

SARAH LUCH

For the South West Seattle Historical Society at the Log House Museum

Ida Culver Home in Seattle, Washington

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JonLee: This is JonLee Joseph, June 23, 2000. I'm meeting with Sarah Luch, who was the gym teacher at Madison Junior High, for many years, in West Seattle.

Okay, would you talk about where you were born and raised, Miss Luch?

Sarah Luch: Yes, I was born and raised in Vancouver, Washington. A member of a big family, with no money, so we had to start working at a very tender age. So, we've all worked from childhood, picking fruit and vegetables and so on. And then we had a fruit cannery in Vancouver, and I think we all worked in that in the summer time. So, I've worked summers for many, many years.

JonLee: What was your family ancestry? What ethnic groups?

Sarah Luch: German, Dad was German. And mother – Norwegian. And they both came to this country at a young age. Mother was two years old. I think my Dad was about thirteen when he came. My Dad came with his brother, to the Middle West, and I don't know the details about my Father, unfortunately. But anyway, he and his brother parted company, and he came to the West Coast and what happened to the brother, I have no knowledge, whatsoever.

And my Mother's people were farmers. They had a dairy farm.

JonLee: Down in Vancouver?

Sarah Luch: Yes. A little town out of Vancouver called Amboy. And she grew up on the farm, and in fact, I don't even know how far she went through school. I think probably through the eighth grade, then she started working.

JonLee: Now, where did you go to college?

Sarah Luch: I went to college, my first year Washington State College in Pullman, Washington. And, the next three years, University of Washington.

JonLee: Were you a scholarship student? Or did you work to put yourself through?

Sarah Luch: I did. But I did earn a scholarship, the only one issued, and I got that because I was Valedictorian of my class. The scholarship amounted to one semester's free room rent at a dormitory, which was the oldest one on the grounds. However, I didn't get the scholarship when I went, so I enrolled, and I moved into McCroskey Hall, which was nice living quarters for a woman. And, it was about six months later, I guess, I got my check for thirty-five dollars! (Laughs).

JonLee: Oh my!

Sarah Luch: But, I laugh at that now, as scholarships go begging.

JonLee: For thousands.

Sarah Luch: Yes, if you're accepted. I was so lucky. I was the only one who got one, and it was worth one semester's room rate. Anyway, I went to Washington State one year. My Dad died in '28. And I graduated from High School in '26. Somehow or another, I had moved back home to Vancouver, and I worked a summer in the food cannery. Then I decided to come to Seattle and complete my college at the University of Washington.

JonLee: When you graduated, and looked around for teaching jobs, what was available?

Sarah Luch: I graduated in the Physical Ed Department. There were twenty-one graduates. Two of us out of the twenty-one got jobs.

JonLee: Was it during the Depression?

Sarah Luch: In 1926. Things weren't very prosperous then. I was extremely lucky.

JonLee: Did you start working at Madison?

Sarah Luch: My first teaching job was in Coeur DeLane, Idaho, and I taught high school, junior high, and supervised grade schools. Coeur DeLane is a lovely place. And after three years there, they had to retrench and cut out several departments. So, they cut out Physical Ed., music and a study hall supervisor. So then, I thought, well, I might as well go back to University and get a Master's Degree.

I worked at the cannery again, all summer, before I came to Seattle. About a week before school started, I got a telegram from the Seattle Education Department. Would I accept a

substitute job for one semester while a teacher was on leave? Well, I thought, "That's fine." So, I came to Seattle and worked in a grade school, teaching Physical Ed. from the fifth grade up through the eighth grade.

The teacher didn't return, after her leave of absence, so I had the job for the rest of the year. I got a contract for the next year. I'd been teaching as a substitute for about (\$ 10) ten dollars a day. So, I was delighted to get a contract. However, my contract was less than that of a man they hired as a shop teacher, right out of college! And he'd had no experience, at all. They hired him and paid him a higher salary!

Well, I thought, "That isn't fair." Because I've had five years of experience, that ought to be worth something! So I went down to the Superintendent's office (Laughs), talked to his secretary, and told her I thought my experience was worth something. Because, he was getting more than I, without any teaching practice, whatsoever. She said, "Well you have a good point there." She said, "I'll take it up with the Board." So I said, "Fine." So, in a short time, I got a new contract.

