

**Narrator:** Betty Siemer

**Interviewer:** Carla Hilgert

**Date and Place:** Interviewed on October 16, 2001 at [REDACTED]

**Tape One - Side A**

**Carla Hilgert:** This is Carla Hilgert interviewing Betty Siemer. This is tape one of one and side A. Betty can you please say and spell your last name?

**Betty Siemer:** My name is Betty Siemer. It's S-I-E-M-E-R.

**Hilgert:** Betty can you tell us when and where you were born?

**Siemer:** I was born in Alton Illinois on September 10, 1946.

**Hilgert:** Were you born at one of the hospitals in Alton?

**Siemer:** I was the only one of seven children in my family to be born in hospital.

**Hilgert:** What hospital were you born at?

**Siemer:** Alton Memorial.

**Hilgert:** Alton Memorial. Now, was it a relatively new hospital at the time?

**Siemer:** I think Alton Memorial hospital, I'm not sure when it was established.

**Hilgert:** Oh, I have here in 1937.

**Siemer:** It was about ten year after that then, nine.

**Hilgert:** Ok, so you say you were the first child of your family born there at the hospital?

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** And all the rest were home births?

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood?

**Siemer:** I came from a big family. I had five living brothers and sisters, my oldest sister died at birth. We lived on a farm in Godfrey, it was a farm that my relatives, when they came from Germany in 1849 established that farm and

the Clifton Terrace Inn and they came from Laufen German which is near Stuttgart, and they came on a riverboat. They stopped at Clifton Terrace because it looked like the bluffs in Laufen and they had grown wine and grapes there so, and my niece lives in Stuttgart now part time and she said Laufen does look a lot like it. We've had relatives go back and tell us there is a great deal of similarity between the area and Laufen Germany.

**Hilgert:** What about the neighborhood you grew up in. Can you describe that?

**Siemer:** It was rural, there were farms mainly, we knew all of our neighbors. It was, my father worked at Shell Oil Company as pipe fitter. My mother was a stay at home mother. We farmed eighty acres and it was rural, very country. We didn't have any of the urbanization areas around us or urbanized area I should say.

**Hilgert:** So would Alton have been like the big city for you?

**Siemer:** Alton was the city we went to for medical reason, for food, for clothing. Yes, and if you wanted recreational areas you go to St. Louis for the baseball game, that was about it.

**Hilgert:** Did you go to St. Louis much for the baseball game or anything?

**Siemer:** When I was older yes but basically you listened to them on the radio because at that time you didn't have money to go to the baseball game. But you didn't go to St. Louis to shop. We didn't, it wasn't like today where you jump in the car and go to the Galleria or Jamestown, no we never did that.

**Hilgert:** Do you even remember the first time you went to St. Louis to shop?

**Siemer:** Probably when I was in high school.

**Hilgert:** Do you remember where you even went?

**Siemer:** Northland I think. Northland or River Roads, that was, that was the place to go and, but you never did go downtown or anywhere but one of the shopping centers. Northland or River Roads was probably one of them.

**Hilgert:** Northland River Roads, that's where I grew up.

**Siemer:** Oh.

**Hilgert:** That's where I always, well until I was in second grade, that's where my mom always took me to get our picture taken. We lived right over there in that neighborhood behind there.

**Siemer:** So you went shopping quite a bit then.

**Hilgert:** Yes, right there at, at Northland. I think it's all closed up now.

**Siemer:** I haven't been over there in a long time.

**Hilgert:** It's a bad neighborhood now too

**Siemer:** Is it?

**Hilgert:** Yes, you don't want to go over there.

**Siemer:** Um huh.

**Hilgert:** Not on your own. How has your neighborhood changed over the years?

**Siemer:** It's become much more suburban like. When I was a child I can remember none of the subdivisions out here. There were no grocery stores, there were no gas stations, there were no businesses whatsoever. It was just farm area and rural.

**Hilgert:** and I guess we should say you live on [REDACTED]?

**Siemer:** [REDACTED]

**Hilgert:** [REDACTED]

**Siemer:** [REDACTED]

**Hilgert:** How do you spell that?

**Siemer:** [REDACTED]

**Hilgert:** [REDACTED] And what is the, the main road?

**Siemer:** Route 3.

**Hilgert:** Was that, that wasn't there?

**Siemer:** Yes Route 3 was, Route 3 was here, but it used to be Route 100, they changed it and they put, Route 100 is now the River Road and they gave, they named this Route 3. I'm not certain why.

**Hilgert:** It probably wasn't paved when you were younger I imagine was it?

**Siemer:** Yes it was. It was the hard road.

**Hilgert:** Oh.

**Siemer:** It wasn't three lanes, but it was, it was the two lane road to town.

**Hilgert:** Now we talked about shopping and I often hear people talk about shopping downtown in Alton, especially on Third Street. Can you describe a typical shopping day if you ever went down there?

**Siemer:** Snyder's was on the corner and you bought your Red Goose Shoes at Snyder's. And you bought your bib-overalls, I'm sure Bob Burrell bought his there when he was a kid. You bought your saddle oxfords there, men bought their suits there, women bought their, all their apparel there and the little old ladies would buy their snuggies [laughs].

**Hilgert:** What are snuggies?

**Siemer:** They're oh, when I worked in college, they're sort of an undergarment but they were longer and more flannel like. The farm women would come in and buy their snuggies and the men would buy their bib-overalls.

**Hilgert:** Now what shop was it that you said?

**Siemer:** Snyder's.

**Hilgert:** Snyder's?

**Siemer:** Snyder's in downtown.

**Hilgert:** What is that now?

**Siemer:** It's, antique store, it's an antique store.

**Hilgert:** Is that on Third St.?

**Siemer:** It's on Piasa and Third. Yes it's right across the street from the Nature's Nest and Tony's. It's right here on the corner.

**Hilgert:** It's Tootie's.

**Siemer:** Yes. It's Tootie's. Yes, and right next door to the old Sears store.

**Hilgert:** Tootie's Antiques, all right that's what I was wondering. Also where was the Sears?

**Siemer:** Sears was right next door.

**Hilgert:** Sears was right next door and Sears, how long ago did that close down? Do you remember?

**Siemer:** At least twenty to twenty-five years ago, I would think. I'm not real sure though. We have friends, like a friend that we went to college with worked there during high school and another friend of ours worked there in high school and they're our age. But I, I don't know when it closed.

