



## Interview with Erma Bennett Dorrer

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Project Coordinator

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**Erma Dorrer, present day**

**Ms. Wikoff:** My recollections are so fond of Erma Dorrer because she wasn't Mrs. Dorrer when she had me in the sixth grade, but I mentioned that she probably knows me by the name of Stillwell. Erma's long-term teaching career is very well noted and has been written up in many papers and so this is going to be a fun time for us this morning. Erma, where you were born?



**Erma Dorrer at the age of one**

**Ms. Dorrer:** I was born on a farm in West Freehold in a great big fourteen-room house. And now it is no more, because they have a lot of new houses there. It really makes me very sad, but I walk there and I look across the fields where my father labored as a farmer and raised six children. I was the oldest of six. And remember my father really came from the Tennent area, and was very well known. He said that he didn't have a chance to go to college, and we were going somewhere and every one of us did go. Not to Vassar, and not to the more expensive colleges, but we went somewhere. And three of us became teachers in the community.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Did you go to Trenton State?

**Ms. Dorrer:** I went to Trenton State.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes. That's when it was called Trenton State.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, it really had just been called Normal School.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, see, my mother went to the Normal School.



**Erma Dorrer at Camp Trenton Normal, 1924**

**Ms. Dorrer:** And, by the way, your mother was a wonderful person. Mrs. Stillwell was a teacher, and we became very good friends when I had the children, you and your sister, Eleanor, whom I loved so much. And I remember when I was ill one time, your mother substituted for me for quite a period of time. And I used to go out to your parent's farm, the Stillwell farm, often for dinner. And she was the greatest cook. I always loved to go to her house.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, teachers were so respected in those days, oh, my goodness. The sun just rose and shone for teachers. I mean, if you did anything bad in school, don't go home and tell your parents because it was the teacher that was right.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And you know, I still hear from many of those children I had in Englishtown school.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Um-hmm, well you were a dear teacher, you were loved.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And I loved them. I remember when I had a chance to go to another school in Manasquan; it took me three years to get around to actually going, to Manasquan. And I remember telling someone that I had taught in every room in that Englishtown school, and Joe Clayton, the County Superintendent, said, "Well, now it's just about time you went to another school."



**In 1952, fifty eighth-graders from Manalapan and Englishtown prepare for graduation at the Main Street Public School. Erma Dorrer, principal and teacher, is standing in the top row, center.**

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, you know, you also taught Ted Narozanick.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Oh, I did. I just loved my Ted. In fact I'm going to call him today, I have to tell him something. I want to tell him, because I know he's running again, I so hope he gets elected.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I'm so proud of Ted.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Oh, I am too.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I mean, when you know somebody all his life, and he's dedicated his life to serving the public, he's a statesman in Monmouth County.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, you know, I remember him when he was a cute little boy. When he would get up to say a piece, you know, we had to speak, when we had programs, and I can remember him standing up on that Englishtown auditorium platform and saying his piece; I'm so proud of him. I hear from him all the time.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Oh, wonderful.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And I'm very active in the historical society of Manasquan, and I had him come and speak. And he also is a life member of Manasquan Historical Society. Well, let's go back to education. You know, I lost my only child -

**Ms. Wikoff:** I never knew that, Erma -

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, well, early, it was never born. I mean, lots of people didn't know.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I never knew that, I'm very sorry.

**Ms. Dorrer:** So I had planned to teach five years, and then when that happened, I went right back to teaching, and I taught for forty-one years. Then at the time my husband died in 1959, I just threw myself into education. And I -

**Ms. Wikoff:** It took the place of your loss -

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, and I went right up in the NJEA. I was executive committee member for many years. I was on the delegate assembly, and I have to laugh when I think that in Trenton they called me Mother Dorrer.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Instead of Mother Theresa!

