

**JANET SKADAN INTERVIEW**

**For The Southwest Seattle Historical Society at the Log House Museum**

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**JonLee:** This is JonLee. I'm meeting with Janet Skaden, the granddaughter of Ferdinand Schmitz. Today is June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000. We're live! Now, would you please, Mrs. Skaden, talk about what it was like to be raised on the Schmitz Estate? When we met last time, you told me about cherry trees and sweet peas, and a little lake.

**Mrs. Skadan:** Yes. To have that much property to roam in, is the delight of any child. But we spent as much time on the hillside behind the houses and on the beach, as we did in the yards. We spent our summers on the beach. The tide brings in such fascinating things that a good deal of our time was spent there. It was an ideal place to grow up.

**JonLee:** Would you talk about your grandfather bringing back cherry trees from Japan? And what happened, and how people came to visit, please?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Yes. I'm uncertain of the detail of his....the primary reason, but, he did cause to have cherry trees delivered to the United States, and he planted them in his garden. And, there must have been a dozen, sprinkled throughout the garden. And, it attracted Japanese people in the spring to come and enjoy the blossoms. And they were excellent guests to have. They came and treated the garden with respect, and enjoyed the blooms of the cherry trees. The trees were beautiful, and it was unusual in that time to have that many in a single place.

My grandfather had a great love of gardens, and his garden was his whole life, when he retired. He made a permanent job out of keeping care of his garden.

**JonLee:** Would you talk about the lake with the island in the middle?

**Mrs. Skadan:** The lake with the island in the middle was part of the landscaping. And, it lent interest to the garden, and the garden was on different levels, and the lake lay at the bottom of the hillside. The island in the middle was, I suppose, ten or fifteen feet around, and was always planted with flowers.

**JonLee:** Did you boat over there?

**Mrs. Skadan:** No.

**JonLee:** How did you get to the island?

**Mrs. Skadan:** There was a little bridge, probably a twenty-foot bridge that connected the main part of the garden with the island.

**JonLee:** Last time we met, you talked about when your grandparents asked you to go down and get sweet peas.

**Mrs. Skadan:** Yes, we were not an integral part of his garden exactly, but we did try to help when we could. And I remember one of my simple jobs was to cut the sweet peas. And, he meant to cut every blossom off. And, it kept them blooming for a longer period of time. And we'd have little tasks like that, that helped him. Or, we'd go down and help pick the corn. And, he was a great believer in fresh vegetables and so I'd go down and pick the corn, half an hour before we'd go back up and eat it. So, it was really fresh.

**JonLee:** Just to go back into the genealogy: Your mother was Emmy Hartman, who was the daughter of Ferdinand Schmitz?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Uhm huh.

**JonLee:** Okay. And what was your grandmother's name?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Emma.

**JonLee:** But, you lived on the estate also. It's quite a large estate.

**Mrs. Skadan:** We never called it an estate. We just lived in a house. It was a big yard. And it was primarily, my grandfather's property. And my uncle lived on the other side of us. And my grandmother lived some distance from us, but next door. The largest piece of the property was held by my grandmother and grandfather.

**JonLee:** Would you talk about that place in the woods, with the Johnny jumps ups, that you mentioned last time we met?

**Mrs. Skadan:** We had our special places in the woods behind the house, where some of the wild flowers grew. And unfortunately, there were also nettles there, and we were frequently stung with the nettles. My mother would put baking soda on us, to try to bring down the itch.

**JonLee:** You said that sometime later, you went back to look at that place that had been so magic to you, and it had changed.



**Mrs. Skadan:** I don't think it had changed, but I think I had changed. The trees that seemed towering were just big trees, they weren't the special places where we felt we could hide from the world and would take our lunch up and eat in special little places.

**JonLee:** Do you think that's because you'd grown taller, and the trees were in relation to you?

**Mrs. Skadan:** No, I think it's that a child has a better imagination than an adult does.

**JonLee:** Would you speak, for a moment, about the gardener that you had there, and the beauty that he created.

**Mrs. Skadan:** That's really not accurate.

**JonLee:** Please correct me.

**JonLee:** Oh, I was thinking of the Japanese gardener.

**Mrs. Skadan:** He came after my grandfather died. I think. But, he was not at all responsible for the design of the garden at its prettiest.

**JonLee:** That was more your grandfather's style of doing.

**Mrs. Skadan:** Uhmhm. And this was during the Depression, I grew up, really. I was born in 1923. And so the 30's were....