**Hilgert:** What about some of the other shops that were, that's like where Nature's Nest is now and where Tony's is now?

**Siemer:** Young's was there. It was a department store and it had a man, went up only three stores but they had an elevator operator. You got in and they shut the gate and they manned the elevator which was quite, nobody does that anymore, but his job was to go up and down the elevator [laughs].

**Hilgert:** And this was when you were fairly young? You remember this?

**Siemer:** Junior high, high school.

**Hilgert:** Ok, do you remember anything about when you were real young and going shopping? What about the Red Goose Shoes.

**Siemer:** Oh.

**Hilgert:** Buying those, do you remember anything about buying those?

**Siemer:** They had a golden goose and if you bought Red Goose Shoes they'd plug it in and then they'd put the golden egg up and then you got an egg with a toy in it and it was quite, quite the thing.

**Hilgert:** Now I also understand next to Young's was Vogue Apparel?

**Siemer:** Yes, that was very exclusive, all the young girls would go there and get their Bobbie Brooks. Everybody wore Bobbie Brooks, that was the name brand and you got your apparel there.

**Hilgert:** Was this, now was this when you were in high school?

**Siemer:** High school. Everybody went to Bobbie Brooks [probably meant to say wore], another place, Bendlers, no it wasn't that, I can't remember the other place that everybody got their clothes. But the dime store was right on the corner where the, the oak furniture is.

**Hilgert:** Oh where Frontier Furnishings is now?

**Siemer:** Yes, it was a big, it was a Kresge's, a Woolworth's and you go down there and they'd have malts and, there it is that's it.

**Hilgert:** We're looking at a book now called Alton, *The Best of Alton* by Charlotte Stetson. And we're looking at the picture of the F.W. Woolworth's Five and Dime. Is that how you remember it looking?

**Siemer:** Yes, I'd say my cousin lived on, on 9th St. and I'd go in and stay with her and we'd ride the bus down and we'd go to Kresge's and we'd go shopping and that was quite the place to be.

**Hilgert:** You could actually walk down there though from 9th St. couldn't you?

**Siemer:** Yes we could, but we always took the bus. I don't know, but living in the country I'd never taken the bus. Taking the bus was quite the thing then.

**Hilgert:** Do you remember how much the bus cost?

**Siemer:** Probably about a quarter but I don't remember exactly.

**Hilgert:** Did you get an allowance from your parents to.

**Siemer:** No we just, if you needed money you got it but there wasn't a whole lot of money to be had.

**Hilgert:** Now what about, I'm looking at this book again, Jupitar? Do you remember this?

**Siemer:** Yes that was one of the new stores, Jupitar.

**Hilgert:** What did they sell there? It says on the sign here discount stores.

**Siemer:** Sorta like a Dollar General and you know KMart, Kresge's.

**Hilgert:** What about this Slack Furniture Company?

**Siemer:** I don't remember that.

**Hilgert:** You don't remember that?

**Siemer:** But when I was in junior high school I wouldn't gone to look for, for furniture.

**Hilgert:** What about Shiff's Big Shoe Store?

**Siemer:** I don't remember that. People usually would go to Jacoby's if they, on down, if they wanted their, for furniture.

**Hilgert:** Ok, here's a picture of the Vogue Apparel.

**Siemer:** And there was.

**Hilgert:** Yungck's Department Store.

**Siemer:** And around the corner on by, now where you go to find out about the, right across from the boat. And the parking lot there.

**Hilgert:** Oh you mean the, where you go to get like tourist information?

**Siemer:** Yes right next to there, there was a H.K. Johnson, a big hardware store. Next to that was where my, some of my relatives had a cafe, a saloon and there was a building that had our name at the top and my cousin that was here for the weekend, that does all our genealogy, has pictures of it. And when she comes back that's one of her objects is to find all she can about old family pictures, and she's got some real neat pictures of the building.

**Hilgert:** Now next door to the Jupitar was I think Barleff's.

**Siemer:** Barleff's was a very nice men's store and I think it's out, it used to be, Upper Alton now Godfrey. My brother-in-law worked there for years when he was in high school and college.

**Hilgert:** My friend's grandfather that's, that's who owns that.

**Siemer:** Henry Saenz

**Hilgert:** Henry Saenz yes.

**Siemer:** Henry worked with my, yes my brother-in-law worked for Henry.

**Hilgert:** Now what about shopping on College Ave?

**Siemer:** That was called Upper Alton. You went to Upper Alton and when I was a kid we had three acres of asparagus and in the spring we would cut it in the morning and in the evening and then you'd box it up in boxes and take it to the train station in Upper Alton. And there, we didn't shop very much because that was further away. But they had drug stores, I think the Kerr Drugstore is still there with a fountain.

**Hilgert:** Kerr's is actually closed now.

**Siemer:** Did it .

**Hilgert:** They closed down when not too long after CV, or Walgreen's and CVS opened.

**Siemer:** But they had real thick malts and shakes and then you go to the movie up there, there was the Uptown and you'd go to the movies there. Now the last time I went there was 1967 to the The Graduate.

**Hilgert:** The Uptown. Now is the Uptown Theater, was that where Walgreen's now is, up there on.

**Siemer:** I think it's where the movie, where you get movie rentals.

**Hilgert:** Ok.

**Siemer:** Right there.

**Hilgert:** And that's on College and.

**Siemer:** Washington I believe.

**Hilgert:** That's Washington, right.

**Siemer:** Yes, Washington and College.

**Hilgert:** Now there's some other shops I have listed on College Ave. was Leverett's Bookstore, Stork Laundry, Thrifty Drugstore, the Laclade Hotel, something called the Outaga Theater, does that sound familiar?

**Siemer:** No.

**Hilgert:** I wonder if that maybe was called the Uptown? Streeper Funeral Home?

**Siemer:** Yes, the funeral home was around the corner by, it's right down the street on Washington. It's a white building. It's right next to Hardee's. It's a white building, right next to Hardee's. It's now.

**Hilgert:** It's a dentist office.

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** That's my dentist office.

