

Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

Norma Glazebrook Oral History Interview

Meghan McNamara, Interviewer

Alton, Illinois

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Meghan McNamara (MM): The following interview was conducted with Norma Glazebrook on behalf of the Madison County oral history project that is part of the Madison Historical, the Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive of Madison County, Illinois. The interview took place at the home of Norma Glazebrook in Alton, Illinois. The interviewer is Megan McNamara from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Norma do you want to start with telling me when and where you were born?

Norma Glazebrook (NG): I was born in Alton, Illinois, on February the 13th, 1932. I was born at home because they only hospital with maternity at that time was St. Joseph up on Fifth Street and they had an epidemic so doctors told the parents to be that child can either be born at home or if you want to go up there you can go there. So my parents chose to have been born at home.

MM: And that was in the Brown area?

NG: I lived in the... I was born and raised in my parents' home on 1012 Brown Street in Alton.

MM: And do you want to tell me a little bit about what your folks did for a living?

NG: My mother was a stay at home housewife. She did volunteer work very much with the school on Mother's Clubs because I went to Humboldt school and we had a lot of children, which we called Dog Town where they live behind the old Illinois glass company. They lived either on houseboats or they lived on houses, on stilts, and when the floods would come they had to be evacuated and they were very, very poor income. And they went to Humboldt school and so did I, and my mother was in the Mother's Club that helped the children that were less fortunate.

MM: You said they made, you she made like two meals or something.

NG: The Mother's Club made two meals a week of yip yips, milk, and a cupcake and it was ten cents I believe for a ticket and then they sold them to the children, and then the children that they didn't have the money for it, they gave them free tickets, so they knew they had at least one meal, two meals a week.

MM: And you went there all through elementary school.

NG: Grade school, yeah. Kindergarten through sixth grade.

MM: And your father, he worked for the railroad.

NG: Yes. He was a conductor on the Illinois terminal railroad.

MM: And your grandfather as well worked for the railroad?

NG: He worked for the Burlington railroad, yeah. [crosstalk]

MM: You had a cool story about your grandpa and the railroad. Do you want to tell it?

NG: Yes. If you all remember the bridge from Alton to St. Lou... er, from Missouri, Illinois to Missouri, there was no bridge at that time in 19, er, 1894. And my grandfather was an engineer on the Burlington and he took, they put in a bridge that would turn so that when the barge traffic went through with the higher boats that they could go through. Otherwise they couldn't because the bridge was too low. So my grandfather took the first train over that bridge and his boss told him, "Klel, I think it'll work, but it's all steel. It isn't rock. And I'm not real, not real positive on it, but if you feel it shake a bit, well I want you to jump." But grandpa said, "But he never asked me if I could swim or not." [Laughing] But the train went over the bridge, they had a big celebration at the Illini hotel, which is now the Stratford Hotel, and they had served pheasant under glass and I don't know what all. I have a copy of the invitation.

MM: That's a very cool story. You want to talk a little bit about um, the baton twirling? You want to get into that already or do you want to talk more about your childhood a little bit?

NG: Basically I was just an average child. I was an only child so I was always out in the neighborhood looking for friends to play with because most kids had brothers or sisters to play with and I didn't have that, so I pretty well was average kid, but I was always out looking for friends to play with and unfortunately, there weren't a lot of girls in our area, but there were a lot of boys, so I learned to play kick the can and what all the boys... I was kind of a tomboy.

MM: Um, well, let's get into the baton twirling. You always wanted to be-

NG: Way back from a little girl on when I would see the major ads and we'd go to the different parades... patriotic parades and I'd see the baton twirlers or usually they were just a drum major directing the band, but that was what I thought I wanted to be when I grew up. Didn't realize when you got to be older you couldn't do those things. But that was always my dream to do this and I wasn't able to find a teacher and do anything with it uh, until I was 14. When I was 11 years old, I was in Shriners Hospital for six months because of the growth on my knee and that was in 1943 when the war was on and they thought that I had cancer of the bone on my left leg and I was in Shriners for six months and um, the doctors told him when we left there, I want that girl to get activity, strengthen her legs and mom and dad would never let me ride a motor, motor, not a motorcycle, a bicycle, because we were on a busy street. They wouldn't let me roller skate on the sidewalk, busy street. You might get out in the street and get hurt, and so the doctor says I want her to get a bicycle and I want her to get skates and I want her to strengthen the legs. And from then on I've been in baton twirling. I got a chance from a majorette down in southern Illinois that moved here and she was giving lessons in her backyard and I thought, well I'm on my way now. So I started there.

