

AL 109

Interviewee: Esther Jones

Interviewer: Debra Hess

Date: March 11, 1989

H: This is an interview for the Florida Oral History Archives. My name is Debra Hess. Today is March 11, 1989, and I am interviewing Esther Jones at her home outside Alachua, Florida. Mrs. Jones moved to Alachua County in the 1940s and has been a long-time member of First Lutheran Church in Gainesville. State your full name for me, please.

J: Esther Magdalena Schwehn Jones.

H: Is Schwehn your maiden name?

J: Schwehn is my maiden name.

H: That must be a German name.

J: That is a true German name.

H: Where were you born?

J: In New Haven, Indiana.

H: Where is New Haven?

J: New Haven is about ten or twelve miles from Fort Wayne, in the northeast section of Indiana.

H: Tell me a little bit about your family. When were you born?

J: Oh, dear.

H: You can just state the date, if you like.

J: In 1917 in New Haven. That is where I went to school, the Lutheran school.

H: Do you remember the name of that school?

J: Emanuel Lutheran School from the Emanuel Lutheran Church.

H: Is that church still in New Haven?

J: The building is still there, but it had been sold to, I think, the Church of Christ.

Emanuel rebuilt about five or six blocks from there.

H: What were your parents' names?

J: My dad's name was Herman, and my mother's name, naturally, was Magdalena.

H: That is how you got your middle name?

J: That is how I got my middle name.

H: What did your father do for a living?

J: He was a farmer.

H: What kinds of things did they grow on their farm?

J: Corn, oats, and wheat, and we had a lot of cows that we had to milk before we went to school and after we came home from school. We did not have things like they have now – automatic. We had to do it by hand.

H: Your mother helped on the farm, too, I suppose.

J: Oh, yes.

H: Did you have brothers and sisters?

J: I had one older sister and a younger brother.

H: What are their names?

J: My sister's name is Alma, and my brother is Elmer. So close!

H: And you are Esther. Did they get you confused at times? I tend to do that.

J: No.

H: All of the children, I am sure, helped on the farm.

J: Oh, yes.

H: How many head of cows did you have?

J: Oh, we had about twenty or twenty-five, which was plenty for a small family. We had I think only sixty or seventy acres of land.

H: You milked them and sold the milk?

J: Yes. We had to separate the cream from the milk. Golly, that has been so long ago.

H: Was there a machine that did that?

J: No. Well, there was a separator, and you turned the crank and the skim milk came out one spout and then the cream came out of another one. Each went into a container, and we cooled it. The next morning the man came along in a big truck and picked up those containers.

H: So, with twenty-five head of cattle, you had quite a few chores to do around the farm.

J: Yes.

H: Tell me a little bit about what you remember from your school days. What was your school like?

J: We had two big rooms, and there were four grades in each room. My first grade teacher was a lady. I went to a little one-room school house that was only about a fourth of a mile from our house. After that my mother and dad decided that they could afford to take us to New Haven to the Lutheran school, which was four miles from our home. Then I had three grades with Miss Meitzler, who taught the first four grades. Then Mr. Buuck, Adelbert Buuck's dad, taught the other four grades. Adelbert was my classmate and friend.

H: Oh, another real German name.

J: I did go to the eighth grade, because that year they gave us the choice of taking the eighth grade exam in the seventh grade, and if you passed you could go on to high school. I think I should have waited, because my freshman year was terrible. I missed all the algebra.

H: Where did you go to high school?

J: New Haven High School.

H: Was that a big change from a two-room school?

J: Oh, yes, that was a big change. But it was fun.

H: What was your favorite subject in high school?

J: I liked Latin and I liked algebra. I also liked typing because that was easier and I did not have to study for it. [laughter]

H: What did you do after you graduated from high school?

J: Before I started nurse's training, I did housework for a year and a half. My sister was already in nurse's training, and we could not afford for both of us to be in college. I did housework, and then I went into nurse's training for three years.

H: Do you remember what year you started nurse's training?

J: It was 1937, because I graduated in 1940.

H: Where did you take your nurse's training?

J: In Fort Wayne, Indiana.

H: In a hospital?

J: At Fort Wayne Lutheran Hospital--FWLH.

H: Is there anything you remember particularly about nurse's training?

J: Oh, it was heaven! You learned a lot, and you met a lot of people.

H: Did your parents encourage you in your studies?

J: Well, Mom always wanted us to do something because she did not get to.

H: So she really wanted you girls to go to school.

J: Not necessarily to be nurses, but she just wanted us to do something. We both wanted to be nurses.

H: And your sister is a nurse, also?

J: Yes.

H: When you graduated from nurse's training in 1940, then what happened?

J: Well, that was war time. I was an assistant supervisor on one of our surgical floors for a while. Then that supervisor got married, and I took her place. Then we were in a true war, World War II, so I joined the Navy Nurse Corps.

H: Tell me about that. How did you go about joining?

J: Oh, goodness. One of our surgeons, Dr. J. Short, a urologist, was a retired navy man, and I asked him what I should do. He said to just write in. I forget where I wrote, but I got an application blank and sent it in. Then I had to go to Great Lakes [Naval Training Center near Waukegan, Illinois] for my physical and be accepted.