**Siemer:** That was a funeral home.

**Hilgert:** That's an actually fairly small building.

**Siemer:** It wasn't very big. There were quite a few funeral homes. Gent, that's still in existence.

**Hilgert:** Gent is still up around, no Gent is in.

**Siemer:** In Upper, North Alton.

**Hilgert:** In North Alton, but Upper Alton there around the corner, there is what funeral home?

**Siemer:** Smith?

**Hilgert:** Smith, ok, Elias-Smith.

**Siemer:** Right

**Hilgert:** So Streeper Funeral Home, I didn't know that, and my dentist name is Dr. Wolter.

**Siemer:** It is? In fact there was a Bill Streeper whose folks owned it and went to graduate from high school with me.

**Hilgert:** I'm going to have to ask my dentist if he knows he's working in a funeral home.

**Siemer:** See if it's haunted.

**Hilgert:** What about Rexall Drugs?

**Siemer:** I barely remember that, like I said, like a kid, well when I was in high school I remember those places, but a lot of those places were gone by the time I went to high school because the Burger King was one of the first places up there and when we went to, when they first opened it was like twelve cent hamburgers and it was quite the place to go for lunch. Maybe it wasn't the Burger King, what was the name of that place? Bob Burrell will know because he.

**Hilgert:** Burger Chef?

**Siemer:** Burger Chef.

**Hilgert:** Where was the Burger Chef that.

**Siemer:** Where the Piasa, Mental Health place is, was, but now is the Red Cross, it was right there. It was one of the first cheap hamburger joints in town.

**Hilgert:** That's kinda on College and Main then isn't it?

**Siemer:** Right.

**Hilgert:** Or that's on Main, a little down from College.

**Siemer:** Right.

**Hilgert:** And so what other movie theaters do you remember in town?

**Siemer:** The Princess was downtown and we'd go there. Right next to Jacoby's Furniture. We had one in North Alton called the North Alton Show.

**Hilgert:** Where was Jacoby's downtown? That was.

**Siemer:** By the Wedge Bank. Down past where the Germania is now, where they have the clinic, down near the pawn shop is and then.

**Hilgert:** Ok, down on Broadway.

**Siemer:** Right and right next to.

**Hilgert:** Oh, Jacoby's right.

**Siemer:** Jacoby's was the Princess Theater.

**Hilgert:** Is that building still there or do you think they tore it down? I can't.

**Siemer:** I don't know.

**Hilgert:** I'm trying to picture any building down there that would be a movie theater.

**Siemer:** I don't think anything's been torn down but it's changed a lot. I don't know how they changed it, but no it's not, I don't believe it was torn down. But there was, and Uptown, and I'm not sure what they called the movie theater in North Alton but we called it the North Alton Movie Theater. And there was the Blue Dell, it was a bar on the corner. I'm probably more familiar with North Alton because that's where we would go.

**Hilgert:** Here I got the Princess Movie Theater.

**Siemer:** Yes the Princess was right downtown next to Jacoby's. That's where the

Princess was.

**Hilgert:** And I.

**Siemer:** And the Grand was downtown.

**Hilgert:** I have it written here it was located in the Finke Building, F-I-N-K-E, does that sound familiar?

**Siemer:** I didn't know it was the Finke Building but it was the Princess Theater.

**Hilgert:** And Neizche Drugs was next door.

**Siemer:** I don't remember that drug store.

**Hilgert:** I think I have a picture.

**Siemer:** My husband might remember it because see he's from Upper Alton too so he would be more familiar with Upper Alton. Yes, that's the Princess.

**Hilgert:** I'm trying to imagine a building downtown that looks like that.

**Siemer:** They may have changed the facade of it .

**Hilgert:** The facade of it.

**Siemer:** And then the Starlight Drive-In. Oh yes everybody went there in high school.

**Hilgert:** The Starlight Drive, you all went there in high school?

**Siemer:** You'd.

**Hilgert:** It says here they're showing Gary Cooper and Jane Wright in *Task Force*.

**Siemer:** Everybody would go to the Starlight. There was another outdoor theater but I can't remember.

**Hilgert:** It said this, the Starlight was located on East College Ave.

**Siemer:** That's right out by the, where the Medical Center is now.

**Hilgert:** Out there by also where the.

**Siemer:** Right by the viaduct and the hotels. That was the Starlight. Down on 111

there was another one.

**Hilgert:** It says the Alton Alt-Wood was located on Old St. Louis Road.

**Siemer:** In Wood River yes. There was one down by, not too far from downtown Wood River. Those were the two.

**Hilgert:** They considered opening a drive-in in Godfrey but they never.

**Siemer:** Never did.

**Hilgert:** Never did that. Now when you went to the movies back then or to like the Princess or something, did you have to get dressed up?

**Siemer:** Not when we were little kids. I remember my husband saying that his, for a quarter he could walk up, he lived on in off on Oakwood which is off Milton Rd. They'd get a quarter and he could walk up and get into the movies and if he had any, like a dime or so he could get like popcorn also. So it was quite reasonable but you'd go up on the Saturday after, he'd go up on Saturday afternoons to the cowboy movies.

**Hilgert:** Now Oakwood. Where is that off of? Is that off of.

**Siemer:** Milton Road.

**Hilgert:** Off of Milton? That's actually now a housing project area.

**Siemer:** Oh, no that's a different Oakwood. This if off, this is off Brown and Milton Road that area. There is another Oakwood, it's behind the Jack in the Box. But that's a different Oakwood. This Oakwoods over by where Bob Burress grew up.

**Hilgert:** Do you remember when they started building the housing projects in town?

**Siemer:** I, my brother and I were talking about that. He believes it was like in the 1960s. But I don't remember when they were begun. I remember before they were there and all of a sudden they were there, but I don't remember the dates.

**Hilgert:** It is, it seems Alton has about five of them. Four or five isn't there?

**Siemer:** Yes, there's one on Belle, there's one down by Fast Eddie's, isn't that Joestings?

**Hilgert:** Joestings.

**Siemer:** And there's.

**Hilgert:** Alton Acres.

**Siemer:** Alton Acres, what's the other one? Oh off by the Little Theater. What's that one, is that Alton Acres?

**Hilgert:** I don't know.

**Siemer:** 20th.

**Hilgert:** Is that Belle Manor? Is that a.

**Siemer:** Belle Manor is as you go down Belle Street, yes. There have several. I don't know why Alton was chosen for them either [laughs].

