

Interviewee: Walker, Donna

Interview Date: June 25, 2007

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Donna Walker
“East End Catholic Churches”

Interviewed by: Mikaela Selley
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Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: 2346 Munger, Houston, Texas 77023

MS: My name is Mikaela Selley and I am interviewing a current member of Queen of Peace Catholic Church and this is for the oral history project. What is your name and date of birth?

DW: My name is Donna Walker and I was born January 18, 1946.

MS: Okay could you tell me a little bit about your family, how long have you been in Houston?

DW: I was born and raised here in Houston. My parents met here in Houston and lived here all their lives. After I got married I moved away and I came back when my daughter was in the 3rd grade and my son was in the 1st grade so we have been here every since and that was a long time ago. So I've been here most of my life.

MS: Okay, what role did Queen of Peace play in you and your families lives?

DW: A big portion. My parents were there from the very beginning when the first church was opened and I received all my sacraments. My brother received all of his sacraments and we were very active in the church. My parents and myself and my brother we always... went to church every Sunday and of course my parents belonged to everything that went along with the Queen of Peace Church and school.

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MS: Was Queen of Peace always at that location?

DW: Yes, always on the same block. Of course, the old church is still there and they use that for meetings and things but the new church came out in the '60's.

MS: Why did your family choose Queen of Peace?

DW: Well at that time back in those days you had to belong to the church that you were in that district and so it was in walking distance from my house so that is why we went there.

MS: What other churches were around at that time?

DW: Catholic Churches?

MS: Yes.

DW: Saint Christopher's was here and I can't remember any of the other ones, I know there were more than that.

MS: What is the earliest memory you have of the church?

DW: Golly earliest memory?

MS: Your first communion?

DW: Oh I remember my first communion my confirmation was in that church. We had May Crowning every year and we made our first communion in first grade. In second grade if we could wear our dresses we went in before the eighth graders, they did May Crowning and the eighth graders did that and in the second grade we walked in with them. Golly I guess I remember before going to school. I remember going to church over there and the main part, they opened up and if a lot of people came, you know those doors that open up in the parish hall?

MS: Yeah.

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DW: That was closed unless we had a lot of people. We, you know, had an altar and big pews and everything but I guess it was a very small parish at the time.

MS: So you did attend the school from the very beginning?

DW: Very beginning, first grade.

MS: Do you know when the school opened?

DW: Oh gosh they just had their anniversary. No I don't remember.

MS: It was soon after the church started right... if you had to guess?

DW: I... yeah not long after that.

MS: Okay and what grade did it go up to?

DW: First through eighth.

MS: First through eighth okay. What were the parishioners like and the students and the neighborhood... did everybody walk to church?

DW: Golly I think we drove to church most of the time. I really don't even remember that! But the people were mostly white and we did have a lot of Italians. We did Mass on Sundays and holy days. I don't remember them having daily Mass and I'm sure they did but I don't remember until I started school. Then after I started school I went to daily Mass so I'm sure they had it before then. But my parents both worked so I guess I didn't go then.

MS: Who ran the school... an order of Nuns or ...?

DW: It was Dominican Nuns.

MS: Dominican Nuns.

DW: Always Dominican Nuns up until when my kids went to school there.

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MS: So what school did you go to after eighth grade, what were the options for high school?

DW: I went to Mount Carmel but there was Mount Carmel, IWA and Saint Agnes, Saint Agnes was downtown not across town.

MS: Oh okay.

DW: And of course there was always Saint Thomas for the boys. I wanted Mount Carmel.

MS: Did the school or the church have any events, fundraisers, dances, sports?

DW: The only thing I really remember is Father _____ (6.5) was our pastor for a number of years and he did not like bazaars so we did not have bazaars but I'm sure we had fundraisers and things to raise money but he believed in the parish... and he's the one who built the old convent which is the office now and the new church and the rectory and the big garage and everything. He had that all built. And we did have sports. We had football... volleyball for the girls, football for the boys and baseball for the boys and girls. We had a drill team and we also had cheerleaders.

MS: So you played against other...?

DW: Catholic schools.

MS: Other Catholic schools?

DW: Other Catholic schools.

MS: About when did... do they offer bilingual education?

DW: No, never.

MS: Never, okay. So about what time would you say that the congregation shifted to mostly Mexican immigrant population?

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DW: Gee I don't really remember. I know when my kids went to school there... 18 years ago I guess my daughter graduated from there and when she and my son... my son later... it was almost all Hispanics then. So, there were mostly Hispanics and three or four whites in each class. In my son's class there was one black boy but that was the only one.

MS: Is that about the same time that they started offering Mass in Spanish do you remember when they did that?

DW: I'm sure they had Mass in Spanish then. Oh yeah, I'm sure they had it then. But I've never known them to teach Bilingual at all at Queen of Peace. I mean they may after my kids graduated but I don't think so.

MS: Can you describe the neighborhood and businesses?

