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Oral History Interview on Bloomfield

Diane Janusz

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Transcribed by: Aleesha Young

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Abstract: As a white woman, Diane Janusz recalls being a parent and resident of Bloomfield during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the town experienced growth in the African-American population. She also worked as a teachers' aid at Metacomet Elementary School and was an active PTA member. She recalls racial steering in the real estate market, voluntary school busing, and the redistricting of public school attendance zones.

Speaker key:

AY: Aleesha Young

DJ: Diane Janusz

[all comments by transcriber in brackets]

AY: I am interviewing you because you were active in Bloomfield during the 60's and 70's, but before we focus on your role, where did you live in Bloomfield during that time? Did you live on Briar Lane?

DJ: No, part of the time I lived at 22 Pine Grove Road, also in Bloomfield.

AY: And why did you decide to live in Bloomfield during the 60's and 70's?

DJ: It was a nice community, houses were affordable.

AY: What kind of work did you do during the 60's and the 70's?

DJ: I was a teacher's aid and my husband worked at Aetna.

AY: Do you have children?

DJ: 2.

AY: What are their names so I can follow?

DJ: Dori-Ann and Richard.

AY: When and where were they born?

DJ: Dori-Ann was born in Maurly, [sp?] New Jersey. Rich was born in Hartford Connecticut.

AY: Did they attend Bloomfield Public Schools?

DJ: Yes, all the way through until they graduated.

AY: And what were your experiences with Bloomfield Schools?

DJ: As a parent?

AY: Yes.

DJ: I always found them to be, the administrators to be very receptive. I was active in the PTA and parents groups.

AY: What about your children's experiences?

DJ: My daughter has always said that she was very, very glad that she attended Bloomfield Schools. It's helped her in life because she was not just one culture. She comfortable in a multicultural setting...and Rich, he never said much. He did fine.

AY: In your view, how has the quality of Bloomfield Schools changed since the 1960's?

DJ: Well, the scores have gone down and awful lot. Now I don't know if this the result of more parents needing to work, because when my children were growing up, I worked for the school system, and most of my friends worked part time, we were with kids an awful lot.

AY: Where were you a teacher's aid?

DJ: Metacomet School.

AY: Where did your children go to elementary school?

DJ: Wintonbury.

AY: During what time were you active during the 60's and 70's? I think I have read that you were involved in the school board.

DJ: No, I was never on the school board, but I went to every single meeting. This is just a guess, 1966 through 1974.

[Note: The interviewer switched to the ordinary resident interview guide here.]

AY: I am gonna go back just a little bit. Did you own your home at the time, or did you rent?

DJ: No, we owned both homes.

AY: And do you remember who sold it to you?

DJ: Our first home was from a private owner.

AY: And this was the one on Pine Grove.

DJ: Do you want their names?

AY: Sure.

DJ: Their last name was Bracy or Bracey. I am not sure which. The second home, it was American Development.

AY: Were there any other housing options that you considered at the time?

DJ: Not really because my daughter was going into high school at the time that we moved and she very, very adamant that she wanted to continue. It's where all her friends were and it was fine with us.

AY: Can you tell me about your neighbors during the 60's and 70's? I know you said you moved...so you can talk about...when exactly did you move?

DJ: To Briar Lane?

AY: Yes.

DJ: We moved to Briar Lane in '72.

AY: And so you were at Pine Grove...

DJ: 11 Years.

AY: Can you tell me about your neighbors on Pine Grove or Briar, was it racially mixed, or was it mostly one race?

DJ: In the beginning, on Pine Grove we had 1 black family, and then as the years progressed, we had more black families.

AY: We've read reports about racial steering and block-busting; did you experience or witness any of these?

DJ: Sure.

AY: When was the first time you heard about?

DJ: Probably mid-60's.

AY: How did people respond to these kinds of events?

DJ: I think the way anybody responds, you don't like, people doing things in an underhanded manner which they did, but I supposed they had to. I don't necessarily mean the people that bought the homes. I mean the people that were doing the steering were not very above board.

AY: How long did you teach?

DJ: I didn't teach.

AY: Oh, ok, you were a teacher's aid.

DJ: I was a teacher's aid for 5 years.

AY: What grades?