**Ms. Dorrer:** And I knew all the people on the state level and all the politicians in Monmouth County who were active and gave a lot, like Dick Stout and all those people with whom I worked. And so Lydia, it's wonderful to have you here, because you were one of those many children that I loved.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, you were loved too, and as I say, teachers were so respected in those days. It really is a thing that's gone now; it's a shame.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, it is not the same. And when I think of that little schoolhouse, when I first went to Englishtown; there was only one school; now there are about seven, are there not?

**Ms. Wikoff:** Oh, yes, yes. And now, of course, it's called Manalapan. I never even knew the word Manalapan.

**Ms. Dorrer:** No?

**Ms. Wikoff:** I never knew it until I started paying taxes.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, I know.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I was an Englishtown girl, of course, because I went to school there. But now it has changed.

**Ms. Dorrer:** It has grown so.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Go back to your background of farming; I forget what your dad raised.

**Ms. Dorrer:** He raised potatoes, mostly. And hay. Then sometimes, we had all kinds of vegetables, and I remember one time when they raised tomatoes, which they trucked to Camden -

**Ms. Wikoff:** I'll bet, we did too -

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes.

**Ms. Wikoff:** And if you went down there, and they had too many tomatoes, do you remember this, they would turn back your load.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Oh, yes! And the juice would be running through the truck. Oh, and this is one reason I didn't ever like to get tomato soup because I thought of that.

**Ms. Wikoff:** You knew what happened -

**Ms. Dorrer:** I knew what happened to it. My sisters and my brother and I worked right out of the field. I remember thinking, "Won't it be wonderful when I get too big and don't have to pick potatoes?"

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, I know, but I kind of loved sorting tomatoes -

**Ms. Dorrer:** When I was very young, I went across the field where my grandmother and grandfather had another farm, and they sort of adopted me, and I used to run back and forth between the two houses.

**Ms. Wikoff:** That road is Route 537 now .

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, 537.

**Ms. Wikoff:** So you were crossing such a busy road, but it probably wasn't even paved then.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes. And then even at Christmastime I remember the children, the rest of the children of the family always had to wait until I ran home, back to the family home, for Christmas, to open the presents and things.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Oh, how about that. That's wonderful.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes. Well, it's wonderful, back, far back, was a wonderful, wonderful time - it's something you look back on.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I know.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Of course, we were not wealthy, and I often wonder how my father did all he did. He sent us all to school and worked as hard as he did. That's why it sort of tears my heart out when I see all the expensive houses and the old farmhouses torn down, and it just tears my heart out.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, you might not have had to pay hardly anything for college. I know Hamilton, my brother, was able to work his way through, and it didn't cost anything.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I think Hamilton was in the eighth grade when I started teaching in the fourth grade. And Hamilton was someone who became really well known, and is well known.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, he was a great educator.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes. And I am proud of him -- well there are many people who came out of that environment in that area who have made a name for themselves.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, well see, the one thing that he didn't want to be was a farmer. And I can understand why. In fact, my parents didn't want me to marry Charles Wikoff because they knew he was going to be a farmer. And really the farmer's lives were pretty desperate in those days. Dad went through about three or four different farms. He couldn't make a living. You laugh about it now, but it was kind of sad.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And the area is so different now out there. Well, later I went on to get my degrees and -

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, and you had to, because you didn't have the complete degree to teach so where did you get your extra -

**Ms. Dorrer:** Rutgers. And then I went on, possibly pursuing education. And I would go on Saturdays, and after school, and then I married Raymond Dorrer, who was someone from New York whose family became friendly with my father. I met Raymond through the family. We were married, and he was a mechanic, and right in the Depression, we bought a place in Neptune. That was in the 1930s.

**Ms. Wikoff:** It was a garage.

**Ms. Dorrer:** A garage. And I used to drive back and forth from Neptune to Englishtown for years.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I didn't know that.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And then when he went into the service, I would go to work in Englishtown, come home, help in the garage with my brother-in-law, and we really did a very good business, but it was very trying because I remember I didn't have a very good car; it was an old Chevrolet, that was just about ready to fall apart -

**Ms. Wikoff:** But you had a mechanic for a husband anyway!

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, but Raymond was in the service, and so we carried on while he was in the service.

