

Louise Mehren Spicer

Interviewed by Joan Fabris
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I lived in Upper Saddle River from when I was born, 1941 until I got married in 1964. I now live in Ramsey. My father moved to Upper Saddle River during the Depression. He was still living with his parents. They bought some land in Upper Saddle River and built a small temporary home while my father was building a larger home with the intent some day to sell it and make a profit. However, when he met my mother his plans changed and he decided to move into the house. He and my mother are still living there on Lake Street, just before Carlough Road as you head towards Ramsey.

When my father first moved here many of the roads were still dirt roads, including Carlough Road and Union Avenue. Even when I was a child there were many dirt roads. My father worked as a carpenter during the Depression and my grandfather worked for the WPA when they were building Route 17. My father remembers watching the men as they were building it. A lot of the work had to be done by hand. By using manpower they would pull out huge stumps using ropes. They sawed trees with hand saws. That was in the late 1930s.

My mother lived in Ramsey most of her life. She remembers when there was no Route 17 and there used to be a trolley going through Ramsey. Transportation patterns were very different. There weren't that many cars. People depended on the train. My grandfather had always commuted to New York City by train. He didn't need a car. My mother lived on Spring Street when she was small. There's a business there now. When she was twelve her parents moved to South Central Avenue. She told me they used to take rides through Upper Saddle River and it was like going into the past because there were so few houses and it was very undeveloped and really country.

When I was small there were still few houses. There were three houses on Lake Street within walking distance. It was lonely for a child. There weren't a lot of playmates readily available. I played with Ann Carlough across the street. She was a little older. Her father Atley Carlough had been mayor right after the war. She had an uncle Weaver Carlough who had a small farm. I remember one time as I was about to go out the front door to play, we heard this thundering sound and looked up to see Mr. Carlough's plow horse coming through our yard. My father grabbed my younger sister out of the way. Mr. Carlough would go after his horse with his pickup truck and follow it until it got tired and was ready to be led home. It was a big old horse with great big feet.

When I was a child we all had to chip in and help with the chores, cleaning house and doing dishes. I don't know if it is different today. We had a regular routine that my mother charted out. It was good training for when we got older. My mother's first washing machine was electric but it was small and involved handwork. It wasn't very good. When my sister was born my father bought a Bendix, an automatic front-loading type that was quite modern. We didn't have a dryer. Everything went on the clothesline.

I started school in 1946. I had turned six in November. There was no kindergarten so I started in first grade. We had an indoor sand table at school and blocks but mostly we went right into a first grade curriculum. My teacher was Miss Bogert and the school was the one-room school that is now the center of our Borough Hall. It was heated by a huge potbelly stove that burned wood. Miss Bogert had to feed the fire herself or have one of the older boys do it. She was janitor, nurse and whatever else was needed. We had two outhouses, one for boys and one for girls. We had a woodshed filled with wood that was cut up by one of the men who came to do custodial work after hours.

When school started Miss Bogert would signal us by ringing a bell in the bellfry and when recess was over, she would ring it again to signal us to come in. She would let some of the older children ring it. The books and materials that Miss Bogert used were very sparse. I guess the Board of Education just didn't have the financial backing then that they needed. I can remember the report cards. They really weren't designed for grade school. They were high school reports cards. She would cross out the hard subjects and write in "Reading, Writing, Spelling, etc." I understand her salary wasn't that good either.

She was a great nature lover. She had a corner where she had a great collection of stuffed lizards, seashells, rocks, bird's nests, hornets nests. She would take us on nature walks. I remember going up to what is now Old Chimney Road. There was an old ruin of a house there, with just the chimney left. It had been a home and there were lilac and azalea bushes there. We spent a whole day there once, collecting wildflowers and having our lunch there. Upper Saddle River was rich in nature at that time. You could walk in the woods at leisure.

I always felt close to nature in every season in Upper Saddle River. In the spring there were the dogwood and apple blossoms. The dogwood in the woods used to be luxuriant. I remember looking for frogs and tadpoles. Summer was haying time. I lived down the street from a small farm, the Zarachowicz's. They used to come down and cut the hay in the field next door to my parent's. I used to get a hayride. I remember the smell of the hay in the barn. There were brooks around and we went swimming in many of them. It was mucky but it was clean water. Where my parents lived, there was a large swamp area behind them with springs that ran into the brook. I learned how to swim in the Saddle River, down off Lake Street behind Mettowee. There was a big swimming hole there.

