

Interview with Bessie Timmerhoff, January 31, 1984.

Annette: Would you spell your name for me, please?

Bessie: It's Bessie Timmerhoff.

Annette: What is your maiden name.

Bessie: It was Johnson.

Annette: Can you tell me what your first experience with the Senior Center was?

Bessie: Yes. I suppose different ones have told you that we started in the old Kroeger building, down on Talmage Road.

Annette: How do you spell that? Do you know why it was called the old Kroeger building?

Bessie: No, I don't. That was before my time--before I came here. It's where the _____ School is now down there, by that ice cream drive-in.

Annette: Out on Talmage, you said?

Bessie: Where you turn the corner there at the light. And it's right back of that ice cream.

Annette: Off State Street?

Bessie: Yes. Anyway, we started there, and we went from there--we were there quite some time--Golda Connor and myself and Lynetta Jones. We all started down there, and we had quilting and different activities down there. We had a dance down there, and we played cards. Then we went from there to the Clubhouse up at the park, and we also had cards and sewing and potlucks and stuff like that up there. And then we went from there--Al Eldrick and Golda and myself--went up to North State St. when the North Coast people were moving down on Smith St. down here. They helped us to get that place up there to meet.

So we were there. We had several different directors there that ran the place, you know, while we were there. Anyway, my part up there, I helped Claude Trimble, I helped him run it, and I was working with Betty Cooper up there. Anyway, I waited tables. And then I had cards, we had sewing and different activities like this.

Then we went from there. Myself and my husband, we had a rummage sale down at the--used to be the Junior hall down by the depot, and they had moved out. And so then we took that over, when we got this. But anyway, my husband and I, we had a rummage sale in there for about 6 months, for the Senior Citizens. So then it wasn't too long 'til the Senior Citizens moved down after that. They brought that building down where this building is now.

Annette: They moved the building?

Bessie: Yes. And they cut it in two to move it down there.

Annette: That must have been quite an event.

Bessie: Yes, it was. And then I helped up there, and we had...I ran the card parties up there, for quite awhile.

Annette: On Leslie? On Leslie St., where they are now?

Bessie: Yes. For about 2 years I had the card parties, and we had a nice crowd.

Annette: What did you do at a card party?

Bessie: We had pinochle. And we had cribbage, some of 'em played cribbage. Some of 'em played other card games. Oh, we had 8 or 9 tables up there, as well as up at the park. We had a nice card party up there-- 8 or 9 tables.

Annette: Was this at the same time?

Bessie: No. This was when we went from place to place. When they moved you see, why then we'd go from place to place. And our card parties was up here, and I helped...I had the potlucks up there for quite some time. I don't know, several months. I always helped wait tables.

Annette: This was on Leslie?

Bessie: Yes. Well, at the other place I waited tables, and helped up there too. And then we had sewing, of course, I had told you that. And then I worked with them since they been over in the other building, we had dinners over there. And then I had the dance over there, part of the time. Other people had it before me.

Annette: Now which building was this?

Bessie: In the long building, where they have the dinners now. And then we had picnics up at the park--the card party people did. Then we always had something going most of the time. And I was on the Board, when we first started, over on Leslie. We had a little kitchen over there, until they remodeled. And we had our own little kitchen, but of course in the other part--the one over where we have the dinners now, the Community Building, I suppose that it's called--why, we had something going most all the time.

Annette: Sounds like you had a lot of activities.

Bessie: We had crocheting, and we had ceramics, and sewing--we did, we had an awful lot of activities.

Annette: Did you have a large turnout? Did lots of people come?

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Bessie: Yes, we did. We had an awfully lot. ^{urtime} And for potlucks, the old building--before they remodelled, you know, Mr. Barlett's offices is now--that was all dining-room in there. So, as far as I know, that's the way we arranged things. *also Bingo*

Annette: What were your dances like?

Bessie: Our dances were very good. And we had a good crowd all the time Each one of us would bring something, you know, in the food line. We didn't charge, we donated. Each person would donate a dollar. I think now it's two dollars. We had a real good time. We had the Cloverdale band up one time, Kitchen Band, one Sunday afternoon, and we had a nice crowd there. We had all kinds of dancing. Doc and Ione--Ione was in charge of the dance at one time, and Doc played the piano--

Annette: Is that Doc Powell?

