

Oral Memoirs

Of

Ingrid Bryant

An Interview Conducted by

Erin Montgomery

March 21, 2015

Oviedo History Harvest

HIS 5067 Introduction to Public History Graduate Course

Spring 2015

Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories (RICHS) of Central Florida

Oviedo Historical Society

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Interview Histories

Interviewer: Erin Montgomery

Transcriber: Erin Montgomery

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

RICHES of Central Florida is an umbrella program housing interdisciplinary public history projects that bring together different departments at UCF with profit and non-profit sectors of the community.

Central Florida has often been associated with large-scale, commercial tourism and housing development. While those aspects of Central Florida are important to the economic growth of the region, much of its history has remained unnoticed and under researched. The Public History program at UCF links many projects under one initiative to promote the collection and preservation of Central Florida history. By facilitating research that records and presents the stories of communities, businesses, and institutions in Central Florida, RICHES seeks to provide the region with a deeper sense of its heritage. At the same time, the initiative connects the UCF students and faculty with the community and creates a foundation on which Central Floridians can build a better sense of their history.

The Oviedo Historical Society was organized in November 1973 by a group of citizens. The society is a 501(3) non-profit organization. Its purpose is to help preserve the community identity of Oviedo by collecting and disseminating knowledge about local history, serve as a repository for documents and artifacts relating to Oviedo history, promote the preservation and marking of historic sites and buildings in the Oviedo area and foster interest in local, state, national, and world history.

Erin Montgomery is a graduate student in the history department at the University of Central Florida.

Ingrid Bryant is a native of Munich, Germany, and has lived and worked in Oviedo, Florida, since 1958.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Ingrid Bryant is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 21, 2015.

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Abstract

In this interview, Ingrid Bryant, a long-time resident of Oviedo, Florida, recalls her experiences growing up and living in this community. Bryant discusses her birth in Munich, Germany, in 1944, during the height of World War II, and her subsequent immigration to the United States. Bryant reminisces about the difficulties that faced her in Orlando, specifically her language barrier. She then goes on to talk about her success at Oviedo High School, her eventual mastery of English, and her decision to become an American citizen. Bryant talks at length about her family and her love for Oviedo. She also highlights her efforts to obtain a Catholic church for the Oviedo area and her membership in the Oviedo Historical Society (OHS). She also voices her strong feelings about the new plan for Oviedo's downtown and her desire for the creation of a museum to showcase Oviedo's rich history.

Ingrid Bryant

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Erin Montgomery
March 21, 2015
Oviedo, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Montgomery This is the oral history interview of Ingrid Bryant, and the interview is being conducted on March 21st, 2015, by Erin Montgomery at the interviewee's home in Oviedo, Florida, and The topics of this interview will include Oviedo history and, uh, Central Florida history. I also I just want to let you know that I'm gonna to be, um, as quiet as I can, um, not to be rude, or not to risk[?] – like...

Bryant I know.

Montgomery Uh, but to just, uh, keep the audio, um, clear – I guess is the – the idea, um – and less noisy. So do you have any questions before I start asking you questions?

Bryant Not really.

0:00:41

Birth and immigration

Montgomery Okay, alright. So, um, where were you born?

Bryant I was born in Munich, Germany, on February 21st, 1944, in the height of the Second World War. My mother married an American soldier in 1955, who brought my brother and I – my brother Norbert and myself and my mom to America. They – he was with the [U.S.] Air Force. he was stationed at Pinecastle Air Force Base,¹ which is now the jetport that we have for – that was the Air Force Base, and, uh, we went to school in Orlando – Cherokee Junior High School – my brother and I.

