

Oral Memoirs

of

Helen Michels

An Interview Conducted by

Patrick Rotton

October 23, 2012

HIS 5067 Oral History Project

University of Central Florida RICHES of Central Florida

University of Central Florida Public History Center

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Interview Histories

Interviewers: Patrick Rotton

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Public History Center, University of Central Florida, Sanford, 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.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Helen Michels is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 23, 2012.

Abstract

Oral history interview of Helen Michels, who was born in Palm Bay, Florida, on May 4, 1936. Michels, her parents, and her thirteen siblings migrated to Sanford in 1942. She attended Sanford Grammar School, located at 301 West Seventh Street, and Seminole High School, at 1700 French Avenue. When Michels entered college, she originally began as a lab technician, but changed her major to education. Following college, she taught as a schoolteacher in Hollywood, Melbourne, and Puerto Rico. After witnessing social justice issues while teaching in Puerto Rico, Michels decided to enter into drug therapy work for about 10 years. She then became the director of a halfway house for federal prisons. Upon retirement, she moved back to Sanford. This interview was conducted by Patrick Rotton at the UCF Public History Center in Sanford, Florida, on October 23, 2012.

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University of Central Florida

Helen Michels

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Patrick Rotton

October 23, 2012

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Rotton Today is October 23rd, 2012. My name is Patrick Rotton with the University of Central Florida History Department of [the College of] Graduate Studies. We are conducting an oral interview today with Ms. Helen Michels, uh, who was a member of the Sanford Grammar School. Uh, we are at the [UCF] Public History Center in Sanford, Florida. Um, Ms. Michels I wanted to start with some biographical data. When and where were you born?

Michels I was born in Palm Bay, Florida, in 1936.

Rotton Did you have any siblings?

Michels Yes.

Rotton Yes?

Michels Thirteen.

Rotton Thirteen? Wow [*laughs*]. Um, how many boys and how many girls?

Michels There were six boys and eight girls.

Rotton Boys and girls. And what did your parents do for a living?

Michels My father was a carpenter and my mother took care of children.

Rotton Sounds like it.

Michels She worked hard.

Rotton When did you move from Palm Bay to Sanford?

Michels In 1942.

Rotton In 1942. So you were six?

Michels Yes.

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Rotton Um, what was it like growing up in Sanford?

Michels Well, it was – it was like heaven [*laughs*]. I have no recollections of the earlier years, or very few. But in Sanford, there was a big area. We had plenty of space. Plenty of space in the house. and there were just lots of things we enjoyed doing. Summer recreation programs. All the[?] way[?] that type.

0:01:27

Attending Sanford Grammar School

Rotton So you – when did you first attend school in Sanford?

Michels In – I started in September of 1942.

Rotton 1942. And did they have kindergarten, or was that...

Michels I...

Rotton Just first grade?

Michels It was just first grade. I didn't go to kindergarten.

Rotton Okay. Um, what was it like going to school in Sanford?

Michels Well, it was a beautiful experience. Especially this building.¹ This five and six – grades five and six.

Rotton So – so did you enjoy going to school?

Michels Oh, yes. Most of the time [*laughs*]. I enjoyed going until I was about seventh grade, when there was that change going from grammar school to junior high [school]. I found that to be quite challenging. But all the rest of it was – it was fun. I always loved school.

Rotton Oh, did ya? What – what was a typical day like, as far as school-wise? I mean, when you were in this building.

Michels It was, uh – I guess a – a typical school day, we came in. We pledged the flag. We came in. and had just roll call and the regular business of the day. And then we would start, uh, whatever. I don't think – like math was early. Arithmetic was early. And it was the teacher, Miss Page, made it such fun. We used to play arithmetic baseball and all kinds of things. And it was just – it was just fun and interesting. And then we would go on to maybe our spelling class – our regular classes.

¹ UCF Public History Center (formerly Sanford High School, Westside Grammar Elementary School, Sanford Grammar School, and the Student Museum and Center for Social Studies).

