

## OAKWOOD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT TRANSCRIPT

Gary and Doris Jurkiewicz (moved into Oakwood in 2001)

Interviewed by Liisa Ogburn on July 15, 2013 in her home at 720 North Bloodworth Street

Liisa: And if you need to start over at any point, no worries.

Gary: Alright.

Doris: okay.

Liisa: If there are any loud noises, like a guest coming in. or dogs, I might have you repeat something. Alright so, if we could start of by the two of you introducing yourselves in full sentences please.

Gary: okay. My name is Gary Jurkiewicz. I was born in Detroit, Michigan and I resided most of my life there and about 2001, in August we came down here to by the Oakwood Inn Bed and Breakfast.

Doris: My name is Doris Jurkiewicz and I was born also in Detroit, Michigan and lived there in the Detroit area until we came down here.

Liisa: How did you find the inn?

Doris: We actually found it through a broker, who was, said she had the inn listed.

Liisa: And what led you to this, specifically to Raleigh, NC? Did you know this was the area that you wanted?

Doris: No, we didn't. We were looking at places in Ashville, because our friend that lived in Cary told us that we should go to Ashville and that broker actually had the inn in Raleigh and it sounded better to me, because it was closer to our friends in Cary and my daughter lived in Virginia Beach, so its better that we move here, than far away in Ashville, and Ashville is very pricey.

Gary: I originally wanted to have a place on the coast, but she talked us out of that, because she said if there was a threat of a hurricane, business would probably drop off for awhile and she said if one were to hit the coast then you lose business for up to a year. So we didn't care for that idea to much, we wanted something that was a little bit more for sure.

Liisa: Tell me; walk me into the Oakwood Inn for the first time, with our broker?

Gary: Well, we kind of drove through the area and was looking around, and saw that this was interesting, coming through the south park area and we pull up in front of the inn and, I wasn't overly impressed at first with it. We walked into the place and looked around and after awhile we became quiet impressed with the furniture, there was quite a few pieces that are antiques and period pieces are just about 95% of it is. We were just quiet impressed with the way it was kept up. It was nicely done, there was some issues, you know that we had to deal with, but over all, the over all look of the place as nice inside, and we just started thinking about , would we like to live in Raleigh, being that we are two hours from the coast, about three and a half hours from the mountains. So depending what we want to do, if we want to take a little mini vacation we could have that. Walking into the Oakwood Inn was an experience that we looked at and we decided, well, we went out into the street and we thought about it and Doris was a little anxious about it, but I said well, lets do it here. It was that simple. I felt good about it and she said Okay. She kind of followed my lead. (Laughing) We decided to purchase it.

Liisa: Doris, remind me what year that was.

Doris: It was in 2001. It was early May and it was, one of the things that impressed us when we walked in is how, usually when you are looking at houses and you are going through different places. You look at a house, and you know, this would be, this would fit. This house felt comfortable. It just had a whole different feeling, like we were going to be keepers of the building, rather than being owners. It was just different.

Liisa: At that point, Oakwood itself, the neighborhood, what was the feel?

Gary: Well, we, our first person that we meet, was Betsy Buford. I think it was like the first day we were here. She came over with a nice gift basket. You know for us and introduced herself as president of SPHO and she welcomed us to the neighborhood and she was just very nice and kind. She was the first person that we met in the neighborhood and we really felt at home after meeting her. I think we met Bob and Norma, shortly after that. It just felt like a nice neighborhood to live in. You know it was Bob and Norma, talked to us over the fence that we had, the lot next to us was vacant at the time, and the other brick building that is there, they had constructed walls up there, was a vacant lot, so we kind of just talked a little bit over the fences, if you will, the bushes. It just felt like it was a very nice neighborhood that we were very welcome, coming in here in the neighborhood.

Doris: When we were walking around the neighborhood for the first time, people were saying hello, and we were looking at each other like "what is going on here." (Laughs)  
We never experienced anything like that before,

Gary: We are from Detroit. You don't talk to people. (Laughs)

Doris: Gary was checking where his wallet was. (Laughs)

Gary: We were expecting something else was going to happen. There was a lot of warmth and friendliness within the neighborhood.

