

(S.P.) "How did you come to be Steve Petro"  
Oral History

(Mary) "Well, I went down there from Cassilan, MI with a friend of mine. He was looking for a job and I was going to look for a job, so we did. We went and stayed with my sister and I found a job doing housework for a civil engineer and his wife. They were very, very good to me. They were wonderful people."

(S.P.) "What year would that be?"

(Mary) "That was Interview with Mary Heiser  
Marquette, MI 4-3-89

(S.P.) "Before the depression started."

(Mary) Subject: Life in Milwaukee and Chicago in the 1930's  
And then I went to visit my friend in Chicago. She coaxed me to quit my job and go back there and work, so I did. I stayed with Anne and got a job at a phonograph recording company. I was working there when the depression hit. When people were losing all of their money On Oct. 7, 1929 when the Stock Market crashed. And my girlfriend used to work at Western Union and she'd send me a telegram. She'd say: "Somebody just jumped from the Hotel Stevens or one of those high tall buildings in Chicago. They lost their money so they just couldn't back it. So I have telegrams, I'd get telegrams from her. She only worked ten blocks away from where I was staying. And she'd tell me, another one jumped, must have lost all of his money. So that started the depression down in Chicago, when they'd have food lines, oh my gosh."

(S.P.) "Did you keep your job through the whole.....?"

(Mary) "Yeah, I was there until the factory went broke. So then I had to go hunt for another job and the only thing I was qualified for was housework. So I got a job doing housework. Again, I worked for this Jewish family and they were very good to me. And I stayed there for about a year."

(S.P.) "How much would you get paid?"

(Mary) "Oh, seven dollars a week."

(S.P.) "And how did that compare to the factory work?"

(Mary) "Well, when I was working at the factory, I used to make \$20 a week. And then out of that, I paid my board and room, street car fare, bus fare, whatever."

(S.P.) "O.K., then after Chicago, where did you go?"

(S.P.) "How did you come to be in Milwaukee?"

(Mary) "Well, I went down there from Caspian, MI with a friend of mine. He was looking for a job and I was going to look for a job, so we did. We went and stayed with my sister and I found a job doing housework for a civil engineer and his wife. They were very, very good to me. They were wonderful people."

(S.P.) "What year would that be?"

(Mary) "That was in 1928."

(S.P.) "Before the depression started."

(Mary) "Oh yes. I stayed there for about a year and a half. And then I went to visit my friend in Chicago. She coaxed me to quit my job and go back there and work, so I did. I stayed with Anne and got a job at a phonograph recording company. I was working there when the depression hit. When people were losing all of their money On Oct. 7, 1929 when the Stock Market crashed. And my girlfriend used to work at Western Union and she'd send me a telegram. She'd say; Somebody just jumped from the Hotel Stevens or one of those high tall buildings in Chicago. They lost their money so they just couldn't hack it. So I have telegrams, I'd get telegrams from her. She only worked ten blocks away from where I was staying. And she'd tell me, another one jumped, must have lost all of his money. So that started the depression down in Chicago, then they'd have food lines, oh my gosh."

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(S.P.) "O.K., then after Chicago, where did you go?"

(Mary) "I went back to Milwaukee. And I worked in a hospital there for ten years. I learned how to run all of the machinery, in the laundry and when the woman retired, I ran the laundry."

(S.P.) "How old were you?"

(Mary) "I was born in 1911, so I was in my twenties."

(S.P.) "What was Milwaukee like?"

(Mary) "Oh, I like Milwaukee. I liked it when we used to go to Washington Park a lot. They had a nice zoo there. And I'd go to the library a lot. I just liked Milwaukee and I had a lot of good friends there. I worked with 3 or 4 of them from Iron Mountain. And their still living in Milwaukee. We used to take a lot of trips to Iron Mountain and rent a cottage for a week or two."

(S.P.) "How did you travel?"

