

Synopsis of Interview with Doris Barkley
February 4, 1992
Tacoma, Washington

Doris Barkley was born in 1921 in Tacoma. She was raised here, except for a few years when she was very young. From the 2nd grade on she attended St. Leo's school.

She recalls the different ethnic groups here in Tacoma and tells of the Italian's desire for a parish of their own. St. Rita's parish was started in the 1920's for the Italian populace.

Father A.J. Krebsbach is remembered for his diligence in getting St. Leo's parish out of debt during the depression years. Many people had a difficult time during these years. She mentions working for the power company to help pay for service and paying 25 cents a week to the milkman. When parents had a difficult time paying tuition, they were able to assist with work and jobs which needed to be done in the school or for the parish. Many women cooked for the school children and helped provide the meals they received.

Some of the various parish organizations which existed over the years are mentioned. Evidently, there was a beautiful church choir as well as school choir. Many wonderful evenings were spent enjoying drama productions at St. Leo's. One of her fondest memories were the Elocution contests St. Leo's was famous for.

Some discussion of the 1960's is present. Here again, we have an opinion of a parishioner concerning the removal of the statues and altar rail, etc. It seems that this physical renovation altered how many felt about the church.

It is interesting to note that she does support the social justice issues which the church has undertaken. However, there seems to be a

mistaken belief that the school was closed as a result of these. From my research, I find this not to be true.

This interview covers autobiographical information as well as touches on several issues relating to growth, development, social change concerning St. Leo's.

February 4, 1992 Interview with **Doris Barkley**, former parishioner of St. Leo's Parish, now a member of St. Rita's Parish, Tacoma, WA

Can you please share with me some information about your family and ancestors here in Washington, your background, occupations, education, nationality, marriages, children, etc. so we get a little bit of a feeling for you.

O.K. My grandparents came from Ireland. They came over on a steerage boat where the men were in one area and the women were in another. They were married when they got to St. Louis, Missouri and they settled in a little town in Missouri. He was in the mines. They had a large family. My mother was one of the older children and when she was 16 her father died of lung disease brought on by working in the mines. So Grandma took the children, she was pregnant with another one, and came to the wheat fields. Oh, what is that county where all the wheat is [grown] in eastern Washington? She [grandmother] didn't like it there on the farm. She had two brothers and I guess she had to work too hard. I think she had six children at that time so she had her hands full. So then she went to Spokane and settled there and remarried and had more children. In all she had thirteen children. Now a lot of them died in infancy but she raised seven children. My mother was the second oldest of the group. She went to work -- as a just working in housemaid type of work -- you know Irish maid -- her sister did too.

Mom married my father who was in construction. He was born in Nova Scotia. His folks came over from Ireland and from Scotland and settled in Nova Scotia. He left home when he was a very young man and came here to work. He was from a family of thirteen, I think -- big families. He used to tell us about how his mother made all their underwear, knited everything. Anyway he came [to Spokane] and met Mom there and they were married in Spokane. Being in construction work you move around a lot, so eventually, he was sent to Tacoma and they settled in Tacoma down on East 26th and "D". That's where I was born.

Remember what year they came to Tacoma?

Well, it was probably 1920 because I was born here and I was born in 1921. Most of the 7 children in our family were born in Spokane or Republic, Washington. So then we lived on 26th and "D" for a while and we moved to various other places. We eventually lived on 11th and Ainsworth and also 12th and Washington, not too far away from St. Leo's. That's when we started going to church at St. Leo's. However, I was not baptized in St. Leo's. I was baptized in Portland, Oregon because my dad was sent on a job to Portland after we were here for a short while. We were there for maybe a year or year and a half. But he had a stroke so we moved back to Tacoma. That's when I started [school] at St. Leo's -- maybe 2nd grade level. I continued to go there until I graduated from High School.

So you went all through school at St. Leo's as well?

Right. I was confirmed there and was married there.

As you were growing up, since you were here from about the 2nd grade at St. Leo's, what do you remember about Tacoma at that time? What was it like?

It wasn't as busy as it is now. It was quiet. Not all the houses, not all the activity. There certainly wasn't the crime, or at least I was not aware of it. Perhaps, there was but I was not aware of it. St. Leo's was one of the largest parishes in Tacoma and it was very popular. A lot of different nationalities went there. Lots of different people from all areas went there. And [let's] see what else --

You said lot of different nationalities, can you remember what some of the predominate ones were?

