

Agnes Kutkiewicz



This interview in March 1982 is part of an Oral History of West Islip project sponsored by the West Islip Public Library. I am Ethel Morris of the library staff and I will interview Agnes Kutkiewicz, who was born in West Islip in 1909.

When did your parents come to West Islip?
March the 15th, 1907.

And why did they come to West Islip?
For better living and for work.

Where did they come from?
Well father came from New Jersey and mother came from Amsterdam, New York.

Amsterdam. And were things bad in Jersey?

Jersey was very bad. A time they had a depression they used to call it a panic of 1907 which was very hard for...uh, no work of any kind, industries were really not moving or anything at the time and the time of the President Taft or whatever they said was very hard. So that's

why father wrote to his cousin, can't you guys give us any jobs here, and he says well you can come down in the spring they used them as plenty of work on the estates. And that's what made it come here to West Islip.

Oh. When were your parents married?
October the 15th, 1908.

Where?
In West Islip.

And where was the reception?
The reception was held over to Kachunoski, Mr. and Mrs. Alan Kachunoski. His cousin's place.

The house?
The house, yes. Right.

Is the house still...
No, its demolished.

Demolished, oh. And where did your father work, on which estate?
McGirdy's, in West Islip.

And that started on Montauk Highway?
Montauk Highway all the way down to the Great South Bay.

Starting around...what street?
Eaton Lane as far as I would say DeForest Avenue.

And then it ran all the way to the Great South Bay?
All the way to the Great South Bay, yes.

Where Sequams is now?

Yes where Sequams is right now.

Did he work on any other estates?

Yes he worked for Keats and he worked for...

Minor Keats?

Yeah Minor Keats and Ed Arnold and Amy Arnold.

The McCurdy estate was where he worked mainly. How did Mr. McCurdy make his money? What was his business?

Well, I really don't know. I really don't remember that.

Did you ever visit the estate?

Yes I did. The days my father took over on Sundays. While he had to, you know ...

He worked on Sundays?

Yes, mornings and evenings. Different calls, what he had to do, feeding the animals, and the chickens. And he used to drop me off at the big house where the help was very nice to me and treated me with cake and a glass of milk.

Did he work seven days a week?

Seven days a week, every day.

Everyday? He didn't have a day off?

No, not those days.

What were his hours?

His hours were from 7 to 5. That's what they worked

And how much salary did they get?

About 15 dollars a week at that time.

Unbelievable. When did your father purchase his first car?

Uh, the year of 1920.

What kind of car was it?

A Mercedes, purchased from Ed's Auto Estate. It was a second hand car.

How much did he pay for it?

150 dollars. Hahaha.

And what were the roads like?

Dirt roads.

Do you remember when the first street light went up.

Yes, in November of 1920. We were very glad to see them at that time. Which people were fighting to get the lights on.

A lot of excitement?

A lot of excitement, yes it was.

Were your parents active in religious affairs?

Yes, they were. West Islip St. Peters and Pauls Church, of course we had no churches in West Islip that was the first one we had. Most of the people in West Islip went to St. Josephs in Babylon.

And when you were growing up, what were some of the things you did to have fun?

Well, it's just like all the children, always looking for different things to do during the summer, and as Dave was saying, you know used to go hooking berries, and swimming...

Where did you swim?

Eaton Lane, used to be the Great South Bay. This was where we went swimming in our days.

Do you remember one incident in your childhood that stood out?

Oh yes, oh yes. In the winter the sports was usually skating.

Ice skating?

Yes ice skating. Looking for different ponds that were frozen that would be safe you know to go on. So we happened to go to the Wagstaff's and this was where they used to cut the ice and put in storage for the summer months.

In the ice house?

In the ice house. As I was skating, well they were cutting the ice and putting it in the trucks to put it into the ice house while I happened to wanted to jump just like the other children you know over the hole and I slipped. But thank god there was a couple of boys there that they pulled me up. I was half ways in, I maybe would have never got out if it wasn't for them. Haha. Mrs. Wagstaff happened to be there at that time and she told her man to take me to the big house you know to get dried off. They were very nice to me. He sat there for a couple hours. And I was anxious to get home and afraid to tell my mother about what happened to me. And she never knew and never told her.

Afraid to tell your mother when you get into trouble?

Well yes, I was, because we were always punished at that time.

You got into trouble even if it wasn't your fault?

That's right, that's true. Haha.

How about in school, were the teachers very strict?

Our days the teachers were very strict. Our days, it seems to me we did have nice times, playing and, but it isn't like today that you can get away with everything. But years ago when you went to school and if you were bad you were punished for it.

How?

Well, a little horsewhip. Haha. I mean, a little uh whip factory over here on John Street and once in a while Mr. Smith would stop and pick up a few switches, she'd have it handy, and anything that we did wrong we got punished. And she'd bring some up to Mrs. Fellon too.

What were some of the things the children were punished for?

Well, just like every little thing they did you couldn't get away with you know like the children do today.

Do you remember anything about the Depression in the 1930's. Did you family suffer during the Depression?

Well, my father did. He didn't have work for about 3 or 4 years. And different people went to the town of Islip to get you know a little help. A lot of people went there to get relief work, little flour or something and my father just went there to get a couple days job. You know to help him out. He owned his property and he owned his life insurance, he couldn't get no help from them what-so-ever. He came home and he was very much upset over it. Finally when things went a little better and we got out of the debt and everything.

How did he get along if he didn't work for 3 or 4 years?

Well, whatever they had. Some of the things they had to mortgage a little bit, you know, the lights were good. And after that, when he owed a few dollars he went to the bank, took the money and paid everybody off and went back to work.

Did you raise any food to help?

We always had a nice big garden, we had our chickens, we had our ducks, we had our pigeons Pop used to have. And plenty of fruit trees and cane you know so really during the summer we did very well.

What about fuel for your house?

Well fuel was wood. It was wood fires. And cold. Plenty of woods where you could get all the wood that you wanted. And so that's the way we lived, with kerosene lamps, pump water...

Got through a difficult time...

Yes. I guess that's pretty good, isn't it.

And if you had to live your life over again, would you live in West Islip?

Yes, I would. I love West Islip. And I would never get out of here. I really do like West Islip. And I love all the many people that I've lived with. They're all passed on. But there's a few of us left yet and you know you got somebody when you go out shopping or you go out and you know these people, and it's a community that you wouldn't want to leave, especially when you get older.

Thank you so much for a very interesting interview Agnes.