I, unfortunately, never applied myself to learn English. It – it wasn't really offered in Germany in those days yet, and so I came here not speaking English. My grandmother told me that if I didn't like America, that I have to give it a year, but she'll send me a plane ticket – no, not a plane ticket. She hated planes. A – a boat ticket to come back to Germany. Well, I arrived in America, stepped on American soil on January 3, 1958. So I said, *Well, you know, grandma's gonna get me back home, so I don't really need to stay here, because the children can be quite –*

¹ Previously known as Orlando Army Air Field #2 and Pinecastle Army Airfield, and later known as McCoy Air Force Base.

not so understanding about anything that's different than what they're used to. So I was being made fun of ver – uh, very badly and it hurt my feelings, 'cause I was[sic] always wanted – wanted to fit in. That didn't happen in Orlando, and they – they really didn't know what to do with me, 'cause there were no ESOL [English as a Second Language] lessons. So here's my year: uh, we get a, uh, telegram December 15th that my grandmother had passed. so there went my chance at ever getting back to Germany. So I said, *Well, Ingrid, got to make the best of a bad situation*, and my mom, in the meantime, knowing my difficulties, she found this place called Oviedo.

Now, my gen – and she was told they had a good school there. Mind you: I come from Munich, Germany, which at that point, in 1958, had a population of one million people. So it was already culture shock coming to Orlando, 'cause it was quite small and, of course, no circus, no opera, no nothing[sic] like that, but we already had that, because the American Marshall Plan,² that was in place after the war, had helped rebuild Germany, and I am eternally grateful to not only to my American soldiers, but to the American people that[sic] sent care packages over there, and get – I had clothes, and the American soldiers – they shared their food with us – their rations – and I had my first Juicy Fruit gum and so forth, when I was a little girl, but – o we come to Chuluota, which at that time, was a development that – that just had started up it and was low-income housing, more or less, but it was, you know – there were nice houses, and my mom found one that she said, "Well, we'll move here, then you can go to school in Oviedo."

0:04:04

Oviedo High School

Bryant

I went to Oviedo High School, and, uh, it was completely like night and day. They accepted me, and my English teacher – she told me, "When you graduate from Oviedo High School, you will be speaking English." I said, *Yeah, right*, and, uh, my math teacher let me do my math wor – you know, the way I worked my problems the way I was taught in Germany. She said as long as I worked the problem – Ms. Deshaso[sp] – then – and I have the right answer, then she would accept that, so that worked. My history teacher – God bless him. He was also the coach of Oviedo High School, and he – He was the most patriotic man you would ever wanna meet, and he instilled the love of America to me. I already knew America was special, however, the way he taught history – and in 1960 – was the first year that we had Americanism vs. communism. They brought in an ol' TV, like we used to have – black and white – and we had an hour of that a week, and I said, *Oh, my goodness*, you know, with this – and then Sputnik and all of that happened right about that time.

0:05:22

Citizenship

² Formerly called the European Recovery Program (ERP).

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Bryant

I managed to get a command of the English language, and yes, I graduated from Oviedo High Schools[sic], and I learned English, and then, I wanted to become an American citizen. So I went to Coach [Paul] Mikler – they named the – the baseball field after him in Oviedo. I went to him and I said “Coach, I want to become a citizen. What do I do?” He said, “Just do it.”

So in 1967, I became an American citizen. I was given a booklet to read, that I read from cover to cover, memorized whatever I could, and when I got there to the George C., um, Young [Federal], uh, Courthouse, which is now the Diocese of Orlando in Orlando. They bought that building. I went there and I thought, *Oh, boy. I am good to go*, and I get to the examiner and she asks me three questions: Who is the first president? Who is the president now? And what are the first two – Ten Amendments to the [U.S.] Constitution? And I said, “Now what?” She says, “That’s good.” she says, “good.” I[sic] says, “I know you can write English.” I say “Yeah, but is that all your asking me when I memorized that whole book?” She says “That’s all I need you to do. You know what you’re doing,” and so I became an American citizen in September, and then I – I had gotten – no let me backtrack.