**Ms. Wikoff:** And then when he came out, did he continue the garage?

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes. Well when he came back, he flew, he had a plane, and I had my ground training from Ed Brown, who was pretty well known in the local community of Wall Township. And Raymond went to Florida on a short vacation, and on his way back he went down off Atlantic City, and we never found anything, nothing was ever found.

**Ms. Wikoff:** That's sad.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, that was very sad. And by that time I was teaching in Manasquan and -

**Ms. Wikoff:** That's why I didn't hear about it that much.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes. And I just loved my job in Manasquan. I was head teacher, about the same as vice-principal, and I was in charge of all the little odds and ends of discipline and so forth.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, you were an excellent organizer. But you had to be.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I liked being a leader, and I would go to Trenton to meetings and most every Friday night they had the meetings, and I'd get home very late, and I just sort of threw myself into education, which I enjoyed so much.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Would you like to talk about some of the things that you reminisce about - I think we talked about the changes, a lot of the changes in Monmouth County - and we talked about, you know, how it was when you were growing up. What memories do you have when you went to school, before you became a teacher?

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I remember my first day of school, going to the old Thompson's Grove School, which was off of -

**Ms. Wikoff:** It's off of Route 537.

**Ms. Dorrer:** It's off of 537, and it was a little one-room school. The teacher, Miss Lewis, I imagine she didn't have much education, but she was a very nice person, and tried very hard, but she surely wasn't as much educated as teachers are now.

**Ms. Wikoff:** They didn't have to be.

**Ms. Dorrer:** They didn't have to be. So I went in, and all my family started in that school, but most of us went on to Freehold. We had to walk from the farm to Thompson's Grove, but when we went to Freehold, we went on the bus, the little old rickety bus, that came and picked us up and took us into town. We didn't have much to do with after school activities because we had to take the bus and go home to the farm.

**Ms. Wikoff:** My husband Charles's mother was a Thompson, and that Thompson would be her great-grandmother, and her grandparents gave the land for that school - that's why it's called Thompson Grove.

**Ms. Dorrer:** You know I never knew that was the reason, but it was called Thompson's Grove. And it was the Clayton farm, and now the Clayton farm is being developed.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I was very disappointed in Mr. Clayton. I asked him personally to save that farm, but the bulldozer operator called me up one morning saying it was going to be demolished and they said that I had to go today if I wanted to protest that. And I said well, what could I do today?

**Ms. Dorrer:** You know he went to that school, I know how you tried to keep that from being torn down. I sat in his living room for an hour and a half, begging him; I almost got down on my knees...

**Ms. Wikoff:** See, I didn't know that. We could have done it together, and, today I think if we had used a little bit of -

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I almost got down on my knees to him, and he said that there was too much red tape about antique buildings.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Isn't that a shame?

**Ms. Dorrer:** And he was such a wealthy man, and a long time resident of that area and you know I cried, I really did. I didn't realize that you and I could have worked on that -

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, I wish I had known that you were trying to save it, also. I was doing it because I had been appointed historian for the Township, and I desperately wanted to save that school because it had so much history with Charles's family, the Wikoff family. Anyway, it went.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I have a picture I want to show you of when I went there in the early days. And every time I go by there, I go up to the fresh fruit farm to get fruit from Schletwegs, and all those farms up there.

**Ms. Wikoff:** So that was reminiscing about your earliest childhood in school. Where was the school in Freehold at that time?

