Interview: Venka Ambuehl
Interviewed By: Joshua D. Koenig
1:00 PM Nov 15, 2001
Lincoln Place: Granite City, Illinois

Koenig: This is Joshua Koenig, interviewing Mrs. Ambuehl at one o'clock on Nov. 15, 2001. Mrs. Ambuehl, would you please state your full name and spell your last?

Ambuehl: Venka G. Ambuehl. A-M-B-U-E-H-L.

Koenig: Mrs. Ambuehl, would you please start out by stating some background information about yourself.

Ambuehl: Oh, when I, my mother came over from Bulgaria, she was pregnant with me. I was born on May 25th, May 22nd 1925. I remember the good life here in this area. There were Armenians, Hungarians, Mexicans. We were very friendly. We didn't argue, we didn't fight. What I remember mostly, at Christmas time, especially the Armenians, they would have a table set with all their goodies, and their doors were wide open. Anybody could come in and go out. And another thing I remember mostly was that some of the young men in this area had instruments, and on Fridays they had a band at the Lincoln Place center. On Fridays, that's where we went to dance. That's where I met my husband. He went on to the service, and I worked. We had a very good relationship with five of us girls. What else can I say? My parents were strict parents. We had certain chores on Saturdays. The porches had to be hosed off, the sidewalks had to be hosed off. At that time there was a lot off falling dust from the plants. That was strictly something that we had to do on Saturdays. On Saturdays we had to polish our brother's shoes, iron their shirts, and get all ready for Sunday for church. We waited on the men, women were taught that. When I got my first job, I had to give part of my money to my dad. I can

remember one time; I went into the Korps department Store at that time. I wanted to buy a suit, this three-piece suit. It was beautiful I thought. I bought it. It was to be done with payments. I was to get it out by Easter. I kept making my payments, and Easter was shortly here, and I didn't get my suit paid off. My dad taught me a lesson. He paid it, and I got my suit. We went to school, walked to the high school, rain, snow or shine, walked out to the high school. On certain days we were given a nickel, and sometimes pooled our nickels together and take a taxicab. If we didn't use that nickel to take a cab to school, we stopped at Dressel Dairy's for an ice-cream cone. I mean it was a double dip big thing for a nickel. We played a lot of games on the street. We kicked the can, we played hide-and-go seek; we drew a map to see if we could find it.

Koenig: How did your parents meet?

Ambuehl: My mother was from a town called Smilavoh in Yugoslavia. They were burned out. They ended up in Betohia, and my mother's folks stayed in Betohia, and my dad's folks went into Bulgaria. But they stayed in contact. Then they married. My mother went into Bulgaria. At that time my father says that all the brothers had to live in one house, and their father was the big chief. He bought the clothes, he bought the food, and they had to pay him. I guess my dad didn't care for that idea, so he came over here, without my mother, and got a job, and then went got and got her, decided to come back. His brother came with him, but didn't like it. He went back. So he was the only one in the family who stayed here. In 1958, I think it was, Leland and I didn't have any children. We had relatives over there. We tried to adopt children here from the Illinois child place. It just took years and years and years of interviewing. Finally, we had some relatives come over here from Yugoslavia. Her husband was the Army attaché, so she

came along with him. We talked about children. She said, "Oh you can come over here and get all you want." So we pursued that, and went over there. We got a boy and a girl. Tommy was two and a half. Cathy was six months old. They have been good children. I've had no problems with them. I have five granddaughters. My daughter is in Florida with two girls. My son here, Tom with three girls. The oldest one is right now in England, on a semester of learning. I have one in Washington University, and the other one is in high school. The two in Florida, one is in high school, and the other one is in junior high.

Koenig: You were mentioning your childhood earlier. Did the community center play a large role in your childhood?

Ambuehl: A very big role, because we had Sunday school there. They sent two ladies from the Methodist church right across the street from the library here. Miss Gibson and another lady. We went there every Sunday for Sunday school. Then on the way home, we were given orders to pick up bread, and not eat the inside of it before we got home (laughing). Another thing there, they use to have summer activities where we made quilts and all kinds of crafts. We had bible school there. We had plays. We had a festival I think in October, this time of year. We picked a queen; at that time Mary Kambarian was queen. Yes a big part. When you had something to do, that's where you went. When didn't have anything to do that's where you went.

Koenig: You had also spoke of holidays at the community center. What do you most remember about the community center's role during holidays?

Ambuehl: I don't remember too much about holidays when I was younger. They had a Halloween party. I think the mother's club improved some of that in later years. They

had parties for the children. We put a play on there. I can't remember completely any more about that. We put plays on.

