

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1998-99

Interview Subject: BLANCHE CAFFIERE
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INTERVIEW WITH
BLANCHE CAFFIERE
FOR
THE LOG HOUSE MUSEUM
OCTOBER 5, 1999
By
JonLee Joseph

(Mrs. Caffiere was raised near Greenlake, but remembers excursions to West Seattle).

JonLee: So, do you have early memories of West Seattle?

Mr. Caffiere: Very little, I was just a youngster then. I went to school down there.

JonLee: At Alki?

Mr. Caffiere: By that steel mill. It was called Youngstown Steel. There's been a different ownership since.

JonLee: You went to Cooper Elementary? (As I needed to repeat questions to him)
I ask, "Do you have a hearing aid?"

Mr. Caffiere: Not very well. Mr. Stuart who lives on Vashon had the merchant food corporation down there where the American flag is.

JL: Oh, yes. Do remember any Indian residents there?

Mr. C: The Italians were, but not Indians.

Blanche Caffiere: Well, going to Alki Point in the summertime was the biggest high point in the summer. I'm sure it was just as exciting in my mind as if we were going to go to Disneyland nowadays. Because there was the wonderful water to swim in and all those little houses along Alki: Mutt and Jeff, Maggie and Jiggs, and the Katzenjammer Kids, all these names. As we would go along, all the kids in the streetcar, on a hot summer day with all the windows open would read them off in unison. And that was lots of fun, I thought.

But I will start back at the beginning. My Mother wasn't much for picnics. She was a great reader. But the neighbors were, so they would include me when they went. But one time, my Mother and sister and I decided to go to Alki. And Oh, I was just delighted to think that she was going to do that with us. And we fixed up a big lunch and we put on our summer sandals and all. It was hot! It seemed to me it was much hotter in those days than now, perhaps not. It's just that I was more conditioned for it.

Anyway, we lived way out on Roosevelt Way, which used to be 10th Avenue Northeast, by a reservoir that people in the north end are familiar with. And then we had to walk clear down to the Greenlake streetcar. And it was a mile, probably. Then, when we got down there, Greenlake at that time was not filled in there, around the station. The car came all the way around the edge of the lake. And we would stand there with our stuff, anxiously waiting for Number 20. Now, I vaguely remember that the streetcar, the Greenlake was Number 20.

I'll never forget Number 1 for the Alki! Because that was the magic streetcar that took us to Alki Point, exactly. And, I thought that anybody that lived out there was enchanted. So, we'd get on the Greenlake streetcar, and there was conductor and a motorman, and the streetcars were run on electricity, a rod that went up to wires. The motorman wore a uniform, kind of navy-blue and brass buttons. The conductor had his uniform. The only thing that designated the difference was their caps. And there was that box there, at the back end of the streetcar, where you dropped your five cents, is all it was, in those days. That was about in 1912.

The streetcar went around the lake, and through Woodland Park, through trees. There was kind of a trestle in there. And then on downtown across the trestle. There was no Fremont Bridge in those days, just a trestle. And then we'd go all along Lake Union on a trestle. And you could look in all the little houseboats. Somehow, they were never as romantic as the one out along Alki Beach. Maybe because Lake Union was supposed to be very polluted. They, of course, were in Lake Union.

We'd get downtown, get off the Greenlake streetcar. I think we'd get off on Pike, and walk over to First and Pine, and wait for the Alki. And it never seemed to be there when we got there. We stood on that corner and looked up at First and Pine, waiting for that beautiful orange streetcar to come around that corner, with its Number 1 up in front.

Fauntleroy was (Number) 2; it didn't have the romance, because there was no beach. There was Lincoln Park, but they didn't have a pool at that time. And that was very important to me – to go swimming.

So when we got out there, oh yes, I forgot to mention, going across those mud flats, in south Seattle with the trestle. The motorman on the Alki streetcar loved that trestle! He didn't have to stop to let anybody off or anybody on. He really whizzed along there! The streetcar swayed. I loved it! I wasn't scared at all. Later on, a streetcar did fall off from up there. It was sensational news! But ours never did. And I never expected it to. Because it was just such a glorious summer day, and then when we got out there, my sister was older. She said, "Now we got to hurry up and pick out a picnic table in the sun." Mother, who had gloves on and a hat thought it was unladylike to get tanned or sunburned, wouldn't hurry to get the table. And maybe we'd end up in the shade, and Esther would be very disappointed.