H: Where is that?

J: Just north of Chicago. It was the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. I did not know there was such a thing as the reserve and the regular navy, and when I got my papers back, this surgeon came up to my floor and asked, "Did you get your papers?" I said yes and showed him. It was hilarious, because I was in the regular navy instead of the reserves, which was two more years.

H: It was not quite what you had bargained for. [laughter]

J: I was thrilled to death, and he was really happy. I thought I would get out and see the world.

H: Where did they send you first?

J: First I was at Great Lakes for a little over a year. That is a big place. Then they gave you a choice where you would like to go, and I chose the Pacific. I wanted a hospital ship in the Pacific. I thought that would be good. Do you know where I was sent?

H: Probably in the opposite direction.

J: Banana River Naval Air Station, which is now Patrick Air Force Base, near Cape Kennedy [in Florida].

H: Oh, my goodness. What did you do there?

J: I was a surgical nurse in the dispensary.

H: How did you feel when they sent you to Florida?

J: Oh, I was thrilled to death, because I was on the ocean. The man in the pay office at Great Lakes told me, "You will see nothing but pine trees." [laughter] But I liked it very much.

H: How long did you stay there?

J: Well, I was there for eighteen months, but if I had not met Thorl, I probably would have stayed longer.

H: Tell me about meeting Thorl, your husband.

J: He was a first class corpsman. At the time I came, he was working in the operating room, and I had a surgical ward, so it all came real nice. I met him, and that was it.

H: How long did you court before you got married?

J: Well, I was an officer and he was a regular service man, so we were not supposed to be seen in public together. You could not fraternize. The officers could go off the base if they were doing sports, so we bicycled and played ball. We did a lot of things in Cocoa [Beach]. That is how we dated. We bicycled down along the Banana River. It was from Easter until December.

H: What year was that?

J: That was in 1943. We were married in December 1943 in the Trinity Lutheran Church in Orlando.

H: Now, tell me about Thorl's family. Where did he come from? Where was his home?

J: Thorl was born in Clay County, Alabama, and when he was three years old, his family moved to Florida in a covered wagon.

H: Is that right?

J: There were five families, I think, that homesteaded. This area had no paved roads then. It was all sand, leaves, and trails.

H: So they came to Alachua County. In about what year was that?

J: He was born in 1919, so this would have been about 1922.

H: He came with his family?

J: With his family, yes. They settled here and eventually bought some land here and started to farm by homesteading.

- H: That is fascinating that they came by covered wagon. Has he ever told you anything about this?
- J: He does not remember the trip, but he remembers a lot of the early years here. There were just trails through the fields. They would walk through the field to go to church, which was about three miles away.
- H: What church did they go to?
- J: To the Baptist church here.
- H: Which Baptist church?
- J: Forest Grove Baptist Church.
- H: Forest Grove Baptist has been there for many, many years.
- J: Over a hundred years.
- H: Is that right? So his family was Baptist.
- J: His family was Baptist. His mother's father was a Church of Christ minister up in Alabama, but then when she married Thorval's grandfather, she went to the Baptist church with him.
- H: What were Thorval's parents' names?
- J: Thorval's dad was Dewey Columbus, and his mother's name was Lula Armanda. She always said it was Armanda, but I wondered if maybe it was Amanda. It was never written out; it was always just an "A." But she said it was Armanda – Lula Armanda.
- H: How did they feel about the two of you getting married?
- J: Oh, they were real happy. At least afterwards they were. The only thing is I was from the North and they were from the South.
- H: That was an adjustment.
- J: To them it did not make any difference, and to me it did not make any difference, but when I went to work here, there was a lot of difference in where I was from.
- H: It was a big adjustment for you.
- J: Yes.

H: Tell me a little about your wedding. Who was there?

J: Well, to begin with, we had to borrow a car; we borrowed a car from one of the lieutenants that Thoral worked for. Then we had to borrow gas coupons. You could get only so many gallons of gas because of rationing, and the government issued coupons that were required to purchase gas. His folks sent us some and somebody else sent us some, and we got enough coupons to get enough gas to go to Orlando. My roommate, Glyn Snelgrove, from South Carolina, and Harold Damsgard, from Alabama, a corpsman who worked with Thoral, were our attendants. There were only two churches we could reach on our time off. One was in Orlando, and the other was over on the coast. I talked with Pastor [George] Trapp over in Orlando, and everything was fine for there, so we drove over there on December 18, 1943, in the afternoon, and we were married at 5:30 in the evening. It was just the four of us and Pastor Trapp.

H: At Trinity [Lutheran Church].

J: Yes. I had asked if someone could play the organ and sing a solo, but there was no one available because of the war. It was hard to get someone, so we did not have that.

H: But you had a special service.

J: We had a special service for just the four of us.

H: How long a leave did the navy give you to get married?

J: We were married on Saturday, and Monday morning Thoral and I had to be back. Of course, I had to report to my head nurse, because at that time you could not be married and stay in the navy. But before we got married, I had already put in my resignation because I was going to get married.

H: So what did she say to you?

