

Spring 2013

## Interview of Helen Gidjunis

Helen Gidjunis

Paula Gidjunis

La Salle University, gidjunis@comcast.net

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## Field Notes

**Interviewee:** Helen Gidjunis

**Interviewer:** Paula Gidjunis

**Interview Date:** February 25, March 4 and April 2, 2013

**Interview Location:** Helen Gidjunis' home at 5623 N. 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Total minutes of recordings:** 2 hours 59 minutes and 7 seconds

**Number and lengths of recordings: 7 recordings:**

Mrs Gidjunis 2-25-13A 39:05

Mrs Gidjunis 2-25-13B 4:00

Mrs Gidjunis 3-4-13 00:24

Mrs Gidjunis 3-4-13A 57:59

Mrs Gidjunis 3-4-13B 21:38

Mrs Gidjunis 3-4-13C 14:03

Mrs Gidjunis 4-2-13 41:58

**The Interviewee:**

Helen Gidjunis was born in the 1920's in the Overbrook section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was born at home. She moved with her parents to 5630 Uber Street when the houses were brand new in 1934 across the street from La Salle. The houses on 20<sup>th</sup> Street and Olney Avenue were not there at that time. She met her husband Joseph Gidjunis in 1947. They were married on June 18, 1949 and they lived with her parents on Uber Street for 7 years. In 1956 they purchased her current home on 20<sup>th</sup> Street. They had three children, Joseph, Carol and Mark who went to school in the local area. Joseph received an academic scholarship to La Salle High School. He also received his M.B.A. from La Salle University and his brother Mark received his undergraduate degree at La Salle. Carol received her nursing degree from Germantown Hospital and attended many of her courses on the La Salle Campus. Mrs. Gidjunis has served as block captain of the 5600 block of 20<sup>th</sup> Street since the early 1960's. As block captain she often acted as a liaison between La Salle and her neighbors. She is the longest resident living on 20<sup>th</sup> Street, quite possibly the immediate neighborhood.

Mr. Gidjunis graduated from LaSalle in 1941. He was a well-known football player at La Salle during that period, having received a full football scholarship to attend. He was nicknamed Knute after Knute Rockne, the famous Notre Dame University football coach, because many thought he looked like and played football like Rockne. He served in the army during World War II. After the war, he worked for Railway Express until they closed due to bankruptcy in the mid-1970's. Mr. Gidjunis died in January 2008.

### **The Interviewer:**

I, Paula Gidjunis, grew up in the Nicetown section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania until the age of nine. The neighborhood was primarily Italian and I attended a school and church at which one of your parents had to be of Italian descent to enroll. Both my parents were Italian and are deceased. I am a first generation American. I moved with my parents and two sisters to the East Oak Lane section of Philadelphia. I attended Holy Family College (now University), majoring in History/Education. Not being able to get a job teaching history after graduation, I obtained a job with the Department of Defense (DOD) where among other jobs, I was a certified instructor in logistics. While at the DOD I obtained an M.B.A. at LaSalle College (now University). I married and moved to Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. I am now divorced and have one son. My DOD activity was closed under the Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC) and I obtained a position teaching middle school social studies in West Oak Lane not far from where I grew up. I retired and am currently working as a bookkeeper for JPG Photography in Philadelphia. I also teach classes at the Civil War Institute at Manor College in Jenkintown, Pa.

### **Background:**

Immediately upon being advised that one of the interview categories could be a long time La Salle neighbor, I knew I wanted to interview Mrs. Helen Gidjunis. I have known Helen Gidjunis for over 30 years. She is my former mother-in-law. I have maintained a relationship with her over the years and I would periodically visit with her, more often since I have returned to LaSalle to obtain my Masters Degree. I knew she is a resident who has lived on 20<sup>th</sup> Street the longest and I believe she has lived the longest in the immediate La Salle community. She and her husband babysat my son [he is currently 30 years old and he is the “Joey” she mentions in the interview] almost daily for his first two years while I worked and then periodically during his childhood and to this day they have a very special relationship. Mrs. Gidjunis would often take my son for walks around the La Salle campus. Once her memory has been jogged, she recalled a great deal about the neighborhood and many names of people who lived there.

### **Description of the Interview:**

I obtained permission from Dr. Allen to interview Mrs. Gidjunis and then obtained permission from Mrs. Gidjunis. Prior to interviewing Mrs. Gidjunis I met with Brother Joe Grabenstein to obtain some old photos of the area to help jog her memory. Brother Grabenstein was extremely helpful. He has met both Mr. and Mrs. Gidjunis and was excited that I was going to interview her. He provided some questions that he was curious about. In addition, my son suggested questions he was very interested to know about his grandmother and I had my own questions. Other questions I obtained from the Thompson Life Story Interview Guide. I sent a list to Dr. Allen for analysis and she provided some additional suggestions.

I reviewed the new book by Dr. John Rossi on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *Living the Promise* at the library to find information on the history of La Salle. I also did additional research on line to get information on landmarks and place names to present to her.