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But the one of the things that really sticks out in my memory was playtime. After – after lunch, we’d have our playtime. And we would run out in the park out in front. And we would run and play. We weren’t doing texting or cell phones, or anything like that. we were just having fun. And when we would go inside, the teacher would – to calm us down – would have us sit at our desks and put our heads down and she would read a story. She read “The Plow Penny Mystery.” I do not know the author,² but she read that part of it every single day as we would – to calm us down.

And then we would have our current events – was very interesting, because she required us, or we got extra points, if we had a cu – cu – report on current events before the, uh – I don’t know if it was a citizenship class, history class – I can’t recall exactly what class. But I do recall the current events. And so every night, – the night before – I would sit down with the newspaper and I would have my current event to give. And it was just – it was just such a learning experience keeping up with the world, and helping us to stand up in front of the group, and give our little reports. They weren’t – didn’t have to be big. But – just – it was something that made us so aware.

And then we had, uh, our reading groups, and class, And, um, art class, music class. I think that that’s so – the art class was always such a[sic] innovative experience. and personally, I believe so much in the arts in the education program. Unfortunately, they’re being all cut. but [*laughs*] the creativeness and the, um – the self-esteem that’s built up.

0:05:17

Teachers and school activities

Rotton

The, uh – did you have the same teacher for all of the classes? or was there multiple teachers each of the classes?

Michels

No. We – we just had Miss Page – Miss Page. And I thought I had hit the lottery after fifth grade, when we got our teachers for the next year and I got Miss Page for the second year. I thought I had hit the lottery. That was just the greatest. She was just the greatest teacher. I don’t recall her ever scolding us, or yelling at us, or fussing at us. I mean, she just – she was just a loving mother to us all. And it was – she was strict. We didn’t get away with anything, but she called our attention in a way that – very respectful. But we knew we did not want to – we did not want to do anything wrong, because she was so good to us.

And I don’t recall – I don’t recall – I’ve – I’ve been tutoring lately – as a few years ago in the schools. And it was almost – it was a very, very, very great contrast being in the classroom then. And just my memories. However right they are, they’re mine. and I just remember it being a wonderful experience. All kinds of activities, skits, plays.

² Lavinia R. Davis.

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We even – another one of the things that I will remember all my life, we did – we made marionettes from the beginning up – clothes, everything. And we learned to use all those strings. And I remember, I made a – I made a witch. That was – it was a Halloween, uh, marionette show. But just the – the memory of participating in the group, and standing up and saying your lines behind the curtain, and that helps people, if they don't like to talk. But, um, that was a project that – it was just one of the art projects. but it taught us so many things about sharing with one another, being re – respectful to one another, and not laughing at each other. I mean, it was – I don't remember having bullies, at that time, in history. There must have been, but I do not recall. It was a very respectful, calm atmosphere in the classroom, but very creative – very active.

Rotton The – so were there just fifth and six graders here, when you went to school?

Michels Yes.

Rotton Okay.

Michels Yes.

Rotton So before you came here, how was your school set up? I guess, first grade through fourth grade – and what school [inaudible]

Michels First grade through fourth grade was Southside Elementary [School].

Rotton Okay.

Michels First – and it was the same way. we were in the same classroom with the same teacher. And the music teacher came around. The art teacher came around to us. And – But it was a self-contained classroom, except for – for those activities. And my – my memory is not – I mean, my favorite two years of my school history were fifth and sixth grade. So when you asked – when I was asked if I wanted to participate, sure.

0:08:59

Favorite subjects

Rotton um, So of your subjects – the subjects that Miss Page taught you – what was your favorite one to – to learn about?

Michels I loved science. And that was – has always been my favorite and most important interest. And of course, the art. I don't – the – considering that a subject, I loved the art. And the – even – I think it was in grade school we learned to read music a little bit. But, um, I wasn't very adept at music. [laughs] that's not a very fond memory.

But in the, uh – and I liked the – I liked – you say that you're a history major. but I liked the way we talked about history. And it was like we lived it. We – we

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talked about it. We didn't do much—I don't recall memorizing dates and things like that. It was more like what—early Florida and what we did, and what the early Floridians did. And I've al—I've always been fascinated with the Indian—American—Native Americans. Not politically correct to say "Indians" anymore.