**Hilgert:** Now do you remember anything, now this might sound odd, about the fire stations in Alton?

**Siemer:** Yes there were more. There was a little one right next to Gent Funeral Home where the credit union is now. There was a fire station, Gent Funeral Home was here and the fire station was butted up right next to it. I remember that one. It wasn't very large.

**Hilgert:** And that's in North Alton.

**Siemer:** Yes and there's one at the bottom of State St. I believe it's either a bar or a.

**Hilgert:** It is a bar now, it's called The Firehouse.

**Siemer:** Right, I've not been in it but that was another one at the bottom of the hill.

**Hilgert:** And that's actually been a number of things, because I think it was a shop before.

**Siemer:** I think it was an antique shop, yes.

**Hilgert:** And there was the firehouse in Upper Alton too on College Ave. right?

**Siemer:** Yes, it's where that new Walgreens.

**Hilgert:** CVS.

**Siemer:** CVS is.

**Hilgert:** And now we really just have one fire station in Alton.

**Siemer:** One large, consolidated.

**Hilgert:** Well no, I guess there's two. Isn't there one at the bottom of College Ave.?

**Siemer:** There's one by.

**Hilgert:** Off the circle? As you're going up Alby?

**Siemer:** St. Anthony's. There's one by St. Anthony's Hospital and then there's one in Upper Alton. Which are really pretty close proximity to each other when you think about it. One's on one end of College and one's kinda on the other.

**Hilgert:** You would think they would maybe have one in North Alton.

**Siemer:** And that, toward, yes toward Godfrey.

**Hilgert:** But they don't.

**Siemer:** No, but they have the Godfrey firehouse out here so I guess they think that come to North Alton.

**Hilgert:** Now where did you go to school?

**Siemer:** Clifton Hill which is now that church the, right up by Clifton Terrace. Because that area the school on out until, including this area was all my, my dad's family's land. So the land where the school was, was, came from my dad's family. The church that is no longer there, the little Melville cemetery, the Baptist church, Baptist parsonage, and then those houses were there but my great uncle's, my grandfather had it all the way out to here. So the land the church was built on and the cemetery all came from my dad's people's land.

**Hilgert:** Now what about nowadays, do kids around here, do they attend Alton Public Schools?

**Siemer:** Everybody goes to Alton.

**Hilgert:** And where did you go for middle school, I thought you told me North?

**Siemer:** North. But they, this was in Alton Schools, but it was just the little neighborhood schools. We didn't have kindergarten. We went first, second, third, and fourth to Clifton Hill and then fifth and sixth grade we went to Godfrey

School which is now, Early Childhood across from The Godfrey Meatmarket and then for junior high, seventh, eighth, and ninth to North Jr. Then Alton High was only tenth, eleventh, and twelfth. It was a three year high school.

**Hilgert:** And you went to Alton High?

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** Did they have Marquette back then?

**Siemer:** Yes, Marquette was, about the, 1926. I'm not sure about that, my husband graduated from Marquette.

**Hilgert:** What about, no I guess let me ask you more about Alton High. When you went there the only building that was there was probably the Main building right?

**Siemer:** No the Main, the Olin, and the Annex, but the new addition wasn't there.

**Hilgert:** On the Annex?

**Siemer:** Right. We didn't have the new addition and lunch, you had the cafeteria was where the band room is now.

**Hilgert:** The band room in the Main?

**Siemer:** Right.

**Hilgert:** And when you talk about the addition on the Annex you're talking about from, you're talking about that wing that houses the cafeteria and takes you upstairs where that big set of stairs is right?

**Siemer:** Right, basically the math and social studies, most of the social studies area.

**Hilgert:** So Olin and the Annex were still there or were there when you went to high school.

**Siemer:** 1952 the Olin building was built and it was called Olin because Olin gave the money for it. It was supposed to have been for vocational education.

**Hilgert:** Now what about church, where did you go to church?

**Siemer:** We went to the little Melville Congregational Church which is now been razed, it's next to the Baptist Church, that brick church, the Godfrey Baptist Church. It was a little country congregational church.

**Hilgert:** Now what about when that was razed, where did you go to church then?

**Siemer:** We went to Alton and we went the Presbyterian Church. We went to Elm Street Presbyterian. [Whispers and laughs], And jumped ship.

**Hilgert:** And jumped ship.

**Siemer:** We jumped ship I guess. Went from the Congregational to the Presbyterian.

**Hilgert:** But I thought you were now Catholic?

**Siemer:** I converted when I.

**Hilgert:** Oh when you got married?

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** Oh because I was going to say I know your kids went to Marquette, but you don't have to be Catholic to go there even though it is.

**Siemer:** No you pay more money.

**Hilgert:** You pay more money.

**Siemer:** And they went to Saint Ambrose and Marquette.

**Hilgert:** What about little confectionery shops or candy shops do you remember anything like that in town?

**Siemer:** There was one in North Alton. It was a, like a soda fountain, it was right, you know where the Yungck's drug store. I guess you can't call it a drug store. But the Yungck building now you buy all the things for the people who are incapacitated and rehabilitary.

**Hilgert:** Oh yes I know and that's on, what street is that on?

**Siemer:** That's on State Street. That was a store, it was a Tri-City grocery store and then next to it was a, like a, I don't even remember what the name of it was, it's been so many years ago but it was like a soda fountain and then the North Alton Show is that parking lot right in front of Depper's. There was Depper's in the back and the movie theater was right on the street there were the parking lot is.

**Hilgert:** I didn't know there was a movie theater there.

**Siemer:** That was the, yes that was the North Alton, we called it the North Alton Show. Across the street from Norb's and that little building on the corner that's now a hair, a barber shop, that was a grocery store Rain and Rain's, it was a family owned grocery store.

**Hilgert:** And what was it called?

**Siemer:** Rain and Rain's, that was two brothers that ran it.

**Hilgert:** Like R-A-I-N-S?

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** Or I guess you just said, is it Rains or Rain?

