

**University of Illinois Student Life 1928-1938**  
**Oral History Project**  
**MaryAnne Barnfield –Class of 34**  
**Ft. Myers, Florida**  
**March 18, 2001**

**Ellen Swain: This is an oral history interview for the University of Illinois Archives. The interviewer is Ellen Swain, the narrator is Mary Reifsteck Barnfield, an alumna from the class of 1934. We are at Mrs. Barnfield's home in Ft. Myers, Florida and the date is March 18, 2001.**

**Could you state your name and your birth date?**

MaryAnne Barnfield: Uh-huh. I'm MaryAnne Reifsteck, R-E-I-F-S-T-E-C-K all around Champaign the full of them. Then I married Milton Barnfield from Sadorus, that's a long ways off, in 1939, and after I married we moved to South Bend, Indiana. Before that, I of course, was at the University, and we drove back and forth. I lived about 8 miles from the University. There was a family of boys a couple miles beyond where I lived, and we shared rides. But it wasn't fun, but we were so fortunate, the 2 brothers younger than I, all went to the University, the only ones out of the 13.

**ES: Tell me about your family--your mother and father and what they did for a living.**

MB: Oh, my mother died when I was 13, so I really don't remember much, and we had a housekeepers and when we didn't have housekeepers, I was it mostly. And the first part of the family were 6 boys and that was a blessing because on the farm, Dad needed them. And then there were four girls. A lot of the time that I was in school, I was housekeeping at home too. We were between housekeepers, so that the University wasn't a fun time for me. But, I realize I was lucky, and when I finished I went to the Barry Castle Business School, it's, it's long been out of town, but then I started teaching there for a while, a couple years. Then I went to work for Mr. Adam, or, Weber in the Bursar's Office at the University. And I worked there until I was married in 1939 then. And that's the last I worked. Oh I think I worked at Bendicks in South Bend before Christmas one year, but nothing—. I had two daughters and each of them had 2 daughters. One's in South Bend, Indiana, and one lives in Topeka, Kansas.

**ES: Why did you go to the University of Illinois, how did that come about?**

MB: Well I just, it was Dad's decision, it was a surprise when he said, "When it opens, you'll go!" I did very well in high school, I think, but there were only 13 in the graduating class.

**ES: And where did you go to school?**

MB: Tolono.

**ES: Tolono.**

MB: Tolono Community High School then, and now it's part of a big concern. And I was smart out of books.

**ES: So he thought it was important that you go to school?**

MB: I guess, and the last 3, we kids went. The other 2 boys graduated from Ag, and they taught Ag in Illinois before died.

**ES: When you went to school, what did you want to do with your education? Did you have any plans, what were your interests?**

MB: Not, well, I was more interested, I think my dad was disappointed I didn't go to Home Ec, but I went into Business. Well, now I know nothing about business that's more than 298.

**ES: How did you end up in Business? Why did you choose that?**

MB: Well I went, I taught at the Business School, and then I went to work for the Bursar's Office until I was married.

**ES: Well I mean when you were a student how did you, did you have an interest in Business, is that why you started taking classes in that area or—?**

MB: Well, I just knew I didn't want Home Ec [*laughter*].

**ES: [*Laughter*] Do you remember any of your professors? While you were in school?**

MB: No. Uh-uh.

**ES: What were classes like? How many students?**

MB: Usually, a lot of times, I was the only female.

**ES: Were you?**

MB: Uh-huh. See, that in 1930, that's—, but I got fair grades, nothing wonderful, but nothing bad either.

**ES: Did you know your professors very well outside of the class?**

MB: No.

**ES: At all?**

MB: Uh-uh. Well, I spent no time on that campus, just hunting rides back and forth out to the country, and—

**ES: How did you arrange that? How did you get back and forth from U of I?**

MB: Well my dad usually furnished us a car, not ours, but, and then the neighbors, with their group of boys. And if I needed a ride I'd just call home, before Dad would come and get me; it wasn't fun [*laughter*].

**ES: [*Laughter*] How was your affected by the Depression? You started school in 1930, is that right? You started at the University in 1930?**

MB: Uh-huh.

**ES: Was your family, during that time, under financial—?**

MB: I didn't notice it, I didn't notice it because we still had plenty to eat, had big gardens. I don't like vegetables to this day, but—

**ES: How much younger are your brothers who went to school, U of I?**

MB: I think about 2 years, George about 2 years younger than me, and Skip about that much younger than him.

**ES: So at least 2 of you were at school during the same time?**

MB: Uh-huh, I think all 3 of us were for about a year or so. Uh-huh. We're just lucky that we got to go. I don't know that it, well, it made sense, quite a difference in their life because they were teachers in Ag. One of them did get drafted to the Navy, and the other one went home, farmed, and he was exempt then, and his family still lives in the same place. It's a huge place; 6 bedrooms upstairs, and a bedroom downstairs, a dining room 15x21.