(Mary) "Well, one of the girls had a car, so we'd come up North in a car. We'd go to Sagola, Channing, Iron Mountain and that's where we'd rent that cottage. Near Iron Mountain."

(S.P.) "What were the roads like then?"

(Mary) "They were pretty good. They weren't bad. No we took a lot of trips up there Hilian and her car. And then when the world's fair was in Chicago, we took a couple of trips to Chicago. We went to the World's Fair. And I had may two brothers come to Milwaukee and I took them down on the North Shore Train. They really enjoyed themselves."

(S.P.) "Did a lot of people travel by train then?"

(Mary) "Oh yes, train and bus. Yes I used to go to Chicago a lot on that North Shore."

(S.P.) "What did you and your friends do for.....?"

(Mary) "They all worked at the hospital."

(S.P.) "And what did you do in your spare time?"

(Mary) "Oh my gosh! What did we do? We'd go to movies. We'd go to the beach in the summer time. Tan. We'd go to dances. We used to go dancing three or four times a week."

(S.P.) "Pretty good night life, huh?"

(Mary) "Yeah, well, we didn't mingle much with men, but we had a good time. We danced a lot. Then, during one of those years I met Liberace when he was playing in the basement of the Plankington Arcade. We'd go down there and order probably a beer or a drink and he'd play any song we asked him to play."

(S.P.) "Was he a nice man?"

(Mary) "Yeah, he was a nice young man. He was very courteous to us and as I said, if I had known he was going to be so famous, I would have asked for autographs."

(S.P.) "How old was he then?"

(Mary) "He was just out of school. I think he was about our age, maybe younger. Yea, I think he was younger. But, Oh, could he play the piano. Just beautiful."

(S.P.) "Was he dressed flamboyantly then?"

(Mary) "No, no. He didn't dress like that then. It wasn't until he was famous that he started to dress that way."

(S.P.) "He was just a normal guy?"

(Mary) "Uh-Huh. And his mother and brother were still living then. And I guess they went with him to California."

(S.P.) "He was Milwaukee originally?"

(Mary) "Yeah, he lived in West Allis, yea, that's where he grew up. And his brother George died before Liberace."

(S.P.) "Was there anything else for fun in Milwaukee? I know they have a baseball team now."

(Mary) "Oh, I never went to baseball games. I didn't like them. I don't care for baseball. We'd go to basketball games at the school. And we'd go out to eat a lot. They had some nice restrauents in Milwaukee. They had Maeter's, the German restrauent. Oh, they had good food."

(S.P.) "Was there really a distinct separation in the German section of town."

(Mary) "Well, Milwaukee is like any big city. On the South side they had a lot of Polish people, I can't remember what the east side was, then there was a section that was German. Swede. I liked Milwaukee. It was clean. They didn't have too much of the problems that they have now. You know...."

(S.P.) "Crime?"

(Mary) "Yes."

(S.P.) "What was the city like? As in buildings. Were there a lot of skyscrapers?"

(Mary) "They didn't have the tall buildings like in Chicago. But they had quite a few taller buildings. They had a building where we used to go to operas a lot."

(S.P.) "Operas?"

(Mary) "yes. I went to Carmen. I saw Madame Butterfly. I enjoyed that a lot. We used to go quite a bit. And we'd go to stage plays at the different theaters. They had one at riverside that they would bring in different acts and we would go down there and see what they were. It was nice."

(S.P.) "Did they have streetcars in Milwaukee at the time?"

(Mary) "Yeah. When I first went there, they had streetcars. When I left they were using buses. I came up here in nineteen-thirty something."

(S.P.) "Did a lot of people have cars then?"

(Mary) "Oh yeah, my brother-in-law had a car and a lot of his relatives had cars."

(S.P.) "Would you say that most of the people had them?"