J: Oh, she was real unhappy with me. She always asked me who I was going to marry, someone from home or someone from here, and I said someone from here. She was real happy until she learned that I was marrying an enlisted man. That was a no-no. She had been in the service thirty or forty years, and she was very much against the fraternizing of the two groups.

H: A rule is a rule.

J: A rule is a rule. As far as I was concerned, the service men were just as good as

we were. But the commander of the base was real happy. He was an old navy man, and he was real happy for us.

H: After you turned in your resignation, what did you do?

J: Well, I had to wait until they got a return order from headquarters, wherever that was, and that took a couple days. I think I had to be off the base that Friday after we were married. Then we lived in a Melbourne hotel for maybe a week. Our funds were getting low, so we had to find a cheaper place. We found one of those little cottages like we had here in Gainesville, and we lived in that. It had no heat and no stove – we had a little hot plate – but it was fun.

H: It did not seem to matter too much.

J: No problem.

H: How long did Thoral stay in the Cocoa area?

J: This was in December, and I think it was February or March when he got orders. It was just before Easter that he shipped off from Norfolk, Virginia.

H: In 1944?

J: In 1944.

H: Where were his orders to go?

J: Oran, [Algeria, in] North Africa.

H: Was he on a ship?

J: Well, no, he was at a hospital base there. Oran is right on the coast [of the Mediterranean]; right after you go through the strait [of Gibraltar], there was Oran right on the coast. It was a big hospital base for the navy, and he was there the entire time he was overseas, about twenty months. I came back here to Alachua and stayed with his folks about six weeks. It took me maybe another six weeks to get myself adjusted over in Gainesville to start nursing.

H: It must have been difficult having been married only a few months and then coming to live with your in-laws. Had you met them before you came here?

J: Let me think. In September Thoral brought me home, and I met his folks and his sisters – he had three sisters – so I knew them and liked them.

H: Still, it must have been an adjustment.

J: It was totally different. His grandmother lived with them, also. His brother-in-law was in the navy, so that sister was there, too, with her three little children.

H: Things were different than they were in New Haven, Indiana.

J: Yes, a lot different.

H: What are some of the things you remember that were hard to adjust to?

J: Food. [laughter] I had never eaten greens--turnips and mustard and collards. At home we ate the turnip bottoms; we did not eat the greens.

H: You threw the top away. [laughter]

J: Here they ate the top of the red beets, but we ate the bottom of the red beets. I had never heard of okra. When they said they were having peas for dinner, I thought of English peas; that is all we ever had. Well, here it was field peas, white acre peas, black-eyed peas, and all the rest of them. But I liked them; I tried them and I liked everything – except the boiled okra. That was hard.

H: Hard to get used to.

J: Yes.

H: Why did you move from staying with your in-laws back to Gainesville, into the town?

J: Well, we were twenty miles from Gainesville. I did not have a car, but I thought I wanted to do private-duty nursing here, or general duty. I went over to be interviewed at the Alachua General Hospital. I found out there were only five private-duty nurses in Gainesville, but there was a great need for them because there were no ICUs then.

H: I do not know the difference. What does a private-duty nurse do?

J: A private-duty nurse takes care of one patient – the critically ill people. The people that normally go in ICUs now are critical care. We had all those people.

H: You said there were only five nurses?

J: There were only five nurses, and I made the sixth nurse.

H: They were happy to see you walk in.

J: Yes, they were real happy. They liked for me to do general duty, and I did general duty about two or three weeks. But I just felt I could not do justice to my patients, so I chose private duty. There were not enough nurses, and I thought that I would do better if I did private duty and served only one patient. I worked twelve hours at night, seven to seven.

H: So you worked twelve hours off, twelve hours on.

J: Yes. I got a room about half a block from the entrance to the emergency room on McCormick Street. I could just walk out of the hospital and past only two or three houses, and I was right back in my room. I stayed there the whole time that Thoral was overseas.

H: Was Alachua General in the same place it is now?

J: Yes.

H: I know that nursing has changed a lot since that time, but what are some of the differences that you have seen?

J: Oh, I do not know. Maybe we gave more personal care back then than they do now. Now the patients are expected to do more for themselves, which may be good in the long run. But back then we were taught to do it for them.

H: What about medicines?

J: Medicines are totally different. The methods of everything are totally different. I am sure it is for the good, but when you are a patient, you sometimes do not think that.

H: I bet there was a shortage of doctors then.

J: There was. Dr. Thomas, W. C. Thomas, was the OB/GYN doctor. He would be there for weeks. He would sleep on the floors and stay in the hospital, because they needed him.

H: Was he the only baby doctor?

J: There were a couple other ones, but I think that only he did OB [obstetrics], so he was probably busier than a lot of them were.

H: When you moved to Gainesville, I know there is an interesting story about your trying to find a Lutheran church in Gainesville. Tell me about that.