My brother, Norbert, that came to – from Germany with me – he was a year younger than me. that’s him up there, and, uh, He, uh – he, uh, kind of excelled, because he went to the accelerated schools in Germany that we start – we’re at fourth grade, and they test us, and then we are separated to go to über die Realschule, which he did, but, of course, his silly sister that was older than him didn’t measure up. So he – he did not have the difficulty learning English like I did. He had one of those photographic minds. He could just – but when I came to Oviedo, there was one – another culture shock waiting for me. I had to repeat the ninth grade, which put me in the same grade as my brother, which at the time was a big help to me, but was also not what I wanted.

0:07:55

Graduation, marriage, and career

Bryant

1963, I graduated with my brother on June 10th. July – I mean June 23rd, I married an Oviedo boy. July 16th, my brother Norbert was killed in a car accident. it was an accident. So he’s buried at the Oviedo Cemetery. So that was very difficult, very difficult, ‘til this day, I miss my brother, but from the marriage I had from my first husband, I have three children: Christopher, Patricia, and Tina – Christina. I had to name her after her brother, because he wanted a brother and she had turned out to be a sister. so he got a sister named after him. Then I – I had a little difficulty with my first husband when I wanted to name our first child, which was Christopher, after my brother, Norbert. He wouldn’t – he didn’t want me to do that. So I didn’t.

Then, I married my second husband, after that marriage didn’t make it, and his name was Norbert. He was German like me. I said “God, you have a sense of humor, don’t you?” I was 35 years old. I end up pregnant, and I have my little

Norbert. He's now 35 years old. So that worked out to my favor too. From my four children, I now have nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, which I'm a very blessed lady.

My other thing that—Oviedo has been holy ground to me. They've been good to me. When I wanted a job, they had an, uh—they needed a customer service rep]representative for the City of Oviedo. This was in 1986. At that time, they hired me for the water department to collect the monies and do—be accounts receivable, so to speak. I was good at math, and, uh—so I went to work and my boss interviewed me—A. M. Jones. They named the water plant after him, and he says, "Mrs. Ingrid, why would you wanna work in Oviedo? You're never going to make any money here." I said, "Because I want to give back." I said, "You're going to pay me a living." I said, "I want to give back. You—Oviedo taught me English. Oviedo took me in, and made me feel very special." So he hired me and I retired there in 2004.

0:10:41

Efforts to get a Catholic church in Oviedo

Bryant

At that point, all along, when we came from Germany, there was never a Catholic church in Oviedo, and my mom—he wrote the Vatican in the early [19]60s, and they gave us a priest to come out and say Mass in Chuluota at the [Chuluota] Sportsman Club—it was called—which is now the Girl Scout [Citrus] Camp in Chuluota. So she managed to do that. When they decide—and the developer of Chuluota gave us seven acres so we could build a church and a school, and that was back in the early '60s. So the Diocese of St. Augustine, which was—we were under, at that point. the Orlando Diocese wasn't established 'til 1968. Bishop Joseph Patrick Hurley decided to build St. Joseph's [Catholic Church] in Union Park first, and he said we would be next. Well, that didn't happen.

So I kept—when we came to Diocese of Orlando, I decided to go on a writing campaign. I like to write letters, and, uh, I would ask the bishops, you know, "Can we have a Catholic church in Oviedo?" And I'd get letters back saying—they couldn't say we didn't have any property, because we did—Chuluota-Oviedo. To me, it's about the same, and so they told me, "We have no priest." so—okay. I bought off on that. So 1996 comes along, and my mom passes away, and on her—she's 71, and on her deathbed, she said to me, "Ingrid, you still don't have that Catholic church." I said "Mom, I been trying." She said, "Try harder." About the same time, this doctor comes into my office, who moved into Oviedo. No, actually, he came earlier. Let me back track. He came in earlier, and I noticed his name was Carlos Velez-Munich. I said, *Munich? Dear Lord. Is this another sign? Just like my little Norbert that I managed to come—that came—that I wanted.*

So 1996, I had this lady, Anna Marcantoni[sp]—she used to help me file at the city, because I was busy collecting money, making sure the right accounts were

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hit in the—in the systems and so forth and so on, and so she would come in and she'd file my applications for me, and she says, Ingrid, "Spanish community wants a Catholic church in Oviedo too." I said, "They do?" She says, "Yeah, we have formed a—a group called Grupo Shalom." I said, "well, get me in touch with whoever is in charge of that." I said, "I need to talk to them. I said, "I've been trying forever to get this church and my mom said I'd better work harder."