(Mary) "Well, no. Well I don't know. There was a lot of cars in Milwaukee and a lot of the people who worked at the hospital where I worked had cars. Like my friend, She had a car. And we'd go all over. But I liked Milwaukee. I thought it was a nice clean modern city. And I'd like to go back there and live, but I don't think my daughters would be very happy if I moved away from here. But, no, I like Milwaukee."

(S.P.) "I know in Chicago in that era, there were problems with organized crime."

(Mary) "Yeah, all the crime was terrible. But I was glad when  
(Mary) "Huh-ho. It was terrible. When I went to Chicago the first time, I was afraid to get off the elevator train because I thought the gangster would be there to shoot me. Oh it was terrible. She was waiting down stairs and I was waiting upstairs where the elevator train went and finally she came up stairs. And she said, 'there you are,' and I said, 'well I was afraid to come down, I thought the gangsters were going to get me. That Valentine Massacre was only about ten blocks from where my girlfriend lived in Chicago. She lived right off of Hawstead and Lenter street in Chicago."  
(S.P.) "Where these things happening all of the time? Was it big news?"  
(Mary) "Oh yeah. I was actually; afraid to go to Chicago, because I didn't know what to expect. But, there was a lot of crime in Chicago. And of course after the Stock Market crashed and they had all of these Soup Kitchens. People had lost their jobs. There would be long, long, lines of people waiting to be fed."  
(S.P.) "Did you live at the houses with them?"  
(S.P.) "In Milwaukee, was there any organized crime?"  
(Mary) "Yeah, I lived right at their home. It was an elderly office down town and people would bring inventions to him. Then he would get  
(S.P.) "A much safer city."  
(Mary) "Yeah. I liked Milwaukee much better than I did Chicago."  
(S.P.) "How did the people of Chicago feel? Were they pretty conscious of.....it was Al Capone running it then. Wasn't it?"  
(Mary) "Uh, yeah. he lived on the West side of Chicago. My friends, they didn't know him, so they didn't comment one way or the other on HIM."  
(S.P.) "Was it recognized that...?"  
(Mary) "Well yea, they realized that he was King of the..."  
(S.P.) "...he pretty well ran the city."  
(S.P.) "What year would that be?"  
(Mary) "That was in 1937. So I got an apartment over here on Cook Street and my brothers and I stayed there for quite awhile. And then I met Harold and we went to Marinette, Wisconsin and got married. I never told anyone for a long long time."

(S.P.) "Yeah, all the crime was terrible. But I was glad when I lived, then I went back to Milwaukee. I worked at the hospital for ten years. And then the hospital I worked at went bankrupt. A woman used to run it. Her husband was a doctor. She had two sons. She ran this hospital all those years and I remember during the depression, people couldn't pay their bills, so we didn't get our paychecks every month, sometimes it would be two, three months without a check. And I went in there one time in her office, Mrs. Hickey's office, and asked if I could have borrow some money on my check. And she, threw up her arms and said, what do you need money for, you get your meals, you've got a room, you don't need money. She wouldn't give me any either. I suppose they didn't have any. Those were hard times. But they eventually got back to normal. For a while. Then the hospital had to close up. Then I got a job doing housework out in Fox Point. This was an exclusive area, where people that were just rich lived. And the people I worked for, I guess he was a millionaire. They were nice people."

(S.P.) "Did you live at the house with them?"

(Mary) "Yeah, I stayed right at their home. It was an elderly couple. He used to have an office down town and people would bring inventions to him. Then he would get patents on them and take them to different factories and have them manufactured. He was a smart man. So, anyway, that is what he did until he died. He died while I was working there. Mr. and Mrs. Schultz."

(S.P.) "Did you stay on there?"

(Mary) "I stayed on for awhile and then I quit and came up North."

(S.P.) "Why did you come up North?"

(Mary) "Well, I was going to establish a home for my two brothers. John had just got done with high school and Steve had six months to go and decided he had had enough. So they needed a home. So that's what I came up here for."

(S.P.) "What year would that be?"