So I—but I think that, uh, math was not my strong point. But I—I did well, because I worked at it. I had to work at that. the others I didn't have to work very much at it. And spelling, of course, that was just—that was fun, because we would have spelling matches and last person standing. And just—kids love that challenge and competition. So...

Rotton The, uh—did—did Mi—did Miss Page teach art, as well? Was she the art and music teacher? or was there another place in the building that had a specific teacher that did that?

Michels No. she was the one that did all these projects. I can still see us. I brought this thing that I sculptured, which we poured vermiculite and plaster of Paris in milk cartons. And then when it hardened, peeled it off and we all did our carvings. Well, you can see it's still important at this age that I still carry around this—I don't—sculpture. But it was just such a beautiful experience. The fun of making out of that block of plaster something. So—and that was Miss Page. the making of the marionettes was Page. The different kinds of art that we did was all Miss Page, as I—as I recall. I associate her with that.

0:11:28 **Layout of the school**

Rotton Do you remember what room in the—when you came here, was the wing—were the wings here? or just the main building?

Michels I cannot remember.

Rotton Do you remember which classroom you were actually in [inaudible]?

Michels It was in the corner classroom on that end.

Rotton Okay.

Michels Whether it was in the wing, or whether it was in the—the second floor. it was the second floor classroom. Whether it was, um—as I say, my memory on that is—but I just remember it being the—a corner classroom.

Rotton Alright. Was, uh, pa—you know, part of our project—we're trying to get the history of this building. Do you remember where was the cafeteria at in relation to...

Michels You know, I do not remember a cafeteria. I don't—I do not have any recollection of a cafeteria. And it might have been because, uh, with 13-14 children, we

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packed bag lunches. And I do know that, across the park, which is now the park—I don't believe that street was open there. not during recess. We would go across the street and use our nickels to buy—there was a little candy store. we would buy that candy. But I do not—I—I simply—last night I was trying to—*Where was the cafeteria?* We must—we would've had to have had a cafeteria. But I could not—I could not recall it.

0:12:54

School clubs and sports and extracurricular activities

Rotton Oh. Um, so, as far as—were there—were there clubs or sports here at the school, while you were going to school here?

Michels No. There were sports, but not competitive sports. I mean there was play. We didn't have teams of any kind, uh, to compete—that—that I recall. I know that we were encouraged to join the Girl Scouts [of the United States of America]. And I became a Girl Scout that year, which was another great experience for me to get to know other people. That was not on campus. That was off campus.

And I know that another thing that Miss Page did was walk us to the public library, which was a couple blocks from here. And each one of us got a library card. And so, I could walk after school to get my books and be back when my dad would pick me up later on in the afternoon. Or maybe I'd come up on weekends. But I know I would get four or five books each time I checked out books.

Because I—I really attribute to Miss Page, the love for reading. And to me, that's been one of my greatest pleasures in life is—is reading. and it still is. I like to hold a book in my hand. I'm of that generation. I like to have the book, not the little readers. But we would—she showed us how to use the Dewey Decimal System in the library. We had a—she would tell us to look up such and such book. Give each one of us a book, look it up in the card catalog, and go find the book. And so it was just—we learned to manipulate, or to maneuver, in the library system, which, at that time, all library systems were pretty much the same. No matter where you'd go, you—you had that background and you had that training. So I—I am eternally grateful for the love of reading that was instilled in us. And that has stood me well.

0:15:02

Memories with siblings and classmates

Rotton Okay. Um, did you go to school—when you—when you were going to school here, were any of your siblings in the same grade? or the grade above or below you?

Michels No.

Rotton Were they just a couple years out or...

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Michels Wait a minute. Um, I think, my sister was two years above me. So this was a two year school. One of the – my sister that’s next to me. And my brother – I think he might have been held back a year. so he was just behind me. so when I came out – when I came in – when I finished the school, he came in the school – If I recall.

Rotton What are, uh – what are some of the memories you have with your classmates? I mean, just in class.