Now, a friend of mine had a similar experience. She went down and complained, and AC Pelton, a man who was head of the Physical Ed. Department, in the school system, told her if she was unhappy with what she had, she could look elsewhere for a job. So, I thought, "Wasn't I lucky?" I talked to a woman (laughs) instead of a man.

So, I was at Madison for many, many years.

JonLee: When did you first start in Seattle? Do you remember your dates?

Sarah Luch: Yes, 1933.

JonLee: And when did you retire?

Sarah Luch: I retired in '71.

JonLee: From Madison Junior High.

Sarah Luch: I think I was there the longest of anybody. The last thirteen years I was a counselor.

JonLee: And you were telling me that only one time, in all your years of teaching, you sent only one student to the office. And, this is a remarkable record, I think.

Sarah Luch: Well, I was a tough teacher, a good disciplinarian. Let's put it that way. I should say a good disciplinarian rather than a good teacher.

But, one day I had a small class of ninth graders. I hadn't been there too long. So I said, "Well," I said, "I'm anxious to improve my teaching, and I'd like your honest criticism. I want you to write a paper, and not sign your name, so you can say what you really think. Because I want to know how you feel about the class." Oh, I wish I had kept those papers! Doggone it! (Laughs). I could read them over and enjoy them. (Laughs). There were three criticisms. Yeah, there were three criticisms that came up numerous times. One of them was I was too strict. And one was, I worked them too hard. And what was the third one? I was too organized. But I laughed at those criticisms, because they were (laughs) to me they were not faults at all..... But, then the good points. I wish I'd listed those. I got such a kick out of those. And some of them said, "I was so fair." "I had no favorites." "I treated everybody alike." "I was enthusiastic."

JonLee: (Sarah Luch had been my Physical Education teacher at Madison Junior High 1954 – 1957). I remember that about you too. Very democratic!

Sarah Luch: Do you? Well, I think it's deadly if you show favoritism in the school. Kids get wise to that, you know.

JonLee: Now, over your forty some years of teaching, well, it would have been thirty some, how did students change? How did the culture and students change?

Sarah Luch: Well, I think there's more freedom among students. They pay less attention to discipline, and want to do more things, when they want to do them, rather than follow your directions. But, yet that's a matter of training. I never had any problem having kids follow my directions. But, I know some did.

And, a Home Ec. teacher came to me, complaining one time. The kids sassed the teacher. And I said, "Now, that I can't understand." I said, "And I don't know what I would do, if somebody did that to me." "Oh," this woman said, "Oh, Miss Luch," she said, "They would never sass you. They have too much respect for you."

JonLee: Isn't that wonderful!

Sarah Luch: Yes. I thought that was a nice compliment.

JonLee: Now, you and I were talking about Schmitz Park, which is a very beautiful, old growth park, given by the Schmitz family to the city of Seattle Parks Department, (in West Seattle), and how, you're ninety-one, I'm fifty-seven. We've never

been in that Park. I've been down the driveway, in my car. But I didn't get out of the car.

Would you tell me how you perceived that Park, when you were teaching there?

Sarah Luch: How sad to think we have worked so many years in West Seattle and never visited the Park. Well, I've never been in the Park.

JonLee: You've never been there?

Sarah Luch: Yes. I've never been in the Park.

JonLee: It wasn't considered safe, was it?

Sarah Luch: Well, probably, at one time it was. But I think a few things happened. A girl was raped in the Park, one time. And I thought, "Well, that's no place to go alone."

JonLee: I know what else I wanted to get to – After you started teaching, you started traveling in the summer! Would you talk a little bit about the year and the time of traveling to China? 'Cause that's magnificent!

Sarah Luch: Well, in 1938, there were eight of us young girls went to Europe. And, that was before the war. Oh, we had a glorious time! And I thought, "Gee, this is for me!" I had borrowed money from my sister, so I paid that back as quickly as I could, and I started saving. I thought, "In 1939 I'm going to go to the Orient." Well, the Japanese moved into China. You know, there was a war on. People said, "You're crazy! There's a war going on, you don't want to go over there!" And I thought to myself, "If I don't go now, I may never have another chance!" And the thought of war didn't bother me at all. But people were concerned that I was foolish enough to do that. But I had the time of my life!

And, my sister who went to University that summer, said afterwards, "I wish I'd gone with you, rather than going to school." (Laughs). There were no Americans traveling. And the white people who lived in China at that time, were there because they were in business, and making money. They were so anxious to hear news from home, that they practically snatched you off the boat to entertain you. So I was wined and dined in so many places there. When I crossed from Japan to China, I was the only white person on the boat with the Orientals. There was a Sicilian newspaperman who thought it was his duty to look after me, because I was alone! (Laughs).