**Siemer:** Rain and Rain.

**Hilgert:** Oh, now what about Norb's, that's a bar up there in North Alton?

**Siemer:** Been there a long time.

**Hilgert:** That's what I was wondering.

**Siemer:** And there used to be another bar down called Tommy's, it's in the, where the now, where the bank is. That new bank on the corner. There was a restaurant called the Blue Dell, a restaurant and a bar, and right next to it was Tommy's Tavern.

**Hilgert:** Is that at the corner, Homer Adams and what's turned into Godfrey Road?

**Siemer:** No, it's Delmar, State and Delmar.

**Hilgert:** State and.

**Siemer:** Where the CVS is on one corner.

**Hilgert:** Oh I know what you're talking about.

**Siemer:** And the bank is on the other corner. That was called the Blue Dell Restaurant. Then next to it was a little pub called Tommy's Tavern and there was the, there were a couple of drug stores, drug stores on the corner, Massey. It used to be Massey-Yost. I think it's only Massey now, it was a drug store for years and the place that's Winds and.

**Hilgert:** Strings?

**Siemer:** Yes, Winds and Strings I think that's it.

**Hilgert:** That's across the street.

**Siemer:** Right, that was a drug store. So there were at least two drugstores in North Alton.

**Hilgert:** Now there is another drug store next to that Winds and Strings, now the Medicine Shoppe has opened up there.

**Siemer:** Oh next to St. Peter's? Near St. Peter's Hardware?

**Hilgert:** Yes, yes.

**Siemer:** Oh I know where that is. I saw that tonight, yes it's on this side.

**Hilgert:** Right.

**Siemer:** I mean St. Peter's Hardware was a little bitty place.

**Hilgert:** And that's now a big place.

**Siemer:** Right. They razed that and then they built that in the back. A big one. And I think they do a lot of rentals, I think that's what keeps them pretty much going.

**Hilgert:** St. Peter's Hardware, yes because they rent stuff to help you fix up your house like sanders or anything like that. Now the Massey's drug store, that's still.

**Siemer:** A drug store.

**Hilgert:** A drug store but it seems, it looks to me like they're only operating out of one side now as opposed.

**Siemer:** Maybe a bicycle, there used to be a bicycle shop.

**Hilgert:** I think they're now over in the side that was the bicycle shop and the other side looks like it's closed because they've got paper up over the window.

**Siemer:** Oh, haven't noticed.

**Hilgert:** So now, but you said you remember that being there for.

**Siemer:** The drug store yes, a long time. And Gent Funeral Home has been there.

**Hilgert:** The building looks kinda nineteen-sixitish or nineteen-fiftish, like.

**Siemer:** And it's been there, because all my family has gone to Gent Funeral Home for years.

**Hilgert:** They have a, they still have a neon clock out in the front.

**Siemer:** That, yes, that is, I don't ever remember any other clock being there. That has to be an antique.

**Hilgert:** We will stop the tape now and turn it over.

### **Tape One - Side B**

**Hilgert:** Now we were talking about Rain and Rain grocery store. I've also got listed here in my notes that in North Alton there was a post office, a townhall, and a jail at one time, two beer gardens, the Cinderella Skating Rink, and the Dreamland Theater.

**Siemer:** Those were before my time.

**Hilgert:** Ok.

**Siemer:** [Laughs].

**Hilgert:** So you can't give me any information except about Rain and Rain?

**Siemer:** Rain and Rain I remember.

**Hilgert:** Here is a picture from *Alton Pictorial History* by Charlotte Stetson showing Upper Alton. Does that look familiar?

**Siemer:** Is this Upper Alton or North Alton?

**Hilgert:** Or North Alton, I'm sorry.

**Siemer:** I don't remember that but I do remember the Clark Bridge, it was a toll bridge and you had to have tokens to go over it and they were big red plastic tokens and it had, it was.

**Hilgert:** Had a toll something like that?

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** Oh, well then talking about taverns we'll go back, well, let's stick to the grocery stores. What about, do you remember any other grocery stores? I've got something listed here the M. Walter grocery store in North Alton, do you remember that one?

**Siemer:** I remember the Tri-City. The Tri-City grocery store was there. Do you have that one down, was it there?

**Hilgert:** I don't remember having anything about Tri-City. That was in North Alton, where was that at?

**Siemer:** By where Yungck's is now, in that area was the Tri-City grocery store.

**Hilgert:** I've got the Thorton grocery store.

**Siemer:** That was before my time too.

**Hilgert:** And, let me ask you this, I've got Thorton grocery store, yes it was before your time because it was in 1876.

**Siemer:** Way before my time [laughs].

**Hilgert:** It was at what they call, what I keep reading in this book, the Five Points which is Belle, Piasa and 16th Streets.

**Siemer:** I've no idea what that means.

**Hilgert:** You've never heard that called the Five Points?

**Siemer:** No.

**Hilgert:** What about something called Dogtown, a place in Alton called Dogtown, an area referred to as that?

**Siemer:** No.

**Hilgert:** Oh well then we'll move on to, we were talking about, you were talking about Tommy's Tavern up there in Upper Alton [I should have said North Alton since that is where it was located]. What about the Midtown? Do you remember the Midtown?

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** Because that's, well it just recently closed.

**Siemer:** I didn't know it was closed. It was closed and then I thought someone said it was open. Yes, I remember the Midtown, it was a nice place to eat, people would go there.

**Hilgert:** And that's at 7th and Central.

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** And it was run by, first I guess by a guy named Russell Elsnor and they by Bob and Dorothy Metzger.

**Siemer:** Yes. Russell ran it for, when I was, we'd go there in college on Thursday night they'd have nickel beer and all the college people that went to college in Alton and Edwardsville and lived in the area or young people would go and go to Thursday night nickel beer night for I think like two hours.

**Hilgert:** So it wasn't a fancy place?

**Siemer:** No.

**Hilgert:** And then it became.

**Siemer:** Not when we went there.

**Hilgert:** It became more like a restaurant later didn't it?

**Siemer:** It was a restaurant and has been up until as you said, recently it closed.

**Hilgert:** And that's still there, the Midtown.

**Siemer:** Someone was going to buy it and renovate it and I don't know what happened to that. But it was supposed to have had someone interested, and they were going to do all sorts of renovations and make a very nice restaurant in that area.