Koenig: Obviously the community center played a large role in your life, because you said that's where you met your husband. Can you tell me that story please?

Ambuehl: Well, we went there every Friday. They came from across the tracks to dance down here. He asked me to dance. I guess the next Friday we danced again. Then one Friday he asked me to take him down to Dimole Boat, that's when the Admiral was running. We went on a boat. Then he went into service, he didn't make any big promises, but we wrote, through mail and so forth. Then one year he said that he was coming home. He asked if his mother and dad could go, and we would buy a ring, and we bought a ring. We were engaged. Then he came home in June. I can't think of what year that was right now. Then he would be sent away again, and the war ended. His mother and dad lived way out on Palm Street in St. Louis. He didn't have a car. He had to ride the streetcar. If he stayed at my house too long, he would miss the street car (laughing). Finally my dad, he kept coming over, my dad said, "If this is the guy, decide what you're going to do." We got married on December 15th, 1945.

Koenig: Now going back to your parents. You had mentioned that your father came over here by himself. Where did he stay?

Ambuehl: Well, the way he used to tell stories. There were like, sheds, a lot of sheds here. That's where he stayed. Then he met the Roseoff's. They became Godparents. They didn't have any children. They took him in. They took him in when he came back with my mother. They were all bachelors, and they stayed in these houses. When he came back with my mother, the Roseoffs helped him. They became our Godparents, and

we called her Grandmother. At that time, Mr. Roseoff had fruit truck. He sold fruit. In his truck he went up and down the street with produce, tomatoes and all that. I can remember many times he'd come home, and if things were ready to spoil or go bad, he'd give them to my mother. I remember a bowl of fruit on the table where maybe my mother had taken the bad parts out of an apple or so fourth. They helped them a lot. She learned to cook. She cooked a lot, knew how to handle all that. She used to make jelly, cook grape jelly. My mother never knew how to make cakes. Our desserts were jelly bread. She made a lot of bread and jelly bread.

Koenig: From doing research on Lincoln Place, along with the bachelor housing, there was also a large role played by coffee shops in community living.

Ambuehl: Yes, coffee houses. They were still going when my dad was still living. Duke's had a coffee house. There was a building here by Alabats. They housed a lot of people. It was like a department store. It had clothing at the bottom. Then there was this place in Madison, Pauchiff's place. It was rooms, and it had a bath and toilet at one end. Immigrants came and stayed there.

Koenig: Did the coffee houses play any role in your father's life before your mother came over?

Ambuehl: Not that I know of. Just to talk, just to visit with the men and talk their problems over. While he was married with my mother, that was kind of like an evening out. They'd go and play cards. They didn't play for money or anything. A lot of times they'd come home with candy bars. They'd come home with that kind of stuff. It was just a place to go, and talk about maybe what each one had heard from relatives. A lot of them were married, had wives and never went back.

Koenig: You had mentioned that the Roseoffs helped you, or your parents greatly. What can you tell me about the sense of community from Lincoln Place?

Ambuehl: Anybody would do anything for anybody. My dad was kind of like a handyman. He'd put a door up for somebody. You should hear a lot about him. He just did things. Tiled, as a matter of fact, he built this house. They just helped each other. Whether it be food, funerals, they just worked together. Nationality didn't mean a thing. Most of my friends were more Armenians than Macedonians. There was not that deal, you can't go with them, or you can't do this, or you can't do that. We had Hungarians. What I remember mostly too, in the summer time, people didn't close their doors or their windows. The Hungarians across from my mother used to be Nagy's, they had music. Next door was Mexicans. You could hear it. Up and down the street you could just hear the music going all the time. Everybody kept their place up. It was a neat looking place. I regret that all the young people, as soon as their parents died, they had to cross the tracks, and buy houses across the tracks instead of staying here. Some of them wish they had stayed. I remember when my girl and son were growing up, when I was raising them. They didn't have the relationship with their age, youths in this area, they just weren't here. When I was growing up, there was a lot of my age, and more of us. When they grew up there wasn't that. I think they really missed a lot. Whereas some of the friends of mine my age stayed, and their children if they were all in this area, they would have had the same relationship. Like I said, they all moved across the tracks.

Koenig: That is interesting that you used that term, "across the tracks."