Zeman's dog Brownie would come to school every day. He would sit amongst the rows of desks or he would fall asleep in the sun. He went to the Green School House for years. There was a black dog who came too. Brownie would sit on the steps and wait for Miss Bogert.

We had an old pump in the front. We had a sink in the schoolhouse for washing your hands but it had a tank over it that had to be filled. It was always cold water naturally. I remember in the winter we would go out in the snow at recess and when we came in Miss Bogert would hang our mittens on the wood stove.

We were allowed to bring our sleighs to school. There was a big hill behind the school. It was great fun. I remember once a boy had the brilliant idea that he would go down the hill in the woods because the other hill was too crowded. He got about halfway down and a tree stopped

him. In the spring I remember watching Mr. Berdan getting his horses out and getting ready to plow. We would watch him cutting hay and gathering it. He had one white and one brown horse. We had Maypole parties. Parents would come and watch. I'm not sure that we did it properly but it was great fun.

I remember seeing an indigo bunting in town and bluebirds. One of my childhood memories is the sudden sound of bulldozers, chain saws, well drillers that came with the influx of housing in the early 1950s. The woods and farms were taken over all over. It depleted the birds, foxes, deer and other wildlife.

The water table has gone down with all the building. A lot of the old residents have shallow, hand dug wells. My parents did. There's was only 14 feet deep but the water was pure. The wells often go dry now in the summer. Miss Hicks on Union Avenue does. She has to get water from neighbors in the summer now. My parents finally got a drilled well. The purity of the shallow water was in jeopardy too.

We used to pick blackberries behind our house and also up where Orchard Road is. There was a barbwire fence there and a whole row of blackberry bushes.

Miss Bogert was a firm disciplinarian but she probably had to be to keep order. She was very fair and very loving to all the children. I wasn't afraid of her but I respected her. I had maybe twelve children in my first grade class and we sat in two rows of desks. Then there were maybe ten in second grade, and for some reason only three in third grade and the rest were fourth graders. The group made up a good-sized class. She would teach one grade at a time, give assignments, she had a real routine.

When I started third grade, they needed more than just the one-room schoolhouse. They moved the third and fourth grade into what was the Borough Hall, across the street where the firehouse is. That was about 1948 [It was more likely about 1949.] It was the same situation as the other schoolhouse, the outhouses, the wood stove, and then some sort of gas heater that made a big blowing sound. Miss Bogert taught third and fourth grade and they hired an assistant to teach first and second. I think her name was Miss Snack. When I got to fourth grade, I guess I was about halfway through the fourth grade when they opened the new Bogert School [1951]. It was a four-room school with two grades in each room, all the way up to eighth. They had kindergarten in the one-room schoolhouse. I graduated from eighth grade here in 1955. There were fifteen kids in the graduating class that year.

When the Bogert School was built was when Mr. Cavallini came to Upper Saddle River. He taught the year before it opened in the Chapel and went on to become principal and superintendent of schools. They had fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades in the Old Stone Church Chapel while the Bogert School was being completed, two classes upstairs and two downstairs. I never went there. I went right from fourth grade into the new Bogert School.

I went to Ramsey High School. It was extremely crowded. It was on split sessions. I had to go in the afternoon. I didn't get home until after five o'clock at night. Classes ended at five and then we got on the bus. There were so many towns sending. There was Saddle River, Allendale,

Waldwick, Franklin Lakes, Wyckoff, Mahwah, Oakland. The enrollment had gotten huge and they had to tell the towns they could not longer send students. When I was a senior Mahwah High School was being built. Before that Ramapo Regional was built for Franklin Lakes, Oakland and Wyckoff. Upper Saddle River went to Mahwah for a while. My class was the last to graduate from Ramsey High School. No, it was my sister Nancy's in 1963.

Since my parents only had one car, we couldn't depend on my mother to take us places. So we walked places or rode bicycles. We probably stayed around house more than today. I did a lot with my sisters even though there was a 4 and 9 year age difference. We did a lot together as a family. We created our fun, building tree houses, playing with old cardboard boxes, making up games. My father showed us a lot. He had a carpenter shop. He would let us use his tools. We built models. We could experiment and use our own creativity. I built my own rabbit coop.