**Hilgert:** And like we said, that's at 7th and Central and across the street from that is Fast Eddie's Fried Chicken.

**Siemer:** Used to be Block's, had a drive-in. The Block's on Milton Road, in fact we went by it the other day, my husband said "I can't believe it's closed." And the Block's in Godfrey, they were all the same family, had that.

**Hilgert:** And the Block's on Milton you said right?

**Siemer:** Right.

**Hilgert:** So they had 3 restaurants in town?

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** On 7th and Central, on Milton Road, and then.

**Siemer:** Godfrey.

**Hilgert:** Godfrey Road.

**Siemer:** Godfrey is still open.

**Hilgert:** The Godfrey is still open, right and they've closed the other two and they had really good, they had the best.

**Siemer:** Hamburgers and.

**Hilgert:** Onion rings.

**Siemer:** Really good onion rings. The Block's on Milton Road, when we were in high school that was the place to go on Friday and Saturday night. And you'd go there and just drive through and kids would sit for a while and then you know they'd say you have to move so then you'd just drive through. And the whole evening, it was just driving through Block's which sounds a little [laughs] something, I don't know what'd you call it? "What are you going to do? I don't know. Going to Block's and drive around," and that's what they did in high school. You just drove, got the car and drove around [laughs].

**Hilgert:** What's really neat about Block's is they really haven't changed the, have they changed the buildings much?

**Siemer:** No.

**Hilgert:** I didn't think so because they look pretty much like the same.

**Siemer:** Exactly like they would. They had carhops.

**Hilgert:** Do you remember when they opened?

**Siemer:** No, just in high school they was always there. My husband would remember because he lived up the street from it. But there was also a drive-in right across from the Little Theater in that parking lot that, there's a little, it used to be a lawyers' office. I don't know, is there a lawyers' office there now? Catholic Charities or something was there. That was a drive-in years and years ago.

**Hilgert:** A drive-in restaurant?

**Siemer:** A drive-in restaurant. I don't remember the name of it.

**Hilgert:** That street there, that's.

**Siemer:** 20th.

**Hilgert:** Well that's North Henry St. that the Little Theater is on.

**Siemer:** Ok.

**Hilgert:** And then if you, instead of, if you're on, because you access that like off of Elm St.

**Siemer:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** And the, what I'm wondering is, going down Elm St. there, which is over by where now there is a housing project.

**Siemer:** Right.

**Hilgert:** There's a lot of little building that seems like there must of been a lot.

**Siemer:** One was an A&W Rootbeer stand was there.

**Hilgert:** Oh there is one over there that I always think looks like it probably was like a.

**Siemer:** Then it became a fruit stand I believe. But I don't know if it's even there anymore now. But it was an A&W stand.

**Hilgert:** I think there is a building like that still there. Do you remember what was along there on Elm St.? There's now like a fish market there, looks like.

**Siemer:** There was a restaurant, that restaurant, the Chinese restaurant. That was called, I can't remember what it was called but it was a little restaurant bar that you'd go, it wasn't very large and you'd go and maybe have hamburgers and people would go for beers on Friday or Saturday night. And they'd have, it was a restaurant.

**Hilgert:** It's a shame now that's it's all pretty much closed up, so much of this that we now talk about. Continuing to talk about bars, what about Fast Eddie's?

**Siemer:** Fast Eddie's where it is now?

**Hilgert:** Yes, was it always there?

**Siemer:** It was called the Bon Air, yes and it always had, it was down by, there was another one called The Sandbar which was down by, what's the soccer place down by . . . Animal Clinic on Broadway? Irene's Tavern and, it was down by, down by the steel mill, past the steel mill. I know you know where it is.

**Hilgert:** Was it run by the same people?

**Siemer:** No The Sandbar was supposedly run by some Italian people (laughs).

**Hilgert:** Was this known to be a little risque or something?

**Siemer:** Yes, it was supposed to be, some sort of underworld people that ran it. I don't know if it did or did not. But that was always the.

**Hilgert:** And it was called The Sandbar?

**Siemer:** Yes, and people that would work at the glass works and at Laclede Steel would go in on a Friday night, they'd cash their paychecks there and the Bon Air would do the same thing. And it was, men would go in on a Friday night and get their checks cashed and then of course you could make some money from the clientele because it was Friday night, they want to relax and have a couple beers. But the Bon Air was supposedly had quite a reputation of being lots of wild things going on there. I never did know what they were, I don't know if it was gambling or.

**Hilgert:** Are you talking about The Sandbar still?

**Siemer:** The Sandbar, the Bon Air, and Irene's Tavern, they all kinda had reputations. I suppose it was because the men would go in after work on Friday nights and Saturday nights and get their paycheck cashed and maybe gamble a little.

**Hilgert:** Now was the Bon Air always in the location it's in now on.

**Siemer:** That's the only place I've ever known. And there was the Wedge Tavern right in front of it.

**Hilgert:** Right, and that's been taken down because I think Eddie, what's his last name who owns the Bon Air?

**Siemer:** Eddie Sholar.

**Hilgert:** Sholar bought that and then I think tore it down. Now what was the Wedge Tavern like, do you remember that?

**Siemer:** Very very tiny. I was never in it. But I think they planted three trees in the entire area (laughs). It's not very much.

**Hilgert:** Now did you ever go to the Bon Air when you were in college?

**Siemer:** No, never went to the Bon air. It just wasn't the place to go. The Sandbar became the Red Garter and when I first started teaching it would, they would have bands on a Friday and Saturday night and we'd go there because my roommate sang in a band called the Velvet Hammer and they'd be down there on Friday and Saturday nights and we'd go down and party there.

**Hilgert:** What kind of music was this?

**Siemer:** It was, let me see, *Cracklin' Rosie* was one they sang all the time.

**Hilgert:** Sorta poppy-rock sorta stuff?

**Siemer:** Yes. And then Forkeyville is when you went, that was out by Fosterburg and that place you went to all the time. It's right as you make the turn out toward Fosterburg, there's a gas station and then right there is this old building it's called Forkeyville. And you went out there like when you were in college on Friday and Saturday night and they'd have bands and everybody went to Forkeyville on Friday and Saturday night.