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, it was on Hudson Street, right near the rug mill.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, my dad went there, and I remember hearing that he had to take the horse and ride in, and they had a place to tie the horses for the school. You see he was a lot older than you were. There was no bus transportation.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I well remember the high school was on Hudson Street, and the Elementary school was right down the street, not far from that. When I graduated from high school, there were fifty-seven of us, and I graduated in the class of 1923. I'm friendly with the girl who was the president of our class, her name is Dorothy Statsir, and she and I are the only two living members of the class of 1923, we think. We talked the other night because she somehow heard that I had moved from my home in Neptune, or in Sea Girt and she called me.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Wasn't her father the postmaster in Freehold? Bernard Statsir?

**Ms. Dorrer:** That wasn't her father, that was -

**Ms. Wikoff:** Her uncle?

**Ms. Dorrer:** Something like that. The Statsirs were very well known.

**Ms. Wikoff:** They were relatives of -

**Ms. Dorrer:** Bill Statsir was her husband, yes William Statsir.

**Ms. Wikoff:** The Statsirs were related to Charles's mother.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes.

**Ms. Wikoff:** And that's a nice background that you - in a way some people say, "Wasn't that a terrible background?" but really it was our upbringing.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, but I cannot believe that two weeks from today I will be ninety-five years old.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Really? Well, you deserve a medal for -

**Ms. Dorrer:** And when I think of the people I've known, and all the associations I've had, it's just wonderful.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, to have this grand memory is worth so much, and then to share it with our people here in Monmouth County who don't know about it is wonderful. I think, as time goes on, people are going to be more and more interested in what it was like here in the old days. What were some of the medical changes?

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, you know something, there was a country doctor, well, not a country doctor, but he had an office in Freehold. I can't remember his name right now, but he -

**Ms. Wikoff:** It wasn't Dr. Lewis?

**Ms. Dorrer:** No. But Dr. Lewis, I want to tell you about that. I had contact with the person that married Dr. Lewis -

**Ms. Wikoff:** Oh, sure, Gould, Marianne Gould.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, she called me, and I have a letter in my collection that she wrote to me thanking me for being just such a good teacher when she was little. And her mother had -

**Ms. Wikoff:** The telephone office -

**Ms. Dorrer:** The telephone office on Tennent Avenue.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes!

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, but we started something -

**Ms. Wikoff:** The medical practice -

**Ms. Dorrer:** Oh, the medical practice. Well, anyhow, of course, once a year they had a doctor come to Thompson's Grove, and I remember lining up. I think this doctor had a nurse or someone with him, and as I passed by, he made a remark to the nurse. He said, "This child isn't going to live long." But, you know, I always said how I fooled him!

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, remember they used to look in your ears. It was just a cursory kind of examination, it was a nothing really, but they had to hire the doctor to do it.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, but, you know even though my father was a farmer and it was not easy getting along, he always tried to see that we were taken to Dr. Anderson, in Englishtown, our doctor. By the way, he was on the Board of Education when I was hired for my first job. And Mr. Aumack was also on the Board of Education. He was Dad's boyhood friend; they went to school together, so I didn't have such a hard job getting a position.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, you know when Mr. Aumack wanted to retire, he came out and saw my husband, Charles, and he said, "Now you have children." We had just started having a family, and he said, "Now you have children and I know you'd be a good school board member," and that's how simple it was in those days, to become a school board member with no connections at all. And Charles dedicated sixteen years of his life to being a school board member.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And you know my father was president of the Board of Education in Freehold Township when that first school was built on Route 537. And I was always so proud because as you went in the door, there was my Dad's picture. Of course they have thrown it out now. But here was just a plain farmer, and he was President of the Board of Education.

**Ms. Wikoff:** What I always remember in those days was that they used common sense and good judgment. I mean it wasn't because they were highly educated, but common sense meant a lot when you were building, and when you were making decisions.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I have to tell you one little incident about Freehold Township. I was teaching in Manalapan Township in Englishtown, of course, and somehow

or other someone thought I should come to Freehold Township. And I have a letter that says they would offer me a job for twelve hundred dollars a year.

**Ms. Wikoff:** That was big money!

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Oh, dear. I think my mother got eight hundred dollars.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Oh, my goodness. That's terrible.

