

Rosanne Taylor

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Start interview

(Rosanne Taylor) My name is Rosanne Collyer Taylor my birthdate is December 15, 1936 and today is November 15, 1987. I'll try to go down this list of questions and just answer them as you have typed them here Carol. I'm guessing I was ten or eleven when I entered the orphanage and I believe that I was there for about a year. There must have been a hundred and fifty to two hundred children when I was there, um all ages because I can remember a nurse, babies and cribs and there was a nurse attendant who was a nun. And then there was a group of very very young children, then there was a group of older children and that's where I was on the fourth floor. There were probably thirty of us girls on one side and about thirty boys on the other side and we ranged in ages I would guess ten through sixteen or seventeen. Usually by seventeen um a child was graduated and left, there were no kids that were older there. Um we were on the fourth floor and the fourth floor consisted of I'm sharing with you what was on our side, a big dorm with beds in a semicircle and a corner was room for Sister Kevin and she had a comfortable room from what I could observe. Once in a while she would leave her door open and I had to poke my head in there and I could remember thinking how nice it looked, it wasn't a big room it was just a room big enough for a chair, a comfortable chair and a bed and a dresser. And then in one corner of the dormitory was a big um cupboards and drawers where we had our individual belongings and our clothes. Our routine was to be awakened in the morning, get up and brush our teeth and there was a great big washroom with sinks on both side and a mirror over the sink so that we could see and a shelf for our toothbrush and toothpaste and our um soap and wash clothes. Um there was time to get ready and then we had to make our bed and get right down for daily mass, we had daily mass seven days a week, from mass we would go directly downstairs into the ground level where a big um dining room hall was set up and individual tables I think there were four of us to a table, four to six people to a table and we were assigned a table. We sat with the same people all the time, food was awfully good I can remember. A nun was put in charge of the kitchen and then she had others helping her, I think there was a husband and wife and other people who would come in from Marquette on a daily bases and they would cook for us. Um we were served oatmeal a lot for breakfast, there were two of my favorite dishes that I can recall, one of cheesecake and the other one was corn chowder. I can remember really enjoying those dishes when they were served. Um the meal time started with grace and um we were allowed to visit, I don't remember any loud talking or arguing or fighting, I have to say that we were all well behaved. Um the circumstances that put me in the orphanages was a car accident that my mother was in, and it was a pretty serious break in her leg that caused her to be hospitalized for a great length of time. She had to have a pin, replaced, this pin replaces a bone in her thigh and she had a hard time healing, she was in traction for an awful long time. Um and my dad travelled on the railroad so he could not take care of us at that time. So that's why we were in the orphanage. I guess that the feelings that I had, the anxieties or the expectations um being

that my childhood was one of being instilled in me at a very young age, responsibility for my younger brothers and there was a lot of disruption in my childhood. So that when I was put in the orphanage it I guess that having experience so much didn't really jar me or cause a great deal of anxiety that I can recall. The time that I think that I felt most fearful was when a woman from the county would come in and she would take me to these different homes and she would share with me that they are foster homes and she was just checking up on these foster children that had been placed in these homes. And I could never understand why she would take me with her and so I remember the wheels turning and I used to think, now is she taking me with her? Is the next time she takes me is it going to mean she is going to place me in a foster home? And that was a great fear of mine, I wanted to remain in the orphanage until I could go back home with my mother and father, I did not want to be put in a foster home, that didn't intrigue me at all. But nothing was ever shared with me, I think back then in the 40s a lot of things were just left mum and you had things dropped upon you, just you know at the drop of a hat and then you just out of obedience do it. And so I never knew what was going to happen from one day to the next once that woman came into my life and started taking me to these places, but consequently I did remain in the orphanage. Um I guess that I can remember having my grandma Collyer come visit us and she was near and dear to my heart, I used to spend a lot of time with her in her home. I would go and spend weekends and she would take me to mass at St. Michaels and she died while I was in the orphanage and I can remember the morning that the nun came and told me that, that was a blow. I felt a great loss and I had nobody to talk to, I can just remember just sobbing and weeping and the nun lead me into the chapel and I knelt at the communion rail and she left me there. And I don't know what she expected but that was probably not the right thing to do, it would have been better for me to be able to talk about it and talk about her and what I felt. I wondered how it happened and why she died and so I guess that was one of the dramas that happened to me while I was in the orphanage. We had mass right after we would come downstairs and then we would go into the dining room and we would eat and then we would go to our individual classes that we were put in. I can't remember for sure but I think I was in the fifth or sixth grade and there were two classes in each, two grades in each class and school was a big struggle for me, a great struggle I had a hard time with math. That was always a dreadful subject for me and Sister Irene used to tutor me, there were balconies on each floor facing the front of the orphanage and I can remember she take me out on the balcony and she would tutor me. And I always felt special because that they did that for me. I'm grateful to this day too, um Sister Irene never seemed like a very happy nun but then I probably didn't seem like a very happy child. But once in a while she would laugh and sometimes she would even break out into a belly laugh and I used to think that was kind of special. Her real job in the orphanage was that of a seamstress and she's the one who did all of our mending and sewing of our clothes. There was a nun like I said that cared for the babies in the nurse, Sister Pascal [Spelled Phonetically] had the boys upstairs on the fourth floor and Sister Kevin had us, I don't recall who had the younger children, I don't remember that nun. The recreation that we enjoyed there, part of the fourth floor was a big recreation room for the girls and there was big tables so that we could sit and color or work puzzles. There was a player piano where we could sit and play that at our hearts content. We had Victrola, where we could play records, there was cabinets filled with cards and puzzles and games. We were taught knitting so we could knit, there were always plenty of things to do it

