off.

JJ: Over where Wyeth is located now?

DP: Yes. At that time, it was part of Mr. Reilly's farm.

JJ: James D. Reilly, I think.

DP: Yes. He was a good friend of Grandpop Carey's.

JJ: [described the Kay Ruoss letter that mentioned taking walks over to Reilly's farm.] Did you ever take walks over there?

DP: Yes. Kay would be a good one to talk to.

[discussion of Ruoss letter and the idea of Riggtown as an example of community-building. J showed D the picture of Charles Carey's Riggtown tattoo.]

JJ: Talking about how the boys' friendships lasted a long time, you've told me that the same was true for girls.

DP: Wait a minute and I'll show you something ... [tape stops and then restarts. D handed a framed needlepoint to J, who described it and read it out loud.]

JJ: Needlepoint gift to Dottie entitled "Sisters by Heart."
We've shared so much laughter, we've shared so many tears.
We've a spiritual kinship that grows stronger ever year.
We're not sisters by birth, but we knew from the start,
God put us here to be sisters by heart.

JJ: That's an example of exactly what I was talking about [the long-lasting friendships from Riggtown.]

[change of subject]

JJ: How old were you when you got your first job?

DP: I think the first job I had was down in Wilmington. It was an Eckerd's drugstore [and I worked at] the soda fountain.

JJ: Where was it at?

DP: It was around Market Street. Mother and I lived in an apartment at 811 Market. I think across the street was the Alden Theater.

JJ: Your cousin said that your mother worked in Wilmington. Did you ever live in West Chester while she was working in Wilmington, or were you with her all the time?

DP: No, work was hard to come by, and she worked as a waitress. She worked over at the Purple and Gold Tea Room. People by the

name of Williard Ronk owned that property then.

JJ: Was that part of the university, or was it a private tea room?

DP: It was private, but a lot of the university people used to come in.

JJ: Where was it located?

DP: At the corner of Linden and High Street, where the Rathskeller is located.

JJ: Was it a nicer place than the Rathskeller?

DP: Oh yes. There was no beer. It had a soda fountain, and sandwiches.

JJ: Did the students come in?

DP: Oh yes.

JJ: It was a good location. What did your mom think of the students?

DP: I don't know, she never really said that I remember.

JJ: That's a good sign, if she didn't come home complaining.

DP: Oh no.

[J discussed another interview that mentioned the Oriole Tea Room]

DP: Walnut Street and Matlack, they had beautiful homes. I think a lot of fraternities have taken them over, and they don't look like they did. A lot of professors used to live there. There were some beautiful homes.

JJ: [change of subject to unions and strikes] I've asked Everyone about where they worked, and I wondered whether there was much of a union movement around here?

DP: I think it was before the unions really became active. I don't ever remember strikes. Not when I worked over there, because I worked for Schramm's during World War II. I worked in what they called final testing. I was like a clerk, who got all of the data for each unit before it went out.

JJ: After the war was over, did you stop working at Schramms?

DP: After the war was over and the fellows came back, they Claimed those jobs, and women had to find other work. I was used to working, and [even after] my husband came home from the service, I worked in a hosiery mill over in Downingtown. Our daughter was six months old when he went in the service, in the Seabees. So when he came back, I was used to working, and it sure helped out.

JJ: Did you drive up [to Downingtown] in your own car?

DP: I'd moved up with his mother and father [to Downingtown, during the war]. I'd left Uncle Willie and he was there [500ENS] by himself.

JJ: That was during the war?

DP: Yes, that was wartime, because "Parker" and I got married in 1941. Andrew Earl Parker was her husband.)

JJ: What was the whole date?

DP: October the fourth.

JJ: When did he go in the service?

DP: He got a deferment because of war work. He commuted down to the Baldwin Locomotive Company in Eddystone. He kept getting six-month deferments from the government, but he knew that sooner or later he would have to go into the service. At one point, we lived down in Prospect Park because it was closer [to where he worked]. We weren't down there too long, maybe seven or eight months, then I moved back with Uncle Willie [Carey]. Then Parker said he was going in the service, so I moved over [to Downingtown] with Mr. and Mrs. Parker, because i had a six-month old baby then ...