Oh, yes. There were Italians...quite a few Italians. Italians belonged to St. Rita's church which was a parish within a parish. St. Rita's was a separate Italian parish that was part of St. Leo's.¹ They were

¹ This statement is not quite correct. St. Rita's parish was formed out of St. Leo's parish and also staffed by Jesuits but was not still a part of St. Leo's parish. It was a separate entity.

both run by Jesuits. ***Oh, so it was part of St. Leo's?*** It was within St. Leo's [boundaries]. It was started in 1921 or 22 and it was a parish that was predominantly Italian. But all the children went to St. Leo's school.

Do you know why they divided up the parish?

Well, because the Italians wanted an Italian Mass. They wanted to hear it [said] in their own language -- their homilies -- sermons as they called them in those days. It was a very active parish, a very good parish. Of course, St. Leo's [parish] got along fine [with St. Rita parish] because they were all Jesuit [priests] too.

I remember when Father David McAstocker, pastor, [started Bellarmine]. Father David McAstocker at St. Leo's saw the need of a boy's school. Originally, St. Leo's was a boy's school and then they allowed the girls in. When they started Bellarmine they changed the high school from a boys high school to an all girls high school.

Do you remember when they started Bellarmine, what period of time?

Bellarmino -- let's see -- probably. I have a book that shows the first Bellarmine graduates. The book, I think, is out in the garage and Judy [daughter] has things stored out there and so I can't find anything.

That's all right. During the period of time different nationalities made up St. Leo's, was that during the 1920's?

Yes.

What was the economic condition of Tacoma and the parish at that time? What was it like here?

Well, they were deeply in debt. They had built the school and about 1933/34, sometime after Father David McAstocker went up to Bellarmine, Father [A.J.] Krebsbach came to St. Leo's. At that time I remember distinctly him saying they were paying more on the interest than they were on the principal [of mortgage]. He really cracked down on

the whole thing. He got it straightened around. He took care of the economic situation. He was very frugal and he was very pushy to get everything taken care of. He was wonderful. He had the most wonderful bazaars and everyone would partake of them. It was just great. They would have booths all over the gym and something going on in every direction, friends greeting friends, you know, it was great.

During this same period of time, you were young, what was the economy like in Tacoma?

Poor.

Do you remember what types of industries were here?

Well, there was always logging and the smelter and different things down on the tidelands. We always had a lot of smoke coming from there. Longshoremen -- lot of ships coming in.

Were families that belonged to St. Leo's mostly working class families?

Oh, yes. A lot of working class. Oh, well there were some other people who were professionals, doctors, lawyers. But for the most part we were just plain ordinary working people.

How many other parishes were in Tacoma other than St. Rita's?

There was St. Pat's and Holy Rosary. Holy Rosary just celebrated their 100th year -- just celebrated their 100th year, so they've been around a long time, too.

What businesses do you remember in the area of St. Leo's in the early years?

Oh, we always had the mortuary -- Cassidy and Allen up the hill and Gaffneys. Gaffneys were right up on K Street and Johnson's Candy of course. Bakeries. There was a nice bakery on K street. There were

nice apartments in that area too. A lot of the apartments were really high class at that time. There used to be a big playground where Bates Vocational School is now. That was all a huge playground. I remember going there to play.

You mentioned that you were baptized in Portland but that you started the 2nd grade and were confirmed at St. Leo's and were you also married there?

Yes, married by Father Krebsbach in the old rectory -- in the old house rectory. He said, "now don't throw rice because the housekeeper doesn't like to clean it up." And just about then the rice all dribbled out of my sister-in-law's pocket all over the floor. So --

So did you remain in the parish after you were married?

Yes, for quite a while. Most of our children -- all of them were baptized in St. Leo's. We did live in St. Patrick's Parish for a while but we went down to [St. Leo's] to have the two children baptized at once -- it was Dave and Nancy. And Father Krebsbach says, "I presume you have permission from Monseigneur Noonan" [from St. Patrick's]. I had never thought of it. He said, "well, as of today you are living at your mother's house" which was in the parish. So they were all baptized there and they received first Holy Communion there and were confirmed there and some of them were married there.

