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Interviewer: - batteries yet, so that's good. Okay. Today is June - I'm sorry, July 2nd, 2015. My name is Anne Lacey. I'm the arts and humanities librarian at Kansas City, Kansas Public Library, and I am at the main branch with Sue Thompson. I'll be interviewing Sue today. And she was born in 1941.

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And we will be talking about Kansas City, Kansas City, Kansas, Johnson County, raising families, volunteer work, some of those things. So we've kind of talked a little bit and I know a little bit about your background already. So tell me a little bit about where you grew up.

Respondent: I grew up mostly in Merriam, Kansas. My parents, we had a garden.

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And we were required to go pick strawberries before we could have breakfast because we froze and canned a lot of stuff in order to make it through the winter. My dad was a milkman and that's home delivery kind of milkman that they don't have anymore, with glass bottles.

Interviewer: It's making a comeback.

Respondent: Mom was a nurse. And I have three brothers. So there were six of us. And Mom could make a casserole with one pound of ground beef for all six of us.

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And we went to the Merriam Christian Church and we were an active part of that. And we did all right. You know, I look back on my dad. I found out when I helped sell the house, when they had to move to a retirement center, they spent \$17,000 on the house, and it took them 20 years to pay for it.

Interviewer: Wow. Things have changed.

Respondent: Things have changed a lot. Yeah.

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And I drove by that recently. And now it's a cul-de-sac because there was so - there was an acre and-a-half, and so there are homes all around, and it's worth a lot more now than it was then. I went to Merriam Grade School and we went through eighth grade in those days. Went to Hocker Grove for one year because they were just building those. And then I went to Shawnee Mission, and it was Shawnee Mission until my senior year, where they finally finished building East, and so our school became North.

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So I'm the first graduating class of North in 1959.

Interviewer: All right. Was that also where you raised your family?

Respondent: I raised my family in Kansas City, Kansas.

Interviewer: Okay, so tell me about when you moved to Kansas City, Kansas.

Respondent: Well, we moved to - we were in Piper first, which is now Kansas City, Kansas, but then it was Piper in western Wyandotte County.

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And we moved in town. My husband, who was an attorney here, tired of driving in on the turnpike and back every day, and he said it's just time to move. And our boys were at the age where having neighbors would have been nice because we didn't. You know, when you're right in the middle of 170 acres, you know, they made their own fun playing in the creek and had a tree house and all those kind of things. But as far as neighbors, we didn't have that.

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So we moved into Cedar Home, which was just down the street from Victory Hills Golf Course at the time, now Painted Hills. And so the kids spent a lot of time in the evenings in the summertime going out and fishing golf balls out of the pond, and then they'd sell them, clean them, and then sell them again, being very creative kids. And they went to - geez, I can't think of which school they went to, grade school.

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And then they went to Sumner.

Interviewer: Which we all know is one of the best high schools in the metro.

Respondent: Absolutely. It was cool to be smart. And you know, at that - there was a time when it wasn't. You know, you're really kind of looked down on and you had to test to get in, and you had to maintain your grades to stay in. And I really appreciated that opportunity that they had.

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And some of their friends from Sumner they still are their friends.

Interviewer: Yeah, I've noticed that working at the library, that Sumner has very, very loyal graduates. I think every class has their own group that still meets, you know, once a month. So I think that says a lot about the-

Respondent: Well, for years, I know my older son would go back and visit one of the teachers, you know, at his home.

Interviewer: That's great.

Respondent: Just because he and his buddy really enjoyed and thought a lot of him.

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Interviewer: Well, it sounds like you've had really good experiences, both in Johnson County and in Wyandotte County. And we talked before a little bit about the stereotypes that there are about those different parts of the metro. Can you tell me a little bit about how maybe those stereotypes aren't true or don't live up to what people say?

Respondent: Yeah, when I grew up, my parents, you know, said don't ever go to Kansas City, Kansas because it just is not a safe place.

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And they were a little concerned when I met Chuck and realized that we were going to be in Kansas City, Kansas, but after they met him, they liked him. And so they trusted that everything was going to be all right. And then, you know, after we married and moved in town, they didn't have any problem coming to see us and spending holidays and that kind of thing. They still lived in Merriam, until my dad had some medical issues and couldn't drive any longer.