**Ms. Wikoff:** And we always said that that just went right into the ground because that kept Dad farming.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I know.

**Ms. Wikoff:** It's so silly, but that's the way it worked.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Of course that's the way it was when I was first married and I was teaching in Englishtown, and we were starting our garage. I used to contribute quite a lot to the garage. And during the War I worked right there with my brother-in-law.

**Ms. Wikoff:** So, I was going to say that following Dr. Anderson was Dr. Woodruff.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes.

**Ms. Wikoff:** He was a wonderful doctor, in fact, he delivered all of my children, and then you had to go to Neptune to the hospital. But there might have been one traffic light in Freehold, and I mean you could really get to Neptune Hospital in twenty minutes. But today, if you had to go to Neptune, you'd have the baby before you got there.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I know. Oh, that's right, I remember. What was the other doctor? Before Dr. Barr, there was an older doctor. Of course, I well remember the inn, which is now just the Englishtown Museum, because there used to be a little lunchroom there. And once in a while, when I had a little extra money, I would go down at lunchtime and have a little lunch. And other times I would go across to Vandenberg's -

**Ms. Wikoff:** Sometimes I heard you gave lunch to the teachers!

**Ms. Dorrer:** She made lunch for the teachers, and I paid fifty cents for my lunch. And what a lunch!! You heard Mrs. Vandenberg is such a good cook.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, such a wonderful family.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, and the Vandenberg store was in the center of Englishtown.

**Ms. Wikoff:** And then George Vandenberg married Mildred -

**Ms. Dorrer:** Mildred Wolfe -

**Ms. Wikoff:** And she was my teacher, too.



**Erma Dorrer during her first year of teaching, 1926**

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, Mildred Wolfe and I started teaching about the same time.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, I had her in the first grade.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I started in the fourth grade and went up from the fourth, fifth, and sixth, and then I got in the eighth grade, and I never could get out of the eighth grade. I don't know what there was about it, my voice, maybe, or was it that I'm six foot tall. So Mildred married George, young George Vandenberg .

**Ms. Wikoff:** And I was one of the first students to come to that new school in Englishtown, because earlier all the students had to go to the Tennent school in our area. Hamilton and Eleanor had to go to Tennent, but I was able to start in the new school. You know it was a big thing to go to a brand new school!

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I remember when I took my eighth grade examinations in Thompson Road School. We had to go to Englishtown to take our eighth grade examinations. I can't remember who the principal was, but he came over to our farm to tell my mother and father how I had made out in these. And I got the highest marks, and can you believe, from a little old school like that! And I always remember how we learned to read and love books, and how that happened with a background that a teacher had then is amazing.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes. I'm just curious now. You were in the Freehold Township, across the street from Manalapan Township and you went to Manalapan Township schools.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I think there was some agreement between Manalapan Township and Freehold Township about that school. Oh, but why did they have to tear that Thompson Grove School down.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I know, we'll never get over that!

**Ms. Dorrer:** No.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Okay, let's go on to some of these questions that are kind of interesting. Do you remember the first movie that you ever saw?

**Ms. Dorrer:** The first movie? You know I don't remember. I do remember that I had an aunt who used to come visit us, Aunt Laura, and she used to take us to the movies on Saturday afternoon, and one thing I can remember is somebody who played the piano - it was somebody that you and I would know, but I don't recall now. But I do not remember what the movies were.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, I remember mine. I remember mostly the Shirley Temple movies - they were so good.

**Ms. Dorrer:** That was after my beginning that Shirley came on.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Do you remember anything about FDR - about Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal"?

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, and I remember when I came home the day that Franklin Roosevelt died. My father was out in the field, with the farm machinery, and I went out and told him that Roosevelt had died. Yes, I remember that.