**JonLee:** Hard?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Hard, but I think that's one reason I felt so blessed to live where we did. Because there wasn't a lot of money to do other things, and you had to make do with what you had. And we had our own beachfront and our own woods to play in, and our own garden, and a vacant lot down the street where we could play baseball. I remember that. I never was very good at baseball.

**JonLee:** Could you please remind me of the gardener's name, and his wife?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Yoshio, and Shagino was his wife.

**JonLee:** During the war they were interned, but didn't they back after the war?

**Mrs. Skadan:** They were interned at Tulle Lake and came back after the war.

(Telephone interruption).

**JonLee:** When they came back from being interned, did they come back and work on the estate. I call it an "estate", but the family property?

**Mrs. Skadan:** They started out working first for my Aunt and Uncle. It was later that they worked for my grandmother. And they came back after the war, but they were

changed. We did a sinful thing to those Japanese people, they were every bit as good citizens as everybody else. And it took something out of, particularly Shagino that never could be replaced.

**JonLee:** I agree. Now, did you ever play in Schmitz Park?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Yes. We played in Schmitz Park. I wouldn't say we played in Schmitz Park; we went there.

**JonLee:** Would you speak about the intent of your grandfather in leaving that park to the city?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Yes, it was his intent, that in the city, there'd be a small reminder of what the community looked like before it was logged and settled. And it was to remain natural, and to let the natural processes work. If trees were blown down they were left to rot and sprout new trees—act as the mother trees. And, that plantings should be confined to just native plants. Which has been hard to maintain because there's a natural inclination of seeds to be carried. And people who dump grass clippings and things, and so it's been a difficult thing to accomplish. But it is a remote park, and its safety has always been a concern.

**JonLee:** Would you speak, a moment, about your grandfather, who came from Germany, and what he did in Seattle? Do you remember what part of Germany he came from? You said his wife came separately, and they married here. Would you go over that please, for the tape?

**Mrs. Skadan:** I don't remember the town that they came from in Germany. It strikes me, it might have been Dussburg. But, I don't recall. But he came over as a young man, and started out on the eastern seaboard where he left a German ship, and came west, and ended up in Seattle, where he started a hotel.

**JonLee:** The Butler Hotel? (It had been at 2<sup>nd</sup> and James).

**Mrs. Skadan:** Yes, and when he was established he felt he could support a wife, and he sent for his German wife-to-be, and she arrived in Seattle shortly after he had been burned out in the fire. And, they started over again, and invested in property. He bought property and ran the hotel, and retired at a very early age. But, kept an office, kept his interest in properties. But he made his house and his garden his life, in retirement.

**JonLee:** Did he rebuild the Butler Hotel in Pioneer Square?



**Mrs. Skadan:** Uhm hmm.

**JonLee:** After the fire, he rebuilt the hotel?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Uhm hmm. Yes.

**JonLee:** That must have been a terrible fire to see – the whole of downtown Seattle, just up in flames.

**Mrs. Skadan:** Uhm hmm. My grandmother didn't see it. She came after it was over with.

**JonLee:** Are there particular memories of West Seattle that you would like to share here? You went to Alki Elementary, Madison Junior High, and West Seattle High (School). You were, as I recall, a middle, a half semester ahead, or behind. Would you go into that please, because not many people understand that system. And, it's no longer an option for people.

**Mrs. Skadan:** You could enter, depending on your birth date. You could enter in the winter or in the fall. If you entered in the fall you were in the 1B class, and then you became a 1A in the wintertime. The next year you were a 2B and a 2A. And so it ended up that you ended up in high school and graduated on a half a year basis. And so people generally did graduate in June and either advanced themselves half a year, or held back half a year. And it was a complicated system and didn't work very well.

**JonLee:** Could you please go into here, some remarks about your grandfather's philosophy that women should also be educated, and how that impacted on your family?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Yes, my grandfather was a great believer in the dignity of work. And he felt that any job worth doing was worth doing well, and he also felt we deserved opportunities, and he saw to it that his only daughter, received a fine education at the University of Washington. And she was permitted to do things that were advanced for that time, and for what women were generally expected to do. But she also was taught to embroider and do womanly things.

And he believed that you should work for yourself, but you should give a day to your community. And he was a contributor through the Park system to his community, and he felt that this was a land of such opportunity. I think if you'd come from a structured society like Germany was, this must have seemed like a land of milk and honey.

**JonLee:** So, when it came time for you to graduate from high school, it was expected that you would go on to college, was it not?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Yes.

**JonLee:** And you did.

**Mrs. Skadan:** I graduated from the University of Washington in Political Science. Grade School was a wonderful time in those days you were friends with your teachers and you had them to dinner and they were really a part of your life. My memories of elementary school are very warm. And I still remember most of my teacher's names from that time, where I've forgotten all but outstanding high school teachers.