Ambuehl: Well we were the "hunkies" across the tracks. As a matter of fact, I don't know if my husband told you this, but when he was dating me, his relatives warned him

about coming down here. It was really a mix. There's taverns on Niedringhaus, and there were some Mexicans at that time where there was a little episode where they stabbed each other. Otherwise, everyone had their doors open, the windows open. No air-conditioning, maybe that's why. But all our doors were open. As a matter of fact, in the summer time, we slept at them. I can't think of anything else, but I'll probably wish that I had thought of something after you are gone.

Koenig: How has the term, "across the tracks" affected Lincoln Place, or how had it in the past.

Ambuehl: I don't know, but let me tell you, the story is a lot a lot like; you know Andy Phillips and all that. All the children from this area have done great. I have a brother that has a high school named after him in Blue Springs, Missouri. As a matter of fact, I tried to get that in a Press Record, and they did not print it. That's the feeling we had. Anything we did, they did not want to advertise it. Maybe we had problems with dating, but like I said, I ended up with Leland. A lot of the Armenian girl friends that I've had. They married Armenians that were down here. I remember taking walks. There were no houses in that area down that way (points out window), and we used to just take walks. Pair up and take walks. Only one of my friends married a soldier from the depot. But the rest of them married people that were raised together. Like Andy Hagopian married Ang, and Bob Persagian married a Hagopian girl. That's what it was. Mary Kambarian married an Asadarian boy. I mean it was all here.

Koenig: You had said that, earlier and just now, that your group of friends was made up of Armenians, Hungarians, and all these different…

Ambuehl: Mexicans

Koenig: …ethnic groups. How did that affect your life? Was there sharing of culture, of theses different cultures within your life?

Ambuehl: You saw food. Like I said, at Christmas time, our food was about the same. We did it. Growing up, I guess because the family didn't speak at home. My parents didn't knock Armenians. You didn't hear that at home. As a matter of fact, even the colored, we never heard that. They never preached any of that. So it never did bother us. What else…

Koenig: When Leland was overseas, you mentioned that you worked. What was your occupation?

Ambuehl: I worked at American Steel, in the payroll department. I worked at Union Starch in the Payroll department.

Koenig: Did you work when he came back from the war?

Ambuehl: Yes. When came home, he didn't have any money. He had 300 dollar mustering out pay. He had to buy a suit for us to get married. He was lucky enough that before he went to service, he worked at the depot; he went back in there. So he walked to work, and I walked to work. We lived at my mother's for two years. We decided that we wanted a place. There was an old house almost the size of that one right there (points). We tore it down, saved some of the wood, and we built this place. It used to be a chicken, the ladies that had this place raised chickens. At first it was probably living quarters, but they lived next door, and they used this place to raise chickens (laughing). I remember seeing them, they'd go outside and dig a hole, and they would bury feathers and whatever down in the ground (laughing).

Koenig: When I interviewed Leland, he had mentioned that most of your family holidays were spent with your family directly. What can you tell me about family gatherings?

Ambuehl: Well, I had a father that wanted us there all the time. When my brothers moved away and had a family, they came. You would think that prodigal sons would come home because he cooked, and he made things, and suggested making things, he would get in the car and think of something to run downtown and buy. He would be home in five or ten minutes, then he would think of something else and go again. To him that was the greatest thing. I have nephews, one is in Texas now, they remember that and they say that the most memorable thing, and the most important thing of their life, coming down here. At that time when they came, he took them out to the levee, and they just played around in the area. Slid down, you know used sleds at Christmas time, but every holiday they came. After my dad passed away, they had children and grandchildren, and they would come to their house. While my mother was living, they would try to come a couple times, but it was hard, because when one could come the other couldn't come because of the kids and all that, but that ended.

Koenig: What were your holidays comprised of? How did, for example Christmas…

Ambuehl: Christmas, there is church. That was midnight services; we had to go to midnight services. We more or less, we were forced to go to church. I don't care how late you stayed out the night before, you had to get up and go to church. We knew that. We didn't even try to stay away, or not get up or whatever. There was a lot of day holidays, and it was church. And meals at home.

Koenig: You have mentioned food quite often. Some of us in the class, for one of our projects where trying to put together a Lincoln Place cookbook. What can you tell me about food?