I met with Mrs. Gidjunis on three separate days for six audios. Each was at her house on 20<sup>th</sup> Street. A seventh audio was included later as an introduction for the file Mrs Gidjunis 3-4-13A, which I initially had forgotten to introduce. We sat at her dining room table across from each other. Mrs. Gidjunis is very sensitive to identity theft, and did not wish to have her birthdate nor her maiden name revealed in this interview. She also did not want give the ages or years of birth of her three children and six grandchildren. She does not mentioned her parents full names or her date of birth, just that she was born in the 1920's. Since all her personal information is in the first audio, she asked that this audio be restricted for 5 years or after her death if earlier. I had discussed with her prior to the interviews that if she either was uncomfortable with a question or simply did not remember, that she could just pass on the question. There were a few instances where she was not sure if she wanted to answer a question, so there are some pauses in the dialogue. There were also several times when she could not remember place names, so she would ask for my help as I had grown up not far from the La Salle area and knew some of the places she was discussing. Obviously to get the information on audio, I needed to ask her questions of which I already knew the answer. This often caused some laughter from both of us. Knowing each other for so long was both a pro and con. It was an advantage in I knew a great deal of her history and had a good start on questions to ask. It was also a negative in that sometimes she responded in a way with the assumption that I knew what she was talking about. I then had to ask several follow up questions to have her explain the answer for the audience.

Our first interview occurred on February 25, 2013. We spoke for a little over 39 minutes when her phone rang and she answered it. I stopped the recorder. We then began again for another 20 minutes and afterwards I found that my recorder had stopped after four minutes. I knew it was not the batteries as I had put fresh ones in before this interview. Not knowing what the problem was and it had been an hour, we decided to stop and would continue on March 4<sup>th</sup>. Once I was able to look at my recorder, I found that I had been out of memory. This was as a result of me not understanding the amount of memory that different type of files take on the recorder. There had been previous interviews on the recorder for which I had converted from a wma to a mp3 file and this took a large amount of room. Having resolved the memory problem and removing the files I no longer needed, I was better prepared for the next set of interviews.

#### **Follow-up interview March 4th:**

On March 4<sup>th</sup> we resume the interview for three segments. The three were of lengths: 57:59, 21:38 and 14:03. I stopped after the first segment because as we approached an hour I wanted to make sure Mrs. Gidjunis was not tired. She wanted to continue, so we did immediately. After the second segment, we both decided we needed to take a short break. Then we finished with the third segment when I felt that we were both getting tired and I also wanted to rethink some points that I would possibly follow-up with her

another time if we could coordinate our schedules. I unfortunately forgot to introduce the first recording of March 4th and it is not identified. I corrected this by creating a 24 second file, Mrs Gidjunis 3-4-13, which contains the information for the following file, Mrs Gidjunis 3-4-13A.

There are a few times on the segments where there is silence. At these points Mrs. Gidjunis was trying to think of information. Many times she asked for my help filling in missing names, so I did. I interrupted more than I wished to, as I felt the need to encourage her to continue. There was a moment when I asked what was Mr. Gidjunis' rank during the war and she directed me to look "over there". She was referring me to the flag case that holds the flag that draped Mr. Gidjunis' coffin. It sits on her TV in the living room. There is a plate on the case, which states Mr. Gidjunis' full name and rank.

### **Follow-up interview April 2nd:**

On April 2<sup>nd</sup> we resumed for our third and final meeting for this project. There is one audio for 41 minutes, 58 seconds. In this meeting, we discussed more about her husband and children attending La Salle. She also discussed the faculty that lived on 20<sup>th</sup> Street, remembering that at one point there were eight Ph.D.'s living on the street. She remembers going to several of Mr. Gidjunis' class reunions. At the reinstatement of the football program in 1997, Mr. Gidjunis was asked to toss the coin at the beginning of the game.

Mrs. Gidjunis also discussed her painting, how she began and why she stopped. She spoke of her memories taking my son "Joey" around the La Salle campus and sitting on the porch of the art studio. She also talked of going to my son's Little League baseball games. She discussed the Pretzel man, a staple of the corner of 20<sup>th</sup> and Olney for many years.

I asked questions about George, their dog. He had been a big part of the family for many years and I thought he should be part of her story. Serendipity intervened here as asking about George ignited memories of two specific events that really are fascinating parts of her history in the La Salle community. She spoke of stopping a robbery at Dan Rodden's house [Dan Rodden was a professor at La Salle and began the theater program] on 20<sup>th</sup> Street and of being assaulted on Olney Avenue. She talks again of the La Salle students moving into the houses on 20<sup>th</sup> Street. In the background during this conversation you can hear my cell phone ringing slightly, but I ignore it and it does not disrupt the flow of the interview.

She mentioned that she had a cousin who taught at La Salle, Brother Bill Ronner and that they were related to Carl Ronner, a famous theologian.

I thanked her for her time and we ended the interview.

### **Note on recording:**

For recording, I used my Olympus Digital Voice Recorder DS-30/40/50 on battery power. I did not use an additional microphone. After the interview was completed, I connected the recorder by USB cable to my MacBook Pro and uploaded the audio WMA files that cannot be read on my MacBook Pro. I had previously downloaded a free program All2MP3 that converts WMA files to MP3 files that can be read by my Mac computer. This program is very easy to use and only took a few minutes to have my audio file ready to listen for abstracting.

Upon the upload of the audio file to my Mac, I immediately backed it up to a flash drive. I also backed up my entire hard drive to an external hard drive as I do on a weekly basis.

### **Editing the Transcript:**

My editing decisions included:

- 1) use of statements that provided some insight into Mrs. Gidjunis' personality and her connection to La Salle
- 2) use of statements providing information that was important for La Salle to have about the neighborhood and its changes.
- 3) use of information about faculty that Mrs. Gidjunis knew
- 4) use of unrestricted information to show the family connection to La Salle.
- 5) use of footnotes to explain landmarks and location of place names
- 6) use of quotes around Mrs. Gidjunis' exact words
- 7) use of brackets [] to indicate additional information such as clarification of comments, pauses, and other non-verbal clues