- J: That was in the fall of 1944. I did not know where it was, and, of course, in the hospital it was a no-no for you ask anybody where the Lutheran church was. It was as bad as being from the North and working in the South. [laughter] Well, I thought the easiest way would be to call a taxi cab. That is what I did in Fort Wayne, so I got a taxi cab. I had my hat on, my wedding hat, and I was all dressed up on Sunday morning about 10:00. When I asked him where the Lutheran church was, which I knew was St. Matthews Lutheran Church, he did not know where it was. I said, "Well, someone told me or I read somewhere that it was on the campus." Then he said, "Oh, that is the bunch of people that used to be down in the recreation hall." I knew they had been someplace else too, so he took me there. As it turned out, it was only about three or four city blocks from where I was living, so from then on I walked.
- H: Where were they worshipping, the people from St. Matthews, at that time?
- J: At the old Florida [Student] Union building.
- H: They did not have a church of their own yet?
- J: No.
- H: How did you feel, finding this group of Lutherans so far from Fort Wayne?
- J: Well, it was just like home then.
- H: Did they welcome you into the group?
- J: When I walked in, they were having Sunday school; it was about 10:15 in the morning, and they were having Sunday school. Pastor [Erhardt] Weber and Allen Hill's grandmother and mother and several aunts [were there].
- H: Was that the Wenzel family?
- J: Yes. They were there, and there were several people who came from Camp Blanding. There were service-connected people there. There were not very many there, just a handful.
- H: About how many people do you think got together on a Sunday morning?
- J: Oh, thirty would have been a tremendous group. The Lutherans were few and far between.
- H: What was the pastor's name again?

J: Erhardt Weber.

H: I know he also helped serve the Lutheran students on campus.

J: He served the campus and also St. Johns in Ocala. I do not know if he already served it then, but I think he did.

H: I think you are right. Tell me about the people from Camp Blanding. How did they get to Gainesville to worship?

J: I would imagine with their cars. They must have had cars to get there. I suppose they rode together, because not a lot of people had cars.

H: That is quite a long way for them to come, about thirty-five miles.

J: Yes.

H: This group worshiped in the Florida Union. Tell me a little bit about that. It was upstairs, you said.

J: Yes, it was on the second floor. I think they used a folding table that was beneath the big colored window, and they had a cover on it, a nice white cover. That was the altar. Then there was a lectern to the right, and eventually there was an organ. The Kreinkes came, I think, in 1945, 1946, or 1947. Ruth [Kreinke], who is now up in Atlanta with her family, was just a little tot about four years old when they came.

H: There was Walter [Kreinke].

J: Walter, Elsie, their two sons, and their daughter Ruth.

H: At that time was Walter employed by the University?

J: Yes. That is the reason they moved here from Oklahoma. He was employed by the University.

H: It was nice to have another Lutheran family move into town.

J: It sure was. The Kerkesners were an old pioneer family, too. They had just one boy.

H: Besides having the services at the Florida Union, were there any other activities of the congregation during the week?

J: Well, let me think. I am sure there were, but since I was working nights, I did not get to participate in a lot of that. Later on, when Thoral was home, I was a member of the LWML, but I was on the group that could not come to the meetings. They would send us literature, and I did my work at home. That is when my babies were little.

H: The LWML is the Lutheran Women's Missionary League.

J: Yes.

H: The ladies met together. What kinds of things did they do?

J: They had Bible study. They announced ahead of time what the Bible study was for that particular meeting, and we would do our lessons at home. Each one was a different circle. I think we have just the Miriam Circle now.

H: I would say that is something.

J: Yes.

H: When Thoral came back, what year is this?

J: In the late fall – I think it was November – of 1945, nearly Christmas of 1945.

H: How did your life change that night? I know that was a happy time.

J: He wanted to go back to the University because he had already had a year and a half, so we hunted and hunted for an apartment where we could cook or at least wash our clothes, but we could not find one at any price. I would have continued working and he would have gone to school, [so we would have had enough money,] but there just was none available. [Apartments were few and rooms in homes were scarce, with no cooking and no washing rules.]

He said that someday he wanted a farm, so we decided we would just move here and buy part of the land that his dad had. His dad was happy to sell some because it was getting to be too much for him. He had some health problems. So we bought eighty acres from him. But we lived one year with his parents. There were sixteen of us in the house. His sister's husband had come home, also, so all of us were there. We had sixteen at the table three times a day.

H: That is a lot of mouths to feed. Did you continue to work as a nurse during this time?

J: No, I stopped nursing then; I stopped for almost ten years. We stayed with his folks for one year until we could get our farm bought and house built. [We

borrowed money from FHA to buy the land, build a house, and finance our first crops.] At the end of that year, we built a packing house that we used for tobacco, and we lived in the packing house. That was a no-no here, too. Everybody thought I had lost my mind.

H: Why was that?

J: Well, they said, "You do not want to live in a barn," but I said, "We decided that would be a lot better than washing sixteen plates three times a day. Plus we wanted a little privacy." So we bought some furniture, and my folks sent some things down. It was just beautiful in there. We sectioned everything off into rooms. We lived there almost a year. We got everything going for our house. In the meantime, while the contractor was building our house, Thoral and his dad built the tobacco barn.

H: When were your children born?

J: David was born January 18, 1948.

H: Where was he born?

J: He was born in Gainesville, at Alachua General.

H: And your daughter?