**JonLee:** And, do you remember who the principal was?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Mr. Cassidy. And he married Miss Ragadah. And that was quite something!

**JonLee:** She was another teacher?

**Mrs. Skadan:** She was a first-grade teacher. And I thought they were all elderly ladies, and in truth, they were fresh out of college when they taught me (laughs), I think. But I felt very protected with my teachers.

**JonLee:** Is there anything else you would add, about particular memories of West Seattle or that area, or people who you knew there.

**Mrs. Skadan:** Well, I remember I tended to have my school friends, and then we had our neighborhood friends. Most families had, just one car. So, there wasn't the freedom to travel that young mothers have today. My mother always had a car, but we played with the children in the neighborhood in the summers and on weekends, and didn't travel far afield. But we walked a lot.

The public beach at Alki was a place where we went in the summertime. But played mostly on the beach in front of our house, because there were five or six people our age. I had a sister just three years older than I was. She and I were very good friends, and spent a good deal of time together, especially on vacations, and summers.

**JonLee:** Was JoAnn Fulton a friend of yours at that time too? She lived in that neighborhood.



**Mrs. Skadan:** Yes. JoAnn was a friend. But JoAnn was older than I, and probably not that many years, but it seemed vast then. I knew her sister, Madelyn. Madelyn was younger than I. So, JoAnn was sort of glamorous, because she was older.

**JonLee:** Okay. I thank you very much. Unless there's more that you would like to add. (Break, pause in taping). Please speak about the log booms.

**Mrs. Skadan:** Oh, speaking about the beach as a whole, we'd time our visits to the beach frequently to catch the Tacoma boat that ran from Seattle to Tacoma, and put out a big wake and sent some interesting waves ashore. And we'd love to be out on a raft when the waves came in. And that was the way we could time ourselves, to what time of day it was when the Tacoma boat went by. I can't remember the boat's name.

**JonLee:** Was it *The Flyer*?

**Mrs. Skadan:** I don't remember. But, a salt-water beach is a magic place. Because every tide brings something different in and occasionally a log boom would break and those big logs would come ashore, and we would call the lumber company involved and they would come and retrieve those logs. It happened twice that I remember.

**JonLee:** But in the meantime, did you play on them?

**Mrs. Skadan:** Oh yes! Not the big ones, they were too big to move. But we'd play on any driftwood that came in. And we'd create our own rafts, which fell apart of course. We'd go down and look at the treasures. The low, low tides were our very favorite time to go, because we'd walk out and see sea creatures that we'd never see at any other tide. And that is still – you can see, when the tide is low – a lot of people go to the beaches and explore. It goes on today. There will be a very low tide right after the fourth of July.

**JonLee:** And that beach there (in front of the former Schmitz property) has little chitons that are like little abalone. They're turquoise. It's a very old, old creature. They grow on that beach. They must have grown there in your time. They still do today.

**Mrs. Skadan:** I'm sure they did. And, we had a lot of clam diggers then. And then the beach was declared polluted, so, that stopped. I don't know what the condition of it is now. I think it's all right.

**JonLee:** Well, because Metro has come in with a treatment plant, but until that time just the long pipes running out to the reef, to the shelf, to take out the sewage. Up until the 50's or early 60's. Okay? Thank you very much.



**Mrs. Skadan:** When you ask me about what I remember about West Seattle, it's the special times that I especially remember were when I was young and in the grade school level. It was comforting. It was a home place for me. I felt comfortable in West Seattle. And, I wasn't as aware of the rest of the city as you become as you get older. So, it remained my home base. And because my family lived always in the same house, my Mother went there are a bride, from her house next door. She lived there until she died, at age eighty-eight.

And, when you've lived in West Seattle, and seen the sunsets, and the beauty of the mountains – it's hard to live anywhere else. It's kind of a separate enclave in the city, and was a very wonderful place in which to grow up.

**JonLee:** Thank you. Thank you very much. You're live.

**Mrs. Skadan:** One of the favorite things we did as children – my sister and I would gather some of our friends, and there would usually be four or five of us, and we'd take sleeping bags down to the lake in the garden, and put our sleeping bags out, so we could watch the shooting stars. It was a magical time. And I remember it was years before I understood what a shooting star really was. And I didn't understand then why they came at mostly, certain times in the summer. It was one of our special things to do – to sleep outside down by the pond in the garden.

**JonLee:** Thank you. Thank you very much.

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