

Jane Kutkiewicz

This interview on March 10, 19982 is part of an Oral History of West Islip project, sponsored by the West Islip library. I am Ethel Morris of the library staff and I will interview Mrs. Agnes Kutkiewicz and her sister-in-law Jane. Agnes was born in West Islip in 1909 and Jane was born in West Islip in 1914.

Morris: Jane, where were you born?

Kutkiewicz: I was born at 232 Higbie Lane. The house is in the area where "Turf and Tree" is.

Morris: Still standing

Kutkiewicz: Still standing

Morris: Were you born at home or in a hospital?

Kutkiewicz: No I was born at home.

Morris: Oh you did say, was there a hospital here?

Kutkiewicz: Yes, the Southside Hospital was situated at that time at George and Cooper St. where the Babylon post office is now.

Morris: In Babylon?

Kutkiewicz: In Babylon before the Southside Hospital was built in Bay Shore.

Morris: But you were born?

Kutkiewicz: My mother was attended by a mid-wife and my birth was never recorded for that reason.

Morris: Did you have problems with that I imagine.

Kutkiewicz: Yeah, as I got older and found that I needed a birth certificate and so forth. I went through the process of getting affidavits from god-parents or people that were still could vouch for my birth, and then it was recorded in the town of Islip and a birth certificate was issued.

Morris: Lucky those people were still alive. That's interesting. What were your mother's responsibilities as you remember when you were growing up?

Kutkiewicz: Well she was busy at home taking care of her family and boarder at that time because there were many unattached and young married men here without their wives. Their wives were still in their native lands and these men needed homes and they would board with a married couple and a household could take up to 3, 4, 5 boarders and they would be fed and taken care of.

Morris: And your mother was responsible for all that?

Kutkiewicz: Yeah.

Morris: How much did a boarder pay for room and board at that time?

Kutkiewicz: \$3 a month.

Morris: Three dollars a month for room and board, quite a difference. Did your mother have any duties in the household different than what women today would have?

Kutkiewicz: Besides the usual cooking and cleaning and washing and so forth

Morris: Cooking and cleaning, anything unusual?

Kutkiewicz: She used to make her own soap



Morris: Soap, how did she do that?

Kutkiewicz: Well, I remember that any fats that were around were always dumped into some container, a big container, and so forth. She accumulated enough fat..

Morris: Fat from what?

Kutkiewicz: From cooking from pig slaying at that time. Everyone had their pigs and they would have salt, they would salt the pork and in the cooking there was always an accumulation of fat. As I remember it would be done outside and boiling of this fat and adding lye to it and whatever else, I don't remember but I know it was a dangerous process because we were always warned to keep away from the lye. And then it would be put into pans and then it hardened and cut into bar, squares, whatever and the soap was used for everything, washing clothes, you hair.

Morris: That was quite a chore; she had to build a fire outside and first start boiling it up. Boy that will keep you busy. What were your responsibilities or duties as a child?

Kutkiewicz: Well, primarily always there to help mom and then my sister and I would go berry picking in the woods and the fields, the wild strawberries, the blueberries, the blackberries, wild cherries to bring home.

Morris: The woods were filled with berries around here, oh wonderful.

Kutkiewicz: Right, then my mother would make pies, jellies, so forth. And in addition to that in the summer there was no, we were not in school, we went to take the cows to pasture and spend the day watching the cows until milking time and during that time to pass the time away we would go hunt for turtles, scratch our initials and dates on their backs.

Morris: Scratch your initial on the bottom side of a turtle?

Kutkiewicz: Yeah, and look for it the following year. See if you're going to find your own turtle. Many time we found them. The same turtle would hang around the same places we did.

Morris: Sounds like you were never bored.

Kutkiewicz: Oh we were never bored.

Morris: What are some of the games you used to play?

Kutkiewicz: Hide and seek, that was a standard; hit the can, jump rope, shootin' marbles.

Morris: Did you have a lot of toys as a child?

Kutkiewicz: No. I remember one Christmas; my aunt came to visit from the city and brought us, my sister and myself a doll each and that was the biggest thing. At that time they had the dolls with the eyes that opened and closed.

Morris: So toys were not a big thing in your life those days.

Kutkiewicz: No

Morris: It was just fun.

Kutkiewicz: Fun.

Morris: Um, what year were you married?

Kutkiewicz: 1935.

Morris: Where?

Kutkiewicz: St. Peter and Paul's Ukrainian Orthodox Church on Higbie Lane.

Morris: Still on Higbie Lane?

Kutkiewicz: Still on Higbie Lane

Morris: Can you describe a typical wedding in those days? Some of the things that were different than today.

Kutkiewicz: All the weddings, took place in homes or the one community hall that was on Hawley St. and that was booked prior to 1920 I believe.

Morris: They started from the house?

Kutkiewicz: They started from the house and musicians would be there.

Morris: At the house?

Kutkiewicz: At the house, sometimes local men could play an instrument, a violin, a trumpet, but anyway, they would lead the bride out of the house. And the parents would lead the bride to the church and usually the parents had some lesson to tell the bride not the couple and from the church we go to the place where the reception would be held. Could be in the backyard or in the home or in the hall

Morris: Were large weddings ordinary in those days?

Kutkiewicz: Yes, compared, because they included the whole neighborhood; the whole neighborhood was small

Morris: The whole neighborhood was invited?

Kutkiewicz: Yeah, and uh, prior to the wedding the couple, the young couple would go house to house, door to door and verbally invite the people, their relatives, friends and neighbors to the wedding.

Morris: So there were no written invitations, just all by word of mouth?

Kutkiewicz: Well maybe there were people that did it differently but this is the way I remember it being done.

Morris: And did the neighbors participate in the preparations and all?

Kutkiewicz: Yes because, there was no catering, so all the food was prepared by friends, neighbors, relatives so forth and brought to the place of the reception. I know at my wedding the chickens were taken to a bakery in Lindenhurst to be roasted and then brought to the hall.

Morris: Fascinating - what was the wedding cake like?

Kutkiewicz: It wasn't wedding cake as we know today. It was a home-baked, yeast dough elaborately decorated with roses of the dough. Some people that were really handy would make little birds and decorate this kind of a tiered tall what we called a ??? and on the top of the, it could be anywhere from a foot to two feet high.

Morris: A yeast dough, like a bread?

Kutkiewicz: Yeah, bread

Morris: It was a bread?

Kutkiewicz: Yeah, it wasn't a cake but it was a sweet dough, a sweet bread dough. And the top always had a some kind of a stick or something from it was attached green vines and ribbons and so forth falling over this tall home baked yeast dough bread, uh, cake. We call that the wedding cake.

Morris: And it was cut up and served?

Kutkiewicz: Oh yes it was part of the wedding.

Morris: At every wedding?

Kutkiewicz: Right at every Ukrainian wedding.

Morris: Jane Kutkiewicz thank you so much for sharing some of your memories of the early days in West Islip, that was fascinating.