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Interviewee's Name: Mickey Barker

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INTERVIEWER

INTERVIEWEE

Jon Lee Joseph 12/30/00
Date

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Maxyne Barkes

Seattle, Washington

December 30, 2000

for

Southwest Seattle Historical Society

by

JonLee Joseph

Maxyne Barkes

Interviewed by: JonLee Joseph

for the Southwest Seattle Historical Society

December 30, 2000

1st Oral Interview

Seattle, Washington

JonLee: - the 30th of December, 2000. This is JonLee. I'm interviewing Maxyne Barkes Barks who had a business at the West Seattle California and Alaska Junction for thirty-five years she taught accordion lessons. When I thought about coming to see you, what I remember very vividly is your wonderful laughter. It's a very distinctive laugh that's almost contagious. Whenever you laugh it must make people around you smile.

Maxyne Barkes: Yes, well they do. Yes. 'Cause I get so tickled that I can't--
[laughs]

JonLee: Would you talk to me about how you set up your business of teaching accordion and where it was?

Maxyne Barkes: Well, I taught for Spano for about five or six years and when he moved out to Burien, I opened my own studio. I said, "I'm not going out to Burien, that's for sure."

JonLee: So your studio was right above, what, Liberty Printing at the Junction?

Maxyne Barkes: No. It was above the appliance store.

JonLee: Appliance store. Was that where the grocery store went in then?

Maxyne Barkes: I can't, I can't tell-- It's got a [inaudible] right beside it, you know. You come along and you swing up and onto California Avenue from that light that's on the corner there. And you go about, how far? Not far, I mean, and there's a little road that's all paved and everything beside that building, so--

JonLee: The alley, you mean?

Maxyne Barkes: Yes. And, let's see, I faced the, my studio faced the parking lot which was nice, I liked that, rather than face the Avenue.

JonLee: And where did your students come from?

Maxyne Barkes: All over West Seattle.

JonLee: How did you get your business?

Maxyne Barkes: I put an ad in the paper.

JonLee: And you ran that business for thirty-five years?

Maxyne Barkes: Approximately thirty-five years, yes.

JonLee: Did you have recitals?

Maxyne Barkes: Oh, did we ever have recitals! And you know, I put my, when Bob got sick, that's when I closed my studio and he passed on. And--

JonLee: My condolences.

Maxyne Barkes: And I was two years of doing nothing but stare out the window, you know. I kinda had a dingbat brain 'bout that time. And I didn't play my accordion, I didn't do anything. I broke up the studio, brought home the files, and the music and all that. But I didn't teach during that time. And, what did I start to tell you in the first place? Oh! I went to play and I can't play! [laughs] I mean, without errors, sloppy playing, which I wouldn't allow my children to walk on the stage if they didn't know it backwards, too.

JonLee: How is it that "Lady of Spain" got to be a favorite--

Maxyne Barkes: Oh, who knows!

JonLee: --accordion number? I just think it's great. I love it to this day.

Maxyne Barkes: Do you? Well, I rarely gave it out unless they asked for it. If they asked for it, I had it. But it's not my favorite tune.

JonLee: It isn't?

Maxyne Barkes: No.

JonLee: Now where did you learn to play the accordion?

Maxyne Barkes: From Spano.

JonLee: And who's Spano?

Maxyne Barkes: Joe Spano. He was, he played for, who's that local dance band for so many years? On the highway between Seattle and Tacoma.

JonLee: Oh, out by the Spanish Castle?

Maxyne Barkes: That's it! Spanish Castle! He played there, the accordion, in the group. And then taught during the day. And I was one of his students.

JonLee: So you didn't learn the accordion until you were an adult?

Maxyne Barkes: Huh-uh. I could play the "Moonlight Sonata" on the piano if I had it to practice, you know, keep up on it. But I had not played at all. This is just despair, I tell you. I tried to play and the pieces I walked out on the stage and didn't have any music or anything you know, memorized. Can't play 'em. Not clean.