JonLee: How did he look after you? Did he dance with you?

Sarah Luch: No, they had no music. But he sat and chatted with me all the time.

JonLee: Okay.

Sarah Luch: And then he wrote me an introduction to the Italian Attaché' stationed in Peking. And he said, "Here's your letter of introduction. Look him up." In China at that time, when you entered the city gates for the first time, there would be a hundred rickshaw boys, all bidding for your services. You pick out one. And then he's with you twenty-four hours a day. He sleeps in his rickshaw, outside your hotel. He's on call twenty-four hours a day.

My rickshaw boy was with me all the time, and even at night, he slept in his rickshaw.

With this letter of introduction to the Italian attache', I had my rickshaw boy take me out to his home. We got in the rickshaw and went down the muddy road in the country.

With high stone walls on both sides and, I thought, "Where in the dickens is he taking me?" Finally we came to a gate, an opening, and we went through the gate. It was springtime inside, with a beautiful garden!

It so happened, his wife was at a party someplace. So we sat out in the garden, and had a drink, and waited until she came home. Pretty soon she came home and she joined us.

Oh, they were a charming couple! I guess they were Americans, I can't even remember. But anyway, this will sound kind of chopped up here, I should have my diary to check my facts.

JonLee: Oh no, that's okay. Impressions are..

Sarah Luch: Well, anyway, when I went to visit, I had a letter of introduction to another person. Usually you don't pay too much attention to things, but if you ever go to a foreign country and have a letter of introduction, you use it!

JonLee: Aren't they wonderful?

Sarah Luch: Yes. Well, we went out in this place, and the man was having an afternoon nap, and his manservant didn't want to wake him. So I left my name and address, and said, "I had come to pay my respects." I no sooner got back to the hotel, than my phone rang. And it was the Attache' who said, "Oh, I scolded my servant for not waking me up! So I missed you." But he said, "Come to dinner tonight; dress easy." I remember that expression, "dress easy." (Laughs) -- meaning informally. He arranged a dinner party for myself, American, an Austrian man, a Eurasian German girl, the most

beautiful girl I think I ever saw in my life – half German and half Asian. And I think there were, there were six of us anyway. And he took us to a Chinese place and we had twenty-two courses! And me, with my tremendous appetite – I sampled everything! And then he took us on the boat to – for a boat ride, in the Royal Lagoon. The Emperor's Royal Lagoon. (Laughs).

JonLee: Oh, my!

Sarah Luch: I was entertained so royally! In China. Just because there were no people traveling – no Americans traveling. So, I had the whole field to myself.

JonLee: When I saw that article in the *Pacific Northwest Historical Quarterly*, did I not see a picture of you on an elephant?

Sarah Luch: Yes.

JonLee: And where was that?

Sarah Luch: Uhh, It might have been Ceylon. (Pause).

Another picture was at a drinking garden, the Restaurant Lucerne. It was someplace in Switzerland. And this is the sister that is now over here in the nursing home. She's got Alzheimer's. And she's in the Foss Home. I went over there this morning before I came here. I think that was in Ceylon, but I'm not sure. (photo of Sara on an elephant).

Because I rode an elephant in several cities. I've ridden donkeys; I've ridden camels; I've ridden burrows; everything but an ostrich. (Laughs).

When I was in South Africa. it wasn't convenient at the time, or I would have ridden an ostrich.

JonLee: Now, since you were teaching, did you ever go back and get your Master's degree?

Sarah Luch: No, no, I didn't. I went to a number of classes. And, I'm just a couple of hours short, but at that time, I'd had enough schooling. I just wasn't interested. I should have been. It would have made a difference in my salary, but I wasn't concerned about that. I was kind of tired of school.

JonLee: Well, you traveled every summer that you could, didn't you?

Sarah Luch: Oh, Accredited, I must tell you about my trip! 1957, up to 1957, Seattle School Board gave you credit for travel. 'Cause so many people who go to Spain and study Spanish, go to Germany and study German and that kind of thing. Well, I went

traveling in 1958. And I thought, "Now, they're not going to give credit for traveling anymore." I just went for a good time. So, I really haven't any reason to (laughs), put in a bid. But, I took a chance. And, wrote a paper, on *The Kindness of Strangers to a Stranger*. I was so royally entertained.