Michels Well, I [inaudible] – I have a picture of my class, and I could not find it today. but I could tell you the names of practically every child in that class. And we grew up, we – we played together, we shared together, we talked together. And I know that in the sixth grade, one of my very, very closest friends moved away. And I thought that was the end of the world. because we would get on the phone, We would talk at lunchtime, talk at playtime.

But I – I just remember various ones and their names. And the – The one that was the clown in the class, David Parks, who was always drawing. and today, he’s a – he draws, uh, the sketches for the newspaper. what do you call them? cartoons for the newspapers.

Rotton Yes.

Michels he still, um – but I remember he was such a – he was such a nice kid. And of course, at that age, it’s mostly girls and boys. and the girls – interested in attracting the boys. but, you know, the giddy 11-12 year olds, where you – you don’t want to be a grown up, and yet you don’t want to be a child. you don’t want to be a grown up. so there was a lot of teasing going back and forth, but I wouldn’t call it hurtful teasing. You know, So it’s passing notes in school. just the look of Miss Page’s eyes, when you [laughs] – if you got caught.

And – But, um, I can’t – I know there’s a – a lady that I hope – I’m sure that they have interviewed – is Grace Marie Stinecipher, who was the – she is the his – historian in the class. She’s the one that gets the class reunions together and organizes all that, but she also is – writes a lot of history – a lot of histories. and I’m certain that they have contacted her, because she writes – I think even today, she still writes in the paper of things from the class.

0:18:15 **Career aspirations as a child**

Rotton At this point in your school career, had you – was there anything that you were – that you wanted to be when you grew up?

Michels I don’t think – I don’t think I wanted to be anything. I wanted a horse.

Rotton You wanted a horse?

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Michels I wanted a horse [laughs]. And mother always promised me a horse, “when we have a place to put it.” So I never got a horse.

But, um, I don’t—I was—I would always—I got a chemistry set for Christmas in fifth grade. And I would—I would love to start making experiments with my chemistry set. In fact, when I went to college, I went—I started out as a lab technician. But I found out I liked people more than test tubes [laughs]. and so I changed my major.

But, um, that was—I think probably I was leaning towards that. I loved animals. Um, I don’t think I wanted to be a vet[erinarian]. I don’t think that entered into my head. But I—and I loved—I wanted to be a schoolteacher. I ended up being a schoolteacher for many years. So, um, I think that was part of it. I would take my little brothers and sisters in the summertime and I would teach them. We’d have school at home during the summertime. and couldn’t wait for school to start again. And they didn’t like it that much [laughs]. They didn’t like school that much [laughs]. But I...

0:19:50

Career as a teacher and counselor

Rotton So when did, uh—you said you grew up to be a teacher. Did you teach in this area?

Michels No. I taught—I taught in um, Hollywood, Melbourne, and then I went to Puerto Rico to teach high school science. And from there I went—I—the social—I became very socially conscious of so many problems that students were having, because of the justice situations. And so I studied and went into drug therapy work. And then from there, I—I was doing that for about—I taught—let’s say eight—I taught 14 years in all. Grade school in Melbourne and Hollywood. And then when I went to Puerto Rico, I taught the high school sciences. And then, I went into drug therapy for about 10 years.

And then, they asked me to direct the halfway house for federal prisoners in Puerto Rico. They were just opening a halfway house for federal prisoners. And the company that—the drug com—the drug treatment company that won the bid for the halfway house—so, because of my English—bilingual—they needed someone that would be able to handle that. So for 25 years, I directed the halfway house in Puerto Rico for—for federal prisoners. And then, retired back here to my—most of my family is still in the Sanford area.

0:21:38

May Day and the maypole dance

Rotton Um, when you went from the sixth grade to the seventh grade, did you get—was there a graduation cer—ceremony-type deal? or was it just kind of...

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Michels Oh, I'm sure there was. One of the things that we—it's interesting that, here in the—in the grammar school, is that we celebrated May Day. We had the maypole—the maypole dance [*laughs*].

Rotton Oh, really? I—I—I'm not sure what that is.

Michels Well, I don't know either [*laughs*].

Rotton Okay.

