

## **Marjorie Coolman**

**March 8, 1989**

### **Would you like to tell us a little bit about your life in Northville?**

Yes. It is generally accepted that I am a native of Northville which is all wrong. I'm not even a native of Michigan. I was born in Warren, Pennsylvania and lived there till I was about two or three, I think. We moved to Detroit and lived on the corner of Longfellow and Third. The other night I was listening to late-night radio and the man wanted to know if anybody remembered Pearl White and the Perils of Pauline. It's been sixty years since I heard that. My mother used to take me to the matinee. We saw all of Pearl.

Then we decided to move to Northville. My father was in the meat-packing business and worked for Hammond Standish and Cuta Brothers. We were not part of the white flight. They were urban people who always wanted a place to have a garden, and I think they overdid. We bought a place on Randolph Street, and it's still there. Stinkins live there. We had a place with six acres with everything on it. We had apples, we had peaches, we had a grape arbor and we had chickens. We didn't go in for livestock anymore than that, and for that I thank the Lord. But I think that's why.

### **How old were you then?**

I think I was in the sixth grade, around thirteen or fourteen. I think that's why I was never interested in having plants or working in gardens, because we worked, we really did. We made cider in the kitchen with a cider press. We made wine out of the cherries. We just used everything. My mother canned everything in the world which we provided the city of Detroit with because we couldn't possible use it.

### **Were you an only child?**

I had a brother who died within hours of spinal meningitis. When we came to Detroit, I was very seriously ill and not expected to live with diphtheria. I have a feeling that was probably why we didn't have any more children because we had been through so much. When I came out here in the sixth grade it was in the old building and it was a delightful change to me.

### **The one that faced West Street and is now closed off at Cady?**

No, the one that was the high school. We didn't have big enough classes then, you could put the whole system in one building. I missed being in Detroit. Anybody that age when they move leaves all their friends. But I did enjoy a little more freedom. Although I had a lot of freedom in Detroit, compared to what children have today. I took the streetcar to music lessons and the things like this. Piano, which was a total loss. I always wanted to play jazz and blues, and my

teacher always said I was technically perfect, but I didn't have any heart in it, and I didn't. I shudder to think of the money that went down the drain. I enjoyed being here and I soon made friends. Then when I went into high school, I got into athletics and that was the end-all and the beginning of everything for me. I enjoyed it so much.

Our athletics were so different then. Instead of having a boys' team and a girls' team, we traveled together. The girls played first and the boys played the second game. We had no busses. That's when parents really worked. It was up to our parents to get us there and get us back and stay there with us.

### **What schools did you play?**

We had a large league. There was Farmington and Plymouth who were our deadly enemies, and Dearborn, Wayne, and Redford; and our outside games out of the league were Saline and around Ann Arbor. We didn't go north very much, but it was interesting. Also, we had to have good marks; nobody with a D or D- played.

### **Who was your coach?**

Our coach was the coach of the girls (the wife) and the coach of the boys was the husband. Their names were Mr. and Mrs. Miller.

### **Did she teach in the schools also?**

Possibly. I didn't have her for any classes. I would imagine they did. Our apparel that we wore on the floor was so different than it is today. You wonder how we got around. We wore high tennis shoes and black stockings and really beautiful black-serge, pleated bloomers. I liked our uniforms better than anyone else's. We had orange shantung middies (and this is the ridiculous part when you think of flinging the ball around) with long shantung ties. Plymouth wore all white, and they always looked as if they had just come out of the washing machine and starched, they were that stiff. We had to wear those for track and baseball.

### **Were they long-sleeved?**

Oh yes. Although we did get to the short sleeves before we were through with high school. Track was really something. Northville, especially, had a very small team. We were a very small school, so you had to be able to do practically everything in the meet. I ran all the dashes, did the broad jump and the high jump. One time we were having a big meeting in Dearborn, out league and several other schools, and I decided I was not going to put myself through that again. I made myself a pair of skin-tight sateen, black bloomers. They were long enough, they were proper. Then I put my coat on and got out of the house before anybody saw me, and I didn't take my coat off till I got to the track meet. My coach about died, but it was too late to say anything about it. I think as a result of my not having any clothing trailing around me, I was the high

point winner for the meet and got a big silver cup. I had it for years and years till it got so disreputable looking, I tossed it, much to the dismay of my grandchildren and who would loved to have seen it. We did have great times. We had no busses, and the people in the country, it was their responsibility to get the children to the school. If you lived in town, you had lots of company, because with working parents (they were home parents then) but they always had chores to do on their farms. Also part of the reason the downtown stores were two stories high with apartments is the farm people who were also in business would put their car up on blocks and move down to the apartments over their stores all winter. That was always fun for the town kids because we got to go through whole new attitudes and situations. The entertaining was also different in those days. We didn't go out as much. Parties were either held in the house, or if you didn't have a big enough house, parents used to rent the old library that is now down at Meads Mill (Mill Race) and we had dances there. It was a gentler time and a quieter time, but we all had a lot of fun. As far as dressing was concerned, we wore what we were told to wear. There was no stamping of the feet and saying that I had to have this kind of tennis shoe because somebody else did. We would have just been out of luck. Parents said "no" - kids didn't rule the world at that point. Nobody felt that badly off. Naturally you had graduations in income in town, we all seemed to mingle, and we could see that another person might be better dressed, but it wasn't such a big deal then. Also, we didn't have all of this going steady. We went in groups. Talk about peer pressure, the peer pressure in those days was more against that kind of thing than it was for it. While a girl was supposedly wild and that sort of thing, she wasn't envied or thought to be the thing to do, she was considered a little out of it. One foot off the curb type of thing. Nobody was nasty, but it was just not the thing to do.