MM: But first before you bought your first baton, you had a couple of [crosstalk].

NG: Well, yes. Anything I could ... If I got a stick... broom was a little too long, but mother had a glass towel rack in the kitchen and when she'd go to the grocery store, I'd try that, and in the living room on the rug, but one time it slipped and broke in many pieces and when she came back, I'd taken a wire coat

hanger, straightened it out and put it over the edge where the towel rack was and I have dish towels over it so she wouldn't see it that, when she picked up the dish towel, naturally the wire fell out and you know, the whole story was unfolding there. And so then, I uh, my dad tried to make me one out of a copper pipe, uh, half inch copper pipe with a tennis ball on one end and a, and a uh, chair crunch on the other end, I mean um, yeah. One of things that fits on the ends of the chair legs. And uh, that did not work too well. It was too long and we didn't know anything different. But then later on I sold Christmas cards and I bought my first baton from Plover Kramer music store way down Broadway.

MM: I love your story. You want to talk about the first time you brought it home?

NG: Yes. I sold Christmas cards for two years, bought the baton - it was under \$5. I think it was about \$3.98 to be truthful. But anyway, I brought it home and it was shiny, it had a hard metal, well, it was during the war when I bought it, so there was no rubber to be had for the ball of the baton, it was kind of a plastic thing and there was a chair tip? cup on the other end I guess. But anyway, it had a seam down the middle of the metal and it was shiny and I came home and tried to do things, I knew the wrist twirl and figure eight. And I came home with it and after I messed with it for a while I put it in the corner and I got up the next morning and everywhere my hand touched, the perspiration from my hand, it had rusted and there was all rusted on. And so when my father came home from the railroad, he worked nights, he took it down and sanded it down on his work bench and then he painted it aluminum color so it would at least be silver looking. And um, I tried that, that didn't work very well at all but least it was a baton. And then eventually I got a real baton.

MM: So, when did your lessons switch teachers? I know you switched from your first teacher? [crosstalk].

NG: I started with Marion Slicker, who was the, just a high school majorette from southern Illinois when her parents moved to Alton. And then when I needed a baton, she sent me to Ludwig music in St. Louis and uh, to buy a real baton, which I thought was thrilled to death. I think it was \$4.50. And uh, my mother of course went with me and we when I told him what I wanted they said, did you know we have a former national champion man here that is in our facility. He doesn't teach baton, but he's here and his name was Roger Lee. So he came down and fitted me for the baton, the size with my arm length and so forth. And he took me down to the basement of Ludwig's. My mother was with me and he said, "Well, show me some things you can do." And at that time he said, "We have a very good teacher here." And I had outgrown the, the high school majorette that had shown me what she knew. And I started there with lessons and then after while he watched me again and he told my parents, he said, "She has outgrown this teacher" and he said, "She has visions of being a real champion." And he said, "If you will let me work with her and coach her in my yard at home on Sunday afternoons," he said, "I will not charge you anything IF you go along and later on let her teach baton twirling in this area. We don't have much of it here. And I'd like to see it grow." And so that my parents agreed and they take me every other Sunday afternoon to his backyard and, and he's the one that was my coach when I won the national championship in 1950 in January at the University of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

MM: And so they didn't have the majorettes in junior high when you were there. You didn't start until high school, is that correct?

NG: No, I started when I was 14 years old. Played around before that. But when I really started my first lesson, I was 14.

MM: Um, so you started the junior high majorettes, is that correct?

NG: Yes, I did. I taught the classes for the band director so they would have high school majorettes coming in. Yes.

MM: And then when did the Piasa Indians come into play?