Michels But we all got dressed up, and we—you have ribbons tied to, um—all different ribbons. And then You do a dance, and weave in and out. So the—it gets—it actually, probably had some type of ethnic background, because it's the day of the workers—the, um, Germanic type of—I think it comes from the Germanic background. But I know that that was always—that was a—that was a big a—occasion, where we would do the dance, and get all dressed up in our—I think I made—if I'm not mistaken, I have a recollection of making crêpe paper dresses to wear—And the different colors. So it was a very colorful occasion.

0:22:50 High school and physical education

Rotton Um, When you went to high school, where did you—where—where was high school at for...

Michels Uh, It's Seminole County—it was Seminole High School, which today is a middle school,³ but it was, um, right—just across French Avenue—down [U.S. Highway] 17-92.

Rotton When you were in high school, what was the—what—what—as you got older, what did you and your friends do?

Michels Oh, gosh [*laughs*]. I don't know if I want it on camera. No. we just hung out a lot. There were lots of sports in high school. Our gym teacher did not approve of intramural—did not approve of competition in—in having a school team to go to other schools to compete. She believed and got the support that everybody should participate in sports, and everybody should learn all the sports. And so I, of course—I loved that.

Um, we had intramural sports against—against the different classes. In fact, at one time, my softball team from my class, and my sister's softball team from her class, won the—the two of us were in competition for the intramural final game. She won [*laughs*]. their team won.

But it was, um—and I—I truly think that it is something to be questioned about all the money that goes into sports programs for a few. And we knew how to—

³ Sanford Middle School.

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we learned how to play football, basketball, softball, archery. Um, and we had six weeks of exercises And That wasn't fun – But, uh, running and track. But we did a lot of sports activities. And we the [inaudible] – w had the pep club, which was – accompanied the marching band at the – because they did have the boys teams. and the – the pep club was like a support – a marching group – with that. And I was in that all four years.

And so my friends would – we would camp out. we would go on our own, not related to school. We'd go out, have a Coke. Um, it's very interesting, 'cause none of us smoked or drank all the way through high school – of the group that I hung around with. And then, we went to college and came back for the first class reunion. Everybody pulls out cigarettes [*laughs*]. I started last. But – but that was the influence of that particular teacher, because she just encouraged us to live a healthy lifestyle, and keep our – keep our bodies strong and healthy. And that was not strong. that wasn't good for your health. So a lot of that was that influence.

Rotton So was it a physical – it was just – I guess it was just a P.E. [Physical Education] class?

Michels Yes.

Rotton Is what it was. And were – And was it co-ed[ucational]?

Michels No.

Rotton So it was all just girls?

Michels It was – the girls had their program. The boys had their program.

Rotton Did the boys tra – uh, sports teams travel?

Michels Yes.

Rotton Okay. So they...

Michels We had competition for the football and the basketball and the softball games.

Rotton And of the sports, which one was your favorite?

Michels To play?

Rotton Mmhmm.

Michels [*laughs*] It would be hard to say. Basketball, Volleyball – probably basketball and volleyball. Softball I liked too, but that was...

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0:26:37 **Favorite teacher in high school**

Rotton [clears throat] Um, as you got into high school—I know that you said Miss Page was your favorite teacher. Did you have a favorite teacher in high school, as well?

Michels Well, it was the P.E. teacher.

Rotton Oh, it was?

Michels Because she was such a—she was such a model. I mean, she was such a—She was such a good person. And—In fact, instead of study hall, I didn't really have to study real hard. School was pretty easy for me. And so I didn't have to study very hard. So you had a study period every day, but I never—I always—I was an assistant to the—to the gym teacher. Getting the equip—the equipment out, or refereeing, or umpiring or whatever. One of the classes—so I actually had two P.E. classes all through high school [laughs].

I also might say that I had an almost perfect attendance record through the four years of high school. And [George] "Babe" [Herman] Ruth[, Jr.] came to Sanford to visit and I skipped school to go see Babe Ruth with my friends, and the principal was there [laughs].

Rotton Hm.

Michels We got caught. so I messed up my record on that, but it was worth it.

0:27:57 **Pig 'n' Whistle**

Rotton What was the most popular spot in town for teenagers to hangout?