DW: Yeah. Like I remember also when you would walk out of the front door of Queen of Peace do you know that building that's up there? That was Weiners do you remember a Weiners?

MS: Yes.

DW: That was a Weiners right there.

MS: Oh wow!

DW: Then there was a Phillips station on the corner that's the Thai place now and then going towards the Gulf Freeway it was a little beauty shop and that's where my mother worked and when we would walk home from school we would stop by the beauty shop and tell mother we were on our way. I can't think of what it was called it was a store that sold material and but more than sewing stuff there and that was the man that gave the properties for Queen of Peace gave that whole property. Right next door to him was a

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little furniture place right there it was a grocery store and it was just a little grocery store and we all went there. And I mean you could sign, you could stop and buy two candy bars and sign your name and they would bill you later.

MS. That's neat.

DW: Yeah it was totally different than it is now.

MS: Okay. So how have you seen the neighborhood change since that time I know it's...

DW: It's gone down. But the City of Houston is trying to work on building up this part of Gulfgate, the stores coming this way and things. Yeah it has really gone down.

MS: How would you say that has affected the church?

DW: I'm sure they don't get as much money as they used to. I mean they have... the church and the number of people going to church is far bigger but I think they people had more money back then for what they were paid and they gave a lot. So I think it hurts the church because it is poor around there.

MS: Do you know if the church has interacted with other churches or businesses in the area in any way do you know?

DW: No I sure don't. I don't have any idea.

MS: You remember, I'm sure you remember when the Vatican Counsel met in the 1960's and they made all the changes...

DW: I sure do.

MS: How did that affect Queen of Peace?

DW: Ah Queen of Peace. Well Queen of Peace had just opened their new church and our Pastor, Father _____ (11.9) had had this beautiful alter put in so that is when they

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wanted the alter looking toward the people. So we still have the two alters, you know, how it is...

MS: Oh yeah.

DW: So he said, "We spent so much money, we're going to use this alter." Because the priests had their back to the people and at that Vatican they turned toward the people. So later on he broke down and had another alter put up there. And then of course we went from Latin to English and that was really strange.

MS: I bet.

DW: Knowing all the prayers in Latin and having to learn them in English. But I think it is more personable now. I think Mass is not... it's warmer, like when you turn and shake people's hands and different things. I think it's for the best.

MS: Oh you didn't do that before?

DW: Oh no, oh no. That was brought back in years.

MS: I had no idea.

DW: Well it was before your time.

MS: Do you think it had a negative effect?

DW: A lot... the older people disliked everything. They didn't want any changes and as you know since we got the companions of the cross... we used to have (13.4) priests which are in our district. When we got companions of the cross a lot of people moved from here. A lot of the old white people moved because they had heard that these priests were more charismatic and they didn't like that.

MS: Okay.

DW: But I love it. I love the showing of hands and all this stuff... praying on people.

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MS: What do you mean by charismatic is that...?

DW: Charismatic... you know how we do our hands during the Mass and just a lot of different stuff. The most of the thing that I like is the healing Masses the praying over people and stuff like that. Back in the 50's and 60's and 70's and 80's if a person received extreme _____ (14.6) the last rights, you were dying. I can remember in the back room back in here my grandfather was here from Schulenburg, Texas and well he knew he was dying because the Priest came over and gave him last rights. Now it is called The Anointing of the Sick and I have had three surgeries in the last two years I guess it was and I've had the Anointing four times and so it is totally different, you know. So it doesn't scare me.

MS: Did the politics of the times affect the church in any way? For example in Vietnam the Korean War... things like that.

DW: It was in my days, the Vietnam War and the young men that I knew that went over there... they either never went back to church or they came back full strength. I mean like if they just went once in a while and they came back they were strict Catholics. So it was just kind of depending on the person I think. And I think it was a horrible war like any other war. I only personally knew two or three guys that came back and two of them were messed up bad on boats. You know I don't know that many.

MS: Do you remember if the priests gave sermons about that or was it... I know you aren't supposed to mix politics and religion and it's very...

DW: The only time I've ever heard politics mentioned was when Father Christian got up and said something and he never told us who to vote for... he just told us that it was our duty to vote but no I've never heard it in a Catholic Church.

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MS: Did that surprise you for him to...?

DW: No the way he said it... no and I think he was trying I didn't feel like he was talking to me because you know I was born and raised and when I turned I think it was 21 when I could vote, it was just something that I was brought up to do and but I think with our Hispanics and stuff, of course a lot of them are illegal and can't vote and that's scary.

MS: In your opinion has it been hard for the parish to adjust to the amount of immigrants that have come into the church? I know that the parishioners have been mostly Hispanic for a very long time now do you think that in the beginning was it... was it like a slow change or was it any time that you remember that it was very...