Doris: Yeah.

Liisa: I am sure when you first were considering buying it; you heard stories about the Inn. Was it being run as an Inn at that point?

Doris: Yes, it had been, well this is Raleigh and Wake County's first Bed and Breakfast. It was opened in 1984. We looked more into different publications and saw that it was in a lot of publications and read about it that way. We really didn't hear too much of the history of the Inn itself from the people here. They talked a little bit about how long it had been opened and stuff, but, you know, since we've moved in we have met all the previous owners.

Gary: Just about.

Doris: They have given us their little piece of history of the Oakwood Inn, so that has been fun too. I think we have met at least one person from every family that has ever lived here. That's a bit unusual and we weren't expecting it at all.

Liisa: What are stories that you tell people who come to stay in the inn?

Doris :(Laughs)

Gary :(Laughs) I guess I am the storyteller.

Doris: Yeah (Laughs)

Gary: Well, there is a story that Mary Tome lived next door and she was talking about one time. There was the, where the Palmoarene room is, there was like an apartment, and upstairs apartment and she was talking about the backside stair way and the south side of the house. There is no stairway there, what is she talking about. She was like, "yeah when the boys used to be younger, they used to come up drunk, come up the side of the house,

up the stairs so no one would hear them coming in. It was kind of strange, and she was talking about this, and she was kind of older and she was starting to lose some of her memory at the time. Then, I remember, we went to the Archives, the State Archives, lo and behold there was a sketch of that side of the house, with a stairway. So it was kind of interesting.

We learned a lot of the history from people like Mary, and Jimmy Stronach, Bob and Norma Toomb. We also had William, it was William Stranta Jr's, daughter, came to the Inn and introduced herself, and she provided a lot of written history from William JR. So we had a lot of those stories. There were a lot of newspaper articles and then I started to become very interested in the history of the house. I started doing my own research. I never really finished it, but I have accumulated a whole box full of stuff that we've had from various people who have come to visit that they said they have been, their grandfather owned the house at one point. I believe Mr. George Strong, who was the original owner, who had the house built. His great, great grand niece, or daughter came and she even brought us a book to show his picture and some of the history of him. It has been quite interesting owning the house. We have met a lot of the past owners' relatives. I am talking very deep past, back in the early 1900's or late 1800's. It's been a very good experience.

Liisa: I know when I interviewed Jim Stronach he mentioned that when his grandparents bought the house across the street, it was a dairy farm at that point and there were cows. Any stories you have heard from that early?

Doris: yeah, there was one relative of the Stronachs that said that they had rabbits and way in the back lots of rabbits died and they marked all the little plots with a stone.

Gary: Lilith

Doris: Yeah, it was Lilith.

Gary: We were told at one point, that there was possibly, on the south side, where the parking lot is, a tennis court, or something like that. There is actually a gate that does open up like it would be. It's a wrought iron fence, with a gate. It's possible that something was there at the time. All that property was a part of this at one time. If you look back at the records, George Strong did own a lot of the land and then eventually must have sold it off.

Doris: We have had, you know, just a, it's not just the people who lived in the house, but interesting things about guests that would come in. We had a woman doing research and was having a real hard time. She said she was done at the archives and she had to go to some small town and see if she could find someone that knew relatives so she could get further information that way. The man sitting across the table from her was from that town and knew her relatives. It was crazy. Who would ever expect that, but that was fun, that was a lot of fun. A lot of things like that happened.

Gary: We had a lot of the descendants of Joel Lane stay with us. He was doing some research and wanted to see his grave. It's been quite interesting who we have met.

Doris: It's funny too, because people, like people with the name of Lane, like to stay in the Lane room. We have had a couple other people like that, they want to stay in that room, because it's their name.

Liisa: Tell me about naming the rooms.