And, the girl who typed it for me, afterwards, said, "Sara, you sounded like you had an awfully good time!" I said, "I did!" (Laughs). And I got three hours credit for it. And that's the last time they ever gave credit for these trips.

JonLee: Now, I wanted to ask you too, because the policy for a period of time, at least in the Northwest, was not to hire female teachers who were married.

Sarah Luch: That's right.

JonLee: But, I wanted to know what the attitude was, after that policy changed, towards single teachers? Since you were single.

Sarah Luch: Well, I had a very close friend, single, who was married..

JonLee: Unofficially?

Sarah Luch: Yes. I guess she didn't announce her marriage until, I think it was 1933, when they lifted the ban. But, I'm not quite certain. '33 or '34. But, there were a lot that got married, of course.

JonLee: And then they just hid the fact they were married?

Sarah Luch: I guess they let them, if they wanted to continue teaching, and were married, I think they continued, after that.

JonLee: After 1933?

Sarah Luch: I think that was the year.

JonLee: So, it was a very acceptable occupation for single women to go into?

Sarah Luch: Yes. Yes, at that time, yes. Now, if they were to fire all the married women, there wouldn't be anybody left! (any teachers).

JonLee: Right, right.

Sarah Luch: But, the sad thing, a lot of girls out of college, single, got jobs, and got married, and taught long enough to buy a new refrigerator or a new house or new car, or something. A lot of them didn't teach for many years. Not like the single ones who hung on. So there were a lot of short marriages at first. I think now, it's quite different, they're allowed to go in it and stay in it – married.

JonLee: Now, are there particular incidents or events that happened in West Seattle that you would like to have the historical society be aware of, during your time there? Because you lived some of the time in West Seattle, and some of the time, you said that you lived downtown and commuted out to West Seattle.

Sarah Luch: Yeah, I lived with a friend who was teaching, in a school, overlooking the beach. Not too far west of Madison, however. But, gosh, I can't think, we attended many community functions. They didn't have as many then as they do now. The Physical Ed. Department put on a pageant, or performance every year. And I think, now, they never in the world would do that. I had about six hundred girls, I guess in school. The school's around twelve hundred, I guess. Six hundred in an athletic performance, and I had them on the field at the same time. You blew a bugle, and they'd all perform something. Then you'd blow a bugle, and they'd do something else. Or you'd blow a whistle and they'd do something else. They were all trained, well-trained before hand. So that was a big performance –The Field Day.

And I'll never forget that! (Laughs). I couldn't any more do that now than (laughs).. I wouldn't want to.

JonLee: (Laughs).

Sarah Luch: But, our school programs were well attended by the West Seattle public. They had great respect for the school, and for the teachers. And all the school activities were well attended. We had a great PTA, and our Christmas Program was spectacular. We put it on two days, so everybody could see it. And there was a lot of school spirit, I don't think you see now. Although, maybe I shouldn't say that, because I'm not in the schools. But I just surmise that from what I've heard. The kids were dedicated to their school. And they thought a great deal of it. They took a lot of pride in it. I don't know if the kids do now or not.

JonLee: I couldn't tell you; I don't know. Depends, I suppose, on the neighborhood, and their family, and all of that.

Sarah Luch: Yes. Well, the family turned out and oh our Christmas Program was spectacular! And, it was kind of heart breaking, when they took away the Christmas Programs from the schools. 'Cause it was a great...

JonLee: They did?

Sarah Luch: Oh, yes. Now, Christmas time, (laughs), they get together, and maybe they sing, *Jack Frost*, or something like that. No mention of Christmas, which is kind of sad.

JonLee: Because of the different religions?

Sarah Luch: Yes. One Christmas Program, the fellow who played Jesus, was a Jewish boy. And he was so happy, (laughs), playing Jesus.

JonLee: Makes sense to me – Jesus was a Jew, historically.

Sarah Luch: To the kids of that day, school was everything to them at one time. Now, it's just one of the things.

JonLee: When you retired, what did you do? Did you stay in West Seattle, or travel widely?

Sarah Luch: Yes, I traveled. I lived on Queen Anne hill. Yes, I lived in a couple of different apartments on Queen Anne. But, I saved my money with the idea of taking a trip. And, so I've done a lot of them. (Shows me a world map of travels – all over the world). Unfortunately there were a lot of places I didn't have a chance to stay very long. But you pick up a lot of the flavor of the country, in a short stay.