JonLee: Well, you're practicing right? So you will be able to.

Maxyne Barkes: Uh-huh. But he went out there and I just took my students with me. I asked if I could and he said, "Sure." So I just kept my students that were there that I had been teaching all the time and he was in the big room and I was in the little room. And that's the room I kept.

JonLee: Where were your recitals?

Maxyne Barkes: Well, there was a church down here that looked kindly on us and we had it there.

JonLee: Down here on Alki?

Maxyne Barkes: California. No, on California Avenue.

JonLee: Okay. Do you remember which one?

Maxyne Barkes: I think it was a Baptist Church, I'm not sure. I really can't be sure.

JonLee: Up by the Post Office?

Maxyne Barkes: Yes, right in there. And they thought we were fun.

JonLee: Well, if you didn't hand out "Lady of Spain" which ones did you hand out for beginning students?

Maxyne Barkes: Oh, for beginning students? Oh, waltzes that's one of the biggest thing. They had a, I had a series of accordion music

that they went from Book One to Two, Book Two, Book Three and so on. And out of those books there was some nice music. And even the simplest stuff you know, little kid comes out there with a big accordion on, you know, grins to see if he can find his mother before he starts to play. [laughs] Everybody thought was, delighted with the recitals and we always had a full house.

JonLee: That's great. Now, you must have started when in the '60's? In the 50's?

Maxyne Barkes: Oh, no. I started in the '40's.

JonLee: In the '40's. Because your friend Betty Boyd played, I think, did she learn from you?

Maxyne Barkes: Mm-Hmm.

JonLee: And when she lived, she lived in an apartment in a house on Shore Place that I lived upstairs. She lived downstairs and had her accordion--

Maxyne Barkes: Oh, and played.

JonLee: And tried to teach me a few things one time. In the '40's how much did you charge for a lesson?

JonLee: \$10 a month.

JonLee: For a lesson a week?

Maxyne Barkes: A lesson a week. That's \$2.50 a lesson.

JonLee: Your prices went up.

Maxyne Barkes: Yes. They did go up. But when they went up I closed my studio. 'Cause I didn't think, I wanted it to be the same, I'm a creature of habit [laughs]. If I was going to teach I wanted to be able to teach them without them having to quit because there wasn't enough money going around, you know. And Lord already knows, I went through that, through the Depression in Yakima. Oh. I can remember standing on line with my mother in the food line where they gave you canned food, government canned stuff, you know. And I didn't want that to happen so I just closed my studio and the kids, besides that they had dropped off a little and I didn't have as many. I had, one time I had, see, well, every month I would give a recital during the wintertime and I had enough for a crowd with their families and friends with the number of students I had. So usually I had ten, or ten or twelve in the recital. So I must have had forty students. But it was fun. I loved it.

JonLee: I would think you'd make a marvelous teacher. Because you're so interested yourself in the music and in people and you enjoy, my memories of you is that you always enjoyed the social aspect of--

Maxyne Barkes: Yes, I did. And it was a kind of a blow to my better students you know, because there was nobody to go to. And now you can't even buy an accordion in Seattle!

JonLee: Where did you buy accordions then?

Maxyne Barkes: Well, I got it from an accordion company back East.

JonLee: The only person I see with an accordion these days is Stan Borson once in a while.

Maxyne Barkes: Yes and he leaves a lot to be desired! [laughs]

JonLee: His humor is not my humor. But he's still out there performing. So, as different instruments and different music comes into vogue, what was the heyday of accordion music? Back in the '40's you think?

Maxyne Barkes: Yes, the 40's and '50's.

JonLee: Is that with the dance bands?

Maxyne Barkes: '40's and '50's. And I've forgotten what that man's name was that played out, I think you mentioned his name. Who played out at the-

JonLee: Spanish Castle?

Maxyne Barkes: Yes.