seems like. I can remember Sister Kevin um teaching us neat songs, we did a lot of singing and she taught us how to harmonize. Down where the expressway goes through was all beautiful wooded area with pretty trees and grass, there was a creek running through and there was picnic tables down there and the cooks would bring big pots of um corn chowder down there. We would have our picnics and play some games, we would be taken to the island, we would be bused to the island and we would spend a day down there. Prior to leaving I can remember helping the cooks in the kitchen make these sandwiches and we would pack them and we take boxes and boxes of sandwiches and we would have a drink and fruit. And we would swim for half the day, stop for this picnic lunch and then go back to swimming before we would go home. And those were fun times, we weren't too far from the Corey and so we would walk down to the Corey, the nuns would take us down there swimming and that's where the second tragedy happened to me while I was in the orphanage. I had this little friend by the Irene Gence [Spelled Phonetically] she was just a small girl and she and I were sitting on the, it was like oh a divider between the shallow end and the deep in and she and I were sitting on there and if you can visualize just sitting there and then diving, like just relaxing your body and putting your head in the water. And we were, we would do that a lot, well Irene did this and um I didn't pay any attention and I just jumped in and started splashing and playing around and pretty soon somebody asked where Irene was, might even been Sister Kevin, and nobody could see her. And that's when help was called in and that's when we discovered that when she dove, her body went underneath this board and she got caught, and that's where she drowned. And I can still remember the nuns gathering us and we left to go back to the orphanage and what a horrible feeling that was because Irene was alive when we arrived and went down there and we left and she didn't go back with us, and that was hard to take. Irene's funeral was held right at the orphanage, they had her laid out in the, a big lounge area right as you come into the front entrance to the right was a big lounge area where there were couches set up. A visiting area where people could visit with their children and that's where they had Irene's funeral. Um the clothing that we wore was I don't know if it was donated while we were there or where these clothes came from but there was an area that was just a humungous big room where there were shelves and shelves of clothing, everything from socks to underwear to dresses, skirts, sweaters blouses, and everything! And I can remember going in there all by myself, there were plenty of windows so it was well lit. And I would just like to go in there and browse, it was just a time where I would go to spend and while away the time, the hours in the days, when I would have nothing else to do. Um it was fun to do that, I don't know where all these clothes came from, I would surmise that people in the Marquette area donated them, maybe stores, I don't know I really don't. I can remember one time um Marquette Grayroad High School had an art teacher that came to the orphanage and they asked for um two children and they wanted them to go down and Lou's Department Store outfitted us with clothes, I was one of them that was chosen. Then we had to go to the art class and we posed for these students and they drew our picture, I have no idea what ever became of that picture because it was never given to us but that was kind of an interesting event in my life. I can remember feeling kind of special have been chosen. Chores, we did have chores they were chores that we had to do daily which would be our beds had to be made perfect and I do mean perfect. And to this day I can make a perfect bed, the corners have to be turned just so and if they weren't the beds were torn apart and back then I thought that was