So I got to meet Dr. Velez, and they had a meeting, and he got us an appointment with the—with, uh, Father [Richard] Walsh, in St. Margaret Mary [Catholic Church] in Winter Park. He got us a—an appointment with—you're not going to believe what bishop that was—Bishop Norbert [Mary Leonard James] Dorsey. So that is what started the—getting Most Precious Blood Catholic Church. So there was a standing joke in the [Oviedo] City Hall that if Ingrid ever gets her church, she can address the property. So I just came back from Barbados with my aunt, and, uh, my friend called me and she said, "Ingrid, you have to"—Laura Feldman, and she's Jewish, mind ya. I'm Catholic. She says, "Ingrid, you have to come down here. Diocese wants an address for this property, and I can't move until you come and do it." So I addressed the property: 113 Lockwood Boulevard, and so then we had our first Mass on the 24th of April, 2005, which we're now having our anniversary—for 10 year anniversary. Unbelievable. Un—incredible what this town has meant to me, along with everything goes along with it. So I consider myself blessed. Now, my passion was getting the church, which I succeeded.

0:14:59

Oviedo Historical Society the New Downtown Oviedo

Bryant

My other passion is getting a museum in Oviedo. We had—I—I love the [Oviedo] Historical Society, and I've always been involved in history, 'cause in Germany, history has always been right to the forefront. I mean—we try not to let history repeat itself over there, but it did with two world wars, but again—so I've been on a kind of a mission—sort of wanting this museum, and when Mrs. Clara [Lee Wheeler] Evans made a bequest of an acre property on Oviedo Street for the historical society to have—because I felt we were the little red-headed stepchild.

Montgomery [laughs].

Bryant

Child—children, because we never had a place to meet. So we would go from this church to that church, to here, there and yonder, you know, and so she made that bequest. Well, unfortunately that was—she passed away, and that was kind of passed over by the City, buying the old [Geneva] Post Office building that's on Geneva Drive to make a senior center. So I was just a little bit taken aback by that, because when I questioned her one time, I said, "Well, you know we do need someplace," and she says, "Are you doubting my word? I told you we'd get an acre of property," but that didn't come to fruition evidently, because the—it's an off-trade now for the post office, which, uh, her family sold to the city for

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\$400,000. I was upset with that, because I've been here forever, I knew how — when it was built, and I just — I — I'm just, you know, I don't understand this at all, but evidently the City and the powers that be in the historical society decided to make that happen.

Now, it hasn't evolved to what it's supposed to be, because I do believe they have now put the new downtown of Oviedo — south of Oviedo — on the forefront, which I personally have to agree to disagree with the [Oviedo City] Council and with the Mayor [of Oviedo]³ for doing that. Reason being: there was[sic] only two defined downtowns in Seminole County. One is Sanford. One was Oviedo. So I know the road is going to be cut through, but I thought maybe they would do what Sanford did and embellish what they had and work with that, rather than spend all this money with a new downtown that I, uh — I'm — I don't understand. Let's put it that way. I do not understand the logic behind this.