**Ms. Wikoff:** And isn't it interesting: I'll bet that neither you and nor I never knew that he didn't stand up by himself...the reporters were so kind, thank goodness to him - do you remember just recently reading that there was controversy when this monument to him in Washington D.C. - whether they should have had him in a wheelchair or not, and of course, they didn't.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, that was how they got away with that one.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Now, in today's world, you don't get away with anything. What newspapers made all the names?

**Ms. Dorrer:** *The Freehold Transcript*. And I can't remember the name, there was another paper, the *Democrat*. *The Freehold Transcript* came out on Thursday, I'm quite sure, and that night was a real important night in our lives because everybody, including my father, had to read *The Transcript*. And the Center Word column.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes! And then each little area had a gossip column. I'll never forget the one in our area. And you didn't kind of like everybody to know what you were doing. I remember she would call, and she would ask, "Now what did you do over the weekend?"

**Ms. Dorrer:** Oh, yes, and if anybody ever came to visit -

**Ms. Wikoff:** She'd put their names in.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And people came to the farm from far and near. Especially in summertime. You know, some of them came that we didn't want. They'd come to get the nice things we had on the farm to take them back with them. I remember some of them stealing my grandfather's watermelons, and I went in and said to my grandfather, in front of all the farm people who were sitting and having dinner, "I saw such-and-such person stealing your watermelons."

**Ms. Wikoff:** We had that happen all the time, too. Especially with the pumpkins and the watermelons. There was some charm to be able to steal either pumpkins or watermelons. That's interesting.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes. And I remember my grandfather going right out. I don't know what he did, but anyhow, he took care of that situation. Of course, I was convinced there was a trick.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I can imagine that you had the same visiting that we had on a Sunday night. I remember that mother would always have a cake ready for Sunday because the relatives would stop in - it was a wonderful time for visiting. It's a shame people don't visit today, but now you have to call somebody first.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes. In the summertime you either had lemonade or iced tea.

**Ms. Wikoff:** And do you remember when your dad got into haying they would make root beer!

**Ms. Dorrer:** And then, in the middle of the afternoon, you'd have to take a little refreshment out to them. And that's another thing. My grandfather used to say, "If you needed Erma to do anything, you hook a horse up to it." Because I loved horses, and I rode a horse. Later in life, I learned that children always had so much, but you know, we had one of everything, we had one bicycle, one this, one that, but at hay time, I remember driving the hay fork -



**Erma Dorrer on the farm  
with her horses, 1919**

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, and I did too. When you got old enough to do that you were pretty proud of yourself. But that was a talent to be able to do that correctly.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, and then you drove, and then they'd call to drop the hay into the haymow.

**Ms. Wikoff:** They'd say, "Whoa!" We can never go back to those times. What were some of the childhood games that you played?

**Ms. Dorrer:** We had one croquet set, and I remember that was quite a joy to play croquet. And I guess we had our own little games -

**Ms. Wikoff:** Parcheesi I bet was one.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, and Five Hundred was quite a game for the older people as I remember.

**Ms. Wikoff:** We play that today. In fact I played on Saturday night and the women were against the men and we lost, badly!

**Ms. Dorrer:** No kidding. I didn't realize that they were still playing that.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, I guess it was just our age group that plays it.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And you lived in the Tennent area, near the old Tennent church, your mother played the organ, didn't she?

**Ms. Wikoff:** She played the organ all her life and when I was very, very little, the pews were like box stalls, because I can remember crawling down underneath, because the pew door was locked there and I would like to play with the people's feet in front of me.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I remember Mr. Neff who was the minister when I was there.

**Ms. Wikoff:** A saintly man.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, he was. I went to the Methodist Church in Freehold, and my father took me, I guess I couldn't have been more than three or four years old when I started going with him, and he was very active, he was on the Board of whatever they had in the Methodist Church.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Did you ever teach Sunday school?

**Ms. Dorrer:** I had a class of twenty-one girls. I have a picture somewhere - I hear from one or two of them yet, as they were young girls, well, high school, and then there was a Mr. Cobb who had a YMCA in Freehold and he had a boys group that was just the same age as my girls.

