



2007 Sesquicentennial Oral Interview

Rosemary Nusbaum Murphy

RM: In coming back, we hadn't been back here in 20 years; I saw things I hadn't seen before. I saw them in a different way. Because I had been living in Colorado and California, and I came back with a totally fresh look. So I painted a lot of rural Douglas County. Was kinda interesting because one time I stopped in traffic on 1061, I painted a farmhouse and that was a postcard winner.

CH: Kansas Arts Commission?

RM: Kansas Arts Commission. [Specifically, this competition was hosted by the Association of Community Arts Agencies of Kansas.] One day, Helen Lorraine Grosdider said "I am positive. That was the



house that I lived. In another auction I painted something, someone said, "Oh, that was my grandparents. It was another Grosdidier farm. I would like to do Church Street because basically all the churches are gone. Growing up there were homes on there that were significant. All the churches were sort of interesting. When I went to high school, someone went to Methodist. Some went to St. Paul's or the Catholic. I would like to do that. Connie's grandparents' house was on that street. And Paul Sommer's. There are just things I think would be interesting. Then, lately, I have had this desire to do the plain, simple houses on Main Street. Because the stories are so interesting. Emma Jean Taylor has lived over there, what 58 years or more. Marvin built the house. My mother has lived here for 57. Janice Colman has been across the street for 46. An interesting dynamic. A lot of people look at houses today and think this is a starter house. They don't think "this is where I am going to live and die." I think there are things that would interest me that I would paint around here.

CH: This is Cindy Higgins, I am talking with Rosemary Nusbaum Murphy. This is April 2, 2007, and I had asked Rosemary as a watercolorist and painter what sort of things she might be interested in. Were you born in Eudora or did you move to Eudora?

RM: Moved to Eudora when I was six years old.

CH: So, when you moved to Eudora you lived in the area.

RM: Yes.

CH: What was it like at that time, who lived here, and do you have any memories that stand out?

RM: I think our neighborhood was the very best neighborhood you could ever grow up in. My husband who moved here in, let's see, he was in elementary school. He tells stories about his neighborhood and all the guys he'd play ball with. Everybody seems to have that view of their neighborhood.

CH: You were talking about your husband's neighborhood.

JM: He has all these great stories. The highway [old Hiway 10, now 10th Street] was the dividing line. We couldn't cross the highway. It was too dangerous. Too much traffic. His neighborhood was almost all boys. We had a lot of girls. But we had the Smith boys right behind us. Schehrer s were one house over. Then the Mercers. We were all so close that a few years ago my son was visiting with someone and we were talking about Judy and Joe Harris—Judy was a Schehrer . I heard my son say, I don't remember exactly but we're related on my mother's side of the family. I said actually, we aren't related the way you think. Then my mother said, of course, you were related by the alley. And that was the way it felt. They ate as many meals here as we ate at their house. With as many girls with one bathroom in each house. If one bathroom was busy, you could always run down the alley to another house.

CH: At the time you lived here, how far did Main Street really go?

RM: The end of our block was as far as we were allowed to go.

CH: That would be 11th Street. There were still houses up and down Main Street.

RM: Not as many. Mercers were second from the alley [actually across the alley]. Bill Mercer. We could kinda time certain things when Bill Mercer backed out of his basement garage. He'd gun the motor. Then, you didn't go out in the alley. They had two children. Barbara Mercer was a year older than my oldest sister, Virginia. Ward Mercer went on to become a professional entertainer. We thought he was a professional entertainer. We thought he was absolutely wonderful.

CH: How about on Elm Street? Across the alley? Did you have any friends there?

RM: [Mercers, of course and the] Millers [home of Ruth and Vincent Miller] were up on the corner. April and David were closer to my younger sister and my brother's age. When they walked to school, April often stopped in to check our refrigerator if she needed a snack on the way to school. Madge Rothberger lived where you lived [1023 Elm]. My brother and the Smith boys thought she had wonderful trash. People burned their trash. They spent a lot of time looking for old perfume bottles. The Smith boys, Duane, Darrell, Dougie, Dennis, David; Denise came along after I moved, were over there. We just couldn't wait to get up in the morning, particularly in the summers to get outside. There was activity.

CH: During that time, your parents had a grocery store. Did you ever work there?