(Mary) "That was in 1937. So I got an apartment over here on Rock Street and my brothers and I stayed there for quite awhile. And then I met Harold and we went to Marinette, Wisconsin and got married. I never told anyone for a long long time."

(S.P.) "Back to Milwaukee. I'm not sure the exact year they repealed Prohibition, but you must have gone through that."

(Mary) "Yeah, I remember that they repealed Prohibition, but I didn't drink much so it didn't matter to me."

(S.P.) "But the other people."

(Mary) "Yeah, well when you went out, people would have drinks."

(S.P.) "Even when it was illegal?"

(Mary) "You know, I've forgotten all about that."

(S.P.) "I know there were illegal clubs."

(Mary) "Oh yeah, but I never bothered much with clubs or anything. No, we didn't."

(S.P.) "Who were the big movie stars of the day?"

(Mary) "Oh god, that was in the 30s. Cripe, I can't remember. you should have asked me that fifteen years ago. i can't remember who they were. if I heard some of them mentioned it might bring it back, but right now I couldn't. Would that be Jackie Kugan? Is he an old timer? Who else?"

(S.P.) "Were these mostly pictures with sound?"

(Mary) "Yeah, but they were all black and white. There was no color. That's a long time ago. That's fifty years ago. There was a little theater right near the hospital. We used to go there to movies. Black and white."

(S.P.) "Was the brewery a big employer in Milwaukee?"

(Mary) "Oh yes. They had Schlitz brewery, Pabst brewery, Blatz brewery. Schlitz was right near the hospital. Three blocks away. They employed a lot of people. And Blatz was about eight blocks from where I worked. And Pabst was on the east side. And then there was another one that was on the west side, Gedelman's. There was a lot of breweries in Milwaukee."

(S.P.) "What did they do during the Prohibition Period? Did they just shut down operations?"

(Mary) "Oh yeah, it would be packed."



(Mary) "Gee, I didn't know. I wasn't really interested enough to care. So I don't know. Wait a minute Schlitz closed up, but the other breweries kept on going for quite awhile."

(S.P.) "Maybe they were shipping it out of the country."

(Mary) "I don't know."

(S.P.) "And later on in the thirties, they were producing and employing a lot of people?"

(Mary) "Yeah they did. they had a big employment. I know there was a lot of people that worked at Schlitz."

(S.P.) "Did they have a lot of boats coming in?"

(Mary) "they used to have boats coming in, yeah. As a matter of fact one time they had a boat that came into the river on the south side of Milwaukee and we were allowed to go aboard it. Boy was I scared because you had to go up that ladder and you look down and see water. And I was so afraid that I would lose my balance and fall back in the water like I did when I was a kid, a little baby, in the ocean."

(S.P.) "You don't swim?"

(Mary) "Oh, I took swimming lessons, but I never cared much for the water."

(S.P.) "Speaking of Swimming, you said you used to go to the beach a lot."

(Mary) "Yes, Bradford Beach."

(S.P.) "Did the women wear the suits with the stockings underneath, then?"

(Mary) "No"

(S.P.) "What kind of suit would they wear?"

(Mary) "No stockings on there is there. You can see her belly button."

(S.P.) "Quite a bit like suits that you see now."

(Mary) "Yeah, but we didn't have any bikinis."

(S.P.) "Did a lot of people go to the beach?"

(Mary) "Oh yeah, it would be packed."

(S.P.) "What did they have at the fair in Chicago?"  
(Mary) "They had all kinds of things. They'd have theaters, people from Hollywood, exhibits. John, my oldest brother would go where the orchestra was playing. He wasn't interested in any exhibits. He only wanted to hear Henry Bussy."

(S.P.) "Was he a big star?"  
(Mary) "Oh yeah. He sure was. That was quite a big fair. Chicago World's Fair."