JJ: ... and there wasn't any other kind of day care ...

DP: Right. And then I went to work at Schramms.

JJ: That meant that when you were living in Downingtown, you were actually driving to West Chester to go to work at Schramms.

DP: There was a fellow that lived in the same block who worked over at Schramms. We used to ride over with him.

JJ: Gasoline was in short supply during the war?

DP: Yes, gas was hard to come by. There were four of us who rode with him. And then when the fellows came back from the service, they over their jobs back at Schramms again, and I worked at the hosiery mill, and then after that, at Pepperidge Farms in Downingtown.

JJ: When did you go over there?

DP: In 1959.

JJ: That makes sense. I was born in 1953, and I remember in the 1960s when Pepperidge Farms started to advertise and get big. Did you retire from there?

DP: Yes. I worked there for six months, and the lady who was our supervisor got sick. I was just a couple years older than the

other workers there, and I guess they thought I was more responsible, so they asked me if I'd be leader and take over while she was out. She was out for about six months, and when she came back, we had gotten so busy, they asked me if I would go on "night owl" [or "night hours"]. I started up "night owl"--this was in the biscuit division making cookies--and I stayed on night owl for five years. I hated that.

JJ: My dad used to work night shift and he hated it too.

DP: I never got used to night work. During this time, some Houses became available in Downingtown. Little houses. So my husband and I bought one. Then, I got changed to 6-to-3 and I was on that shift for 25 years.

JJ: Does that mean you retired in the late seventies?

DP: No, in 1984.

JJ: When did you move up here [to Rock Raymond Road].

DP: We moved up here when my daughter who graduated in 1960. We sold that little house and we'd bought this land up here.

JJ: Now, you had one daughter?

DP: Mary Louise.

[answer went unrecorded because the tape ends; switch side; start tape. We were looking at candlesticks made by William E. Carey.]

JJ: There's something written [on the bottom of a candle holder that once belonged to a neighbor, Mrs. Holden] "Given to me by Mr. Carey, May 1929, handmade"

DP: One of the Smiley girls, Marie Smiley Doyle, [gave me this candle-holder] ... my grandfather made these. He was pretty talented ...

[D continued to show me other photos, and documents. On the tape, J referred to the Casa Grande where Richard Carey served in the navy. D produced the poem listing all of the neighborhood boys who served in WWII, and gave me a copy.]

DP: [Indicating another photograph] That's my husband, and that's me. And that's Lawrence Holston, and that's his wife Kate.

JJ: Ben and Isabelle's son?

DP: Right. That's Kay and me--I was the matron of honor [at Kay and Vernon's (Ruoss) wedding].

[J presented a copy of the Greenfield ball field petition to D, and she helped me to identify some names.]

DP: Sammie Achuff lived on Niels Street.

JJ: Do you know in what house?

DP: It was coming down the hill above the bridge, but I don't know what the number was.

JJ: That narrows it down to the 200 block of East Nields Street.

DP: Tommy Baker lived ... in the 600 block of South Matlack Street.

[tape stops, then restarts. I asked about Harry Townsend.]

DP: He worked over at the mushroom plant on Matlack Street. Jacobs had it, and Jacobs got him to do a lot of research on penicillin, and Mr. Jacobs thought a lot of Harry Townsend, and I guess he paid him well. Harry married Katie (Katherine) Kugler.

JJ: Was Mary A. Townsend Harry's mother?

DP: She was Wacky's mother, and also William's mother. Anyway, Jacobs did a lot of research, and worked with Dr. Fleming [discovered penicillin for antibiotic]. I'm not sure if that was the beginning of Wyeth Laboratories.

[commenting on names from the petition]

DP: Ernie Wilson lived over on South Franklin Street, in between Linden and Rosedale. [700 block] He worked at the Keystone Tag Company, too.