J: She was born five years later, on August 16, 1953, in the same hospital.

H: Would you please tell me the full names of your children?

J: David is David Thoral, which is his dad's name, and Joan [pronounced "Joanne"] Elizabeth. I did not want her named Esther, but I liked Elizabeth, so that is how she got it.

H: Tell me about raising two children in the country. Where did they go to school?

J: They both went to school in High Springs, High Springs Elementary. That happened to be where Thoral graduated from high school, also. They finished there and then went on the Santa Fe High School, which is between Alachua and High Springs.

H: David was born during the time that people at St. Matthews were still worshipping at the Union. Was he baptized there?

J: He was baptized in February of 1948 in the Student Union building by Reverend

Eugene Helms. Then Joan was baptized in the new parish building. She was born in 1953, so it must have been in 1952 when they built it, or the beginning of 1953. She was born in August and was baptized in the new parish building on NW 5th [Avenue] by Reverend Gerbhardt.

H: Oh, you have a picture of that.

J: Yes. There is David; he was five and a half.

H: I know the church struggled for a long time to be able to build their own building. They purchased property on 5th Avenue, but because of the war they were unable to build for quite a long time. Tell me a little about that.

J: After we left Student Union, we met at the parsonage, and we met in an old paint shop, which used to be a Seventh-Day Adventist church, I think.

H: Do you remember where that was?

J: Well, eventually they moved it to 6th Avenue when we did not use it anymore, I think. We met in the Dewitt C. Jones Funeral Home, which is now Johnson-Hayes. David was just a little tot when we were in the Johnson-Hayes funeral home chapel.

H: It was probably frustrating for this group of Lutherans to keep together and find a place to worship.

J: Yes, it was. Can you imagine going in the parsonage and moving all your furniture for a Sunday morning worship?

H: Do you remember where that house was located?

J: I think it was on NW 12th [Avenue]. I am not sure, but I think that is where it was.

H: Back in those days the streets were named instead of numbered. I think it was 12th Avenue.

J: That was when David was not a quiet sitter. [laughter] You did not do such a thing as take a child up to communion with you like we do now. He was to stay in the chair and sit with my sister who was visiting us. The next thing I knew, I felt this tug. There was David. He was barely able to walk good, but he was right up there.

H: He was a trend-setter, even in those days. Do you remember anything about the

dedication of the new building on 5th Avenue? That was in December of 1952.

J: Oh, I think I have [the order of worship from that].

H: Oh, you have the dedication service [bulletin]. That is the new building.

J: This is the new building, I think, when we put air conditioning in. We did not have air conditioning at first, or floor covering or anything. It was just cement.

H: The first building that was finished at the end of 1952 was the one that was torn down when we added our new educational wing. How did you feel about that?

J: Well, I think the ones that were there at that time sure hated to see it go, but it really spoiled the decor of the whole unit. I think the space can be utilized a lot better now that we have torn it down. But it was a little hard.

H: Do you remember who was the pastor at the end of 1952 in the first building?

J: I think it was Reverend Gerbhardt.

H: So he baptized Joan.

J: Yes, he baptized Joan.

H: After Pastor Gerbhardt left, about 1957, then I think Pastor [Roland] Frerking came.

J: Yes. He confirmed David.

H: I see. Do you remember what year that was?

J: I have a picture. That was in 1961.

H: And there were three in his confirmation class.

J: Three boys.

H: Was that a pretty good-size group for those years?

J: I think it was, although I think the class the year before this group had maybe eight or nine in it. But there were only three that year.

H: The baby group.

J: Yes.

H: Also, right after that, the education building was built. Is that the building that we call the Student Center?

J: The Student Center, yes.

H: What was that used for in those days?

J: Sunday school classrooms, and LWML met there.

H: So the first building was for the church and offices, and the second one was for Sunday school classes.

J: Yes. That was the pastor's office and the kitchen. There was a little library in there and the Sunday school rooms.

H: That is great. And there was an organ?

J: Yes, there was an organ.

H: Do you remember any of the people who played the organ during those years in that building?

J: The oldest boy, John Kreinke, and Miss Linzmeyer, who was a Gainesville native who joined our church. She even played out at the Student Union Building when we were worshipping there. Well, so did John. The Adolph family was a very nice family. They had one daughter, Martha, and oh, her voice was heavenly. She sang just like Julie [Larson Schilling] sings now.

H: That says a lot. I noticed that 1962 was the year that Pastor [Robert] Besalski came to First Lutheran. He was not very old; he was only a few years out of seminary. Can you tell me a little bit about when he came?

J: He came in 1962. Joan was ready to start confirmation; she and Karen Hustad were in the first group that was confirmed in our new church building, and that was in March of 1967.

H: So Pastor Besalski started a building program to build a new sanctuary?

J: Yes, and that is our present sanctuary.

H: By this time, the congregation must have grown quite a bit.