**Hilgert:** The building's not there anymore?

**Siemer:** The building is there but it's closed up. There's nothing in it. And today it looks so small and when you're in college it looked like it had all this room. It was such a big place, but you think "Man this place is tiny" (laughs).

**Hilgert:** I guess that's just our memory deceiving us.

**Siemer:** Yes perceptions.

**Hilgert:** Now going back to the movie theaters. Did you ever go to the Grand because I know that was sorta the big one?

**Siemer:** The Grand yes, yes you went to the Grand if you went downtown.

**Hilgert:** That was downtown and I have written here that it was the first air-conditioned theater but I'm sure by the time you went to the movie theaters they were probably all air-conditioned.

**Siemer:** Yes they were.

**Hilgert:** And that closed in 1977. Now that building is still there.

**Siemer:** Yes and right next to it is a little bitty was, it's a coffee house now and that used to be a diner. And it had like one counter and then it had maybe two tables in, and maximum of ten people could get in there at one time, and he had blue plate specials all the time, and Henry Saenz would go down there and have breakfast every morning and go to Saint Mary's for mass.

**Hilgert:** That's a shame that that theater, that so many of these theaters are closed now.

**Siemer:** It had a balcony, the Grand had a balcony.

**Hilgert:** Now I've got another, some other little luncheonettes. Here I've got listed as Greer's Luncheonette, do you remember that one on 3rd St.? Does that sound familiar?

**Siemer:** Yes I remember it but vaguely.

**Hilgert:** It was run by the Peters family and it was torn down to make way for the First National Bank.

**Siemer:** Wow, there was around the corner, maybe I'm thinking of Greenfields. Right across from the bank where the Time Out lounge is, now there was a clothing store and when I was in high school two men went in there and they killed the proprietor of it. And it was quite, I think they shot him or stabbed him and it was quite the thing to happen in Alton a long time ago.

**Hilgert:** Talking about downtown Alton and that area there. Hayner Library is down there.

**Siemer:** Right.

**Hilgert:** And I know the first Hayner Library they built was what is now the Children's Library on State St. which is a different building from the Main Library. Do you remember what was there before it.

**Siemer:** There was a Tri-City Grocery Store in there. The adult library now was a grocery store.

**Hilgert:** Oh ok.

**Siemer:** And the Children's Hayner Library was the main library. They didn't have a

separate section for the for the children. They just had a section in the library for the children.

**Hilgert:** Do you remember what was there before the Children's Library was there, anything in that lot? Because that's kinda, that's on the corner of State and I don't remember that street that comes.

**Siemer:** Yes I know it's a parking lot for the Children's Library now. Is that what you're talking about?

**Hilgert:** Well I'm just talking about where the Children's Library is now. Do remember what was there before the Children's Library?

**Siemer:** All I remember is the Children's Library, it was always the library.

**Hilgert:** Maybe it was built before your time.

**Siemer:** Yes that library was the adult library and that's the library we went to in high school.

**Hilgert:** Yes, ok it was built in 1891 so I guess it was before your time.

**Siemer:** It was there [laughs].

**Hilgert:** Ok.

**Siemer:** The Confederate Prison has been there a while too.

**Hilgert:** Right.

**Siemer:** Because my great-grandfather was in the Civil War. And they live out here and his job was to, when they had the small pox epidemic, whey they died at the prison they loaded them in wagons and then took them up State St. to the Confederate Cemetery. And they buried them at this Confederate Cemetery. And my great-grandfather walked down in 1858 when they had the last Lincoln-Douglas debate, he saw the last Lincoln-Douglas debate.

**Hilgert:** That is so interesting.

**Siemer:** Yes he walked from, of course there wasn't the River Road or anything, but he walked to Alton from our here and saw it. Because we came here in 1849 because there was a big oak tree in the front and my dad said he could remember that his grandfather said he could put his arms around the oak tree at that time. May have been his great-grandfather.

**Hilgert:** Isn't it a shame there's not like interviews with these people?

**Siemer:** Oh yes.

**Hilgert:** Or records or something that you could read. Again talking about downtown do you remember anything about the YMCA building?

**Siemer:** It was there when I was a kid and it was there for years. It was up from Snyder's.

**Hilgert:** Right because that's on, that's on 3rd St.

**Siemer:** Right.

**Hilgert:** Did you ever go there when you were in high school?

**Siemer:** No it was the men's, the women's was down from Marquette and the men's was up from Snyder's. And you would never go to the Young Men's Christian Association. And the Young Women's Christian Association is where the Y is now. So the women went there and the men went to the one up from Snyder's.

**Hilgert:** Did you go to that YMCA?

**Siemer:** No I'd drive past it and my kids took their, their lessons for, to be lifeguards there, but that was a lot later.

**Hilgert:** What about, do you remember a little, I've got note here of a little grocery store called Gudell Grocery Store on 6th and Henry Sts. Do you remember anything about that?

**Siemer:** No. The only little grocery store was the one that my husband talked about was The Little Red Store they called it. As you go down Milton Rd. as you make that wide turn that connects you to Broadway there was, it was a house and the people had a store in the bottom and they lived at the top. And they called it The Little Red Store and you were sent up there for bread and milk, but that's the only little.

**Hilgert:** Now I remember when I moved here there was Uptown, where they've now torn down to build the Walgreen's on College Ave. there was a diner that all the kids went to lunch when we still had open campus. What was that?

**Siemer:** We walked up to it, sometimes we walked her. Gosh what was the name of that?

**Hilgert:** It was a really neat little diner, kinda 1950s style.

**Siemer:** You had plenty of time to walk up and everybody always ate hamburgers and you got french fries and soda. Or you went out to the Morning Star Dairy which was a Redbird Special and you got a hamburger, french fries, and a coke for 52 cents. It's now the Wendy's and it was a dairy. You know you could go out and buy the bottles of milk in the glass jugs.

**Hilgert:** And it's now the Wendy's?

**Siemer:** It's the Wendy's.

**Hilgert:** That's out there on Homer Adams.

**Siemer:** Right, yes. Right next to the bowling alley.

**Hilgert:** It's kinda in front of the bowling alley.

**Siemer:** Right.

**Hilgert:** If you're on the parkway there. Do you remember anything about the jewelry stores in town, like there's Gould's or there used to be. Am I pronouncing.