JJ: [laughing] They just went out at lunch time and got them all, didn't they?

DP: There were some Wilsons, the one guy's name was Walt, and his brother was Paul, and they lived on Lacey Street, near the store. Walt worked out at Schramms', and Paul and I were the same age and we went to school together. Slater Zell lived near Thomsons on Nields Street. He was married to a Vesser girl. They were a German family, and Mr. Vesser was the baker over at the college. ... Johnny Yannick had the store at the corner of Lacey and Matlack, I'm pretty sure. ...

JJ: [new subject] What do you remember about your Uncle Willie? [William E. Carey (Jr)]?

DP: After my mother and father separated, Uncle Willie more or less became my ... not a father, but you know ...

JJ: Your surrogate father?

DP: Yes, he was. Of course, Grandpop was busy was busy with his shop, but Uncle Willie was busy too. He worked over at Schramm's. I remember when he took me fishing down in Westtown. We used to get on the train and ride over to Westtown.

JJ: Right, I know the Westtown station.

DP: I remember he would put a dime on my plate every morning. That was my allowance for the day. [laughter]

JJ: You were doing all right if you got a dime a day!

DP: That's what I said, I was spoiled. I was the only girl in there with old maid aunt, a bachelor uncle, my grandfather and my mother. And Uncle Dick lived next door, and he babied me too.

JJ: Was there an Uncle Harry too?

DP: He had a sad marriage. It didn't last too long. He never really got to be a happy person, I don't think.

JJ: He lived over there on Niels Street?

DP: He moved back in that house where Uncle Dick lived. He married a lady by the name of Anna Reece, and they moved out to the west side of West Chester. But no, I wasn't close to Uncle Harry.

JJ: What do you remember about Aunt Florence?

DP: Aunt Florence was crippled. I don't know if she had infantile paralysis or what, but she could walk around.

JJ: Did you have to take care of her?

DP: No, she was well enough to get around when she was younger, I think she used to work for a family by the name of Martindale, as a cook and a housekeeper. But [the more I think about it] I'm sure she must have had infantile paralysis. Of course, back then we didn't know what it was. In any case, she was more or less a semi-invalid. She could cook and clean, but she didn't go upstairs.

JJ: How was your house laid out? Where were the bedrooms?

DP: We had three bedrooms upstairs. There was what they called the hallway, the parlor, the dining room and the kitchen. Then there was a big outside shed where we used to have an ice box, and the ice man would come around there.

[telephone rang, tape stopped and restarted]

JJ: [Holding the "Honor Roll" poem in his hand] I've read a bit of this poem, What can you tell me about where it came from?

DP: Richie and I were talking about it the other day. He said there was some kind of monument down in Riggstown. [I later learned that it was a painted sign at Giunta's store that listed all the local boys who served in the war.] These were all the fellows that came from the south end of town. There were a lot of them. One of the first ones to die was Jerry Davis.

JJ: Your cousin told me about him. He died of a heart attack while he was in the service.

DP: Oh, I don't know about the heart attack.

JJ: Do you remember the Farras?

DP: He lived up on Matlack Street in between Lacey and Nields.

JJ: In the 500 block then?

DP: Yes.

JJ: A while back, you mentioned the Barry family.

DP: They lived on Magnolia Street and had a little store there on the corner.

JJ: Down by Matlack?

DP: Yes. They lived there for years. They had two daughters, Margaret and Agnes. Agnes was a little short girl, and she became a nun. It wasn't until years later that Chris McCallin had a friend who lived down at Camilla Hall at Immaculata. It's a rest home for the nuns. Agnes was there, so I talked to her. And then [there was another local woman who became a nun] Catherine Finegan, who lived on Adams Street, she was the oldest child and for a while, she kept the family together. There was Catherine, Eddie, Julia and Eleanor, and the father. I think the father passed away, and Catherine was the oldest one, and she was always "the mother" ...

JJ: Where was the mother?