Michels The Pig 'n Whistle.

Rotton Is that still...

Michels No. It's no longer open.

Rotton But it used to be. Where was it located?

Michels Seems like it was located somewhere by 25th street, others in my family could tell you, I can't recall exactly. It was a drive-in, where you would just drive up to the car and the waitress would come out to the car and take your order. We'd hang out there. The high school had what they'd call the Celery Crate. Sanford, at that time, was the top celery producing city in the world and they leached all the chemicals out of the ground with the celery, but that's okay. I mean, it's not okay, they had to rebuild. They're still rebuilding it. But the, um, our team was the Celeryfoots. The teams were all the Celeryfoots. The Celery Crate was a

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hangout, a teen, but that was for activities. You'd have specific dances and parties there, at that. And then I think that, mostly, going to the movies. And if we were really, we would go to Orlando to go to the movies, if we didn't like the theaters right down here in the middle of Sanford, that we went to, the Ritz Theater. But if it was something, really a good movie, we would pile in and go to Orlando.

Rotton Was it an enclosed theater or was it a drive-in?

Michels They did have a drive-in, but we would go more to the, at least I preferred the theaters. I didn't like the drive-in's, I didn't like the sound. But I went to the drive-in. But we did a lot of, today kids hang out at the mall. We didn't have a mall. Downtown Sanford we didn't do that much. It was more in one home or another home and we did a lot of outdoor activities. We'd go swimming for the day. Go over to the beach; that was always one of our favorites. Piling in and getting a gang together and going over to the beach and going swimming.

Rotton So what year did you graduate high school?

Michels 1954.

Rotton Do you still keep in touch with any of your classmates?

Michels No, because I was in Puerto Rico for about 40 years. I did go to the last class reunion that we had. But, uh, none of the ones that hung out with me. The group that hung out with me wasn't there. They had all moved away or whatever and we were kinda rebels. Not so much into social activities and that kind of thing. We were on our – just because they didn't come it wasn't as much fun for me. I was happy to see some of my friends, but none of them were my close friends. There were[sic] a group of about ten of us that were really close.

Rotton Do you know anybody else from your class, or from your time of going to school, that you think would be willing to participate in one of these interviews as well?

Michels If I got my list I could. I have a list of all the addresses and I could maybe contact you to give you some suggestions for that.

Rotton That would work. Well do you have any other school memories that you'd like to share? Maybe something that we haven't covered?

Michels I remember one thing. I have become very strongly involved in the justice movement. Peace and justice. Problems that are facing us today and have been working very much in my spare time, right now, in different organizations to try to bring about – I always – that was something that was encouraged from my family, even when I was very young. We lived across the street from – we lived in a celery field. Actually we lived – big house, but there was a celery field

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around it and across the street were the cutters. Some of the little shanty's of the cutters. And at that time in Sanford it was very segregated. But we would play with those kids. They weren't in our school. It was separate education, supposedly equal, but that was a joke. The, uh – my mother never had any problem with that. She would never ever – I mean, we would get our mouths washed out with soap if we said the “n” word, and she [sic], “God doesn't see colors. God's colorblind. Everybody's equal. Nobody is less than anybody.” So that was kind of what I grew up with and that's been part of my formation and part of my principles. What can I do to make a difference, when I'm gone? What will be left? And so, my, the gym teacher had the pep club. They had not gotten the returns from the Easter Seals, the Easter Seals organization. So they called her to see how they could help us. So a month after Easter – here we are, the pep club, all dressed in our uniforms on First Street, Sanford, selling Easter Seals. And my mother said, “You are crazy. People don't buy Easter Seals after Easter.” And I said, “well, we are just trying to re-buy them and we're asking them, if you haven't sent in your money, please send in your money.” But that was the kind of thing – we were just made very conscious of the needs of others. And, of course, in grade school, that was war time. So we were very war-conscious, very conscious of bringing in bottle caps, and bringing in tin cans, soap, lard, we just had all things that we were made very conscious. And victory garden. We had to make – everybody had a victory garden. In fact, in third grade, I won a prize. I won a bond, a savings bond for an essay that I wrote about how to make a victory garden. And that was big, big, big for me. So those are the kinds of things that, my memories are very happy memories from my school. As I say, except for the junior high where you're forced into, where you're growing up and you don't want to grow up. Yet you don't want to be a baby. I think I practically; I didn't fail, I had good grades, but the principal called my mom and said I was going to be retained because I was missing too much school. I didn't miss another day of school. I suddenly didn't have a headache in the morning and I suddenly didn't have a stomachache because I didn't want to repeat the grade. Even though I had good grades, that didn't matter, if I didn't fulfill that requirement. I remember, apart from that short span, I just remember the Sanford schools as just enjoyable. The City of Sanford had a sports program, a program during the summer for city recreation. And we would always participate in that. And in the summertime, my mother took all of us to the lake every day because she was not happy until all of us learned how to swim. Things like that, but that's not related to school.