Like Tahiti – in 1961 I was there for the first time. And, it was a charming place. And then I get over there again in '82 or 3. I couldn't get away fast enough. It's a French island and the French are out to rob you. You pay \$ 4.50 (four and a half dollars) for a cup of coffee. That kind of stuff. And hotels – unreasonable. They've taken away the colorful things.

Now, if you ever get a book that has anything about Quinn's Bar, read it. Quinn's Bar was a famous bar in Tahiti. (laughs). It's long gone now, but it has a ribald history.

JonLee: Oh, did you go there in '61? And '82?

Sarah Luch: Yes, (laughs). I was at Quinn's Bar. It wasn't there then (in '82).

JonLee: Was it a sailor's bar?

Sarah Luch: Oh, famous bar. I should say. For sailors. The French Navy comes in there all the time, and the Tahitian girls go gaga over them. (laughs).

JonLee: So, did you go there and hear stories? Do you know French?

Sarah Luch: No, no, I met an Australian man who entertained me and he said, is this being recorded? (laughs).

JonLee: Yes. Oh do! You can always cross it off. You have the editorial control to cross off what I transcribe.

Sarah Luch: (laughs). Well, the fellow said, "You got to go to Quinn's Bar, while you're in Tahiti." I said, "Well, I've heard of the place. I'd like to go." So, we went. It's a dance hall, and the sailors get pretty drunk and so do the women. But he said, "Now you got to go to the rest room." I said, "Oh?" He said, "Just walk across there and go through that door." So I went. (Laughs). Here was a room with water on the floor, and there was kind of a little bridge across, and you walked across the bridge to get to the ladies room, across the water. But here were the men standing around the edge all urinating on the walls. And there were waterfalls, and they were (laughs) urinating. Well when I found that, I backed out, and I went to my escort and said, "I don't think I have to go that badly." (Laughs).

There was a dance place out in the country called, Lafayette's, a loud, boisterous place. All the drunken sailors and Tahitian girls boarded the bus and went out to Lafayette's. My escort and myself made a mistake, we sat up by the driver. We should have sat in the back end! (Laughs).-- and listened to the conversations (Laughs). Anyway, we went to Lafayette's and about half way there, the driver stopped. Everybody got off. It was a rest stop. The men here; the women squatted there, and the driver came around and collected the fares. (Laughs). And then coming home, the same thing. He stopped midway for a rest stop and everybody got off and the driver came around and collected fares. (Laughs).

JonLee: So, you had a good time!

Sarah Luch: Oh, there were a lot of funny things that happened. You never think of them 'til you get started talking. (Laughs).

JonLee: (laughs). But I think that's what life is – you string together your stories, or events, and the vivid things that you remember.

Sarah Luch: And some that might have seemed a little tragic at the time, are funny now.

JonLee: Like what? What was tragic?

Sarah Luch: Ahh, Well, I don't think of anything, but something that wasn't funny at that time is now funny.

JonLee: Right. It changes. Are there any other events or things about West Seattle, that you'd like to record here?

Sarah Luch: (Sighs), well, I don't think of anything. Ummm.

JonLee: Okay, then let's call it a day.

Sarah Luch: I think of the Christmas time. I lived with a girl who had a house overlooking the Sound. And, one Christmas, I was going to have a cocktail party. And, she'd ordered a Christmas tree, and left it out on the lawn for two days. We set it up that afternoon. Then put the lights on, and I flicked them, I guess, on about five o'clock, I think. And she decorated it in the morning. Well, after the lights warmed up the Christmas tree, the smell just about drove us batty. Some dog had cocked his leg when it was out in the yard. And I thought, "What do I do?" 'Cause I can't have that in here. (laughs). Well, I thought and thought. I'd try it. I had a bottle of pine oil, bath oil. So I sprayed the Christmas tree with this pine oil stuff. And then when the lights warmed that up, beautiful pine smelling. People came in and said, "Oh, how nice and outdoorsy it smells!" (Laughs).

JonLee: (Laughs). Oh, that's great!

Sarah Luch: I think of that – never bring a tree home early, and leave it out in the yard. (Laughs).

JonLee: No, no. (Laughs). Now, how'd your cocktail party go?

Sarah Luch: Oh, fine, fine. You couldn't smell a thing. And I thought, "Oh, the day was saved by a bottle of bath oil!" (Laughs).

JonLee: Okay, what I'd like to do is thank you for today's taping,

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