DP: The mother died. Catherine went into the convent. Her Catholic name was Sister Marita Agnes. I went down to see Chris McCallin's friend, Sister Maria Corona--she's still down there--and I started asking about all of these girls. They were all there.

JJ: At the same convent?

DP: At the same rest home. Isn't that something? They were all Irish families, Finegans, Doughertys, Hamiltons and Townsends.

JJ: The Barry name turned up in a completely different context in my research. [discussion about Rigg and Barry who built the majority of Riggtown houses]

DP: Alonzo Harvey, Jack's grandfather, was a harness-maker over on Franklin Street. Next to him, there was a family by the name of McDevitt. They were Irish. Eleanor Finegan, and myself and Chris went over to see Mrs. McDevitt, and she showed us how to crochet, and we would have tea with her. I thought that was really neat, and that's how I learned to crochet.

JJ: Did women in Riggtown do much baking themselves?

DP: That's where their bread came from. Irish soda bread--I remember that.

JJ: Did people can stuff. You said they had gardens. Did they can stuff themselves?

DP: Jars, yes.

[J mentioned the cannery in the Quonset hut on South Franklin Street where Ralph Smith Trucking Company is located. D remembered it, but did not know any details.]

[I showed D the picture of Richard Carey and two other small children.]

DP: Awww, this is Richie [smiling], and this is my friend Christine [Smiley]. That's her dolly, and this is her little brother Buddy. They had six girls, and then Buddy was the last one. He was spoiled.

[laughter]

DP: Christine really is that well any more. She had triple-bypass surgery.

JJ: How old is she now?

DP: She is 74 years now. [J gave D two copies of the picture]

[looking at the picture of Carey's horse]

JJ: I asked you earlier about the horse ...

DP: That was Uncle Dick's horse, and Aunt Becky's dog Betty [sitting on the back of the horse]

JJ: What do you think these things are? [indicate posts in the backyard]

DP: That must have been part of the fence. Everybody had a fence.

JJ: How come everybody had fences?

DP: I guess it was to keep the children out, or to keep the animals in the yard.

JJ: Especially if you were like your Uncle Dick, who raised turkeys back there one year.

DP: He was a would-be farmer.

JJ: Farmer on his 0.06 acres. [laughter]

[looking at Kate Ruoss' wedding picture]

DP: That is Uncle Dick, Aunt Becky, Richie and Kay.

[looking at ESCO Cabinet Company picture]

DP: That was Jerry Davis, and Potter Hamilton. I don't recognize any of the others. [J pointed out Cie Gincley]

[picture of Gincley family. D recognized about half]

DP: "Billy" Gincley moved to Downingtown and married a man named Snyder, John Snyder. He's still living, but Billy died of cancer.

[discussion of Cie Gincley, the exhibit on "Working in West Chester" at the Chester County Historical Society, and Anne Gincley's reaction to D's invitation to see the exhibit.]

[discussion about the lack of photo resources for Riggtown]

JJ: Who do you know that owned a camera when you were growing up?

DP: I had a little Brownie, but I don't know [what happened to the pictures]. Uncle Willie used to have a little cedar chest and he would keep pictures in there. Then when he moved and sold the house, I don't know what happened [to it].

[looking at pictures of Riggtown in spring 1996]

DP: Oh, that's our house. It looks so nice. Grandpop turned all the posts and railings in our house. ... Brick must have been really popular [at the time when Riggtown was built].

[photo of railroad tracks]

JJ: That must have been a busy railroad yard up there once.

DP: Oh, it was. I can remember when Ringling Brothers, Barnum And Bailey Circus would unload the elephants there.

JJ: What did they do--hold their show over at the fairgrounds?

DP: Yes.

JJ: Then they must have walked them [the elephants] up Nields Street.

DP: No, they walked them up Bolmar Street and then over to the fairgrounds. The fairgrounds were out on Route 3, out around where that cemetery is. [discussion about which cemetery. J suggested the Chestnut Grove Cemetery for West Chester's black community, and D agreed, but I haven't found anything to support that yet.]