The amusements we had were very limited. We had a theater here. We had a bowling alley which was off limits to every well-bred brought-up child. It was strictly a bowling alley and a pool hall, and young people never went to it at all. It was the older crowd. So our resources for doing things were limited, and there was never any thought in those days to come home and say, "Can I have the car?" Occasionally this was provided, but it was the parent's idea and not ours. In the winter we used to have a ball because the farmers would all come in from the farms with sleighs to the grist mills, and we would grab ride out in the country on the runners, and we would catch another bob coming in. We used to do that all day long. It was a wonderful time. We didn't spend much on recreation, but we certainly had a whirl. Then we used to go bobsledding down Buchner's Hill where the old people's home that was Eastlawn San. We would start up there, and we could come all the way down and go way down to the fairgrounds weaving around. After I was married, our big fun was after every heavy snow storm, we'd get the bobs out and hook behind a car and zoom around. It was always terrible on whoever had to be the front man to hang on, but fun for the rest of us. It was an enjoyable time and slower. In the summer we had the bandstand in the middle of the four corners. Every Saturday night there was a band concert and everybody was downtown.

**Did you get dressed up for that?**

Oh no, well, you got out of your house dress if you were a housewife, and if you were a young fellow or girl you perked up a bit because you might see some other fellow or girl. On the corner where they are doing all the building now where there was a parking lot—that was the Ambler Hotel. It was a huge place and that was just as famous as Frankenmuth. People used to come from all over for their dinners. That, of course, had a soda fountain and each drug store had a soda fountain. So we had plenty of places to chat or as they say now, hang out.

**Do you remember the old theater that burned?**

No, I was never in that. It was never in use when I was in town.

**The new one was built or not?**

The Allen's had it.

**Your mom was a great Tiger fan wasn't she?**

This was the actual truth. I was practically brought up in Tiger Stadium, but it wasn't Tiger Stadium then, it was Navin Field. We only lived three doors from Ty Cobb, and my mother and Mrs. Cobb used to take us. She only had three children at that time and my mother and me, we used to go every home game. Ty and I being a little older than the sisters who accompanied us, we used to break away and run all over the stands and do all kinds of things. I often think of it now, how a famous person couldn't take that chance anymore. They would be afraid of kidnapping or those kinds of things, but as I say it was wide open then. But it was delightful. Ty, the father, had a terrible temper and he was really a character. One time when they were going back to Georgia, young Ty had fiery red hair. I often wondered what became of him. He came to the door and had a package for me. He brought me a present because he was leaving Detroit. I took it in and opened it, and it was a plaque that his father had gotten with a big diamond in the middle of it. I should have hidden it immediately, because when my mother spotted it, I was walked down to the Cobbs' to present the plaque, and then Ty got his pants whaled because he'd done it.

**He must have thought a lot of you.**

We were very good friends, you know, we were kids at that point. As we got near the end of high school, we were planning on a senior trip. In those days, they were very modest. Most all the high schools in that day and age which was in 1926, the main trip was to go to Washington.

**By train or bus?**

Train. Oh my, that was a very exciting time and a very nice time. Even in those days when a dollar was relative, it wasn't nearly as expensive as the things the kids try to plan today, so almost the entire class could go. Nowadays, they sound so wonderful, but half the kids can't

make it which seems a shame because this is the last fling you're going to have with these people. We do grow up and go to college and move on and now especially because the world is so mobile. You get out of school and are immediately transferred to someplace you have never lived before.

**Did you have the formal dances then?**

Oh yes, we had the proms. We didn't have as many weekend dances as they do now. That was left up to parents to do. There was a great deal more left up to parents in the entertainment of children. It wasn't thrown outside the home, it was taken care of inside. We were a smaller group so that it could be done. It would be a little hard now, I would agree with that. And that's about it.

**Sounds like a lot of fun.**

Oh, it was.

I was married here in Northville. We raised two children, my husband and I. My daughter went to Michigan State and my son went to Michigan State. He's in education, an elementary principal in Birmingham, and my daughter was a teacher until a personal crisis arose in the family, and she is now an industrial engineer with Ford Motor Company in Ypsilanti. Through no planning at all, my daughter lives right across the street from her brother, and they both live within a block of me which makes it very handy. I think that's probably all that's very interesting to all of you.

**Well, Marjorie, thank you so much for your time and giving us the history of Northville.  
Thank you.**