

Madeline Hanley (Farnsworth House)

Interviewed by DuWuan Johnson , Eric Avalo, and Alex Menjivar (2004)

My name is Madeline Hanley. My nickname is Lynne, but now they call me "Mady." I was born at 9 Preston Court in Dorchester on August 24, 1922. I had seven brothers and sisters. Preston Ct. was a dirt road with only six houses on it when I was growing up — our house, two other houses and a row house ... about 18 families in all. I lived with my father, my brothers and sisters, and my aunt. It was a large family, and I was in the middle. We didn't have a car because we didn't have the money. We always had a cat and a bird. Like Tweedy and Sylvester, but the cat never ate the bird!

When I was young, my mother was seriously ill, then she died when I was ten years old. My older sister was only thirteen at the time, so we had a tough time. I always tell the kids, stay close to your mother, because you'll never miss her until she's gone. Two of my brothers died, one when he was seven, and the other one only lived for two weeks. But the only sickness I ever had was problems with my ears. I had bad earaches, and swimming made it worse.

I went to the Boston Public Schools. I went to the Christopher Gibson School in first through third grades, in fourth, fifth, and sixth I went to the Rochambeau, and then to the Grover Cleveland. I loved school. I went to Dorchester High School for Girls, and I graduated high school in 1939. I didn't learn a trade, but I could sew and I learned secretarial skills. I wish I could have gone to college, but we didn't have the money back then and I needed to go to work. I've worked since I was thirteen years old. First I worked in a laundry, then I worked in a defense plant during World War II making turrets for helicopters.

I like all of the seasons ... I use to love summer best when I was a kid because I liked to swim. We went swimming at Savin Hill and in South Boston over by City Point. I don't really like to swim in fresh water, I only like salt water. What's my favorite kind of music? Well, I don't like Rap. My grandson has tried to get me to like it, but I don't. I like Irish music best, and then I like cowboy music. I also like fifties and sixties music. We use to jitterbug! My favorite song is probably Moonlight Serenade by Glenn Miller. My favorite color? Well, I like all soft colors — pastels, like pink, lilac, and light green. I like more muted colors.

Did I ever play sports when I was your age? I don't know whether you'd call it sports, but I use to like to roller skate and go dancing on roller skates. Yes, I went to ChezVous quite a few times.

What was my life like when I was young? When I got home from school — I was the middle one — so I had to put on the supper for the family. Then I'd read a book or do my home work. I liked reading. After school sometimes we would play games outside like Relievo and tag, or we'd go roller skating or swimming. Mostly, I played with my girl friend and my sisters.

Most of my friends are dead now, but when I was your age we use to hang ... well, not hang, we didn't call it "hanging" then, but we would sit out on the front stairs and sing and smoke cigarettes. I had a few girl friends in high school. Most of my friends were Jewish and they lived in another part of Dorchester. Back then we all got along very well. There was none of this black and white issue then.

Yes, my father was strict. There was no smoking or drinking allowed. We had to be in at ten o'clock. I did get in trouble once with my father because I skipped school. I went into downtown Boston with one of my girl friends. I guess he found out because I wasn't in school. They must have called him. When my dad found out, he yelled at me and then he grounded me. Another time, I almost got in trouble. When I was working at the laundry, I came home at lunch time. We were all downstairs smoking, then my aunt called down and said, "Come on up here, I know what you're doing down there!" So we stopped. It wasn't good for us anyway.

When I got out of high school I had more responsibilities. I had to bring home money to help the family. I had to pay for my own clothes, so I started working as soon as I got out of high school. The best job I ever had was at the defense plant. I liked working on the big machines, and I like doing the war work.

During the Second World War, my boyfriend was at the Battle of the Bulge, and he was taken as a prisoner of war. I use to write to the boys overseas. We would go to the USO to dances and everything. So I met my husband when he came home from overseas, and we got married in 1948. We lived in Dorchester for a while, but my mother-in-law owned a house in Jamaica Plain. When an apartment came up vacant, we moved over here. That was in 1955, and I've been here since. I worked up there on Centre Street for twenty years. I worked at a department store, and at Jones Card Store.

I have two adopted children. Maryanne was six months old when we adopted her. And my boy, Joseph, was two years old. My daughter lives in Baltimore now, and my son lives in Pennsylvania. I hear from my son all the time. My daughter has remarried, but my two grandchildren, Jared and Jennifer, live with their father in Newton. Other family? Well, my sister still lives up in Maine, but the rest of my brothers and sisters are all dead. I have lots of nieces and nephews in California, Maine, and Washington state. One is in Texas, and some other ones are in West Virginia.

The biggest adventure I ever had? Well, I guess just that I'm still living at eighty-two years old! And, I think going up in an airplane and flying over the ocean to an island was wonderful. It was beautiful in the islands. I'd like to live there, but I think I'll be living in Jamaica Plain for the rest of my life!

My best advice to you is to stay in school and get a good job, have a good career. I worked since I was thirteen years old. But I'm retired now and I'm enjoying life. I play

bingo, and I like the computers. I go dance with the ladies auxiliary. And I go up to Maine anytime I can to visit.

This locket came from my sister. My sister died a year ago. She ordered this just before she died, and it came in the mail the day she was buried, so they gave it to me. Her picture is on my drum. That's her there with my friend and me.