**Ms. Wikoff:** He was very involved in the YMCA. Lee Cobb. I taught Sunday school, and I guess it was good to teach because you were learning what you taught, because I didn't know too much about the Bible.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I'm not so sure I was too good at it.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I'm not sure I was either.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I used to be secretary of a group of ministers from Marlboro, Colts Neck, Englishtown, Tennent, and Ardena. It was an organization of people who were connected with the ministers and the people who were connected with the Sunday schools. I was active in that, too: I loved action and groups.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, let's see if we can recall any other things that were of interest to you. I don't think you had any time to have any hobbies, did you?

**Ms. Dorrer:** In my church they have what they call a knitters group, and I must have gotten good at it or something because I was always out running a meeting and doing things. But I can't play bridge, everybody I know, all the seniors, play bridge, and I do not play bridge, but I always kept very busy.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Do you enjoy, as I do, the quizzes on the television shows now, like Jeopardy?

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, I look at those when I have time.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I do, too.

**Ms. Dorrer:** But you know there's one thing lacking at my age now. One thing I find is that everyone that I meet has children and grandchildren; I'm finding this very true right now, that I have none. The only person I have now is a sister, and she lives in Baltimore, and she is getting to have ill health as well as her husband. So I'm sort of alone. And one thing that makes many of these people happy, when it comes to the holidays, is that their children and grandchildren take them home with them and get in touch with them, and I have no one.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, it's one of those things that can't be helped. But you've made such a wonderful life for yourself, and so many people do appreciate all that you've done.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I often think that I must be thankful because even though I don't have children and grandchildren, I have lots of friends. And luckily, I seem to be able to keep some younger friends.

**Ms. Wikoff:** You were such a good friend to my sister, too.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Oh, I loved your sister. And she loved me. People were amazed that I had her in school. I love poetry, and I had a contest one time. I had them learn poetry, and she was the best, for some reason, and she won fifty cents. And she went down to the local store and treated two of her friends.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, that was one of the fun things about school in Englishtown: we could go downtown, and if you had five cents, or ten cents, you could get a soda, you could get ice cream.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I think it was a place called Smith's.

**Ms. Wikoff:** It was. And then if you went and got a haircut -

**Ms. Dorrer:** Oh, Jake Troutman -

**Ms. Wikoff:** - he'd give you a piece of candy! And your girlfriends would go with you because he might give them a piece of candy, too.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Another thing I remember. When I drove up in front of the Englishtown school to teach the first day, I had a Model A. I recently saw a Model A where they have antique cars, and that brought back memories. It had a rumble seat, and I really know that I used to buzz around in that!



**Erma Dorrer with her first Ford, 1920**

**Ms. Wikoff:** And you know, you could do things that you can't do today. Oh, my goodness. We could really have a lot of fun, well there weren't policemen around, really. There was one policeman for the whole of Manalapan and Englishtown. Oliver McGantlin.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Vanderhoef!

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, Ray Vanderhoef.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Vanderhoef, yes.

**Ms. Wikoff:** And how is he connected with Vanderhoef who played Uncle Sam in all the parades. You know, the very, very, tall man. No, he was a Burke.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Burke it was. All the parades. I even remember when the Armistice was signed, the eleventh hour, the eleventh day, the eleventh month. And my father came up to Thompson's Grove and took us to Freehold, all of us in the car, and that was 1918, and I remember it.

**Ms. Wikoff:** There was such patriotism in those days. During World War II, I can remember I gave blood as much as I could, and of course, my husband, Charles, was in the service.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And my husband was in the service. I wanted to go in the service myself. Of course, I was doing plenty of work at home, and teaching; and by the way, Teddy Narozanick is very much interested in having a program about the women doing war work - Rosie the Riveter! And you know I'm going to call Teddy, and I'm going to say, "You know they were great, those Rosie the

Riveters, but I'll tell you what I was doing. I was teaching a long way from home, then coming home and working until midnight in a garage, and we had a very good business going." There were very few garages -

**Ms. Wikoff:** The men had gone to war.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Yes, and ours was known. We were very near Earle, and we had a lot of business from the people working in Earle, and I had many a temptation to go into the black market, but I wouldn't because, after all, my husband was in the service, and I was working for the people, and I wouldn't do such a thing.