NG: I graduated mid-year, 1950 from Alton High and I realized that all the children that were taking lessons if they weren't in band and that's when they discontinued junior high school bands and, at that time to save money, and I realized those kids have no place to go. So I started the Indians as a marching group just to give them something to do with what they had learned. Our first performance was in September of 1950, at Bethalto homecoming, we were paid a dollar a piece. There were 15 of us and then one little girl thought she couldn't make it, did make it. That made 16. They paid us \$15, each kid got a dollar and I got nothing. [laughter]

MM: Aw. But it was probably neat to see all your hard work...

NG: Right, right, right.

MM: How did you advertise for that to get started and what were your age groups that you had for that?

NG: I started them at five and a half years old. If you wanted to start taking twirling in the ... I had a junior red corps and they were from about six to about 12... no about seven to about 12, then I had a junior court from about 12 or they were more mature, maybe 11 up to 14 and a half and then they went into the seniors from 14 and a half, 15 through aging out which would be 20 years old.

MM: And so you taught them all at your house at first, is that correct?

NG: At my backyard at first and then we were at different schools. We were Roxana school, we were at Wood River Roundhouse and different... and then we ended up our summers were always out at the airport and I had the courtesy of having the airport out there, the big area open that people would come and park and watch the airplanes and things like that. That was our main place that we parked there, and Bethalto Junior High School in the winter time.

MM: I guess we are at high school then. When you performed in the Alton parade, did you say you guys were the first ones to be called the marching 100?

NG: Mm-hmm. In high school, yes.

MM: And when did you move to the Ludwig's or Laura's?

NG: Laura building?

MM: Yeah.

NG: When I got a job at the Telegraph, I took a... I was going to [unintelligible] college and I wanted... I was going into advertising, promotion and communications and I got a summer job at the Telegraph and I told them if I liked it I would stay and switch night school for my last year and a half into college. And it... otherwise I was going back to college and I fell in love with the newspaper and I switched to Washington U night school and I taught baton twirling on the weekends and in the evening, and um on the two evenings that I didn't go to night school, and uh, I needed a place and so I rented the Laura building at that time it was Lakeview Business College and they were going out. I had their place and I rented it for \$20 a month. That included the electric and the water.

MM: And...

NG: And I was there 20 years.

MM: Oh my, that's a long time. And you also gave private lessons at home?

NG: I have pri... No, after I moved to the Laura building, everything was down there. Right.

MM: So the private lessons was just right after you graduated.

NG: I gave private lessons up until 1972, and I retired from the corps and the Telegraph in uh, '70... November, December of '72, I retired from the corps and teaching. And then I retired from the Telegraph in February of '73, and I got married in '73. I married Robert Glazebrook 1973 in February.

MM: Oh, I wanted to back up a little bit um, to get back to some of the stuff that we talked about from your childhood. You know, your vacations that you guys took, getting the free passes from the railroad and then as well as the downtowns on Saturday night.

NG: Right. Robert Wadlow and so forth. Right.

MM: I'll just let you talk.

NG: You want me to talk about downtown?

MM: You can talk about downtown or you talk about a little bit more about your childhood like some of the things that we had talked about. About your holidays and your Christmas and then as well as like your vacations with your family. I also thought that was all very interesting stuff.

NG: Well, we can go back to ... I was in Roosevelt, I mean in uh, Humboldt School and we had poor kids from down by the river and they were in my school classes. And from there on, in Alton on Saturday night, everybody went downtown basically a lot. Good part of the people would go downtown, and the men would drive and they would park their cars down in the first two blocks from Piasa Street all the way to State street. And the men would sit in the cars and they'd either be sitting in the car or else they'd be sitting out on the fender talking with other people and the women would be shopping downtown. Every downtown was no taverns and things like that. It was all stores. One after another, there was [unintelligible] there was Woolworths, there was Grants Department store, which was a general department stores. There was Newberry's, which was a big general store. And then you went across the

street and we had stores there and we had the old fashion restaurant there that was very well known. And everybody at downtown basically ate there. We had two or three drug stores downtown and it was, everything was either they sold clothing stores, Young's department store, we had [unintelligible] ladies were ready to wear, we had Carl shoe store, we had many stores downtown. Women and men both, would just start one store out that door to the next one. It was like a huge shopping mall, but it wasn't undercover. And the men would sit at the car, or stand at the cars sit on the fenders or whatever and talked and smoke and things like that while the women were shopping.