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So they moved out to - then it was called the Country Club. It's changed about three times - out on 119th Street. And then Mom died and so he moved to Overland Park, which is the reason why I left Kansas City, Kansas, so that his - he called me to come, you know, do something nearly every day, and the drive was getting to be a little much.

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So I decided to kind of be - I stayed until my youngest finished school, so the home base would be the same. Since they were without their dad, I wanted that part to be the same. And so then I moved to Mission and I've been there since 1996 in a townhome.

Interviewer: How do you like that neighborhood?

Respondent: I love it. The neighbors are really good, and help each other, and look out for one another. You know, sometimes I miss having - I miss the big house.

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But that's it. I don't miss having to do yardwork and all that kind of stuff. I got tired of it when the boys were in college, you know, where they weren't home to help me. So Brian picked KU because it was close enough, but far enough away that I wouldn't be involved terribly in his life. But close enough that he'd come home to do laundry.

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And he brought his buddies home and you know, so it seemed like I always had - actually, I found out, since I'm away from there, and they're older, that they had a lot more parties than I was aware that they had in my house.

Interviewer: That always seems to happen. You find out those things later in life.

Respondent: Yes. The little things about the beer and the drinking. And I thought oh, Lord.

Interviewer: Well, can you tell me a little bit how you've seen different parts of the city or neighborhoods that you've lived in change over the years? What changes have you noticed?

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Respondent: Well, now that I've been recently back in Kansas, Kansas probably five or six times since the first of the year, I've really noticed more green space, more Hispanic influence than was here when we left. And I read about development.

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Of course, I see what's happening at the Legends and all that and the whole image of Wyandotte County is much improved over - you know, I never hear anybody say they're afraid to go to Wyandotte now. You know, now it's, "Meet you at the Legends," or whatever, you know, something in between. One of my husband's best friends is Jose Hernandez who has Jalisco Restaurant on State Avenue. That's where Chuck was killed. And I stopped by to see him last week.

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And we visited, and he used to have another restaurant down in the Armourdale area, but he's had to close it because there's so much competition now, and that's the downside for him. So he's kind of thinking about, you know, calling it in and selling his building, which he and his family

built. It's really hard to let go of that. But he's still hanging in there just with the one restaurant.

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Interviewer: Yeah, that's one nice thing about this area, that there are so many just great restaurants and different restaurants of different ethnicities. It's really very multicultural in this part of town. I think that's something that people don't realize.

Respondent: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Well, I know that you've done a lot of volunteer work in the community. Tell me a little bit about that, what you've done over the years.

Respondent: Well, I've worked at the - volunteered at West Branch library for 16 years. Those same 16 years, I took blood pressures at [Bellis] Pharmacy twice a month for a couple of hours for the Heart Association.

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And that was really nice because people - you know, I had taken them in malls where they have, you know, big events. But in a one-time meeting, you're not likely to tell somebody about what else is going on in your life that might affect your blood pressure, where over the years of coming in twice a month -- and they didn't need to come twice a month -- but I felt, for some of them, it was the social aspect of coming.

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And I'd fill out their little card to take back to their doctor's and I didn't admonish them or anything. I just told them what their blood pressure was. And sometimes if we weren't busy, people would visit about, you know, my daughter's going through a bad divorce, or the children are sick, or something that would affect their blood pressure. So if they brought that up, we might talk about that a little bit, so that they wouldn't be concerned if it was high. And that was, I really did enjoy that.

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And I know it was beneficial because I got - you know, sometimes they'd bring me vegetables in the summertime and people just let me know that they really did appreciate it. Because they said, in some doctors' offices, they charge just to come in and take their blood pressure. And I thought that was pretty awful.

Interviewer: And with your background as a nurse, that seems like the perfect volunteer work for you.

Respondent: It was and Chuck didn't mind any of the volunteer work.

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I debated when I got married. I had worked for years and a lot of people didn't think I'd just be able to stop. But by doing health-related volunteer work, I felt like I was kind of keeping in, even though, you know, my boys still don't understand doing so much volunteer work because they think, if you got the time, you ought to get paid for it. But It's a guy thing I think.

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Interviewer: So you took some time off to raise your family before you went back to work or [unintelligible]?

Respondent: I've never gone back.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Respondent: After Chuck died, I went back to - I decided well, maybe I need to because in a homicide, insurance does not pay until you're clear. I was the suspect because the usual thing is the spouse. And so it didn't pay for nine months.