Ambuehl: A lot of the food my mother made were pots. She used to make green bean stew, and a lot of Lenten stuff; bean soup without meat, green bean soup, not soup like a stew. A lot of bread. Fried peppers in the summer, and tomatoes. We used to make tomato sandwiches, butter and tomato sandwiches. I don't know why, but even to this day I'm not a meat eater. Not because I want to be vegetarian or anything. I can remember, we used to buy chickens. We had people come down and sell chickens. This lady…even the ice was that way. The iceman, what were their names? They sold ice, anyway. But she would get a chicken, and she'd boil it, she would make soup, then she'd make rice with it, and then she'd bread it and fry it. Those chickens had a lot of flavor. I used to know she did that, and there's no way you could do that. You cook one and the broth doesn't taste like it used to taste. They grow them faster now; I don't know what it is. She used to do that. Like I said. Meat, Christmas, Easter we had to have Lamb. Christmas and the holidays were the treat days. You got apples, oranges, I remember at Christmas time big bowls of nuts. At that time Commonwealth where my dad worked, used to give them a box of fruit and nuts. It was a big deal then. Like I said, my mother didn't know how to make any deserts. The only deserts she knew how to make was Baklava. When my sister and I, I guess we were in high school, we took cooking classes. We learned to cook, reading recipes; we'd go to a friend's house. I had a very good friend across the tracks, Alla May Weston. I used to go there, and I'd eat these things there. I got interested in it, so we were baking. We could tell you stories where she and I

would bake stuff. My one brother Gilbert would come home and he'd see it there and it the whole thing and milk. It got where we enjoyed the sweets. There's a lot of stories. We'd make cakes, and we knew about baking, and put it in small pans, and the cake ran over in the oven. We learned. We learned to bake, and in fact I do a lot of it now. We have a bake sale at Christmas, and we've been baking since the first of October. I am the mixer. I've always enjoyed it. I was the kind of a person, if I was down and out, and depressed a little bit, I went to the cookbooks and recipes to see what I could fix, or mess around with.

Koenig: You had mentioned that there was a sharing of ethnicity or culture throughout Lincoln Place. How has your culture been preserved in your own family?

Ambuehl: Till my parents my parents were living it went real well. We you have mixed marriages it's hard, very hard. Even though I went over to Yugoslavia and adopted two Macedonians, Tommy spoke it when I got him, and I wish I had kept it up, but I didn't. We have, I have a good family relationship here, my son comes every Sunday. We make something; I make something big or not. They come every Sunday, we visit that way. It's hard any more, during the week they work, and are busy, and we hardly see each other. At church and then on Sundays, we'll have something. That's about it. It's not like it used to be. Intermarriages, it's hard. You are used to certain kinds of foods, certain kinds of eating and that. Things that Leland has never acquired to this day. Another thing my mother used to make. What did they call it? It's something like a quiche in a big pan. They made it with spinach. During Lent it was made with sour kraut believe it or not. With leek, it was mostly a lot of carbohydrates, mostly. I don't know if she knew of other desserts to make or not. Maybe couldn't remember coming over here

or not. There was not many desserts. Like I said, jelly bread, a lot of jelly, home made bread and jelly.

Koenig: You had mentioned that, just a minute ago, that it is hard to preserve through mixed marriages. Do you feel that other people from Lincoln Place had that same struggle?

Ambuehl: I think maybe everybody else but the Armenians. They seem to have stayed together. Maybe in their homes they were given orders to marry Armenians. I don't know. I would say that they're the only ones that have been able to stay together. I don't know. They'd be the only ones. Otherwise I have not heard of where they can't. A lot of us Macedonians married outside of Macedonian. My best friend Helen Papadino, she married a soldier from the depot. She ended up in Texas. I can't remember anymore. She's in Texas. Helen Kusich married a guy from Detroit. I would say not the Macedonian. Maybe other families but not in mine. I've tried to keep some of the traditions. Like at Easter I have lamb, and that stuff. Although Tommy and his wife lived with my mother for ten years, they lived upstairs. The girls came down, and she loved them. She let them comb her long hair, and take it out of braids. She used to make them coffee, Turkish coffee in little cups. Now they talk about that all the time. Every time they come here, they want to go by the house. Just to look. They remember that, and then Tommy and Tammy worked before they had the children. They stopped here, and I had supper for them. Then when they had children, they'd come here a lot and eat. I was more of a vegetable person, salads and that, and they all liked it. They eat it now; they still eat it to this day. Salads, green beans, and all the cabbages. Some of the things they ask me to make, lentil soup, they love it. I make that for them. Cabbage rolls.