(S.P.) "Did they have amusement rides?"  
(Mary) "Yeah, they had amusement rides, they had animals there."  
(S.P.) "Like a circus?"  
(Mary) "Yeah it was good. I went there quite a few times."  
(S.P.) "How long was it then/"  
(Mary) "A couple a weeks anyway."  
(S.P.) "Was this a show where they demonstrate new inventions?"  
(Mary) "Yeah, they'd have different booths. And have all that stuff on display. People would lecture they had a lot of good food. It was interesting. John and Steve enjoyed it."  
(S.P.) "Were there still people using horses in the city or small towns at this time?"  
(Mary) "There were a few horse delivery wagons. They'd have one or two horses pulling the wagon."  
(S.P.) "What types of things did they deliver?"  
(Mary) "Groceries or Furniture."  
(S.P.) "What did the average person eat at this time? I'm sure there was no fast food."  
(Mary) "Oh yeah there used to be places called Webb's. It's still there now. And different hamburger stands."  
(S.P.) "Did you generally eat a more balanced meal."

(Mary) "Oh yeah. We used to go out into the restraurant and have a meat, and potato salad. Like when I was in Milwaukee, we'd go to Maeter's. That was good food. Or else we'd go to a Chinese restraurant. Charlie Toy's. And have Chines food."

(S.P.) "Is there a Chinatown in Milwaukee."

(Mary) "No, not really."

(S.P.) "There's one in Chicago."

(Mary) "Yeah."

(S.P.) "Did you go down there?"

(Mary) "No, I was on the South side of Chicago once all the while I lived there. And I was afraid to go to it."

(S.P.) "Why is that?"

(Mary) "Because, you'd pick up the paper and someone would be killed on the South Side. It kind of scared me. I was afraid to go down there."

(S.P.) "The people that were getting killed were usually gangsters shooting each other, right?"

(Mary) "Yeah, across the street, firing at each other. Just like that Valentine Murder. That was terrible."

(S.P.) "When Al Capone was arrested for tax evasion, do you remember that?"

(Mary) "No, that was a long time ago."

(S.P.) "Mary Heiser, tape two."

(Mary) "Oh, is that so."

(S.P.) "Anyway you were saying about Al Capone."

(Mary) "I don't remember much about him. But like I said, that was a good many years."

(S.P.) "But the mood was pretty scary then?"

(Mary) "He didn't bother us much you know. I can't remember how long that lasted. They had a lot of their troubles on the west side of Chicago."

(S.P.) "O.K., we can leave that alone. One thing I've have wondered about. Did you have regular refrigerators or did you...Would it be something like we have now?"

(Mary) "No, we had refrigerators then. Yeah. Let's see now. One place I stayed we had an icebox with ice in it."

(S.P.) "Would you have to buy the ice?"

(Mary) "Yeah, then this one place I worked at in Chicago. They had an icebox too. She used to get ice once or twice a week. I can't recall."

(S.P.) "Where would you get it?"

(Mary) "Well they had regular icehouses, you; know. Just like in Milwaukee down by the lakeshore. Lakeshore blud. They had a regular icehouse down there. They'd cut big chunks of ice and store it in this one building they had down there. They'd keep the ice in there."

(S.P.) "How would they keep it from melting?"

(Mary) "They must have had some kind of refrigeration in there."

(S.P.) "Did you go and buy your ice from the store?"

(Mary) "Well the iceman used to go around to the neighborhoods."

(S.P.) "Oh, they delivered."

(Mary) "Yeah, they delivered. Yeah, I had an icebox and I would get ice once a week and they delivered it."

(S.P.) "How much did it cost?"

(Mary) "25 or 50 cents. Depending."

(S.P.) "Was it a block?"

(Mary) "Yeah a big block of ice."

(S.P.) "How much would groceries cost?"

(S.P.) "The city looks pretty much the same?"

(Mary) "Yeah, it's about the same. Milwaukee was a nice city to live in, it really was."

(S.P.) "What kind of ethnic divisions did they have?"