RM: Yes, my older sister worked there a lot. I would go down on Saturdays when I got a little bit older. One of my jobs was to candle the eggs. That meant you stayed in the back. The produce was brought in by local farmers. My husband sold strawberries to them because he picked strawberries and melons. I put the eggs in this little container. There was some kind of viewer. I would look through it. I never, ever knew what I was looking for. I would put them in, look, and put them in the carton. Hate to tell anyone that; I really had no clue.

CH: How did that grocery store compared to a grocery that you might go to now in Eudora? Besides the fact that the farmers brought the produce in.

RM: The farmers brought the produce. There was so much in the attic, upstairs, in the back. My dad loved the grocery business. He loved visiting with people. There was a big case of— I can't think of the bread at Christmas time — fruitcake! He opened some to see what it was. It had evidently been soaking in brandy for 25 years. He put little samples out and people went wild ordering it. Of course, there was a very limited supply. [Addition: Also, many people charged and my parents had regular deliveries.]

CH: This was the old Pilla building?

RM: Uh huh. Pilla building. Always finding treasures.

CH: Did you do deliveries at that time?

RM: One memorable delivery was [to Miss Pilla], my mother always brought milk up to Miss Pilla when it came in because she had cats. One evening she asked me to make the delivery. I was in elementary school; I must have been seventh grade or sixth grade. She said, "Go to the back door. She lives in the back. She won't answer the front door." For some reason, I dawdled on the way. The sun was just setting. It was a little dark. I stood on the front door and knocked, and knocked. I couldn't bring myself to go to the back door. All of a sudden, I became very nervous. The house seemed large and eerie. I did go to the back door finally and knocked. When she opened the door, a cat ran out the door. I handed her the milk, and I think it all happened in less than a second. I ran all the way back to the store. I always remember: I was so frightened. It was silly.

CH: Which schools did you go to in Eudora?

RM: Went to Holy Family. Went to the Catholic school. We had a lot of grades in one room. Met my very best friend there, Connie Colman. We met the first day of school. We were both wearing the same dress. A striped dress. We can both remember it.

CH: You didn't wear uniforms.

RM: No. Really, no one at that time had a lot of clothes. We might as well have worn uniforms. You had two or three school dresses and came home and changed into our play clothes. It was small. And I have good memories of it. I probably have more memories when I went over to the high school because I loved that.

CH: What was the transition like? The comparison between the two schools?

RM: Well, the Catholic school was small and we had been with the same people in small classes for so many years that it was really exciting to get to the high school. For one thing, I could walk down the alley and be there. I was still late every day.

CH: Were there any extracurricular activities that you participated in?

RM: In terms of sports, wasn't very good; they were limited. Not many girls did, if any. I was kinda the class artist as was Bob Worley. Any time we could get out of class if we had to work on a program or paint. Anything like that. I was in plays. The most memorable play for me was "Our Town." I played Emily [Webb]. I had no idea how I got that part. My husband, Jack, was George [Gibbs]. Of course, the story is Emily and George. They marry. To me it was like a dream come true. I had the biggest crush on the world on him. We had never said two words to each other. The night of the play. We were both pretty nervous, I guess. It was in the gym. The stage was raised. I was wearing my grandmother's wedding dress for that. Connie was playing the piano. Unfortunately the light went out. So, she couldn't see what she was playing. She didn't play that well. But anyway, we carried on. When we went down the steps, Jack accidentally took my hand and led me off the stage. Not where the steps were. He went down the steps and I dropped down. So, no one remembers anything except me falling.

CH: And then when you graduated from high school, you moved elsewhere but you've come back to Eudora to visit your parents' house of Robert and Mary Ellenbecker Nusbaum, how have your perceptions of Eudora changed from being a visitor from time to time?

RM: Oh, gosh. Some things are the same. But so much has changed. I don't know a lot of people. I know the parents of people that I went to school with. Seems like I attend mortuaries and funerals [visit mortuaries and attend funerals a lot], which makes me think that I am getting closer. It is a little different. It would be hard for me to pinpoint it. Downtown was just the center of our world. Oley's drug store was there. Colman's hardware, which for me, was important because Jack worked there. It still has some of that hometown flavor, definitely hometown, small town. I am glad that I lived other places. I think that has really given me a different view of everything. You don't have to do things because "this is the way we've always done them."

CH: Since you lived in Baldwin, real quick, the first thing that comes to mind about the difference between Eudora and Baldwin.

RM: Baker University.

CH: Thank you very much. This concludes our interview.