Tammy has not learned to make them. They always say, "Baba, Baba makes them." I don't mind doing it. I thank God that I've been healthy enough to do what I do (laughing). What else? The only thing too, is Leland and I follow follow the strict rules, fast rules in our religion. Leland was not Orthodox when I married him. I tell you, the story was when we were going together, we talked about church. At that time, the Orthodox Church in Madison didn't have a church. We talked about what church and so forth. He said, "Well, I don't understand that man at the other church." When we'd have a priest come in and do the services, he spoke in Macedonian, and Slavic. So he said he'd be happy with the Presbyterian Church. So, I said that I wanted to go to church where my husband is sitting next to me. So, we got married in the Presbyterian Church, and obviously going to church every Sunday. He wouldn't get up and go to church. He'd stay in bed. I would go with my parents. I didn't say anything to him. I'd go with my parents. As he got to know my friends, my Macedonian friends, finally one Sunday he said, "Wake me up and I'll go to church with you." So, that's how it started, and he converted, and now he is very active. The converts are more active the old ones (laughing). He's out there cutting grass six hours a day, once a week. Very involved.

Koenig: What can you tell me about the Orthodox religion?

Ambuehl: It's a rough one (laughing). I mean, it's hard. You know it's a Catholic religion…(I nod) ok. There's a lot of fast days, there's confession. Just those things. If you aren't grown up in it, it's hard to accept. We have a lot of converts, and like I said, they're better than some of us that were raised in it. I've found that I've learned more about the religion since our minister is a convert. He has had classes in that. Where before, when we went to the church in Madison, we were taken by the hand, and it was

spoken in Slavanic. You just need to sit quiet in church. They didn't have confession, or anything like that. Those priests, my mother tells a story, that in Europe they would stop confession because, the priests would snitch on them, on the confession. So, they eliminated. Here, the Orthodox Church in America demands it. It's a hard church. To be a good Orthodox, a good Christian, it's difficult.

Koenig: We've been talking today, quite a bit about change throughout time. How have you seen change in Lincoln Place?

Ambuehl: Those who have moved in here, I would imagine they get these houses cheaper, rent is cheaper. It has not been kept up like it was when these all-ethnic people lived here. They're more afraid. They don't leave doors open. As a matter of fact, I don't know the names of the people down the street, where I knew everybody's house, I knew their name, on all the streets. You don't know that now. It took quite a while before I knew the name of the lady across the street. We would say hello, wave and that's it. Before you were in and out. It's gotten a little better within a few of these houses here. A couple bought the house one over from here. They really keep it nice. We talk. Then right next door is a relative. They came here two or three years ago and visited. Then they put their name in with the green card. Their name got pulled, and they were able to come. So they have a ten-year visit here with a green card. They lived here a couple months with me. That little apartment was open next door. Miss St. Ivann wasn't renting it to anybody, because she was afraid of being by herself. So she said that they could stay over there, so they stayed over there. She died, and they bought it, they bought it. They have been here a year, a year and a half. They had acquired enough money, 26,000 and paid cash. They are very, very frugal. So it was a little apartment on

this side, and then she lived on the other side. Well now, they are breaking a door through, they want to make a whole house. Anyway, like I said, we go out now, the lady, the man one house over, we'll talk. Then another lady, Brenda Whittaker, in the big Boserick house, she has a little restaurant she opened now, on Niedringhaus. There's contact with the neighbors, where there wasn't any for a long time.

Koenig: But this contact is different, still.

Ambuehl: Yes, it's different because, we are not in and out of the houses like we were with the ethnic people. I mean, they'd make things and bring it. They'd bring you something they made. If there's someone died, you know, they took food over. You were in and out of the houses. We were in and out of the houses all the time. If someone was sick, I remember mother taking soup to her neighbor. The … boy had diabetes, a young juvenile. He used to hide under the porch and eat candy and all that. When he died, it was a big thing. The whole community was upset. They all helped. When there is a wedding, everyone went to the wedding. The first funeral that I can remember was a teenager. There was a funeral, they took the casket, they walked it up to the tracks. Then it got on a hearse and went on. Those kind of things. We had this church. This church belonged to the Macedonians. On certain holidays, Saint Cyril and Methody the two Saints that wrote the Slavic language. Oh that was such a big; they had flowers all over the yard, and the door. We had picnics. We had picnics and this man that was God Father took his truck, and we all got on the truck, and we went out to, I don't know what it is in English, in Macedonia you had a farm, I've got pictures where we are out there. Everybody is out there, at these picnics. It was a big deal, those holidays. Those religious day holidays, they were big. They are not as big now. Our church is not all

Macedonians. It's a lot of converts. I guess the reason we don't have all that, maybe that would throw them out, or make them feel different. In other words a tradition that the Macedonians had, they're not pushing it with this church. Our traditions maybe are at home, but not there.