DJ: Just, I was just the clerical aid of the elementary school.

AY: And you said you never thought about moving at the time. Were you ever encourage you to move, were you ever steered?

DJ: No, no, just a couple of neighbors.

AY: You talked about Pine Grove not being as racially diverse, was in the same for Briar Lane?

DJ: Yea, in the beginning, the reason that we moved was that she houses on Wintonbury, they are excellent starter homes, there are only 5 rooms, and no cellar, so at that point, we wanted to have more room, so we just....

AY: I know you said that you we're really a teacher, maybe since you have had some experience with the school systems, what were some of the concerns of parents, and how did these concerns change over time?

DJ: Well, let's see, not so much in the school that I was teaching in, but at that time they started the busing program and they started busing youngsters into different schools.

AY: Would that be the voluntary busing?

DJ: Well, they closed Blue Hills School and then they started busing to different schools, and that was bad, it was bad for the kids, and nobody likes to have their children uprooted, and say, your gonna go to another school now.

AY: Now, do you know why they started doing that?

DJ: They thought it thought it was racially imbalanced?

AY: What were some of the challenges that you and the school system faced during the 60's, and how were these kinds of things dealt with?

DJ: Well just the busing program that kind of disrupted the whole school.

AY: Why did the population of Bloomfield Schools change during this time, in terms of race?

DJ: Well, I think because of our proximity to Hartford, and also the homes were affordable and mostly people from Hartford came, and they went to the east side of town where there really...where homes were affordable.

AY: During the 60's and 70's there were debates about the racial imbalance of schools; can you tell me more about these? I know you touch on them a little. Can you tell me more about the voluntary busing from the Blue Hills elementary school, is there anything else you want to add.

DJ: Well, it took a while for the kids to get used to each other. I had the feeling that the kids who were bused in were a little bit defensive. You know, "I'm here, you're not gonna do anything to me because I'm here". And because they're kids, they are on the playground and they work things out.

AY: What about the redistricting of public school boundaries?

DJ: That also was a big thing.

AY: I have another question for you. I have some...we've looked at Board of Education Minutes and I have some Bloomfield maps. It looks like they were changing the boundaries; we are trying to figure out where... [showing the 1971 and 1974 Bloomfield maps]

DJ: These kids all came to Metacomet School.

AY: Which ones?

DJ: All Willow, Willow Lane, Juniper, [inaudible]. These kids [referring to maps], they all went to Wintonbury and that, my children were never redistricted, my daughter went to the Junior High School, and she remained there for 3 years. It was a good experience, she only went to the High School, 3 years, it let her grow up a little bit you know. It's a good idea for everybody. When my son was ready to go to, it was 6th grade they went to the middle school and I think they closed the Wintonbury School at that time too. I am almost positive. Vincent, where was Vincent School? Vincent was the crem-de-la-crem, everybody from up on the hill. Did you go to Bloomfield High?

AY: Yes.

DJ: The people up on the hill all went to Vincent. You know, the closest school, so that had to put some kids here and some kids there, and Laurel I think too, this was all [referring to Bloomfield Maps], no, that's Vincent, they have given you the wrong coordinates I think. This is Laurel here, and Vincent is here.

AY: I will make a note of that.

DJ: Yea because all the kids from Vincent, that was [inaudible] over there. I didn't really know any of the kids who went there.

AY: I know I asked you about racial steering in neighborhoods; did any of this happen in Bloomfield public schools? When was the first time you heard about this?

DJ: I am not sure what you're asking?

AY: Did you ever experience racial change happening in Bloomfield Public Schools?...there was voluntary busing and all of that.

DJ: Oh yea, like I said you know, and people were able to...There were laws passed; you had to show a home to everyone...and there was no....

AY: Why did you choose to work in Bloomfield School Systems? Was it because you lived there...as opposed to in another town?

DJ: I had the opportunity to work in Bloomfield Schools. I was never sorry. It was an excellent experience.

AY: I know you said you were a teacher's aid, were there any other teaching options that you considered at the time.

DJ: No. I am much more of a clerical person.

AY: I think that's about it.

DJ: Right, now I am also looking for other people to interview. I actually have a contact list of people [shows the contact list]. But if there is anyone that you would recommend.