DW: Well I always went to the English speaking Masses and I don't think that the Mass has much... you know it's either: English, Spanish or bilingual. Yeah it kind of upsets us, I always went to midnight Mass and midnight Mass is only done in Spanish now. One of our (18.0) ministers said to me, "Gee, they never put us on Midnight Mass" and I said, "They don't because it's in Spanish." But yeah a lot of us English speaking people get upset. I've had two or three calls from our party the other day, the one Sunday for the priest going away party. And they said, "You know, we just didn't get enough English." I was in the kitchen the whole time working so I didn't and I had asked, I knew these three deacons were going to do the talking and I only knew one of them that does the English Mass and the other two I didn't know and I asked, "Are they bilingual?" and they said "Yes and they would do bilingual and English." But I think most of it was done in Spanish. And maybe 20 people there were there... Anglos. Or maybe there was more, you know. So they kind of hate going to things when they are like that. And I know I like to go to the first Saturday Masses and first Saturdays are

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done bilingual and so everything is either English or Spanish and _____ (19.3) is done in English and Spanish. So I mean I can read when they are doing to Spanish I can read but to sit through and the _____ (19.4) you have to sit through it twice but it's okay.

MS: How long has the church been doing the church bazaars that you know of?

DW: No I sure don't.

MS: I know that's a big thing in the neighborhood.

DW: I know when my kids went to school there we had bazaars. We had a school bazaar, a parish bazaar and we had kind of like a bazaar at Halloween for the kids. My daughter was laughing she emailed one of her friends that went to Queen of Peace, my daughter went to _____ (20.1) when she graduated and she had to email one of the girls and she said she and her kids came over to the bazaar a few weeks ago. She said, "There was my mama and I was sitting next to a lady that sent her son to Queen of Peace and there we were working a booth together." She said, "It was deja vu." There was my mother and this lady sitting there working the booth. So yeah I've worked many bazaars.

MS: How long has the Church been celebrating things like quinceanara and like the Mexican traditions do you know? It's the 15th...

DW: Yeah I know what they are. When my son was 15 he was in one and he is 33 years old so 33 from 15 is how much... 15 from 33?

MS: 18?

DW: So I know they were doing them back then when I went to school we didn't have any Hispanics so there weren't any then. So that is actually the first one I ever went to, no I went to two. I went to one at Queen of Peace and I went to one the first one I went

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to wasn't at Queen of Peace because they didn't do them at Queen of Peace. So I guess they have been doing them probably 20 years that I know of.

MS: So what has kept you in the neighborhood and you know made you send your kids to Queen of Peace, the same school that you went to, what about Queen of Peace has kept you?

DW: Well I moved back in with my parents. I had gotten a divorce and decided to come back to Houston. I came back to Houston and lived with my parents and I was living with my parents for six months and then I was going to move and my kids I put the kids in Queen of Peace immediately. They were going... we were living in Galveston and my daughter was in school my son wasn't in school yet, yeah he was in kindergarten... they didn't have kindergarten in the Catholic school that she went to. So I put them in Catholic, Queen of Peace here and then my kids didn't want to leave the house. They didn't want to go back to an apartment. So we lived with them so I planned on putting them in Queen of Peace I just thought I wanted them to get their Catholic religion and I wanted them to receive all their sacraments and it worked on one but not on the other.

MS: Uh oh.

DW: My daughter still goes to church she is raising her kids in Pearland and they go to Saint Helens and they go to a public school but they go to CCE classes on Sunday and my granddaughter just received her first communion so they are following in our footsteps.

MS: Another question: was it common for people to... or kids to go to public schools and receive their religion class in church? Like CCE when did that?

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DW: I'm sure they had it back then but of course I always went to Catholic schools.

MS: Right.

DW: You know first I went to public school, I went to Henderson for kindergarten and I was what they call a mid-termer, my birthday was in January, and so I was... I went a year and a half to Henderson for kindergarten and... and I went a half a year of first grade and then I moved over to Queen of Peace but I'm sure they had something. They were... we were very active. We had what was called CYO it was Catholic Youth Organization and that was for the high school kids and we had that on Sunday and there was a Baptist Church real close and I had a girlfriend that went to Austin, Jackson and Henderson and so she and I were good friends we grew up together in the neighborhood and so she went to the Baptist Church it was... gosh I can't think of the Baptist Church. So I went over there when we didn't have CYO I went over to the Baptist Church. So that was the most interacting. When I was in high school when they had a thing for teenagers to go and visit different religions and I remember I picked a Baptist Church a Jewish Synagogue and I think it was a Methodist Church. Yeah Methodist because I thought those were three real different. So I got to go to each of them.

MS: Oh wow!

DW: Yeah back in my days you didn't marry or anything it was all with Catholics.

MS: Within your religion. Okay well is there anything else you'd like to add?

DW: Not anything I can think of.

MS: Okay well thank you for your time.

DW: I think I... me and myself, my family and my kids have done everything as far as school board, parish counsel. I worked in the office on my days off to pay my tuition to

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help me with the tuition for my kids at Queen of Peace. Holy Names Society, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Daughters... we've done it all. That's about it.

MS: Thank you.