I didn't seem to care. All I seemed to think about was getting into that water, and at that time that Natatorium rented suits. Everybody didn't have a bathing suit, those days. They were kind of a uniform suit. Where I recently saw a real good picture of one is at the restaurant ~~across from~~ ⁱⁿ Westwood Village, The Keg. They have these old-fashioned pictures. Well, there's streetcars, graduating classes, dancing – all at the turn of the century. A lot of fun to look at for me. That was the era in which I lived – and my sister even more so. Because that graduating class down there is all in their white, long dresses, dancing, and long hair – no short hair. Anyway it was a different world. So then after we got there, then we ate. And got a bathing suit. I think you had to pay ten cents, or fifteen. And you put a safety pin on with your number, and that was the locker where your clothes were. And that cold water didn't seem to phase me. I went in it and thought I was really living at last! At Alki.

So that was one of our trips out there, but then later they put a little boat on Elliott Bay, Coleman Dock probably and Alki, and there was a dock there. And that little boat was called *The Falcon*. There's a picture down at the Museum. I got it from the Museum of History and Industry. They sold me a copy, because they have it. The boat was called *The Falcon*, as I said. I think it was thirty-five cents. But, of course, you didn't have any streetcar. Well, you did have to get down to the dock. But that was a lot of fun too, to go

on. My neighbors took that boat. I don't think they kept the run up over two or three years. They didn't do that anymore. But, the part, my memory, when I get to thinking about how happy those days were – I think about standing there at First and Pine, waiting for that Alki streetcar to come around the corner, because it was so thrilling just to see that one come around. Then, when we got on it was usually so crowded, it would be standing room only – especially on a Sunday. If you came on a Sunday you just knew you were going to stand up. But on a weekday you might get a seat, but it was questionable. But it really was a great experience to go to Alki.

And then there was Luna Park. Do you have records of Luna Park?

JonLee: Yes, but not your stories.

Blanche: Well, my sister and her friends rented a cabin out there. There were sixteen girls that helped pay for the rent. They were all in their first year of working, after graduating from high school. And I had the pleasure of visiting them, just one Sunday, and listening to them. They were all swimmers. They were used to be kind of a buoy out there in Luna Park. A lot of them would swim out to that and sit on it. That was the finest thing I'd ever heard anybody do. And also at Luna Park, they'd talk about getting the brass rings at the merry go round. If you could reach up and get the ring, then you could get a free ride. So, the world was full of magic out there at Alki and Luna Park, as far as I was concerned.

JonLee: The little house that they rented, was it a tent house or a regular house?

Blanche: It was a little shack with a porch across the front. It was shingles, as I recall. And my sister used to have tons of pictures of it and the girls. She was eleven years older than I am. She passed on ten years ago, or something. Anyhow, as I remember, those were the days!

JonLee: So, you remember the Fieldhouse down at Alki Beach, by Spuds. Do you remember Spuds?

Blanche: No, I know Spuds from nowadays, not then. We brought our own food, always. We could only afford something like, one ice cream cone, one bottle of pop or something.

JonLee: Were you more then, when you went to Alki Beach, down by what I call Duwamish Head, or down by the Fieldhouse?

Blanche: It's where that Natatorium used to be. It wasn't the point, it was this side of it.

JonLee: Thank you. Did you ever see the inside?

Blanche: Of the Natatorium? Oh sure, because that's where you changed your clothes and went swimming?

JonLee: Did you ever see the apartment?

Blanche: No.

JonLee: Okay. I've talked to two people who lived in that apartment, and there was a purple bathroom. (Laughter by both of us).

Blanche: Well that would be interesting.

JonLee: Purple tile, purple paint.

Blanche: Ummm, I didn't know they featured purple in those days.

JonLee: Thank you very much.