Koenig: What traditions do you still try to preserve then?

Ambuehl: We still have the church's name day. Same name day. That's about it.

Koenig: How has all this change affected you personally then?

Ambuehl: Not really bad, but I think about it sometimes and I felt sorry for those, of our children have grown up and are missing out, they are not seeing all of, didn't experience what I experienced. Now they tell me in other states that they, they say in Detroit, big Macedonian community. As a matter of fact, Okracas' (?) Restaurant is married to a girl here in Granite, and he misses it. They have dances there, the circle dance, the holidays and all that. There it is really big. As a matter of fact, the Macedonian organization had a convention in Chicago in September, and they said it was packed. It kind of died down for a while. People were going, but they said it was just really packed. I had a magazine from that. I don't know if you would be interested to look at it. It was, explaining the convention and all that. Just full, from all over Canada. Canada is another town, or another state, whatever you want to call it. There the Macedonians are very active too. Detroit has Macedonian churches, two of them. The Armenians have one up there too. They are very strong; their holidays are carried on. Andrew Hagopian says that they are very strong there, and carry all their traditions.

Koenig: Why do you think this change has occurred then? Why is there a sense of a loss of tradition and culture?

Ambuehl: Intermarriages. Intermarriages. That's all it could be. That's all

Koenig: Is there a sense of Americanization then?

Side B

Koenig: So do you believe that Americanization played a factor in the loss of culture?

Ambuehl: I would say.

Koenig: Before hand you had mentioned the importance of the bakery.

Ambuehl: That one, yes.

Koenig: What can you tell me about the bakery?

Ambuehl: He was a Macedonian. I'm sure he was a bachelor. He didn't have a husband, (laughing) he didn't have a wife. He didn't have children, and he brought this nephew here to help him. The bakery ran a long time. I don't know when it started and when it ended, but we, they took their dinners there and he baked it for them. Bread, I remember, even on Sundays, you went in there and you could get a loaf of bread. Then I think Chris was the man that died, and I then I guess the young man couldn't run the bakery, and it closed. Or else the grocery store took over, I can't remember. It played a big part, big part in this area. I'm sure others could tell you that. The ethnic people, especially the Macedonians I know were big bread eaters. I got to where I couldn't eat a meal without bread after I got married. I had to have a piece of bread. You know they made these big pots of stew, and believe it or not, you could take a whole loaf of bread and dunk it and eat it. We did that. My mouth is watering! That's how we ate. Maybe we got full on bread and gravy, or whatever you want to call it. It tasted good (laughing). I wish you could find the young man. I'm sure he's in the area. Someone said he lives in Madison across the street from the other church. I tried to look up his name in the telephone book,

but I didn't know how to, how he really spells his last name, and I couldn't find it, but they said he's here.

Koenig: Did it function also as a communal gathering place?

Ambuehl: Not really but I guess it, when everyone went there to get bread or get their food, it was, it was.

Koenig: Through Leland's interview, I found out that he was a member of the Lincoln Athletic club.

Ambuehl: Correct.

Koenig: Were you a member of any organizations in Lincoln Place?

Ambuehl: No.

Koenig: Did any of the organizations play a role in your life?

Ambuehl: Mothers club, I guess I could have joined that but I didn't. I was more active with the church, and didn't have time. Other organizations, I can't think of any other one that was down here. Well the Mexican Honorary they had theirs, the Hungarians had theirs. I belonged to the Macedonian Ladies Society, but I don't think it did much for this area. It was another place where women got, just had meetings once a month, and talked about their family, or relatives and life, or whatever. No I didn't.

Koenig: We had talked about how Lincoln Place has changed, and the different cultures that have comprised the neighborhood. How would you personally like to see Lincoln Place remembered?

Ambuehl: Remembered as foreigners that took care of their houses, and minded their own business really. What did they contribute? To raise their children like they should be raised. What else? To learn to get along. We learned to get along, and help each

other, and whatever. It was a clean; it was just a nice place to live. That's why I'm down here now. Like I said, well I guess I'm down here because my folks, my dad was like I said, he was a very handy man. He said, oh, I guess he wanted us close by him. He said, "Let's see what we can get for this place, and tear it down and whatever." So that's what we did. My taxes aren't high (laughing), which helped us. I'm sure if this house was across the tracks, I'd be paying more taxes. Higher taxes. When we were married, and trying to get ahead, that helped. We didn't have a car, for I don't know how many years. It's a place that helped us survive. Try to keep up with the money.

Koenig: Do you see that as being the situation for the other residents of Lincoln Place also?