Doris: Well the rooms were already named when we came in and they are after the streets in Oakwood. Polk, Pell, Linden Lane, East and Elm, and it took us awhile to even put that

connection together, because we didn't know. Yeah, it's just obviously their, those names were taken from pieces of history of Raleigh. That's how they were named.

Gary: It was the county commissioners that were part of Raleigh at the time.

Doris: Well, some of them. Yeah. East, I think was East boundary. I don't even think it was named after anybody.

Liisa: What about objects. The house came with pieces of furniture that were interesting objects?

Gary: Betsy Buford was in the house and was talking to us one time and she said I believe the tables here with matching wall mirrors. I think those are Thomas Day pieces and I would like to have, Patricia...

Doris: Marshall

Gary: Marshall, who was the curator at the Museum of History at the time. She was working on a book about Thomas Day, her second book, and she was co authoring with someone else and she came over and looked at the pieces and did some research and had them authenticated for us. They were Thomas Day and they were photographed and put into their book, then they were shipped out to the history museum for the Thomas Day exhibit. We got to have lunch with the first gentleman, at the time was Perdue's husband, then we went to the opening Gala, we actually had the book signed by Thomas Day's grandchildren. It stated with the museum for the exhibit, which was almost three years, it was supposed to be one year and it turned into three. Then the Smithsonian actually asked for those pieces. They wanted to do a Thomas Day Exhibit. So currently, right now, they are at the Smithsonian. In the Run Work gallery and they are going to be there until the end of July. Those have been four pieces of furniture that has been an absolute gems to have.

Doris: That's the only known set of pure table and mirror existing in the same spot. There is another set, but they are owned by two different people. They were always built in sets, so it's very rare that we have those.

Gary: those came with it, when we bought it.

Doris: There are lots of really nice pieces upstairs we have a sculpture picture, kind of looks medieval. We haven't any idea about the story behind it, but it is just a really neat piece to have.

Gary: We also have the secretary that used to be down here, which was the Parlor is now upstairs in one of the bedrooms. It's got to secrete drawers, so you have these little secrete drawers. I was looking at it one day and playing around with it and my goodness, this piece of wood is loose and it didn't make sense to be, so I pulled out the drawer and it looks like a cutout piece and I push on it and BOOM, the thing pops out. It was kind of interesting (Laughs) You know that what we found, you hear about stuff like that but, then here is furniture made like that, so it is kind of neat. We have had some interesting discoveries. I am trying to think if there is anything else, we have found that has been interesting. We have a lot of very nice pieces of furniture. We have been told by quite a few people who know antiques. I don't really know that much about them, and neither does Doris, but we have heard we have some very nice pieces.

Liisa: So, Gary you were telling me about the 25th anniversary of the Oakwood Inn.

Gary: Yes, what happened was that, it was about January of 2009. I was thinking we wanted to do something special for the 25 anniversary. SO Doris and I talked about it and we had this article, that is hanging on the dining room wall, about the opening of the inn

published. I said let's try to find the original people that stayed here. I put a little blurb out to USA Today to see if they could help locate this couple. I said look, "We are going to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Oakwood Inn in Raleigh and I am trying to find the first couple who stayed with the original Inn keepers and I do have some questions I can ask of them to verify they are indeed are the original people. So I put this little query letter out and never received a response. As the months went on, it was one of those things that I kind of just gave up and I said well we are just going to do a little party here or whatever.

The actual anniversary date is June 1st. It was the weekend before Memorial Day coming up on that date. I get a phone call and it is this lady and she says, "Yes I would like to rent a room." I said, "Okay, fine." She says, "By any chance is that room down the hallway right where the stairs are, is that still available?" I said, "The Polk room?" She said, "Yes I believe that is what it was. We stayed there 25 years ago. We were your first guests." I said, "Oh, really?" Of course you want to doubt it a little bit. I said, "do you mind answering a few questions?" So I asked her a few questions that were related to the article and she answered them correctly. I said, "oh my lord. It is the very first guests." I took the reservation. I am all excited and then I got a great idea to get WRAL here, and the News and Observer. I called her back and said, "do you mind if I invited the original inn keepers to welcome you? They still live in the neighborhood. Also would you mind if I invited the news?" She said, "No, not at all." I called up Chris Yetter and talked to him, and Oakley and Donna Herring and so they all agreed to come out. Steve Zanponelli, he wasn't able to make it. He is still in the area as well. We had those three inn keepers here with Doris, and unfortunately I couldn't be here. They are all waiting for these two guests to arrive. Then they arrive and it was like deja veu for Chris and Donna and Oakley. Twenty five years ago, the same people, they met each other and they got to sit in the parlor and talk. Josh Shaffer was here from the Observer was here to take a nice story. I believe they brought a bottle of champagne. To celebrate. (Laughs)