Another Story:

JonLee: Okay, you're on.

Blanche: The first time I ever remember visiting West Seattle, my mother had a friend who had come out to Seattle to relocate. And, she was a very smart woman, a stenographer we called her in those days. Now, she would be called a secretary. She took a job with the Bethlehem Steel Company, and got herself an apartment in West Seattle.

She invited us over one Sunday. My mother, father and I were going. That was a very rare occasion. It was very seldom that my mother and dad went anywhere together, because he didn't want to go anywhere. He didn't want to get dressed up. He was a hard worker at his job, but Sundays was his day to relax, and smoke his corncob pipes. My family were all from a big corn farm in southern Indiana. They had come out to Seattle because my mother owned the farm, and she didn't want to live on it. And so they sold it and came out to Seattle and got started again.

Anyway, the three of us struck out. I was thrilled because we weren't going to take the Alki streetcar this time. We were just going to take any car that went over that way.

Excuse me, we were only going to take the Greenlake car to downtown. Because, we were going to Coleman Dock to take a ferry boat over to West Seattle. I've seen pictures of that ferryboat and it's very old-fashioned looking now. I don't think it took cars; I think it just took people. It may have had a car or two on there, but hardly anybody owned a car, that I knew. I remember, or I remember my mother telling, because I think I was five, that when we arrived in West Seattle, we were all standing down there on that apron that a ferry boat has. There was a whole crowd. I was very excited because it was a boat and we were landing in West Seattle. I think the ride had cost us five cents to cross there. But anyway, I grabbed hold of my mother the minute that boat touched the dock, because it shook like that! And, I remember my mother talking about it, that I had grabbed a hold of her when the boat landed. But, anyway, then we got off, and then walked, I think, just across the road and took a little, I don't think it was a cable car that went up the hill. From then on, the day is a blank to me, but that trip out there was fascinating to think they had that ferry to cross there.

JonLee: The friend, the lady stenographer was a friend.

Blanche: But she asked us to call her Aunt Gertie. And she had this very fine, secretary to the Vice President, or something big. And, my mother was very proud of her for a friend. But mother also thought she was a little far out. For one thing, she had a divorce. I don't know that our family knew anybody else that had one. So, she bought this rooming house down around the depot somewhere.

JonLee: King Street Station?

Blanche: Uhhmmhmm. Her life went along, and ours too for quite awhile. And mother didn't see much of her. And, maybe she came out to our house ^{more} than we went to hers. Anyhow, all at once, my mother was called to be a witness on a federal court case, in the federal building. I think it was the old post office where she went. This was pretty exciting! "Cuz Aunt Gertie had boarders and some of them were peddling dope. This was way back, like 1920 or something, or maybe farther back than that. And, mother was pretty disgusted. I can remember she was a witness for Aunt Gertie. All she had to do was go in and swear that she'd known her so many years, and known her to be of fine character and that sort of thing. But I remember her saying, "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she knew that was going on." She had this doubt in her mind.

And Aunt Gertie was convicted for a year. Is there a place back in Kansas called Leavenworth?

JonLee: Ummmhum.

Blanche: That's where she... I think there's a women's.... Aunt Gertie went to Leavenworth for a year. While she was back there she took painting, and she sent mother pictures. They wee^{re} really good. Of course, I wasn't a judge really, but she really had a lucrative year, met interesting people, came back to Seattle, and bought a little farm up north, and a car. My mother and dad never owned a car, horse and buggy and surreys. But, anyway, that was this story of this aunt.

JonLee: Well, why was she arrested and jailed, if it was her tenants?

Blanche: Because if she knew about it, she should have reported it.

JonLee: Boy, the laws have sure changed now haven't they? If the landlord was responsible, boy a lot of different things would happen. Were they (tenants) Chinese? King Street Station was in the International District then too.

Blanche: They could have been everything. But then, that's good nowadays to be international.

JonLee: Thank you very much for that story.

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INTERVIEWER

INTERVIEWEE

Jon Lee Joseph 10/5/99
Date

Blanche L. Caffiere 10-5-'99
Date