awfully mean um on Saturday we were all given chores to do. They were listed on a piece of paper and alongside of the chores was our name and we had to look to see what we were to do that day. Sister would check over what we did to see that it was done properly, if it wasn't we had to do it again, with no questions asked and no arguing. Um I guess that I can remember being disciplined oh maybe three or four times, one of them was um a Saturday when my chore happened to be taking a dust pan and a whisk broom and going down all four, five flights of stairs and sweeping them. And I was never a kid that would do fun things, I just wasn't like that I was very serious, I was very independent but I was very serious too. And something just prompted me to start riding the railings all the way down and I was caught, Sister caught me and boy oh boy I think that her punishment for me was to sweep those stairs probably eight times no matter how clean they were. When I got to the bottom I had to go back to the top and I had to start and got to the down to bottom I had to go to the top and start all the way down again. And I suppose I had to do that for an hour I don't remember how long. Another time was when my mother was in the hospital, she used to send a taxicab out to get us kids and usually it was on a Sunday and we would go visit her. She would be out in the lawn and this cab would let us off and we would sit on the grass and we would visit with her. Sometimes she would give us some money and we'd go a couple blocks and get to a store and get ice cream bars or a candy bar. Anyway um we would visit with her during the day and then she would call a cab at the end of the day and we'd go back to the orphanage. Well I can remember it was dinner time when we got back one time and I must have been smarting off and Sister Kevin told me that if I couldn't straighten up that would be the last time that I would go visit my mother. Well I'm sure that it was the last time I started, you know goof off. Um under what circumstances were you aloud to leave the grounds of the orphanage? Well I guess that the nuns discovered that I was a very independent child and I knew Marquette very very well and there was a clinic next to St. Luke's hospital way on the other side of town. Well when there were children that would be new, little ones that would come into the orphanage they had to have a physical that's where they were sent. Well they would allow me to walk them clear over to that clinic and that was quite a distance when you stopped to think about it. They would have me sit there and wait for that child and then I would have to bring that child back to the orphanage. My grandmother Collyer, Rose Collyer lived on Park Street, right off of Third and I would always stop at her house and she would run real quickly to the corner grocery store and get pint of ice cream and she would treat the other orphan and I to some ice cream with her. And she would have some cookies before she would send me on, on my way back to the orphanage. When I stopped and think about it that had to be very hard for my grandmother to be part of that, to see her granddaughter um in an orphanage and it just had to be hard. I know if I would be a part of that lifestyle with a grandchild of mine it would be very hard for me. But there were times that we could work into a privilege um Sister would tell us if we would do thus or so that they would give us the privilege of going downtown. And some of the girls and I would have some money, now whether the nuns paid, or gave us money or what I don't know but we would go to the dime store, Krisky's or Walrus and we would look over the items that came to the amount that we would have. I can remember getting Evening in Paris perfume and taking it back and sometimes it would be finger nail polish and so we were given those privileges. One Christmas we had um a program that, a play that we were in and the local radio station WDMJ wanted us to come to the station Christmas Eve and we were