(Mary) "Well, for us. Usually I always got my meals where I worked. So I didn't really have to buy groceries. But you could get a quart of milk for a nickel. And a loaf of bread for three cents. A pound of round steak would be thirty. And now, you pay a dollar and eighty or two dollars. But then your wages weren't much either. When I did housework, I used to get six, seven dollars a week. And my board and room."

(S.P.) "And that was it."

(Mary) "Yeah."

(S.P.) "Did they provide your clothes?"

(Mary) "Heck no, you bought your clothes out of your wages. We just worked for them, they didn't support you."

(S.P.) "Where would you go to buy your clothes?"

(Mary) "Oh yeah, there was about three. And the spaghetti was so good. And the lasagna, too."

(S.P.) "Were there any more ethnic groups that you can think of?"

(Mary) "Oh, in the dress shop, Sears and Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, or they had stores in Milwaukee or Chicago. You know, you could order through the mail order catalog or pick them up at their shops."

(S.P.) "And how much would that cost?"

(Mary) "Hmm, six, seven dollars, it depends. Not like now. I went to look at a suit here a while back, my gosh, just the jacket alone was eighty dollars. And the skirt was fifty. And I just walked away."

(S.P.) "Have you been to Milwaukee recently?"

(Mary) "Uh-Uh, not for a couple of years."

(S.P.) "What would you think are the major differences since you lived there in the thirties and when you went back a few years ago?"

(Mary) "Well to tell you the truth, I didn't really notice a difference, except at the stores, everything cost so much more, but other than that..."

(S.P.) "Was that hard?"

(S.P.) "The city looks pretty much the same?"

(Mary) "Yeah, it's about the same. Milwaukee was a nice city to live in, it really was."

(S.P.) "What kind of ethnic divisions did they have?"

(Mary) "We talked about that already, remember I told you they...but this one section in Milwaukee, oh gee, it was so nice, third ward they called it. And my girlfriend and her dad used to live down there. They had a little business. Yeah he had some kind of a business. I think it was a little store. We'd go down there every once in a while and it would be so nice."

(S.P.) "What did you do when you went down there?"

(Mary) "Oh, Um, they would have picnics or something and we'd have a picnic at this family where my girlfriend and her dad stayed and uh, when she went home that is. And they used to have some kind of festival once a year. And then the Italians would make all kinds of fancy foods. And people would go there and eat."

(S.P.) "Were there a lot of Italian restrauents in that area?"

(Mary) "Oh yeah, there was about three. And the sphagetti was so good. And the lasagna, too."

(S.P.) "Were there any more ethnic groups that you can think of?"

(Mary) "Well the south side was Polish, so they had Polish restrauents down there like I said before. The Polish people lived on the south side. But I never did go to any of the places down there."

(S.P.) "Did all of the different ethnic groups get along pretty well?"

(Mary) "Yeah, they didn't seem to be having any problems that I know of. And as far as my people. Let's see. I'm Hungarian, so. There were a lot of people in Cudahey Wisconsin. That was a little suburb outside of Milwaukee and that's where my Great Aunt and her family lived. I met them once. And that's the only relative I know except for my Dad's brother that lived in Indiana. And he came to my Mother's funeral in Caspian and then to my Dad's, but that was all of the relatives of my folks that I knew. They were all in Europe. So I grew up without any Aunt, Uncles, Grandmas or any of that stuff. Didn't have any. Nobody."

(S.P.) "Was that hard?"

(Mary)

"Well yeah, all my girlfriends....My girlfriends were Finish and Polish and they had their relatives around you know, their Aunts and Uncles, their grandmas. And it used to make me wonder. And I was all alone. We were all alone. It's a lonesome feeling, even today I think about it. Gee whiz. People talk about their Aunt this and Uncle that. I never knew anyone that was an Aunt of Uncle. Just like you, you've got a lot of Aunts, you know."