- J: They had. I have some church bulletins. Thirty was a good group, and I think we were up to around 100 and 150, and we just kept growing.
- H: Worshiping in the old fellowship hall was getting to be a problem then, was not it?
- J: That is right. It was crowded, and there were a lot of children.
- H: Were there pews in that old building?
- J: No, we had chairs.
- H: And with children that made it noisy.
- J: Yes. At Christmastime we had so many little ones, sort of like we had when I was a child.
- H: Let us get back to your going back to work. You said you stopped nursing for ten years. When did you go back to nursing?
- J: Joan was actually two and a half years old. We had not had any rain to speak of for about four years. We never lost money on our farm – we always made enough to live – but we were not advancing. We were not large enough to put in irrigation. So I chose to go back to nursing.
- H: What year would that have been?
- J: About 1956.
- H: Did you go back to Alachua General?
- J: I went back to Alachua General and started private-duty nursing again at night. I drove back and forth. Only at that time they were not doing twelve-hour private duty, they were working eight-hour shifts, which was nicer because I had a family.
- H: And there were a few more nurses at the time.
- J: Yes, there were. Not many, but there were more. I did private-duty nursing for ten years. As soon as they started the intensive care units, we were not getting the cases that we used to get. We were getting people that had had cataracts removed and older people who had strokes and who could stay with their families. So I was getting to where I felt I was losing my contact with real nursing. At that time the University's med. center [Shands Teaching Hospital]

had started. I went out there then and had several cases out there, and I enjoyed it because I was getting back to true nursing.

Then there was a vacancy in the General Electric dispensary. General Electric Company was located outside of Alachua on the way to Gainesville. I went out there to relieve a nurse on maternity leave, and they asked me if I would stay, so I stayed. I retired from there after almost twelve years. That is where Gates [Energy Products] is now located.

H: So you had quite a few years of hospital nursing and then also industrial nursing.

J: Yes, which is quite different from hospital nursing. I thought I would never like it, but I enjoyed it very much. We had up to 3,500 employees with one nurse.

H: What were some of the things you really liked about that?

J: The employee contact. I did a lot of counseling. We did not have many major accidents, but we had a lot of little skin and finger injuries, cuts, and whatnot. I would say at that time two-thirds of the contacts were counseling.

H: What kind of counseling did you do?

J: Women do not ever leave their role as a mother. They do not leave it at home--they bring it with them. They worried about a lot of things out there, and they would come in and talk about almost anything. We would help them try to solve their problems, and they would go back out and do a good job.

H: So you were really helping the company to get their workers to feel better. And you enjoyed that?

J: Oh, I enjoyed it very much.

H: When did you retire from General Electric?

J: October 1, 1977. Really almost December 1977.

H: You must have worked the day shift at General Electric.

J: Yes. I really was on call twenty-four hours a day, but I worked the day shift, 8:00 to 4:30.

H: Did you like those hours better?

J: It was wonderful.

- H: You got to spend more time with your children when they were at home.
- J: Yes, that was nice. Of course, they eventually got married. David got married after he went into the service.
- H: What branch of the service was David in?
- J: He was in the navy. He went to Orlando for boot camp, and when he got out of boot camp, he got married.
- H: Who did he marry?
- J: He married his high school sweetheart.
- H: What is her name?
- J: Her name was Deborah Pearce. She said that "Deborah" is from the Bible.
- H: They met in high school?
- J: They met in high school. When he finished his boot camp, they were married.
- H: Where did David and Debbie get married?
- J: They were married at First Lutheran in Gainesville.
- H: What year was that?
- J: That was in 1969.
- H: Who married them? Who performed the service?
- J: Reverend [Glen] Rediehs, who was taking a doctorate course at the University, performed the ceremony because Vicar Wise could not really perform the ceremony and Pastor Besalski was going to a convention or something at that particular time. They could not wait because David had his orders to go to Norfolk, so Reverend Rediehs performed it.
- H: After they were married, did they both go to Norfolk?
- J: Debbie stayed and finished her class – she was taking a course in radiology – and then she went up to Norfolk. They had an apartment and lived up there while he was in service. When he got out of service – I cannot remember if he

was in two years or whatever the necessary time was – they came back to Gainesville and bought a house. They first lived in apartment for a year, and then they bought a house over on NW 48th Place.

H: When did they move out to the country?

J: Jason was born in 1976, and they were still living over there then. I guess it was 1978; it must have been in the fall of 1977 or the first part of 1978.

H: Your daughter was also married at First Lutheran.

J: Yes.

H: When was that?

J: She was married in 1973 by Pastor Besalski. He happened to be there at the time [laughter].

H: What is her husband's name?

J: Her husband is Mark Steven Coleman. He is a Florida highway patrolman.

H: Where do they live now?

J: They live about a fourth of a mile to the east of us, and David and Debbie live about a fourth of a mile north of us, just around the corner.

H: Besides David and Debbie's son Jason, do you have any other grandchildren?

J: No, Jason is my one and only. Jason Michael.

H: So you have all your children and grandchildren within a quarter-mile radius of your house. How do you like that?

J: I am very lucky.

H: I know that there have been vicars at First Lutheran for quite some time. Are there any particular ones that you remember or that were special?

J: Vicar Ralph [Hobratschk] was here for two years. That was during the time they were having a little dispute at St. Louis, you know.

H: Yes, sabbatical trouble.