Rotton The, uh – so you went to school during the war – I mean, I know that you said you were first grade, second grade, but was the curriculum kinda turned towards...

Michels It was a lot toward be[sic] good citizens. Citizenship. Patriotic, be patriotic. I can remember a lot of the, learning the Star Spangled Banner. It was also very interesting because it was also had a really strong religious, like you got a little Bible if you learned the 23rd Psalm, and things like that, that would never be

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tolerated today. But it also had a – that’s typical of Sanford, and the religious. Church on every corner practically as you go down Park Avenue. I don’t know how many, but there’s lots of churches. But I do remember, though it was that sense of, there was a strong sense of patriotism. And what can you do to help the war effort. And you felt like you were really, when you would bring in some cans. And I remember the rationing, things like that. You had your coupons, and I think at one time I had to go to church for classes. I had to make my first communion and my brother towed me on his bicycle, ‘cause we didn’t have gasoline. So it was about a three mile ride on the bicycle. So I remember things like that. We couldn’t do all the things that we wanted to do, and we didn’t have all the sugar, or things that were rationed. So definitely it impacted, I think more my brothers were all in the war. And my oldest brother was active duty. He was a Seabee. That’s construction unit of the Navy. And he was injured so that’s – my mother tried not to frighten us, but I knew that something wasn’t right. I knew that there was this tenseness, but that was, by the time we got into grammar school, it was over. So then it was just like that happy time, and after the war and after the prosperity was coming on. And my dad got a better job so it was like. That all added to my happiness of being in grammar school.

Rotton Well that’s[sic] all the questions that I have for you, unless there is anything else you would like to share.

Michels I can’t. I don’t think of anything specific. I know that all of my teachers – I felt like all of my teachers were wonderful teachers. And I can’t remember her name, but my high school teacher that insisted that I – my counselor that insisted that I take typing – I have blessed her a thousand times over, when I had to do all those term papers in college and had to type. And even now on the computer. And so, I felt that all of the teachers were dedicated. And some were very strict. Some were less strict. But at the – I don’t know if I should say this on camera but the high school coaches taught the history in high school. And that was disastrous. That was disastrous; you just had to duck the erasers as they were being thrown. But that’s probably one of my weak subjects that I think that that’s one of the contributing factors on that. But all of the rest, they were appointed to do that job. But they were committed to what they, they were committed to being coaches, and they were good coaches. But the history teachers, as history teachers, so I think that – I could say that there was not one teacher. In fact, not one teacher that I could not say I thought was not committed to her students. I have a brother who’s mentally challenged and he went to public school in the first grade. He simply could not learn. And the public school teacher, Mrs. Welch, tutored him every day, after school, for an hour, at no cost. She would not accept anything for it, because she was committed. She was wanting so badly that he learned to read and write. Well he never did. We found he had a brain injury, a damaged part of the brain, and just couldn’t get that abstraction concept of letters or numbers. But I just think that that’s an example of a public school teacher at that time, at that epic in Sanford, that they were committed people to their jobs.

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Rotton Well, I want to thank you for doing this and this is going to become a part of the collection here at the Public History Center. So thank you for coming.

Michels You're welcome. I enjoyed being with you and sharing.

Rotton Thank you.

End of Interview