MM: And then you had a run in with a Alton celebrity when you were little.

NG: Yes. Robert Wadlow was downtown on one Saturday night and I was amazed we had a Woolworth's department, or dime store there. And to get in the door he put his hands at the top of the door casing and stoop down to get under the door. And then after he got inside the walls or the ceiling was much higher so he could stand up straight and he was in the store there shopping around and I got to see him first right off hand and that made a big impression on my life.

MM: Oh, I'm sure it did. But you said nobody ever went up to him or anything like that.

NG: They never bothered him. They might say hello to him, but nobody ran up for an autograph. They treated them just like a normal person.

MM: And then, oh yea, your family vacations. I love that story about that how your dad didn't have vacations or anything like that offered through the railroad, so...

NG: No. My father worked for the railroad and their idea was you get free passes on the railroad, so if you take a vacation, you don't get paid. And so naturally everybody during those days, they wanted to work as much as they could because we were just coming out of the Depression and everything and before World War II started. And it was very important if they wanted to work and they didn't want to take vacation time anywhere. So we got tickets, but no, we didn't have time to go.

MM: Let's see, what else did we talk about. Your college and how it played out that you ended up at the college that you went to you because you got offered several different scholarships for your baton twirling.

NG: Yes, but what they gave you is... to do it was not enough money for me to be able to leave home and go to college and the transportation back and forth even though I had passed us on the railroad, it just didn't add up. At that time it was very metered.

MM: So you went to college?

NG: [unintelligible], or [unintelligible] Tech, yea.

MM: Okay. And when did you start at the Telegraph again?

NG: Yes. I started the Telegraph in I guess '52... '52, '52 I started the Telegraph.

MM: And you were in advertising, is that correct?

NG: I was in advertising, promotions and communications I think is way they at that time, they don't have that kind of a critter anymore. I don't know what it is now. I think it's communications and something else.

MM: So that's where you met your husband?

NG: Well, yes.

MM: At the Telegraph. Okay.

NG: Basically, yes. He was in the advertisement there. Yes.

MM: I'm trying to think about some of the stuff that ... What were some of the various businesses that you and your husband after you guys got married that you guys had?

NG: Bob had Glazebrook Heights subdivision. He wasn't much of a golfer he wouldn't play, but that was what he called his golf hobby. He would go out there in the subdivision and he did not build houses, but he bought land, develop the land. And so the lots for four houses. There's 120 houses, lots in uh, Glazebrook Heights and he developed that. He was also a public... I mean an accountant. He graduated with an accounting degree from University of Illinois and he also sold insurance. And uh, his subdivision tied him in with selling real estate.

MM: And one of the real estate places that you guys owned together was uh, was the hotel?

NG: Way back he bought as an investment, the old fashion Keystone hotel down at the corner of Langdon and Broadway and it's now Crown Optical. And it's right across from that little old, the house was the 1904 World's Fair house on Broadway there. And uh, when we, when he bought it, it had been turned into just ... Well, there were 46 rooms there and most of the people that worked on the barges would stay there because the rent was \$60 a month for rent room and on the barges were 30 days on and 30 days off. So they would keep all their personal possessions in that room and they would rent it the month that they weren't there for them to keep their possessions there. And then the month they were off, they stayed there and that had been an old fashion hotel and on the third floor they had a large ballroom and uh, it said that the women of the night so to speak, would stand at the second door, or second floor windows and watch when the men would come off the barges, and try and coax the men to buy them drinks. And then there was the dance hall on the third floor.

MM: And the, the bus?

NG: Also that was the uh, bus headquarters for the Jacksonville Bus Line that went from, I don't know how far south it went, but went from Alton all the way up to uh, well I think maybe Peoria. Well I know it was Peoria because I used to teach in Peoria and I would ride the bus up there on a Saturday morning.

MM: And they would just sell tickets out of the lobby.

NG: Yes. They sold tickets out of the lobby and the lobby was probably 10 feet across and about 20 feet long. And that was it.