I do know that we put down waterlines in 1968. I do know the infrastructure of Oviedo, to me, is of the utmost importance, and I'm — I'm worried about things maybe I shouldn't be, uh, but I worked for the city and I love this city with my whole heart. Always have, always will. These are two issues that I'm not comfortable with. I love the people, and when I was a customer service representative and Oviedo had this explosion of growth, I always told my cli — my people that came in and signed up for water, "I need you to do me one favor, and that is to blend in. Oviedo is a wonderful place, you don't try to change Oviedo. Oviedo is fine," and I tell them, "Don't let the overalls fool you in Oviedo either." That is a standing joke I've had forever, but again, all in all, big picture — as I try to look at in my whole life is the big picture — it's a great place for families, it's a great place for everybody. It was a great place and still is for me. I've al — I — I'm totally in love with Oviedo, and I want everybody to love it as I do and do what's best for everything, but, mm [sighs] I guess when UCF came in...

Montgomery Yeah.

0:19:34

University of Central Florida and teen club

Bryant

I was there. I was there. I lived south of Oviedo, and the Attamoochee[sp] site was the site they built the university on — had three buildings. It was — it was something to behold, and that was in 196 — they didn't build it in 1963, but they made it happen in 1963, the year I graduated. So I have a daughter that graduated from UCF [University of Central Florida], I have a son-in-law that graduated from UCF, I have a daughter-in-law that graduated from UCF.

Montgomery [laughs].

³ Dominic Persampiere.

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Bryant And it goes on and on and on, and I am one happy girl, and the school has made me so proud, because you – I mean it was FTU – Florida Technical University,⁴ and now, as it's almost – I do believe the second – third – second most populated school in U – United States. So that's something to be proud of – for them being, uh, right there by Oviedo. Oviedo is special, and hopefully and prayerfully, after my life is done it'll continue to go on, and please remember always: blend into Oviedo. Don't try to change it please.

Montgomery Uh, what was your favorite part about growing up here in Oviedo? Did you have a favorite to go when you were in high school, or...

Bryant Oh, we had a teen club.

[*phone rings*]

Bryant We had a teen club in Oviedo. [inaudible]. Just...

[*phone rings*]

Bryant Pick up the thing and turn it...

[*phone rings*]

Bryant Just...

Montgomery [*laughs*].

Bryant Just the...

[*phone rings*]

Bryant There – there you go. Okay. Sor – sorry about that.

Montgomery [*laughs*] Don't worry about that [*laughs*].

Bryant What was my favorite place in Oviedo?

Montgomery Mmhmm.

Bryant Was the teen club we created out in Chuluota, and I, as a non-citizen, became president of that [inaudible] [*laughs*].

Montgomery [*laughs*].

Bryant Of that teen club. We had dances on Saturday nights, and as far as – Oviedo had one thing that I can call to mind, at that time. You have to understand we were

⁴ Correction: Florida Technological University.

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very small, and we had a swimming pool, and every Tuesday, we would go down on Magnolia Avenue in Oviedo, and Tuesday night, we would have a teen night there, and we would dance and swim and do whatever kids do. Yes, that was it, and, uh, they did, however, close that swimming pool down, so it's not there anymore. I think it's a tennis court now, and, uh, we had one grocery store, the Country Quick.

0:22:21

How Oviedo has changed over time

Bryant The one thing I would like for Oviedo to get again that I know us old people would probably need, because you guys are so techy with your Facebook and all...

Montgomery [laughs].

Bryant And Miss Ingrid don't do Facebook, because I'm from Germany, and I think to myself, *My God, this is a double-edged sword*. It's too much information, and it can be used very badly. So the one thing that I would like to have Oviedo have again is a newspaper. Our newspapers are all gone, so it's hard and difficult for the older people to find out what's going on, just like last weekend, the Taste of Oviedo. I mean—it was well represented, however, not advertised in the paper. I get *The Orlando Sentinel*, but we get bits and pieces, but I love *The Seminole Chronicle*. That gave information that was pertinent to our area, what we had going on here, and I feel with 35,000-plus people, please, somebody do us another newspaper. Larry Neely had his newspaper back in the '60s, and it was called *The Outlook*, and then it became *The Oviedo Voice*, and I think *The Oviedo Voice* is—is in existence, but from what I understand, when taking to the Mayor, they're all struggling right now, even *The Orlando Sentinel*. So—and I've read that forever, but that's the one thing I would like them to have.