Ambuehl: Yes. Yes. It has improved a lot. Because you see people siding their houses. There is a lot of it. That Whittaker lady, I can't believe what she did to that house. There is a few on Olive Street that sided them. It's improved. I can' t say in what last few years, but they are fixing them up. There was a threat here. There was a Mexican they called "Slumlord, Lord Slum, Slumlord", and some residents avoided him from buying them, they bought it just so he wouldn't get them. It's helped, it's helped. I was shocked to see how many students were catching the bus. I didn't think there were that many down here.

Koenig: Well, I would like to give you an opportunity to share any memories or stories that you had wanted to state

Ambuehl: Stories, I don't know any. Like what, anything? I can't think of anything especially. My life has been wonderful. I guess getting my children, going overseas and getting them, and coming back, and being so grateful for this country. Because, I got

very sick there. We got stopped in Belgrade, and they told us we couldn't bring them home, until we could found out that Cathy's father died before she was born, is that how it was? So that there was no attachment to that child yet. I can't believe I forgot all that. But Leland had to take; he left me in Belgrade by myself, with the two kids. He went back to the town where Cathy was born, and found out that the man who was married to the woman who gave birth to this baby was gone before she was born. I think the United States demanded that, they didn't want any problems. I don't know if Leland talked about that or not, but he'd probably remember more than me. He had, and we couldn't talk, they couldn't speak English. We wanted to tell them we wanted a lawyer. We couldn't think of the Serbian word for lawyer. Finally we got someone that spoke a little English, and finally he knew we wanted a lawyer. So, this young man went with Leland to this town where Cathy was born and we got it all straightened out, and we were able to come home. That's the biggest memory in my life, because I wanted children, and I think we were raised that way. I was raised that way, you know. My mother used to tell me, you'll probably laugh at this, my mother used to tell, she'd make me and my sister clean, and she'd say, "No man will want you if you don't know how to do this." So naturally we were trying hard to do, so anyway. We were raised, I would have liked to have gone to school some more, but that's out. They said, "No you'll get married, and raise a family, and that's your job." So I wanted children, we went with the Illinois agency, and I don't know how many years they came, and they checked your house, and all that. It was very, depressing like. But, I think getting this chance to go over there and get the two children was the biggest thing in my life. Especially now that they're, they've been good, and they don't give any problems, and they gave us some

grandchildren I've enjoyed, and still enjoy. That would be the biggest thing. I think about the things we did when we were young, and the friends we had, and the things we did, and all that. You wish you could go back, and realize that it can't be. We had fun, good fun, good clean fun. You know. We, with the Armenians, we had a club, five couples (lists names under her breath), five couples. We met once a month at each other's house and played cards. The women talked, and the men played pinochle, whatever. And then one of the member's wife died, she got killed in an auto accident. We never met again after that. I miss that. We don't see each other as much. As a matter of fact, we have thought about getting together. Since then, one of the members, the wife died and now the husband died along with the other one, and we were going to come together, and those two didn't want to come. Because one's missing a wife, and one's missing a husband. I guess, we thought about, just to get together. We had been setting up dates, and it would get canceled. Like I said, I miss those friends, and my kids, those are the most memorable things of my life that I remember.

Koenig: You had just spoken of your fond childhood memories, and said that you guys had, "good clean fun." What can you tell me about that?

Ambuehl: Good clean fun, what can I tell you. Like I said, we played games out on the street. Tin can, or whatever. We took walks. We went to the clubhouse. The dancing, the bible school, the crafts. We had craft shows. That's what I call clean fun. We went to each other's houses. Like I said, Christmas we'd all stay over at Hagopian's first, and we'd all be there, and from there we'd go to another house. We didn't do anything wrong, to be ashamed of, or regret.

Koenig: Was there a difference between this life here, and the one in which you encountered when you went to high school?

Ambuehl: The life now?

Koenig: Your life outside of school, when you were in the Lincoln Place community as opposed to your life inside high school.

Ambuehl: Inside of high school there was not much for me. I was wanting to stay after school and be in the Girls Athletic Association. My parents would not allow that. We had to be home, and we all had to be at the table for supper. But my senior year, I got to stay, I got to stay there, and I played. Was it soccer? I played something, not soccer. Anyway, if you are there four years, you got a big G. I was only there the last semester, so I just got a little patch. But, I couldn't be in band or any of those activities at school. We had to come straight home. Outside were activities with the friends here. They knew where we were. They sat on the porch, they'd watch. Everyone sat on porches then. We had two swings on the porch. High school, you went to school, and you came home. That's all. And you better not get in trouble at school.