JJ: Do you remember a name for the black section of town?

DP: Mud Row.

JJ: You're the second person to tell me that. Have you ever Heard of "Georgetown?"

DP: Yes.

JJ: Do you know where the name came from? Was that where are the "Georges" lived?

DP: I don't know why they called it that.

JJ: Did you ever hear of Pigtown?

DP: No.

JJ: A black man from Georgetown told me that the area to the east was called "Pigtown," but no one has confirmed that for me. Another black woman did tell me about Mud Row being the stretch of houses along Bolmar Street, because apparently Bolmar Street was not paved very well.

DP: No, it wasn't.

JJ: That's one of the reasons that I think Riggstown was special. Because if you ask how many neighborhoods in West Chester had distinct identities, you hear Georgetown, because it was black, the Italian neighborhood because it as Italian, and Riggstown.

DP: Do you know how the Italian section got up there?

JJ: No. Tell me about it.

DP: P. M. Sharpless of the Sharpless Separator Works made so much money that he went over to Europe, and he saw all these beautiful stone castles and homes, and he decided he was going to build himself a nice home. All in all, he was such a wealthy man that he bought a thousand acres north of West Chester on the highest part, so he could look over and see the clock on top of the courthouse. He hired the Corcoran brothers--these two brothers who were builders--and they went into Philadelphia about the time of Italian immigration, and they hired a hundred Italian stone masons. They came out, and they couldn't go back and forth everyday, so they settled in West Chester and brought their families out. I think it was either two or four years it took to build the Sharpless mansion, which is called Greystone. They all settled mostly around the Catholic Church, and they stayed.

JJ: They had some cultural reasons for staying together. But over in Riggstown, they were Irish, but they weren't all Irish. Were they all Catholic? No, there was a real mix of different religions.

DP: Well, Eliza and John Carey [on Linden Street] belonged to the Holy Trinity Church, and I've tried to look up their records. I found the index, but I couldn't find the book in which they were listed as members, married, or anything.

[compared 1996 and 1947 pictures of the backs of 300 block of

East Niels Street]

DP: That's a shame about Wacky's house. It's falling down.

JJ: Well, you don't know the people who live next door to him, but they are trying to sell their house right now, and how do you sell your house when it's attached to a house that looks like Wacky's?

[picture of Jack and Charlotte Harvey's house]

DP: Woodward's lived here [387ENS] and Doughertys lived there [385ENS]. McDevitts were around the corner [on Franklin Street] next to Jack Harvey's house.

[picture of Jack and Charlotte led to some discussion of Jack. D described him as "a feisty old guy."]

DP: He [Jack] didn't have it too easy living with his grandfather.

JJ: That's come up. Apparently, his grandfather was quite a terror.

DP: Oh, he was.

[change of subject]

JJ: If you were born in 1921, you were 10 years old in September 1931 when the Goose Creek fire took place. What do you remember about it?

DP: I remember all of this black billowing smoke scared the heck out of me. I ran as fast as my legs would carry me over to the Purple and Gold Tea Room where my mother was [working]. But the fire went up the creek instead of down.

JJ: It must have looked like it was going to burn up your whole neighborhood.

DP: I think it was the next day, after the fire was out, everybody went to see what the damage was. You could see all the trees along the creek were charred. My friend Chris and her husband's family (McCallin) lived up on Lacey Street right next to the creek. [Chris was 8 years old at the time, but later they got married.]

JJ: Oh, I know the house you mean. It's a real nice brick house.

DP: Yes. Mr. McCallin worked for the railroad. He was a conductor or something.

JJ: One of the houses on Franklin Street had a chicken coop burn up. Did you know the family of Nathan Shur?

DP: No. Actually, the oil shouldn't have been leaking down into

the creek. You remember what you were asking about whether people got into trouble? Well, the people were angels compared to what they are today. The worst that used to happen was the fellows would get up there by the creek and they'd smoke cigarettes. That was a no-no.