going to put it on the radio. And I can remember telling my mother to be sure to listen to, I was really excited that she would be able to hear this play on the radio and I had a part in it. In the summer time we would spend an entire week at camp and I cannot remember the name of the camp, it was an Indian name and that was always a fun time. They had cabins with bunk beds in there for us to sleep in, girls of course were separated from the boys. A big dining hall for eating privileges and we took turns, the girls were to take turns in the kitchen helping the cook. And I can remember the morning that I was to help the cook, that she went and lit this great big gas range and it blew up and it flew both of clear back to the wall and it burned the hair on my arms and singed the hair on my eye lashes, eye brows and scared the day lights out of the both of us. But breakfast was served and we would sing, gosh it was fun, I can remember a lot of fun times and we would sit up at night and sit around the bon fire and have these scary stories that Father Byer would tell us. Just a lot of fun times, we really did have a good time, we would swim all day long and at night when we were laying in our beds we could hear the nuns laughing in this water, splashing. None of us had enough guts to out and see if it was really them, we really knew that it was but we wondered what they looked like without their habits on and if they had hair and if they had no hair. So all we could do was talk about it, we related pretty good to one another I think um I guess that typical children always do pair off and you do have a buddy, you do have a good friend a better friend than any other. I think that we related real well with the people that were working on the ground outside or the cooks or the nuns. I don't remember any emotion shown, it was a cold atmosphere as far as any feeling or touching. But there was laughter, there was joking um there was fun times, there was a lot of singing. You know I guess that I don't remember the orphanage in Marquette being one where we were whipped or you know that sort of thing. Like from maybe back in the 20s maybe that's the way the orphanages were but I don't remember the orphanage that I was in being that way. Children outside of the orphanage I think were viewed by us that were inside as very fortunate, they lived in a house, they had a home to go to afterschool, they had a mom and a dad there. And maybe we were one big family but um you didn't have what they had and consequently you felt different and I'm sure they looked upon us as being different too. It was probably was a place where parents that had problems with their childrens they would threaten them. You know if you don't behave that's probably where you are going to end up and so I suppose you know other children had that kind of that connotation about us. Maybe they thought that we were there because we didn't obey our parents, so it's hard to say how other children viewed us except how we felt about them. Do I think the orphanage effected my life? Well I guess that it probably has, I don't know if I can pin point any one area in my life that has been effected greatly by it. I am sure that I um was better off there then maybe in a foster home from the stand point that um... there was security there. You don't always know what you are going to get with a foster parent. I think there was a lot of wondering, you know every day I would wonder if this is the day that I was going to go home. Um I'm sure it affected me in a great way I just can't think right now of a particular way that it did affect me. Let's see did I leave anything out? I guess the clothing that we wore, I don't remember feeling any different or being any different because of what we wore. Um there was a farm, an orphanage farm and in the fall when it was time to pick potatoes we would go with the nuns and we would pick potatoes for the week or two or three or however long it took to pick potatoes. And they would feed us, there would be a dining hall and a man by the name of Daddy

Ditmore, we used to call him Daddy Ditmore he was the grandfatherly type. And we just really looked forward to that time of the year and he always made it so much more fun when we would go out there to be around him, it was just really great. Um when I think back overall the things that we did, it just seems like I was there for such a long time and I wish I could remember the exact dates Carol but I can't and I can't even tell you the exact age that I was. I wish I knew for sure the month that I went and the year and the month and the year that I came out but I cannot remember. I don't remember the day I got out. I don't remember the day I went in. I have no idea, it's funny how you forget those things but then I am fifty years old and so it's been a lot of years that have gone by. I am really sorry and sad to hear the condition of the building because it was a beautiful building, very well built and it was so well kept. Everything sparkled and everything was, seemed solid, really sturdy. Beautiful furniture and it's just a pitiful shame that things were let go and I don't understand who was the cause of it, it just really grieves my heart because every floor just had nice spacious rooms and these rooms all had a purpose from the ground level right on up. To hear how they have let it go by the wayside it's a pitiful shame, it's just a dirty rotten shame. Well I wish there was more that I could think of to tell you, I guess that someday I would like to come face to face again with Father Ambelbyer [Spelled Phonetically] who I understand who resides in Newberry because I think that there are some things that I would like to talk to him about. He did a lot of things with the boys and I'm sure my brother is going to share that with you, I'd love to hear what Bugs has to say because um being two entirely different people I'm sure he's got an entirely different view point on his life there then what I have. I must have had so much on my mind weighing on my little shoulders that is why I don't remember very much. A lot of kids would probably you know remember a whole lot more than what I do but this is all that I can remember. Your questions have helped me put things into perspective, I hope that I went over everything. If there is anything that you want to know, you think that I can help you with, please feel free to give me a buzz or drop me a line and I would be happy to share with you. I will try and get that picture, get it out and see if I can get this tape off to you and the picture. I am going to be anxiously awaiting to hear any, anything developing from what you are putting together, I think it's going to be really neat to hear it all. I'm going to sign off now and I shall get this in the mail to you hopefully tomorrow or the next day and I'll fill out this form, sign it and I'll get it on its way to you so you can get to work with your project, ok. Carol I just relistened to the first side of the tape and this side and um I shared with you that I used to stay with my grandmother a lot and that was prior to going into the orphanage that I would spend weekends and nights with her and go to mass with her. I didn't want you think that I got out and went and spent the night with her because I never did get out from the time that I went in until it was released. That is where I stayed, ok talk to you later bye!