MM: That's crazy to me. Um, any other major real estate places that you guys owned together or was it just...

NG: No, my husband owned quite a bit. He bought quite a bit of land for subdividing out in Godfrey and part of that land is what Glazebrook Park is now.

MM: Tell me a little bit about how that got... came about.

NG: Uh, we had a nice lake out there and he bought it. It was all farm land and we used to go out there and fish on Sunday afternoons and things. We'd go hunting out there because at that time Godfrey was not incorporated. They didn't incorporate I think until 19, uh, 1992 I believe this when they incorporated and you could hunt, you could fish, you could do anything you wanted to in Godfrey Township. There was no restriction. And so we would go out there quail hunting and we'd go out there fishing in the lake and Bob used to say, "I know I've, I've developed subdivision, but" he said, "I just can't ever see this being a subdivision. It's so peaceful, so quiet." And Godfrey, the town, or the city of Godfrey, the crossroads, the very center of Godfrey is right where our pond is in Glazebrook Heights. I mean at Glazebrook Park, I'm sorry.

MM: So did he go to the township and ask them or did they come to him?

NG: No, this was done after he passed away November the 20th in 1995. And we had always talked about this would make such a beautiful place for ... Well, first of all we thought about

living out there and I said, "Well, you're quite a bit older than I am and I don't want to live out here by myself." And so from then on it kind of, that idea washed away and um, he's made the remark to me one day out there. He said, "Wouldn't this be a beautiful place for a park? Godfrey doesn't have any parks." He said, "We've only got one park." And that was Homer Adams Park behind the village at that time. And it was one acre. And so, uh, in 19, after Bob died in 1995, I started out in 1996. He died in November and in January of '96, I started going through the preliminaries to see that the first 40 acres of the land that we owned was converted into a park in memory of him and that's why it's named Glazebrook Park. Then later on, after we filled that real well, there was another 80 acres that adjoined us and they never would sell it to Bob. And so then uh, one of the gentleman died, there was five or six brothers that owned it. And so I talked to him and I said, "Would you consider me buying it?" And he said, "Well, I'll think about it, but what are you going to use it for?" So I told him what I had in mind. I said, "We've outgrown the 40 acres and we need more and there's only one place to go and that's east. Other than that, it's all been taken care of." So I went back to Godfrey and I said, "We've got a chance to get this." And they said, "No, we can't afford it. So I went back and I went to the State of Illinois and the State of Illinois and I made arrangements to buy the land. And when they gave me the check, I turned it over to Godfrey and that's the way we had the land to start and we had money in the coffers to start it. Now then Glazebrook Park is now 120 acres, but it started at 40 and I donated the first 40.

MM: It's grown. Quite a bit.

NG: It has grown. Right.

MM: Did you have a say so in how it was laid out or anything?

NG: Uh, we had a friend by the name of Wayne Freeman and he's Godfrey boy. And he married the girl next door to me, that, er, daughter of the people that live next door to me when I was growing up and I knew Wayne well. And, uh, after he found out Godfrey didn't want the 40 acres because they couldn't afford it, they had no money to take care of it. He came to me the next day and said, "I'll take you to Springfield and we'll get the State of Illinois to buy the land from you, you turn the check over to Godfrey and that'll be the coffer to start for the park." And Wayne Freeman's title, he is uh, the chief developer and designer for Busch Gardens. He works for Auggie Busch. He now lives in Montana and that is the man that designed Glazebrook Park.

MM: Oh, very cool.

NG: Yeah.

MM: Sorry, I'm just looking over my notes.

NG: That's okay.

MM: We didn't get too much farther than this. Well, I guess, do you want to start on Make-A- Wish?

NG: If you want to.

MM: Yeah, go for it. You can just tell me how you, how you got involved with it.