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And so I went back to St. Luke's as a volunteer in the emergency room, just to see -- you know, it had been 19 years since I had worked -- how much of a jump that would be to go back. And several of the nurses said they'd sponsor me. But I thought at the time - I mean I continued to do that for six years, for eight hours every Friday. But I've liked being able to say I'm going to Florida and not have to ask if I could go in that way.

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Because we had always done that, go in April for spring break. And then over the years, I continued to go by back. We had a condo in Naples, Florida. We rented it during the season, the same people for 23 years that took care of it like it was their home. And then April was my spring break. In October, when I'd go back, I would do fix up, clean up, paint, or whatever needed to be done. So I like the flexibility.

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And then by that time, I figured out that we're going to be okay financially, that I didn't have to go back to work. So I continued on just because I enjoyed doing it.

Interviewer: That's great. Yeah. So you told me a little bit about working for the - was it the Bar Association Auxiliary?

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Yeah. Tell me some more about that.

Respondent: Well, they met. These were the wives of lawyers. And we met once a month and after a few months, as a nurse, I'm not used to just going to a place, and having lunch, and having a drink, and visiting, and then go home.

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I said, "Well it seems like, with all this talent, we ought to be able to do some kind of service." And they said, "Well, come up with some ideas." So I'd been to the courthouse enough times to see people wandering around looking for the right office. They don't know where to go. And so I said, "Okay, how about us setting up an information table?" And we did that for four or five years every day, every morning.

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And I had various volunteers that would come. We'd have a table there, and we'd just set up, and people come up and ask questions, "Where do I go pay taxes? Where's this courtroom?" A man was having a heart attack coming down the steps.

Interviewer: Wow, you were the right person. Yeah.

Respondent: We were full service. And so apparently we created a need because once we have to stop doing it...

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...because I had trouble staffing it because people have more kids or get other things, they had telephone operators in the basement. And so of course, they had switchboard in those days. So they brought them up. And then they were able to answer the questions. So we created a need. And then we bailed out. We were asked to - I think we were asked. I don't think we would have done this on our own. The Freedom Train came through the nation and landed here.

Interviewer: And when was that?

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Respondent: In '76. And so it stayed for three days down in Fairfax area. And so we organized entertainment for all the people waiting in line, which were thousands of people coming from everywhere to see the Freedom Train. And it had historic documents inside. And so people would go in, and go through two or three cars, and then back out, and then on their way.

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And so I was down there every day just keeping it rolling and making sure people check in and all that kind of thing. So it was fun. And my son got to go in the engine. And as a boy, he thought that was pretty good.

Interviewer: And you said you volunteered for 16 years at the West Wyandotte Library.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: What did you do there?

Respondent: I worked at the desk helping people check books in and out and get their cards. And it was great.

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It was good. I enjoyed it because I like to visit with people. And so, you know, I saw a lot of familiar faces and people coming in and asking for information, especially about medical stuff. And I became friends with Pat Gaunce, the director there, and I got this idea that people come in with one word, one medical word.

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And by the time they go to the books, then they come out more scared because it's all in technical terms that they can't understand. And I said, "How about if, you know, someone could create a video of what is a heart attack, what is an ulcer, what is pulmonary disease, what is asthma, and animate it, and all that, in everyday terms, so they could check it out, and then go to their doctor and ask questions, or even doctors use it?"

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She thought was a great idea. I promoted it at St. Luke's but we just didn't have the money. We just couldn't fund it.

Interviewer: Right. That's always a problem.

Respondent: But I still think it was - and now I think they do because I've been in eye doctors' places where they have a video running all the time, explaining cataracts and that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Yeah. I think you can find all kinds of videos like that on YouTube now, just things [unintelligible].

Respondent: Yeah, but in those days, it just was not an easy thing.

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Of course, we were all on VCR tapes at the time.

Interviewer: That's great. So do you have any heroes in the community, any people you really respect? Who's influenced you?

Respondent: Well, Pat Gaunce because she's such a Dotte and she'll go to her grave being a Dotte. I never met anybody that was so happy and proud to be from Wyandotte County.

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And another one of my personal heroes was [Jack Rudin]. And I knew him politically and as a friend, and gosh, you know, he went through having a heart transplant. And I think the people following that he ran for office and he didn't get it.