- J: Yes, so we got to keep him one more year. He was tremendous. We had a marvelous time with him. He was great. They all were great, but I remember him as being someone special. He came from a farm, and his dad raised a lot of wheat out in Texas. So we had a lot in common that way, too.
- H: He felt right at home out here.
- J: Right at home.
- H: Since you retired from General Electric, were there some activities at the First Lutheran that you were able to participate in?
- J: Well, I was always a member of LWML, but I did not get to attend the meetings. Now I get to attend the meetings. I think it was in 1966 or 1967 when I started with Altar Guild.
- H: What did those people do?
- J: They came in on Saturday and prepared the altar for the next day's services. Joan and I make baptismal napkins, too.
- H: Tell me about the baptismal napkins.
- J: I think Pastor Besalski started the trend. Mary Fuller brings linen. Sometimes we use the old veils, the altar linens that are a little worn. We cut them into small napkin size, and we hem them and embroider a little cross on them.
- H: That is great. That is given to the parents.
- J: When the baby is baptized, there is one for each baby, and it is given to the parents.
- H: You may not remember this, but when we first started talking about when you came, the church was called St. Matthews, but now it is called First Lutheran Church. Do you remember anything about why the name was changed or what happened?
- J: I think that was when Reverend Gerbhardt was here. At that time, I was nursing and did not get there all the time. Joan was little. I think that it had something to do with when the University Lutheran Church came. Somebody was talking that there was going to be a First Lutheran Church instead of University Lutheran, and since we were the first Lutherans, someone suggested that it would be changed. Somehow or other I have in my mind it was the LWML group that instigated this or something. I am not certain; that is not real clear in my mind because I did not get to go to those meetings. But they changed the name from

St. Matthews to First Lutheran.

H: Were they worried that this would be competition?

J: Oh, I do not know, probably not. We were growing in number, and since we were the first Lutheran church, [it made sense for us to change our name]. There was a First Methodist, a First Baptist, so they decided to have a First Lutheran.

H: It fit right in. How about when your children were growing up? Besides Sunday school, were they involved in any other activities, like Christmas programs?

J: They always had a nice Christmas program. The Sunday school children did various things, but I cannot remember all of them.

H: What kinds of things did they do for the Christmas services?

J: They did songs and memory work. They memorized; even those little teeny tots memorized their little Bible verses. It was like an old-fashioned Christmas program.

H: Were your parents ever able to come to Florida?

J: My dad died when David was six months old, so he never got down here. But my mother came when David was baptized; she was one of his sponsors. She was down quite frequently. Both of my parents were very interested in the growth of our church.

H: I am sure they were glad that you had a Lutheran church to go to.

J: That I wanted to go to, yes, since we lived right next to the Baptist church. Now, Thoral was Baptist, but he chose to become a member of the Lutheran Church. I did not ask him, but I was very happy he did. In March of 1947 he was confirmed by Reverend Helms.

H: That is great. In 1983, First Lutheran decided they needed to have an assistant pastor to help out Pastor Besalski. Who did they call to be their assistant pastor?

J: They called Pastor [Steven] Hess. He was at Tallahassee. We call him Pastor Steve.

H: Do you remember anything about when the Hesses came to First Lutheran?

- J: Oh, yes. I remember when he was ordained. I thought that was the most wonderful couple up there. They were just so young and active and looked like they had so much ambition, which they do.
- H: They came with their children.
- J: Their two little children, Peter and Adam. Adam was a baby, almost. [laughter]
- H: You said that one time when Pastor Hess was conducting a Bible class you were charged with watching Adam in the cry room. Tell me about that.
- J: Well, Adam was real nice and quiet in Pastor Hess's arms, but when he handed him to me, he started crying, and he did not stop until he got back into his dad's arms. I could not help him at all. He did not like the toys or the reading or the singing. But I enjoyed him. He just kept on crying.
- H: He was safe, so it did not matter.
- J: Yes.
- H: In those years, in the early 1980s, Thoral was at home, but he was not very healthy anymore.
- J: No. He had had a heart attack when he was in his fifties, and then maybe a year and a half after I retired from General Electric [in 1977] he had a stroke. From then on he just went down. He eventually died December 30, 1985, of cancer of the lungs. He was bedridden for two or two and a half years.
- H: And he was here at home?
- J: Yes, he was here at home, except when he got so sick he had to go back in the hospital. [He died at home, however.]
- H: So all your training in private-duty nursing got put to good use.
- J: Yes. Pastor Hess and Pastor Besalski came so often.
- H: What were some of Thoral's favorite pastimes? What did he enjoy doing?
- J: Watching TV, especially the ball games. He was a football fan. Especially since he had a year and a half at the University, he really was interested in the Gators.
- H: I bet.

J: He liked farming immensely; he was a good farmer. But he always found time to go to the ball games.

H: I do not think I asked you what kind of farming you did here.

J: Tobacco was our cash crop, and we also had corn. We had Black Angus cattle, but not in a big way because we were a rather small farm [160 acres]. We also planted cantaloupe; we would sell cantaloupe, and that would make our expenses to gather the rest of our crop, the corn and tobacco, because tobacco is an expensive crop. But tobacco was the crop that really helped pay for the farm, so we always grew tobacco.