**ES: This is near Tolono?**

MB: Yeah, 2 miles South, and 2 miles West of Savoy?

**ES: Of Savoy, oh okay.**

MB: It borders Monticello Road, I don't know whether they have other names now?

**ES: Had other members of your family gone to U of I?**

MB: No. At the time I went to work there, no two members of the family could work there. And there was some questions, the President's chauffeur was a Reifsteck, he was from Southern, Illinois. He was a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin. And I said, "Well, I hope I get to meet him," and I did.

**ES: Did you have a chance to do any kind of social activity on campus?**

MB: No. We danced a lot, all around the little towns. Ivesdale, Philo, Bonville, and it was great fun. In fact I have a book over here from a fellow that wrote, who lives in Philo, wrote it. And my daughter brought it to me. That kind of a thing. There was just never any cash handy to do things like that. We went to classes and went home mostly. So—

**ES: What was a typical day like for you? When you went into school, what time would you get up at in the morning?**

MB: Oh, I don't know, it seems like we were always up by 7 anyway, and then whenever, of course your classes weren't continuous, you'd study in between times.

**ES: If you didn't live on campus, what did you do when you had down time, where did you go?**

MB: We went to the library or sat in the car or, if it was long enough in between you'd go home. So, it wasn't fun, but we were lucky to get to go. I always envied— and once in a while after a vacation, I would always envy the kids coming back to school. Once and while we'd go to the depot and watch the kids come back from Chicago and so forth. So—

**ES: Did you make friends at school, or were your friends mainly from home?**

MB: Well mostly from home, uh-huh.

**ES: Did people from Tolono go to the U of I? Were there large number of people from that high school that went?**

MB: Well if they went to college they went there.

**ES: That's where they went?**

MB: Uh-huh. And I did meet people from other small, like towns like Seymour and Bonville and around, they were in the same position that I was. A lot of girls would work in homes and go to school, live in Champaign-Urbana and work in homes and baby-sit and that kind of thing and go to school. It was a nice arrangement.

**ES: But you needed to stay at home to help your father? Is that why you—?**

MB: Well, I stayed at home because a lot of times we didn't have a housekeeper and—

**ES: Were your older brothers still living at home?**

MB: They were like, maybe just one for a while, they others were all married and lived around. Always on farms.

**ES: Had they had interest in going to school, or do you know?**

MB: I don't know. They didn't have the chance anyway, and so we were lucky.

**ES: Do you remember the Stock Market Crash in 1929?**

MB: No, no, uh-uh. I doubt that that had any affect on the family. I used to say to my older brothers, "Well, why didn't Dad take mother and go back to Germany?" Because he came from Germany when he was 15, had a clean pair of overalls, was about all and \$5 or something. They said, "Dad never had any money. If there was a farm for sale some place, the salesman would be right on dad's tail and he would buy it." So there was never any cash to do anything with. But, he didn't believe in credit. He wouldn't go and buy on credit.

**ES: What kinds of things did you have to do to get by? You ate mainly food that you had on the farm?**

MB: Oh yeah, uh-huh. And I noticed since I've been here, they have quite a bit of lamb, and I don't eat that. I just don't care for it. We had our own pork and beef and— chickens galore.

**ES: Did you buy your clothes or did you make them?**

MB: Yeah, no I didn't sew at that age, no I think we bought our clothes, but I don't remember really. Didn't have many I suppose.

**ES: Did you ever question why you were going to school? I mean, did you want to go to school?**

MB: Oh sure.

**ES: You did?**

MB: Well my grades were good and that's why I had that opportunity.

**ES: How aware of national things were you? National events going on, do you remember?**

MB: Oh I don't know, we had radio. Of course the wars. And my youngest brother, like I told you, was in the Navy. So—

**ES: You said you didn't really remember any rules on campus, because you weren't—?**

MB: No, I wasn't—

**ES: What time would you go home during the day?**

MB: Whenever there was a...you're classes were through and you got a ride.

**ES: When you got a ride, did you have to wait around sometimes?**

MB: Oh yeah, that's when you studied.

**ES: Oh I see. Was it hard to study at home, did you have other responsibilities?**

MB: Yes, but I don't remember it being hard.

**ES: Do you remember Maria Leonard, the Dean of Women at all?**

MB: Now that you mention the name, I remember, that's all. Of course I had no—

**ES: Didn't have any impression of her while you were a student?**

MB: Nope.

**ES: Did you, did you have any memories of anyone else on campus, like the Presidents or—?**

MB: I didn't know who the President was, but Mr. Weber, the Bursar, because I worked in his office. ( ) the campus was beautiful with the trees over the Broadwalk and I spent a lot of time at the Commerce Building because that's where I was.

