

VOW Intergenerational Storytelling Project: Senior Narrative Excerpts

Over the course of the 2019-2020 school year, Voice of Witness (VOW) engaged in a consultancy and collaboration with Sequoia Living, a local nonprofit organization that provides housing and services to impacted seniors in San Francisco, and Ida B. Wells High School. VOW supported an intergenerational storytelling project that focused on relationship building between seniors and high school students through the co-creation of story art that included oral history, photography, painting, and more.

Student and senior groups would share stories and reflect, then express the details and emotions of their stories through visual art activities.

A handful of excerpts from the seniors' oral histories are shared below.

Kitty:

I was born in Indiana, in South Bend. When I was two, my dad got a job in Texas, so we moved down there and we stayed for a couple of years. So I learned to talk with a Texan accent. From there, my dad got a job with Boeing in Seattle. We moved to Mercer Island, which is just across the floating bridge from Seattle. When I went to school, my teacher put me in a speech therapy class because she couldn't understand me. My mom came in and said, "it's just a Texan drawl. She doesn't have a speech impediment."

We stayed in Mercer Island in a contemporary kind of house with a big yard, and the one thing I remember most about that were the Alder trees we had. When the wind storms came, those kinds of trees tend to fall down and they have multiple, thin trunks. So we would all stay on the other side of the house until the wind storm was gone. One of the things we did get every year was snow, but the whole time we lived there, we only had one white Christmas. We got snow every winter, but there was only one time that we actually got snow on Christmas Day. So that sticks out in my memory.

We then moved to Tacoma, Washington, which is about maybe thirty miles from Seattle. I went to junior high and high school when we were in Tacoma, which was interesting. My high school especially. It had been built as a hotel because the speculators were thinking that the end of the train tracks would be in Tacoma, and when the decision was made to have the terminus in Seattle, they abandoned this big brick building that was built like a chateau. It was six stories high and had turrets and all this stuff. The city turned it into the first high school.

It was a funky kind of place because each of the classrooms were actually intended to be a hotel suite. Some of them were different sizes, and that defined which classes went into them. The Latin classes were up in the top of the turret because there weren't very many students. The PE classes were in the basement.

Mary Ellen:

Living in San Francisco... That's where I always wanted to live. There was a library in an old two-story house down the road from where I lived in Cleveland, and in summertime we used to go in there. And they always had special performances, you know, special things for what was happening. They'd get all the books out on it and everything. And so they had all the books about San Francisco in 1949, and I read *all* of them and I thought, "I'm going to move there someday." It took me a while, but I did.

Lily:

I was a home economics major in high school. The head of the home economics department was in a group called the Ladies Needlework Guild. We were making clothes in the home economics department and she asked me if I would like to participate in an event with my parents' permission. And they okayed it. It was something different. So I majored in fashion arts and I wanted to be a fashion designer. My specialty was evening gowns, rainy gowns, and cocktail dresses. I love doing that work.

I made my junior prom dress. And everybody loved it. But my senior ball gown was straight out of Vogue. Straight. Out. Of. Vogue. And everybody just couldn't believe it. And I loved that I loved making people look really special. It's been a passion of mine to design beautiful clothes. I did it for 50 years.

David:

The Presidio of San Francisco is a very important place to me, because that's where I grew up. At that time, the Presidio was an army base, before you guys were born, but my dad was sent there by the Army. It was the 6th Army headquarters. So I grew up on the Presidio. And I would go into the city to Washington High School in the Richmond district.

I often would walk from my house to school and back home again, because I was in really good shape in those days. I was on the football team and the army buses stopped running at a certain time. So I would have to walk all the way. Between the school and my home, it was maybe a mile and a half, but I didn't mind. So it was a great place to grow up. Close by was the Golden Gate Bridge and you could hear the fog horns at night, and about a half mile away the beaches were on two sides. Baker Beach was on the west side. It was exciting.