**Siemer:** Goulding's.

**Hilgert:** Goulding's.

**Siemer:** That was there for years. Goulding's were there because my great-aunt that raised my father, jeez she was born in the late 1880s, she got a watch from Goulding's Jewelry Store for her 21st birthday. My brother has the watch so it's been there, Goulding's has been there a long time.

**Hilgert:** What about Maneke's, that's up.

**Siemer:** Maneke's is Uptown, I don't think they've been there as long, but the teacher that her husband owns it now, she taught at West.

**Hilgert:** Overrath.

**Siemer:** Yes Kay, Vickie Oberlink.

**Hilgert:** Oberlink the Oberlink's own Goulding's not Maneke's].

**Siemer:** Oberlink

**Hilgert:** They owned a different.

**Siemer:** I think he works somewhere else, they own some other jewelry store maybe.

**Hilgert:** There was one that was downtown that closed down.

**Siemer:** Stone Brothers is still down there and Stone Brothers has been down there for a long time across from the bank. And the First National Bank is where everybody banked. Everybody went downtown to First National Bank. I believe it's now, the banking area is for rent but there's still doctor's offices and offices in the building.

**Hilgert:** Now there's a little shop-restaurant we used to go to downtown called The Franklin House which they've closed now. But that building's been there forever, do you remember anything, what it was before it was the little restaurant called The Franklin House?

**Siemer:** For years now they're saying that's where, it was a hotel, and that's where supposedly Lincoln stayed after the last Lincoln-Douglas debate and supposedly he haunts it. And supposedly there's a little girl that, that haunts it and a man who supposedly had been, he was, I don't know if he was mentally ill or he was an alcoholic, and he'd gone to stay there and he'd always talk about being, having Indian fights and fights with the Indian and he'd go into his bed at night and he'd scream and then one night they went and found him and he was scalped supposedly, rumor has it. The haunting of Alton.

**Hilgert:** Do you remember what that building was when you were in high school or anything.

**Siemer:** No. Doesn't ring a bell?

**Hilgert:** What about the area now downtown where Ralph's restaurant is?

**Siemer:** That's a very very old building but I don't remember what was there. In front of it was where the hardware store was H.K. Johnson's Hardware and next to it was my great-great-grandfather's bar-saloon-cafe or whatever.

**Hilgert:** In front, you mean like in front on the Broadway side?

**Siemer:** Right, like between, right across the street from the flour mill.

**Hilgert:** Oh, so there was the hardware store.

**Siemer:** Yes, H.K. Johnson's.

**Hilgert:** H.K. Johnson's and then next to that was the little saloon or something?

**Siemer:** Yes it was a saloon and a.

**Hilgert:** Was it your grandfather?

**Siemer:** A tavern, like a, my great-grandfather, they also had the.

**Hilgert:** Do you remember what it was called?

**Siemer:** No, but we've got, my cousin's got pictures of it. And they're the same people that ran the Clifton Terrace Inn.

**Hilgert:** Now, but those buildings don't exist anymore do they?

**Siemer:** No, no the last one, the building where they had the hotel, the Clifton Terrace Hotel burned in 1959. And that picture there [points to a picture on the wall] is even before that. But people would come up from St. Louis on boats and spend the weekend there.

**Hilgert:** Now what about moving down on Broadway a little bit, do you remember what was maybe on the corner of Broadway and Henry St., you know where that fancy little flower gifty.

**Siemer:** Mosaic's?

**Hilgert:** Yes, shop is now? Because that's a neat building.

**Siemer:** Yes it was a plumbing and then before that it was, I'm not sure what that was. Alton Refrigeration been right next to it for years and years. And then the building, the building down from the movie there, the Grand Theater it's now a pharmacy, I'm not sure what that was either but it's a really really neat old building. Or the Laura Building, I don't know what all was in that. I do know that the Faulstich Building was right next to the Laura Building and when kids at Marquette, I remember my husband would say, they'd have to go down and wait for the bus there and it was a pool hall and a cigar store. And they would play.

**Hilgert:** That was in the Laura Building, yes.

**Siemer:** Ok, they called it the Faulstich Building. And then they would play pool until the bus came to take them to Upper Alton. The Marquette kids rode the city buses.

**Hilgert:** The Faulstich Building that's right. He had a cigar store, a factory, a news

agency, and a billiard room there.

**Siemer:** And all the boys went to play billiards there to wait for the bus.

**Hilgert:** Now did you work anywhere in Alton like in high school?

**Siemer:** I worked at Snyder's in college and high school on weekends and nights.

**Hilgert:** And that was the clothing store.

**Siemer:** Yes, I sold the Red Goose Shoes.

**Hilgert:** The ones that you bought when you were a little kid. Very good. Now why have you chosen to remain in the Alton area?

**Siemer:** Well I didn't go away to college because I didn't have the money, so, and I got a scholarship to SIU which when I started was in Alton so lived at home and then commuted to school and got my degree from SIU so I didn't go away so I didn't have the opportunity to, you know, meet someone else or to get a job in a different area. And then when I graduated I got hired in Alton for a job, a teaching job. Here was my job and so here I stayed [laughs].

**Hilgert:** Well just to finish up then, do you have any favorite memory associated with any building in Alton?

**Siemer:** No.

**Hilgert:** I know you talk about the Red Goose Shoes a lot.

**Siemer:** [Laughs] No, I guess I just remember that a lot. I do remember the drugstore in Upper Alton when we were real little kids we'd take the asparagus to the train and treat was quite a thing and then on the way we'd stop at the drugstore, the Kerr Drugstore and get strawberry ice cream cones on the way home and that was quite a treat.

**Hilgert:** Now is that the same train station that's in Upper Alton?

**Siemer:** Yes, pick up.

**Hilgert:** Where the Amtrak Station is?

**Siemer:** Right they'd pick up the asparagus and it would go to Chicago. It's the same I guess part of that, that's in our history books now, that's got the little picture of the Chicago to Alton train.

**Hilgert:** Well I think this wraps it up for us, so thank you very much.

**Siemer:** You're quite welcome.