**Ms. Wikoff:** There were people who did not use the gas stamps.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I wouldn't mention any names, but I know somebody from Englishtown who became practically a millionaire being involved in the tires and gas.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes, there was a lot of that that went on. I can remember those ration stamps were so valuable and Charles's mother and father would save them, and they'd hardly drive the car so that Charles could have these stamps (he was at Fort Eustis in Virginia) to give the person who drove him home. It was an interesting time.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And you know during that same time, it was customary to have your business near your house, and our garage was near my house, and the oil tank for the house and the garage was all one. And I remember I would keep the heat where I almost froze to death in the house so the men could have some heat in the garage.

**Ms. Wikoff:** It's something to remember, isn't it? We've had a lot of fun reminiscing here, and I know you're going to have fun showing me the pictures and I am so thankful that you have those one-room school pictures. Just recently, do you remember the one room schoolhouse that was in Tennent?

**Ms. Dorrer:** Was that out in front of the church? Do you know something - Ryan Aumack, who was the Board of Education President, and my father went to that school.

**Ms. Wikoff:** We drive by there when we go to church, and there has been a For Sale sign on it, and yesterday, I saw that it had been sold. I don't know if the person who bought it knows that it was a one room school. But we did mark it. It's dated, and I'll have to go and look and see if they left the sign on the house.

**Ms. Dorrer:** You know there were a lot of one room schools - Paradise, there was one named Paradise, did you ever hear of that one?

**Ms. Wikoff:** Sure, and then No Chance. Isn't that a terrible name for a school!!

**Ms. Dorrer:** And Lafayette, was there a Lafayette?

**Ms. Wikoff:** Yes there was. I've got the list at home. There were five school districts.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And there were a lot in Freehold Township. I think they're saving West Freehold school. That's up there by Moore's Tavern.

**Ms. Wikoff:** The Battleground Historical Society actually saved that, and now we've given it back to Freehold Township.

**Ms. Dorrer:** You have. Oh, why couldn't they have saved Thompson's Grove? Will I ever forget how I sat in there in his living room and I practically got down on my knees and said, "Please don't." He said he couldn't afford it, there was too much red tape.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Oh, he also said he'd have to pay taxes on it.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Oh, well, something like that.

**Ms. Wikoff:** But that's too bad that you and I didn't know what the other was trying to do, because coordinated, hopefully - I don't know - you can't look back. So we'll have fun now looking at your pictures, and I'm so thankful that you do have them to share. And then we're going to have them on display in the Monmouth County Library in the month of November.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Well, I think that you do know that I gave a nice collection of pictures of one-room schools - it's a really valuable collection that I had. Mrs. Higgins came and got it just as I was cleaning out. Of course I had called Ted and asked him what I should do about it, and he told me whom to call. And she came and picked them up. I can't wait for that display because I helped the man who did that.

**Ms. Wikoff:** And you had them all with names on them.

**Ms. Dorrer:** Catalogued and everything, yes. I don't have as many pictures about my early days as I'd like to. I have a lot of when I was active on the State level and all that, but I don't have too many when I was young.

**Ms. Wikoff:** If you do have some, please let's send them to Mrs. Higgins. I understand that there's a way of putting pictures with this talk.

**Ms. Dorrer:** I'm looking, of course, going through a lot right now. It brings back so many memories I start crying. I won't be around too much longer, but I'm so glad to see you.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, I am so happy to be able to do this interview I could cry too.

**Ms. Dorrer:** And I have such great memories of your family. Your mother was the greatest person.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Well, thanks an awful lot.