Koenig: Well, my final question is, we've talked about today, the seemingly drastic change from community life when you were growing up, to community life today. Do you ever think there can be a revitalization of Lincoln Place, and it could come back to possibly where it used to be?

Ambuehl: I doubt it. I doubt it because, the ethnic people are not here. I don't know if those that have moved here, that are in here now would want that or have that. I don't think so. Even the Mother's Club was all ethnic women. Mexicans and Hungarians. I

don't think so. I don't know how it is in other communities across the tracks. Where do you live?

Koenig: I live in Glen Carbon (laughing, somewhat surprised).

Ambuehl: Well my daughter lived up there too. I think down here has gotten like it's been across the tracks. You're in your own home, you mind your own business, you keep your yard clean, and do whatever you want. That's it. Maybe your friends are a block away, or two blocks away, or your relatives are distance away and you just meet with them. I doubt it. I think the life here then was because of the ethnicity of the people. I would say they were almost one mind. I don't think across the tracks in some subdivisions that it is. If you read where it isn't (laughing). They had the same morality, the same rules of acting and so forth. I don't know, I doubt it. Because, I've seen it in my own block. We had dope selling across the street, you know. At that time maybe there was some then, but you didn't hear about it. I think that people are more frightened here to get acquainted with somebody. We had two boys across the street that died from drugs. They found one upstairs in the attic, didn't know he was up there, dead. No, I don't think so. I don't think it will ever be the same down here. Although we're considered that anyway. The view that they had of this area is still here I think. Even though the residents are different, the people are different. I don't think so.

Koenig: As you said you viewed that stereotype to be false. Do you view your experience in Lincoln Place to be a positive experience?

Ambuehl: For me, yes. Definitely. I pray, my prayers always thank God that my dad came over here. I thank him for coming and staying. Like I said, we were over there. It's terrible. We were over there, we wanted to help the relatives with some food. We

went down to the market, and I was going to buy some potatoes and stuff. The man asked me, "Where is my bag?" I said, "I don't have any bag." I was used to hearing that anytime you bought something, they bagged it for you. He took the potatoes and threw them back and just ignored me totally. It was bad. They had no refrigerators, refrigeration. Like I say, many times I think about it and I thank God that he came and stayed. They are talking about it the same way, but they miss home. My dad, see we went over in 1958 to get our children, we came home. He saw pictures of everything, relatives, and he decided, he and my mom decided to go back. They went back, but before they went, all my dad could talk about was Bulgaria, there's nothing like Bulgaria. This was better, they had big things. He talked about his life, ok. When he went and came back, he never mentioned it again. Never mentioned it again. That's like how they are I guess. You still have relatives there and that, and you want to talk about them. They see what they've got here, and they can't believe. His pension is eighty dollars a year. He says that just about takes care of his heating. So I don't think, now he is hungry, very hungry for what we had when I was growing up (referring to neighbor). He wants someone to talk to in Bulgarian. That's all he talks about. He met some in St. Louis, and they have been visiting. But you can understand, coming over here like our parents did, and wanting somebody to communicate with, especially when they can't speak English. They are going to school. They have done real well, learning. The young man is twenty-one. He can't make up his mind, he just came back. He took his sister back home, and came back. He lost his job when he left. He wants to go to school, finish school and work. He says, "I've got to work and make some money, and I want to finish school." So, but I can understand their feelings. When I went to school, I didn't know a

word of English. My mother didn't know much English either, but the community house helped her there. That Mrs. Prather grabbed her one day and said, "Look, you have children now, and you have to learn English." They took her and she learned English. They had a lady, I think Leland's mom, Singer Sewing Machine had my mom and a bunch of ladies there to sew, how to sew garments and all that stuff. And why, then I guess you know the Commonwealth built that, because most of the workers were working there. Like I say it was wonderful. I can't think of anything bad in my life. Unless I say my parents didn't let me do this, this, this, and this. But, otherwise I'd say it was great. Like I said, when my two were born, I hoped that they'd had the life we had here, but they didn't. It was scary. Mostly with my daughter it was scary, because I didn't like her companions, her friends. But it all worked out ok. But if there was enough ethnic people of their age here, they might have had the same life, but they didn't. They had to go across the tracks for their friends. Then most of their school buddies were their best friends. Is that all?

Koenig: Yes, Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Ambuehl: Ok, I hope I didn't rattle too much. I'll probably laugh when I hear myself.