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And I thought they've saved him, you know, because from the effort of being an elected official [unintelligible] protect him. Well, [Jack] decided he was going to run again. And he made it that time. And I was working at Democratic Headquarters, and he just come in and, you know, he's walking up and down the steps in Strawberry Hill. You know, it's not like you're walking on the level. I mean, he was a door-to-door kind of person.

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And I admired that so much. He had to go to the hospital. This was after my husband died. And he had been interested in buying the car that my husband was killed in and for his daughter. And I was wanting to get rid of it. And he had been - he had a serious issue, but and Helen, his wife came out to the waiting room because I went, and she said, "[Jack] wants to talk to you."

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And I go in and he's - you know, he goes like this, you know, and I go closer, and then he says, "Will you make me a deal on the car?" I hit him on his shoulder, and I said, "That's just mean to do that." Because he acted like I might get a better deal if I'm dying here.

Interviewer: Oh, that's funny. He was a jokester.

Respondent: He was a jokester. Yes, he was.

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And he was a big supporter of my husband and vice versa. They were just good political friends, too. So I always admired [Jack's] spirit and his willingness to do whatever to help this city. I just thought he was great.

Interviewer: Well, what do you what do you like most about living in Kansas City, in the Kansas City area?

Respondent: I've never lived anyplace else. So I can't have - I was in the Air Force Reserve as a flight nurse so I spent six weeks in San Antonio.

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And beyond that, doing travels, I'm always, no matter where I've gone, and Chuck and I were able to do a good bit of travel, and my sons and I, about six years ago, went on African Safari. And you know, so many times I thought, oh God, I wish their dad could have been here because he would have really enjoyed it. But every time, no matter where I go, I'm always glad to be home, you know, where things are familiar, the people are great.

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And my idea is, if you live in Kansas City, you're halfway anyplace.

Interviewer: That's true.

Respondent: So business wise or whatever, you're halfway there if you've got to travel, so I always kind of promote that.

Interviewer: Well, great. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today. I really appreciate it.

Respondent: Well, good. I'm glad to do it. And I hate to-

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I don't want to stop without saying something about my husband. And he was murdered in a political hit in December 21st, 1987 in a case not yet solved. And I think it's - you know, it's hard to live with when somebody doesn't get punished for - and I don't know how - you know, people say, "Well, what are you going to do if it never get solved?" I say, "Do the same thing I've been doing,"

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You know, it's been almost 28 years. I'm grateful that people still care and want it to be solved. The budget cuts right now in Kansas, the KBI doesn't even have enough people to work on current murders, never mind old ones. There's a new director. I just recently met twice with him to see whether maybe he'd let us try to be on Cold Justice.

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He said no. And that's hard to accept. Why not? You know, after all this time, why not? Chuck was - he's an attorney. He jogged. He was a Wyandotte person through and through, went to Georgetown Law School. He was in the Marines. So that's the only times he didn't live in Kansas City, Kansas.

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One of the guys, one of his friends said at the funeral, "It was fun to jog with Chuck because you didn't have to work too hard because people came out of their houses, out on the street to stop him, and let's talk." You know, they needed help. They needed whatever because he just did a lot of pro bono work because everybody was his friend, you know? And he had our friend, Jose Hernandez that operates Jalisco said, "He just never could believe that Chuck, that somebody of Chuck's stature could be friends with him."

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But Chuck's best friends were an air conditioning guy, a postman, a guy that owned a liquor store, and Jose.

Interviewer: That sounds like a really remarkable person.

Respondent: You know, we just didn't - we did official things. We really didn't socialize with lawyers and judges. You know, he just preferred being with everyday person and those were his kind of people. Obviously, somebody didn't like him.

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He was trying to clean up some political corruption here and that's the reason why he was murdered.

Interviewer: I'm so sorry.

Respondent: And he thought he was meeting a client, and instead he was shot six times, and died, and my sons, my older one still has a lot of anger in him. My younger one, it helped him by being here.

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Where the other one went to college where he was surrounded by people who didn't know Chuck. Everybody here was always telling a Chuck story, a funny story because he was a jokester. And he was an excellent attorney and just well thought of. You know, he's the reason why I'm - well, I don't say he's the only reason why I'm still here, but it's his home, and it's become my home.

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And I have no intention of going out until I go out feet first. That's all I need to say.

Interviewer: Well, thanks for sharing. Thank you for sharing that story. And thanks again for taking the time today.

Respondent: Okay. Glad to do it. Thank you.