**ES: Was there a place to study there?**

MB: Oh yeah, each one had a library.

**ES: Had it's own library there?**

MB: Uh-huh.

**ES: You said you didn't go to many of the athletic events, did you go to Homecoming?**

MB: No.

**ES: Was that a big deal?**

MB: Uh-uh. Cost money.

**ES: Yeah?**

MB: Uh-huh. We, most of the entertainment was around the small town dances.

**ES: What were those like? What kinds of—?**

MB: Oh fun, fun.

**ES: Did you plan those, or was it kind of impromptu?**

MB: Oh much impromptu, but with 2 younger brothers, fortunately I was a good dancer then, but it didn't matter later. In fact, one fellow I dated, I danced just like he did. He really wasn't a very good dancer. It was that solo idea to dance like they do. Yeah. And that didn't do anything for my future [*laughter*].

**ES: When you were in school did you remember black students in your classes at all?**

MB: No I don't remember that, I'm sure there were a few, but, not many.

**ES: Were there black people in Tolono?**

MB: Oh I would say no, there may be now, but I doubt it.

**ES: Were you aware of any kind of discrimination in town, or on the campus?**

MB: No, not a bit.

**ES: What kind of clothing did you wear?**

MB: [*Laughter*] Just very simple I'm sure.

**ES: Did you have to dress up to go to school?**

MB: No. Uh-uh, but we didn't wear slacks then. Just being clean was most of it, I think.

**ES: And you didn't have a job in school because you worked at home all that time?**

MB: Uh-huh.

**ES: So, really all you were paying was tuition.**

MB: \$35 a semester, plus this gym or something like that. Now it's by the hour, or it has been for years. Yeah.

**ES: Do you remember registration was like?**

MB: What, what?

**ES: Registration?**

MB: Not particularly. It was like a bunch of cows, we just herded along and all.

**ES: Did you go through Commencement ceremonies?**

MB: Yeah, uh-huh.

**ES: Where was it held?**

MB: I don't know, I suppose in the, what is it, the big building at the end of the Quadrangle? I don't know, I've forgot.

**ES: What did you do right after you graduated from school, that would have been in '34?**

MB: Well, I went to Greg Business School in Chicago for a week, getting ready, preparing to teach in the Business school there. So, I remember a fellow who graduated from high school, came to school to me while I was there. Taught typing and shorthand, and bookkeeping.

**ES: And how long did you do that?**

MB: I think maybe 2 or 3 years. Let's see, graduated in '34, and I was married in '39, so that would be a couple years.

**ES: And then you came back to Champaign and worked in the Bursar's Office after that, is that right?**

MB: Yeah, well see, the Business School was downtown Champaign.

**ES: Oh I see, you went to Chicago for training?**

MB: Yeah, just for a week.

**ES: Downtown, I see, I see.**



MB: That's so long ago.

**ES: [Laughter] Now what did you do in the Bursar's Office?**

MB: I was just a secretary, and assistant to the payroll clerk now that you ask, Horence Johnson.

**ES: And where did you meet your husband?**

MB: Well he lived, was from Sadorus, so that, and he dated several of my girlfriends, but a dance mostly.

**ES: And you said you were married in 1939?**

MB: Uh-huh.

**ES: And then you moved to South Bend?**

MB: Yeah, he was already up there, and—

**ES: I see, how was the U of I viewed by people in the area?**

MB: What?

**ES: How was the U of I viewed, by people in the area?**

MB: Where I lived when I was in school? Well just ordinary farm life, nothing unusual.

**ES: I mean did people think the U of I was a good school?**

MB: Oh yeah, well it was the only one around, and possible so— I was just getting back and forth.

**ES: Well I think I've asked.**

MB: I knew I wouldn't have very much.

**ES: No this is great. You kind of mentioned this, were a lot of other students in your position? Did you get a sense of how the Depression was affecting other people who went to school?**

MB: I think there were. Like I said, some of my, girls that were in my group, worked in homes while they went to school and that was a good idea. So—

**ES: Girls that were from your hometown?**

MB: Well, different towns, around.

**ES: People you knew at the University, other students?**

MB: Uh-huh. See that was all they had, once their tuition was all they'd have to pay then, so—

**ES: Were those jobs easy to find?**

MB: What?

**ES: Were those jobs easy to find?**

MB: I don't, seemed like it. I don't know how they made contact, but—

**ES: How do you think the U of I has affected you, effected your later life?**

MB: [*Laughter*] I really don't know. I'm just glad I had the opportunity to go. That was it, and I meant, like these other girls from other towns that were working. But it was fun to go, Sunday evening to watch the Chicago train come down before school started. You always felt like you were missing something.

**ES: Is there anything else you want to say?**

MB: [*Laughter*] Nothing, I just knew I didn't have much to say.

**ES: No, no this is—well thank you.**

END OF INTERVIEW