We always had pets. We had a dog and a cat plus chickens, New Hampshire Reds and Bantams and White Rocks. I was responsible for taking care of them early in the morning, giving them water and mash before I had my own breakfast. After school I would collect the eggs they had laid. We also had rabbits and pet squirrels and hamsters. My sister had a horse but as the town was developing, it became harder and harder to find a place to ride.

My mother was concerned that I didn't have children to play with so she wanted to start me in Sunday school so I could socialize with other children. I was about three when I started to go to Sunday school at the Methodist Church. At that time that was all they had. They had no regular service, no minister. John Kroner, who lives next door to the church, was the Sunday School Superintendent. He ran the Sunday School for many, many years. Many children from town went there. Every summer we had the Sunday School picnic which I guess was the stereotypical idea of a Sunday School picnic with the watermelon pit fights and soda pop and ice cream and games. Simple things. It was a lot of fun.

John Kroner taught a Bible lesson each Sunday but there was not a regular service there until the mid 1950s. By then there were enough people sending children there to have a small congregation. They got some of the parents together and negotiated with the Methodist Church administration. They sent a retired minister who agreed to start the church there, a Dr. Lesourd. They had a piano but they decided to buy an organ. I had taken piano but my father thought it would be good if I took organ lessons. After about four lessons I became the organist at the church. I was about thirteen then and I was organist until I was about 25. I enjoyed it.

I did go to Anona Park but we were never members. I went with friends and I remember the firemen's picnics there. I rode my bicycle there a few times. I was just there a couple of weeks ago. The old pavilion is still there and the old dressing rooms. They're not in very good shape.

I was in Girl Scouts when Mrs. Fleming started a scout troupe here. I had joined the year before she started them but we had to go to Saddle River. Mrs. Deleeuw up on Lake Street toward Montvale was her right-hand helper. Mrs. Fleming would have us at her house for hikes, nature activities, building terrariums, things like that. She made it very interesting for the girls. She came here with a knowledge of scouting. She did a wonderful job.

We had a group in our church, the Methodist Church Fellowship, but it was hard to replace the leadership for the youth groups. A lot of my social activities were with the church though. In grade school we went to the Ramsey movie theatre. Then they closed it and we went to the Suffern movie house. That was a beautiful theatre.

When I was growing up there were some beautiful houses along West Saddle River Road and beautiful maple trees. The houses looked very permanent, like they had been there a long time. The town had a serene appearance. Cider Hill would be white with apple blossoms in the springtime. Mr. Kroner used to have a huge apple orchard up by Skyline Drive, and peach orchards. I can remember the smell of those apples in the hot fall sun. Off of Pleasant Avenue down at the base of the hill was a beautiful place with a brook. We used to follow it into the woods and have a picnic there. My sister and I both liked to draw. We would take our sketch pads there and draw the rocks and the trees.

There was an old cellar hole across the street from my parents. We used to imagine there was buried treasure there. There was an old well there too that was all filled up with stones. Someone told my father that it had been an old slave home. It was in the woods right where Roxbury comes out to Lake Street. Also there was another slave home way back where Lilline Lane is, a Mr. Pompey lived there. Back in the woods there were maizes of stone walls that were built back when the land was cleared for farms. There was an abandoned orchard back behind Roxbury towards Lambert's. The deer used to come in to eat the fallen apples.

When I was a child I remember your father, Chief Rehair, was our crossing guard at school. One thing I remember about the early fire system, they built these fire holes in the beds of the brooks that were a water source for the fire trucks.

I taught for seven years in Upper Saddle River Schools, six of them at Reynolds and one at Cavallini when they had first grade classes there. I taught first grade.

Schools have changed a great deal since the one-room school. There are so many more layers of administration and lots of work beyond the classroom. Teachers don't have as much latitude. Parents were very much behind Miss Bogert. If she chastised a child, they would support her.

In many ways it has been sad for me to see the changes in Upper Saddle River. I will always remember it as it was when I was growing up. It's funny. When I was teaching the students used to love to get me to talk about the one-room school and growing up in Upper Saddle River. They liked to hear the stories.