Bessie: Doc Powell. Well, I can't think of too much else. But...Ione's brother-in-law, he was with us. He passed away, of course. And there was so many of them there, in the band...our own band.

Annette: This was the Senior Center Band?

Bessie: Yes. And, let's see, I had pool up there. I turned it over to my husband, at that time. We had two pool tables in the Recreation Room.

We had a wedding in there at that time. It was Susie Hokum and Oran Gam--she married Oran. I was the bridesmaid. She had a beautiful wedding. We've had several activities there, since then.

Annette: Uhuh. Now where are we talking about now? On Leslie?

Bessie: Yes.

Annette: I think a wedding's interesting. People always think of wedding's for young people, but among seniors just the whole idea of a wedding is nice, isn't it?

Bessie: It sure is. They had a birthday party for this lady just about two weeks ago. She looked so pretty, and there was about 70 people there. She and I is about the same age, I'm older than she is. She had her 80th birthday.

Annette: I'd like to hear more about when you were waiting tables, back when you first got your meal program started on State St. You must have had an interesting variety of people when you were getting it started.

Bessie: We did. We had quite a few people coming in, and all the different people. We've had--ah, so many seniors now, that I couldn't tell you how many at the time. Mr. Bartlett wasn't with us up there, he came down--he was with us down here. I just can't think of everybody who was running the place at that time. *Mr. Nickelson, White, Claud Trimble. all fare Mr Bartlett time.*

Annette: How about people who came in? Do you remember any interesting incidents, or interesting people?

Bessie: Well, they were all interesting. Because when you are out in the public like what, you get acquainted with them, and you love them all. After we moved over here, at Leslie St., I had a man from a convalescent home, and he was real old. Mr. Proudfoot, I think was his name. And he liked to play checkers. He was a professional, had been. Anyway, I didn't know anything about checkers. But I had to play with him, it always fell my lot. He would look forward to coming to play checkers, And, you know, he says, "I wish you would take me to your home and take care of me." I said, "I can't do this." I said, "I have a husband"--I was then living in the mobile home park over here. I said, "I don't have the room. But he just insisted I take him. But he didn't live too long after that, the poor old thing. I felt so sorry for him. He seemed like an awfully nice man. He was up, I think, in his 80's or 90's, somewhere up in there.

Annette: He needed someone to take care of him.

Bessie: He was in the convalescent home, and they'd bring him up every night that they could, that he was able.

Annette: What kind of food did you serve?

Bessie: Up at the other place? Just common food like we serve now, here.

Annette: Was it pretty much the same kind of food that you serve now?

Bessie: Yes. For a little while, when Claude Trimble had it, I cooked 2 nights a week. They had a dinner in the evening, and everybody seemed to enjoy everything that we had, most of the time. Mary Jennings was awfully nice woman. She's passed on now, but she's awfully nice. And she always was there--when the doors was open, she was there. And anytime that bus was ready, she'd go, if she had a chance. She was awfully sweet woman. She had emphysema awfully bad, and..she was cranky, like us all. We all get cranky at times.

Annette: When you moved to the place on State St., it was the Progressive Seniors who moved there?

Bessie: Yes, it was the Progressives.

Annette: I'm getting two views about that. Some people say that the Progressives were going first, then the Seniors started up and the Progressives quit. Others say that the Seniors started, and the Progressives took off on their own, and they were 2 separate groups.

Bessie: They were, later. It was started out as Progressives, down here--the Kroeger building. And then we moved from there, up to the Park, and it was still the Progressives up there. And I don't know, there was a little friction some way, but I don't remember. Anyway, someone else may know more than I do about this. But then I went with the Senior Citizens. How come it was divided, I don't know. The Progressives, then, they had card parties over at another building. I don't remember when they were taken from Progressives to Senior Citizens, I don't remember this. Progressives had their's then, and Senior Citizens had their's. But it did start as Progressives. When we first started.