We're getting the hospital, which is a good thing. I am so happy. I—I've prayed about that, and things are evolving, and maybe the new downtown is thought by somebody, you know, that might know better than I do, but I just thought that the old was quaint and was what Oviedo was. More so than the apartment buildings that I see going up. I question that. Why—and the Albertsons across the street—but I don't want to complain. It will all work itself out, Hopefully—prayerfully.

Montgomery [laughs].

Bryant So—but the museum—I still want a museum. I do, and maybe—hey, I got a Catholic church after 40 years of praying [laughs].

Montgomery [laughs].

Bryant It might happen.

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Montgomery *[laughs]*.

Bryant It just might happen. Maybe not in my lifetime, but other people's. Are there any other question that you have?

Montgomery Um, is there anything else that you miss about Oviedo from your youth?

Bryant From my youth?

Montgomery Yes, anything *[inaudible]*...

Bryant Knowing everybody in town.

Montgomery *[laughs]*.

Bryant Knowing every car that went by my house, knowing that if my – if it rained outside and the laundry was on my clothesline, somebody'd come in and put it in my house. We didn't have locked doors. We had so much going. everybody – it was just a different life that, right now, it – that's passing, but the only thing I would get mad at back then – when somebody would take my laundry back in from outside because it rained – my neighbor mostly – is that she didn't fold it *[laughs]*. That – yeah, I miss the – I miss the closeness of the people, you know, anymore. it's – I still have lots of friends here, because I had a position in the City where people knew me, and so I – I – I treasure my customers.

I do, and I – if it – if I woulda worked longer – but I was getting con – conflicts with trying to this Catholic church – mixing church and state. That just didn't go over so well. Especially, when I'd ask people when they came to Oviedo, I said "What church do you go to?" And say "Well, we go to Catholic church," and I would tell them – I said, "Well, we don't have one yet, but if you help me pray, we're gonna get one soon," and *[laughs]* I don't think that's something you should do. So I guess I'm not the politically correct person...

Montgomery *[laughs]*.

Bryant You want as a customer service person anymore, but these are things that, you know – yeah, but I love Oviedo. In spite of everything, I love Oviedo, and love my police chief⁵ too, because he helped me catch a criminal that burglarized this house, and, uh, we caught her. I – like I said, I love Oviedo – period – and I want what's best for Oviedo, and I want it to go on and on and on and be the success that it is, and who knows? Someday, it will be as big as Munich.

Montgomery *[laughs]*.

Bryant One million population, which will make me happy *[laughs]*.

⁵ Jeffrey A. Chudnow.

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Montgomery [laughs].

Bryant Maybe not anybody else, but me, 'cause[?] I've always been a city girl.

0:27:20 Closing remarks

Montgomery So why did you choose to stay in Oviedo your whole life?

Bryant Why did I choose?

Montgomery Mmhmm.

Bryant Why would I not?

Montgomery [laughs].

Bryant I go to Germany pretty much every year to see my relatives over there that I have, and – but Oviedo's my home, and I have, eh – everything that I have built up is Oviedo. So, yeah, I've stayed.

Montgomery Is there anything else you want to say or talk about before we end?

Bryant I just keep my Oviedo as special as it – as it's always been, and maybe, if there's – if by some chance, we could get a museum [laughs] to where people in the future know that we were the celery capital of the world, and all the people, the backbone of the community that has already passed on, the people that I miss dearly, especially Clara Evans, uh – yeah, keep it going and – and build a museum, and life would be good.

Montgomery All right, the – those were all the questions that I had for you. So...

Bryant Thank you, dear. [inaudible].

Montgomery Yeah, thank you so much.

Bryant You're welcome.

Montgomery I really, really do appreciate you doing this. So thank you.

Bryant I appreciate doing this with you and thank you for come – for coming again.

End of Interview