H: Is there any farming going on here now?

J: Since Thoral died, we planted seventy-five acres in pine seedlings, and we still have twenty-five or thirty acres in pasture for the cows. They are just beef cattle, and we raise them more or less as a hobby. I think Jason owns half of them. We gave him a little heifer calf on his first birthday, so he sort of claims them.

H: Who takes care of the livestock?

J: Oh, we all do. David and Jason mostly. Whoever is there does it. We all work together.

H: Is any of your family actively farming, or are you just on the sidelines?

J: You mean right here?

H: Yes.

J: Joan and Steve, and also David and Debbie several years ago, planted wheat, sunflowers, and soybeans until they were not making anything. You really could not farm and have another job because it was just too much, so they stopped farming. David works at Gates; he was at G.E. Debbie works in radiology at North Florida [Regional Hospital]. Steve is a Florida Highway patrolman; he is in the canine unit now. And Joan works for two C.P.A.s in Gainesville.

H: Do you think that is the way family farming is going to go?

J: I really do. When we came here, this area was all agriculture, all open, and people were farming. But now people are selling their land. I hope we do not ever have to sell the land. If taxes keep going up, we may. May be Jason will. Of course, Jason says he is going to California [laughter].

That is the reason we put the fields in pine seedlings, to keep it in agriculture. You just cannot make anything on row crops, like corn, especially on small acreage like we have. You almost have to get into hundreds of acres before you can make anything, and those people really are not making that much because they are putting a lot out. If we put it in pine seedlings, that will keep the land in agriculture.

H: Why do you suppose that family farmers nowadays are having so much trouble making ends meet?

J: Well, the cost of farming is very high, and labor is extremely high. Not only that, it is hard to get farm laborers now, because most people are working away from the farms. The cost of equipment is tremendous. In our case, David and Steve just cannot do two jobs at one time. David works twelve hours and Steve works mostly twelve hours off the farm, and there is no time for home life besides working at home.

H: You have lived in this county for over forty years, forty-five years. What are some of the changes that you have seen in this county and in Gainesville?

J: You look out the window and see the paved roads. That is one thing. When I came here, they had sand roads. The ruts were eight to ten inches deep, and you had to stay in those ruts. If you met a car, it was hard to jump out of the rut to pass. Now we have all paved roads. The stores are different. We used to have little tiny grocery stores, but now we have all the big markets. Of course, being able to go to church every Sunday is one of the big changes, too. The growth of our First Lutheran sure is a big change.

H: You have seen a lot of people come and go.

J: Yes. There are not very many of us left from way back then.

H: I really enjoyed the Pioneer Sunday.

J: That was so nice.

H: There were people there that had been at First Lutheran in the early days, when things were first getting started. Were there any of those folks you saw there that day that were special to you or that you remember anything special about?

J: Well, Myrna and Clayton Hustad's daughter Karen grew up with Joan. Karen was baptized, I think, the same year, just a few months ahead of Joan, and then they were confirmed together. But Karen got married before Joan did.

H: So you knew them pretty well?

J: Yes. I knew the Hustads and, of course, the Kreinkes. Elsie taught both our children in Sunday school, and I think Walter was the superintendent of Sunday school. The Kerkesners were an extremely close family. When the children were little--this was before Joan was born, when David was little – Thoral and David would go to church, and Bill and Connie Kerkesner would invite them over for lunch so I could sleep in. I was working nights.

H: That was nice.

J: Yes. They were always helpful.

H: Was Clayton Hustad one of the officers of the congregation for a long time?

J: He was. He was a very good leader back then. I think he was president for a long time.

H: And his wife Myrna was active?

J: She was very active. She was a teacher, and she was also very active in LWML way back. Mrs. Kreinke was, also. Myrtle Boles also was very active in LWML. She could go to all the meetings even though she was working. She lived in Gainesville, and she did not have children. She was real active.

H: In the courtyard at First Lutheran there is a beautiful, tall statue of Jesus. It is kind of a landmark for the church. Do you remember how that statue got to be put out in the courtyard?

J: I think it was donated to our congregation by the Beslems. When Esther Beslem died, I think her husband donated that in her memory.

H: Was that after the new church sanctuary was built?

J: Yes, it was not long after the new sanctuary was built.

H: Sometime in the mid 1960s?

J: Probably in 1969 or somewhere in that area.

H: That was a memorial?

J: That was a memorial for his wife.

H: So it is kind of a special.

J: It is very nice.

H: Just to wrap things up here this afternoon, can you tell me about how you felt coming from the North to the South, your years here, what you hope for your family? How do you feel about your life? Has it been a good life?

J: It has been very good. There was an extreme amount of growth in every way.

H: What are your hopes for your children and grandchild?

J: I hope they always remember what we taught them.

H: That is important for every family. I thank you for talking to me today. I think this information is going to be a lot of help to people trying to find out about First Lutheran's history, your life, and the special part you had in the making of First Lutheran church. It has been nice talking to you. Thank you.

J: Thank you.

[End of the interview]