Doris: Yep, the interesting thing was that they hadn't made a reservation to stay. They had come into the welcome center and the center said, "well, this place is new. Maybe you should try that and they called and they hadn't made any plans. Of course at that time, there weren't a lot of nice restaurants downtown and so, Donna and Oakley invited them to have dinner with them. They actually had dinner and the bed and breakfast. They really lucked out. (Laughs)

Gary: That was 25 years ago. It was a nice experience and we have a nice photo of the three original inn keepers, the current inn keeper and also the two guests that stayed. We got a nice photo of them all on the front porch. It was a nice story.

Doris: Yeah.

Liisa: You probably get a certain type of person who wants to stay in this inn? You have also had some famous guest, I believe?

Doris: We had Herby Mann stay with us, and Jane Seymour came. She didn't stay with us, but she needed to have a place to rest, and I guess she needed some of her costumes ironed, and so one of the neighbors said, hey do you want to come down and iron, and so they did. Who else? I can't remember who else.

Gary: Evan and Rachel Woods

Doris: Oh yeah, Evan and Rachel Woods have stayed with us and Jamie Bell.

Gary: They stayed a couple times with us. They came to see David Woods, her father. They have stayed with us a couple times, which was nice. They are nice people. That is really the only famous people.

Doris: Famous, famous.. Yeah.

Liisa: Since I have moved in, I have seen both of you are very involved in the neighborhood, too. Tell me about how that started.

Noise

Doris: Oh that's my girls. (Interruption, Doris' daughters arrive)

Liisa: Okay, so we were talking about becoming involved in the neighborhood.

Doris: When we first took over the inn, Darlene Smith was one of the inn keepers and she told us a little bit about the athletics clubs and that they really didn't get involved, but maybe we should. We took over running the inn September 1st and on September 6th we hosted our first garden club meeting. We were introduced to the neighborhood by fire, I guess, or storm. Then, of course, we were informed that we were going to be on the Candlelight Tour. We had no idea what it was, what it involved. Don't worry we will get volunteers. They meant porch help. They didn't mean there would be a person in every room talking. So Gary and my daughter Debbie and I, manned the rooms and back and forth and talked to over 3000 people that year. That was the year September 11th hit and we had record crowds at the candlelight tour. We could hardly talk after two days of talking and talking. It was a lot of fun. I think that's what started us really getting more involved with the neighborhood.

I don't know when our first athletic club was. We went and we didn't really know too many people then. The more we got involved with garden club and with the SPHO, going to the meetings. We started knowing more people, so we started going to more athletic clubs, then we started, kept them all going. Then I got involved with the garden club and Gary got more involved with the SPHO and it's been a lot of fun. We have done, they were going to do an art project in Valley Henderson Park and they kept talking about a statue or a sculpture, but the location of it they were worried that someone would damage it. I said, "Well, why don't we put a gazebo there. It would be a structure that really wouldn't get damaged, it would be something useful, and Valley would like it because it is something that people could enjoy the outdoors in, even if it was raining." That started that ball rolling. It just, ideas and things, people are so happy when you just, come up with things and help out. It just makes you feel good and when you don't have family, they become your family. It's been a very rewarding experience.