JJ: You mean they would have to hide out when they were smoking.

DP: Yes, because they weren't supposed to do that.

JJ: The parents didn't know?

DP: Well, I guess they knew, but they didn't like it. And girls never smoked.

JJ: Did you ever start smoking?

DP: No.

JJ: That's interesting, because a lot more Riggtown men than women started smoking. I thought it might have had something to do with going in the service, but I guess it started earlier for them.

[change of subject]

JJ: What do you think people who lived outside of Riggtown thought about Riggtown?

DP: I really don't know, but I imagine ... they were working class people that lived down there. They were hard working people. I think there was a rivalry between ... because when the boys would have baseball games, there was a rivalry between the south end and the north end.

JJ: But nobody would have ever called them "white trash?"

DP: I never heard anybody use that expression. Whether they thought it or not, I don't know.

JJ: Where was the poor part of town when you were growing up? Was there any part of town that you definitely did not want to live in?

DP: I don't know. I guess it would be down there in Riggtown. [telephone began ringing, tape stops and restarts]

JJ: What do you think would be important to tell people about Riggtown?

DP: I can remember my childhood, and it was very happy. I think one reason, even if I was an only child, was because of my friends there in that community. The Smileys, especially. Mr. Smiley and his wife Mary were very good to me. They were like my aunt and uncle, and the children ... I was very close to the whole family, and especially Christine. She's the last one of the family, and it sort of worries her a little bit. The others

are all gone.

JJ: I thought that Smiley was a big family around here.

DP: It is, but they're Buddy's children--the youngest boy's children. He had about nine children.

JJ: Well, the one guy is head of Fame Fire Company.

DP: Yes, either Bill or John, I don't know which one. Christine became very active. She went through all the chairs of the Daughters of American Revolution, and traced her family back. She is the one who got me interested in genealogy. Not only that, she got the family together and started the family reunions that they have every year. As the older ones passed away, the younger ones took it over. They had it in Coppersmith Park last year. She's still very active and you have to give her credit for doing that. She found one ancestor who is buried in Great Valley cemetery. His name is Kugler, and I think she restored his headstone and the DAR had a ceremony down there, fife and drum, and a little reception down there.

JJ: The Kugler name is familiar to me. [sound of shuffling papers]

DP: Well, they were related somehow to the one who married Wacky. I don't know exactly how.

JJ: The main relationships seemed to have been the Townsend-Smiley-Hamilton-Regans, and the Harvey-Gincley-Ferriers. When you were growing up, were people conscious of these two large groups [in Riggstown]? Did the kids ever gang up according to what family they were in?

DP: No, not that I know of. Annie Davis and Mary Smiley were the best of friends.

JJ: Well, with all of things going on in society today, all the trouble in the cities and so forth, is there anything from Riggstown that everyone should know about?

DP: Well, they knew how to get along with each other, and they were very industrious. All of their children turned out well. If anything had to be learned from that, I would say that no matter what your circumstances are, if you have the right attitude and are resourceful, and you really want to get ahead and do things, the opportunity is there for you. I think in that age of the Depression--we were all children of the Depression--a lot of lessons were learned, because you have to be happy about the little things and strive to do better for your children.

[discussion about sacrifice for children's education]

DP: One of my proudest moments was when David [her son] got appointed to the naval academy at Annapolis. He graduated in 1988, and he played on the football team. Now, he is a captain in the Marines, and he lives in Hawaii.

[The tape ran out during the final discussion on how to handle interview transcript.]

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Dorothy Parker, telephone interview by Jim Jones (October 29, 1996).

D mentioned that John Darlington used to live on South Matlack Street in the second house up from Jake's Bar on the same side. He worked in the Schramm's Co. office. [Jack Harvey's Schramm's photo showed a "Jim" Darlington who worked in the shops.]

D also told a story about Tommy Thomson, who also worked over in Schramm's office. He and a man named Chris Sanderson had an orchestra. Chris Sanderson was the fellow whose home became a museum over at Chadd's Ford.