NG: Okay. Um, in November, November of uh, 1995 ... I...My husband and [unintelligible] we married in '73. All I could [unintelligible] separate all my community dealings because we were going to travel a lot and things like that. So when I got married I kept all my community services and things like that. That had done the years before, including the corps, which I'd had for 22 years. I started it in '50. And uh, my husband had open heart surgery in 1990... uh, in 1970 ... Well, let's go back here. Wrong on that, 1995. We were married in '73, but in 1995 he had open heart surgery and they said it would be a success and it was. But the fourth day he threw a blood clot to the brain and he was in brain dead. So after he passed away, I no longer had community services and I'm an only child so that was pretty much ... I'm very close with my stepsons. My husband had three boys when I married him. I didn't raise them. They were either on their own or in college. And so anyway, although I [unintelligible] to a family, I had no rela... I had no brothers or sisters. So I decided I had to do something to keep myself busy and there was an ad in the paper for Make-A-Wish and I applied for it for wanting volunteers to do uh, with working out in the field with the families. So I applied for it and I went over to St. Louis and I joined the St. Louis Chapter, Metro East and then later on I was with them from 1996 January until 2012. And uh, right after, right after the terrible tragedy in New York, the bomb, uh, the explosions of everything, they switched it and made each of the groups, the different councils that we have throughout the United States, they made them by state other than by region. So now I'm in Illinois so I have my headquarters are now in Chicago. And uh, so I have been with them since 1996 January. This is 2018, I've been with them since then, 22, 23, 22 years I guess. With Make-A- Wish I've done over 300 wishes to families and I have worked with

their [unintelligible] speaking and I've also done with promotions and fundraising for Make-A-Wish.

MM: And you kind of brought it to this area, right? Into Madison County?

NG: Yes. Yes I did. Yes. And I have been, uh, I just reached this fall, I reached my 300th wish. And many families I still keep in touch with. We're not supposed to keep in touch with them unless they keep in touch with you. Uh, we don't, they don't want us dogging people afterwards, but if they want to keep in touch with me, then that's fine. Then I'm allowed to keep in touch with them.

MM: Any specific wishes that stand out to you over the past 300?

NG: Yes. Yes. There's two that really stand out. When I first started working with St. Louis, we covered Wickliffe, Kentucky. And there was a little boy down there, fantastic musician. And he lived in a, basically we'd call it a shack and he lived up behind a gas station. And when we went to visit him, we had to park at the gas station, walk over a creek, and we had to call ahead of time because if there'd been a rain we couldn't get across the creek and there was no bridge or anything. And they lived in this one room, basic shack up there. His parents were mute, that is they could neither speak nor hear. And they worked on truck farms down in southern Illinois or in southern Kentucky, which is right across from Illinois, down to the end of it, and in Wickliffe outside of Wycliffe Kentucky. And, um, they had this one room, large one room house and they had, they were very poor. They worked in the fields during the summer for [unintelligible] barbers. And the little boy was a musician, talented to the nth ... He was 12 years old and these people in the town had built him ... He wanted a music room and of course they being mute, they had no interest in, not even know what it sounded like. And the city had, or the town had locally, had built him a little like shed the side of the house and he wanted it fixed electronically. They did have electric, they did not have running water. And um, I kept in touch with him until he was about 25 or 30 after that and he went on and uh, went into the musical field. And he...last time I heard he was teaching at a high school. And uh, that stands out. It was one of my first wishes and that stands out very much to me.

MM: Well, that's great. And you had, I mean, you've, you've made a difference in a lot of kids lives kind of backing up a little bit. I remember you were telling me about how some of your kids that you taught baton twirling to ended up going on and being champions, is that correct?

NG: That's right. And they were able to get college degrees out of it, yes.. Much better than when I was trying it.

MM: Yeah. Well, I mean it kind of paid off because your teacher took a chance on you and gave you free lessons and then you, I mean...

NG: More or less passed it on. Right.

MM: Yeah. The gift that keeps on giving. And you said there was one more um, wish that stands out to you.