Gary: Its, it wasn't difficult to meet people here. They just, you went to the athletic club and they came up and introduced themselves, talked a little bit about themselves, you talked a little about yourself. Before you know it you have this bonding with them and the more you see them. The more you have to share and you get introduced to more people and more people. Each athletic club is different; you never know who is going to show up. Just over the years, we have been doing this twelve years, so it's been a very rewarding, as Doris said, very much rewarding.

Doris: there has been a couple of things too, my family came down for my fiftieth birthday and we were sitting on the porch and people would walk by and say hello. They all just looked at me like what?? They are not used to that. The grass was green and it was April. We could have a beautiful day like this in Michigan on this day, but the grass wouldn't be green. There would be no flowers; there would be no birds, so this is really

cool. The neighbors, they keep coming by and saying Hi. That made me feel really good, that they were really proud that I did something that was so successful. Getting to the right neighborhood and then Gary's dad lived with us. He moved. He lived with us for five years, right?

Gary: uh huh.

Doris: Then he stayed with us here and he used to cut the lawn and stuff. He met people for his 95th birthday last year. I invited the neighborhood to come by and just say happy birthday. Quite a few of the neighbors, a lot of them came up on the porch and said happy birthday. It had been the first time he had sat on the porch in probably a couple of years. People would just walk by and wave and say happy birthday. He was so impressed. He had no idea that was what I did. After the day ended and it was night time and time to go to bed. He said, "Thanks for making me go on the porch today. That was really fun." (Laughs) It was good and of course he passed away two months later. I was very glad we did that.

Liisa: Great, great. This will be left in the archive. Anything else that you just have to tell me about? (Laughs)

Doris: Well.

Gary: I know when we first came here a lot of people asked me why we don't do a murder mystery type of weekend and a lot of other inns were doing that. I had to go on and repeat the same thing, we did dinner theater packages. We called it a 3x show. You stay a night at the inn, we send you out to dinner at a local restaurant, and then you go see a play at one of the theater groups. We had theater packages with quiet a few of the theater groups here. Then, eventually, because I do like to write. I have done some writing as for as plays, and that on the side. I wrote my own murder mystery and I had David Woods group, Theater in the Park, I hired some of his actors for food. They came and they helped put the weekend together and it was very successful. So successful that Doris wanted to do another one. Which was successful for me to have her believe that (Laughs) because it is an awful lot of work. Unfortunately we never did another one. I was the writer, the producer, the director, and I had to help her. Doris did a lot of cooking, with the food and that. A lot of people have asked again about doing them. So I may have to do again sometime. I don't know.

Liisa: Are we?

Gary: Anything else you want to talk about?

Doris: I can't think of anything at this moment. (Laughs)

Gary: Just that we made quiet a bit of changes around the property. As far as the backyard. We put a nice arbor or gazebo. We kindly call it the Sistine chapel, because Doris had it erected for her daughters' wedding that was going to be here. We also put a patio, and a garden, a kitchen garden. Which was all approved by the Historic Commission. We had NC state, the landscaping design class, put together the plans for us, they helped design it. We had a class project with them twice, with one of the instructors. She was very nice to have the class do the design for us. Then we had it approved by the historic commission. We have slowly put it into action, completed it finally. Just completed it for Donna's wedding, with that arbor in the back. We have made a lot of nice; I think good changes to the backyard, as well as the front yard. We really haven't done that much improvement; well we have improved some of the rooms. We put a modern bathroom in here to kind of, since you see a lot of guests coming and

they are getting a lot older. The baby boomers are getting older; it's harder to get in and out of claw foot tubs or regular tubs. We have like a walk in shower with a bench so they can sit down. It is also so ladies can shave their legs. It was one of Doris's ideas that we do that. (Laughter)It was a good idea. You have to go with what your guests want. It has been a very interesting ride, owning a bed and breakfast because you are dealing with a lot of people with various backgrounds. We have met people from all over the world. We have had people from Germany, Japan, and China.

Doris: Indonesia

Gary: Poland, Flats

Doris: Chili, Costa Rica. Everywhere.

Gary: It has been a very rewarding experience to meet all these different people.

Liisa: That's a great way to end.