Annette: And then, when it went into the building on State St., was it the same people doing this?

Bessie: Most of us. Different ones was on the Board up there, the same as we were when we started it.

Annette: Were you on the Board at that time?

Bessie: Not that I remember. We met over at the Grange too, before we went out to the Park--I forgot this. Golda Connor was the President, and I was Vice-President over there, but not too long. Then after we went up to the Park. Mrs. Anderson, she came in with us, and I forgot what part she had, but she was on the Board up there with the rest of us. I can't just tell you how all this went--this has been a long time ago.

Annette: Yes. I know what you mean. You mentioned that you and Golda and Lynetta were working to get it started, right?

Bessie: Yes.

Annette: What were some of the things that you did?

Bessie: Well--we had the _____ meeting. And we also had a dance down there, and we did quilting down there. And Mr., Mrs. Thompson was there, and she helped us with the quilting, and I don't know whether... Now I know Mr. Thompson has gone, he has died. And Mrs. Thompson, I don't know whether she is still living or not. She used to live, I think it was over on Oak Street. He filed scissors and saws and all that. He was a real old man, but real nice. But you get acquainted with everybody, and you just love everybody.

Annette: How nice. Tell me a little bit about yourself--where were you born.

Bessie: That's been so long ago.

Annette: Can't remember, huh?

Bessie: YES. I was born in Texas.

Annette: Do you mind saying what year?

Bessie: 1903.

Annette: That's been awhile.

Bessie: Yes, quite awhile for me to remember. I was born in 1903. And we left Texas and went to Oklahoma--_____, Oklahoma.

Annette: How old were you then?

Bessie: I was twelve when I left there. I was 8 when I left Texas and went to Oklahoma. And I was 12 when we left Oklahoma, went from there to Arkansas--to Rogers, Arkansas. My mother died first, and then my

father died. In 19 and 18 my mother died; in 19 and 19 my father died, lacking 5 days of being one year.

Annette: How awful on you. How hard on you at that age to lose both your parents.

Bessie: Well, yes, it was. But in those days people didn't have to live like they do now. My sister and her husband lived with us, and when we lived in Oklahoma, well they ran the--my mother and my sister--ran the telephone, the switchboard, in our home. Then when we went to ARKANSAS, we all lived together. Then I had 2 brothers, and one sister. And this sister and her husband was the one that lived with us. So after my father and mother died, we still lived together. And my one brother lived with us.

So anyway, I was married when I was 17 years old, to Elmer Heinz. He died in 1969.

Annette: Did you move to California with Elmer? Is that how you got out here?

Bessie: No, I had a daughter out here. And we came out here, my husband and I, back and forward. So, he was sick. He had to quit work. At the time, when he had to give up his work, I had a dry-cleaning shop, and I ran the dry-cleaning shop. But before this I worked for the casket company, for 19 years. And then after we came out here--we sold our home back there and came out here--why, we just rented. And we lived in Cloverdale, and then we moved--I had to live in the motels quite a lot.

Annette: What kind of work did your husband do?

Bessie: He was a mill man. He ran elevators, grain elevators, in Wichita. And we went up to Laurenceburg, Indiana, and he ran one up there; then we came back, and he worked in the flour mills and elevators--that was his work, all of his life. Till, he got sick and couldn't work in them anymore, then we worked for _____ and _____ at the typewriting company. He cleaned typewriters and delivered those at night--he would run the route, you know. Till he wasn't able, then he came and helped me in the dry-cleaning shop. I had just a sub-station and--I sent all my work out, see? I did alteration. When he would come and check in and check out, and take care of the trade for me, why I would do my alteration.

So I had that 3 years, and due to his health we give it up. Then we went backward and forwards, from here to Kansas. We decided, then, that we'd stay out here. When he got so he wasn't able to travel anymore, we went back to Wichita, and he died there.

And then I married this Mr. Timmerhoff, Chet Timmerhoff--it was in '70, I guess that it was--and I had a mobile home over in this park over here. And we lived there until after he died, then it was too hard for me to keep up, so I gave it to my son and he sold it. And my son is--I have lost 2 daughters, 1 son, and this other son, he hasn't very much longer

Lew Barrett Disease

yet to live. He has _____ disease, if you know what that is?