NG: The first wish I ever did was with the CEO in St. Louis. And um, it was down in East Alton and little boy after we have a medical deal, but before they, we get their names, they've got, they've been

referred by either a doctor, a social worker, a nurse, a minister, family member, and then we take it from there. The children are checked out medically to see if they qualify for a wish but wishes for children between three and a half and 18 that have a life-threatening illness. And uh, they uh, this one little boy we went to, his mother had died of cancer and he wanted to go to Disney World. He was 12 years old at the time. And right after, about three months after his mother died with cancer, his father married the mother's sister. So a little boy now had a stepmother. So I went down with good news. Good news that the doctors had checked him again after his name was turned in, and he is off of our lists with life threatening illness and he's no longer eligible for a wish. The little boy was happy with that. And the stepmother threw a fit that she wanted to go to Disney World and she was so mad at us and when we left, she had a dining room table that had plastic fruit on the bowl on the table, and as the CEO from St. Louis and I walked out the door, she was throwing that plastic fruit at us if we went back because they didn't get a wish. She was so selfish that other than being happy, the little boy did not have to have the treatments, that he was doing fine and back to normal. Didn't qualify, didn't mean a thing to her. In fact, she wasn't getting a wish to make to Disney World was the main problem with her.

MM: Oh my goodness.

NG: So I went back with the CEO and I said, "This was my first wish." And I said, "I just don't think I can do this." And she said, "I've never had it happen before. And I hope I never have that happen again." But she said, "That's unusual. I've never had that happen before." And I've never had it happen since.

MM: So they've got pretty much all gotten well from there.

NG: They may still be in remission, they may still be doing treatments, but most of them uh ... I have a percentage rate of about 21% that have passed because of the illnesses they've had.

MM: That's a lot.

NG: Yeah, but not as when you stop and think 21% out of 300. That's not... that's a pretty good ratio.

MM: That's true. Well, Norma, is there anything else that you would like to include in your interview? Anything from Madison County that has ...

NG: It's been a wonderful county. I've loved living every day of it and I hope to live to be a 100. My grandfather was 98 and my grandmother I think was 92 or something on my father's side, so I figure if you planned for good and long, well fine. And if you don't make it, well at least you planned for it that way. So that's probably it. I've had a wonderful life and my most rewarding thing in life, yes, I've had a lot of honors, but it's helping the children. That has been the most rewarding of anything in my life.

MM: The Make-A-Wish children?

NG: The Make-A-Wish children, yes. I've helped other children, but that has been a basic and 'course, I did not have children of my own and I didn't have brothers or sisters. So the Indians, we had a reunion this year and basically I guess they're all, the whole pack of them, I guess were my kids, if you want to call it that way.

MM: Aww. Are the Piasa Indians still around?

NG: Uh, no. They disb... I left them in '72 and I left them with a director from Chicago and they went on for a couple of years. But if you don't have a director that's right here, it's pretty tough doing it from back and forth. And then they tried a couple of years here but nobody had the patience or the time or the energy that it takes for that. And so I told 'em, I said, "Before you get band, you want to disband" because I could see they were losing members and it just was not good. So they disbanded in 1995. No, sorry. 1975. I got married in '73. They disbanded in '75, but they were around for 25 years from 1950 to 1975. And we had a reunion in 1990, we had another reunion this past June.

MM: Do you still baton twirl?

NG: Uh, I pick it up to dust under it. [laughter] I wouldn't want to go [unintelligible] an ambulance [unintelligible].

MM: Alright. Well Norma, thank you so much for meeting with me today.

NG: You're welcome.

MM: Um, I've learned a lot. You had a very interesting life. Trying to look back over [crosstalk].

NG: Probably very boring to most, but I've enjoyed it.

MM: No. I did like the story, do you... I just found this in my notes, um... The um, the kids that got bused in to your school, you were talking about how they were more from like the farm areas and how they got to come an hour late.

NG: Yes. 'Cause they were cutting asparagus in the asparagus fields around Godfrey. Godfrey, asparagus, back in the '30s, '40s, '50s, they used to bring boxcars and set them on the side tracks for the asparagus farmers to fill the boxcars with asparagus, Godfrey asparagus. And you would go, my husband and I traveled a lot after we were married and you'd go different places, and these places would have on the menus, way back, Godfrey asparagus when it was in season. Of course, it was only in season from 'bout April until about middle of June. [unintelligible]

MM: So they got to come an hour late. I just think that's great. That's hilarious. Well, thank you for meeting with me today and I appreciate...

NG: Thank you. You've been very nice, and you've listened to a lot of rattle, and I hope you were able to get something out of it.

MM: Oh yes. This is great.