Annette: I don't.

Bessie: It's of the spine and the nerves in the spine. This one arm paralyzed first, and his other one is paralyzed now. He's 48 years old, and he can't take care of himself, at all anymore. He can walk, on straight ground. But if it's rocky or something like that, he can't walk. He falls so easy. But his legs is alright yet. He was in the Navy 22 years, and he's retired from the Navy.

Annette: Does he live here?

Bessie: He lives at Hanford, he and his wife. He's adopted two boys, and has one of his own. His youngest boy will be 18 in September. His other two, one's out of college, and he's a reporter down around Hanford somewhere. And the other one, he's selling cars. And the little one, of course he's in high school. This was my family.

Annette: Uhuh--do you have other children?

Bessie: No.

Annette: How sad for you.

Bessie: Well, it is. But you have to take the sad with the good.

Annette: Well, you have a beautiful attitude, anyway. So what brought you to Senior work? What made you first become interested in the Senior Center?

Bessie: I had to have something to do, I couldn't just sit around. And I started out with the Seniors, and I also joined the Grange, and I go to church at the Church of Christ, and I've always gone down there. That was just my line of work, I've always worked with The Church

Annette: How did you find out about the Seniors? When you came to Ukiah?

Bessie: Oh, I can't tell you this.

Annette: When you first started working with Golda and Lynetta. How did you find out..that it was happening? Like in the early stages?

Bessie: I got acquainted with them some way, and how I don't know. And then I was invited to come down, so I went down with them. Then I got to running around with different ones, and Golda and I ran around quite a lot. We went to Davis and sat in on the meetings and stuff over there. I was on the Board then, when we went over there. I always waited tables, 2 or 3 times a week. Then I'd help in the kitchen, if necessary.

Annette: Are you still active?

Bessie: I would be, if I didn't have arthritis so bad. This has been kind of hard on me. I don't get the exercise that I need, but I can't stand on my legs like I used to. But I enjoy working all of the time.

Annette: Being involved in the Senior Center back in those early days, and seeing where it's come now--what do you think? Is it pretty much what you had in mind for it?

Bessie: Yes, it is. Because when we started out, we had nothing. And we got a grant from the North Coast. They paid us so much on our rent, and they gave us so much to start out to run it. The first year, seems to me like, we got 75%, to run it. They helped us on that building up there--I've forgotten just how much it was--it was quite a bit, over \$100 a month, that we had to pay. NCO took care of that, and they took care of all our groceries and everything--then we got commodities. I also helped on the commodities.

Annette: What does "commodities" mean?

Bessie: Well, commodities meant, what the government puts out for people who needs this--like cheese and flour and all these things--sugar. Betty Fitzgerald and I worked together. Betty Fitzgerald worked up here, for a long time also. I don't know, we just all got along real well, and that's how we started out.

Annette: It sounds nice. You mentioned Doc Powell earlier. I would like to talk to him. Do you know where I can find him.

Bessie: I don't know his address. He lived with Ione--Ione had a home, and he boarded with her. And Ione is awfully bad now, and I just doubt whether you could get to talk to him or not. She can't have company. And I don't know whether she's back home, or whether she's still in the hospital.

Annette: How do you spell her last name?

Bessie: I suppose K-e-e-l-e-r.

Annette: I haven't heard her name before.

Bessie: Oh, you haven't? Well, she had the dances, and Doc Powell, he played the piano.

Annette: When you say she had the dances?

Bessie: She was chairman, same as I. And Betty Fitzgerald, she started out on the dances first, and then I forget how many before I took it.

Annette: Betty Cooper is another person I haven't been able to get--I'm not sure where to find her.

Bessie: She's over on Jones Street.

Annette: One last question. You know of course that I'm gathering these materials for a Senior Center history, that the Board has asked me to research and we anticipate putting into a book. What kind of book would you like to see?

Bessie: I'd like to see a nice, big book with a hard back and pictures. The money goes for everything else, so why not a nice book?