So your mother remained living within the boundaries of the parish?

Oh, yes. She was at 12th and Washington. She never moved out of the boundaries of St. Leo's.

How about your brothers and sisters, did they all stay within that area?

Oh, yes for quite a while. A lot of them went to St. Leo's. That was part of our life.

After you married what did your husband do?

Well, when I married him he was a laundry man. He was a laundry man for 17 years but about the time Margaret [daughter] was getting ready to be born his eyes were getting bad so he had to get out of the laundry business. In the course of going around on his route he met a lady who had a little hotel for sale. So we bought this little hotel which was located down on 11th between Commerce and Broadway. It was where the United Mutual Bank is now or Security Pacific as they call it now. It was located in that block. It was called the Warburton Block. We had the second and third floors of the building and that was the little hotel. This was during the war -- Second World War -- ...very busy time.

When your husband was doing the laundry work, did he have a route? Did he work for a company?

He worked for old Home Laundry and he worked for Superior Service and he also worked for Metropolitan Laundry. All of which are extinct at this time.

Then when you moved to the hotel, purchased the hotel, what can you tell me about those years. It was during the war you said --

Oh, yes. That was the time when everybody was working for the shipyards, building ships. They were working for the boat companies -- busy time and everybody was working and making money.

Did there seem to be a lot of influx of people from other areas at that point?

Oh, yes. From all over the country people came [here] when they were in the service and they were stationed here. They fell in love with the area and they stayed here after the war.

How did that affect St. Leo's? Did you notice it there?

We had a lot of different people there too.

Let's back up a few years. During the depression era, the thirties, can you remember much of what Tacoma was like at that period? Was it affected the way a lot of other parts of the country were or --

People were having a hard time paying their bills and a lot of people, like we did, had to work for the power company in order to help pay the electric bill. And we had to pay the milk bill, say 25 cents a week, something like that. Of course, things weren't that expensive but still it was hard to find jobs and to get money.

Do you remember anything that the church may have done during that time to assist people? Were they very socially minded at all?

People couldn't afford to pay tuition [so they] worked for the church, worked on the church, worked in the school. I know one man that was a painter and he painted inside of St. Leo's Church and he painted the inside of the school. And women worked in the school rooms, the school cafeteria. They didn't get paid but they provided and made nice lunches for the kids. They would have soup and jello and we would have whip cream on that jello. You know that's -- that was to supplement their meals. It was only costing maybe a nickle or a dime and the milk. ...and those women worked so hard to provide it for us. All those older ladies. I thought they were old then -- but then -- (laugh)

Do you remember some of their names, "those old ladies"?

Oh, yes. There was Mrs. Burr, Mrs. Max Schroeder, and there was Mrs. Brosmer, and there was a lot of German women and a lot of different nationalities were there. They all worked hard at it. My mother worked at a store cooking so she didn't have a chance [to work at the school]. She had to go to work after my dad had a stroke. She worked at Johnson's Ice Creamery.

You were a teenager during that period of time? Did you work at all?

I babysat. I used to get 50 cents for babysitting all weekend. And I [also] worked at the store. I packed candy. I worked behind the counter some too, but not very successfully . (laugh)

And after you got married, we'll go forward again. Did you stay home and tend to be housewife or did...

I was a housewife but I always helped my husband in whatever he was doing. I mean he always figured out some way for me to be involved...either book work or something. I took care of the books and sometimes I did laundry. I did all kinds of stuff. (laugh)

When you first started at St. Leo's were they located in the building they are in now or where?

The Church? The church is the same as it's been since I started there. Originally I understand there was a large one that burned down and this is just the basement of that other church but it was never changed. The rectory has been changed. Father Buchanon was there when they built a new rectory . They tore down the old house [that served as the rectory]. The school has always been the same. You know they have updated it in certain ways, a lot of painting and all that. But it was never a fancy school. It's well worn.

How was the school received in the community and by the rest of the community of Tacoma?

Very well. It was well thought of. It was a good school. Children were disciplined.

What can you tell me about the different religious clergy who served the parish over the years. Do you remember the various ones, and any anecdotes you can share with me?

Oh, yes. Well there was Father Joe Lynch who was there for eons. He knew the name of every boy on the play ground, every boy but he could not remember the name of a girl. He would come in to give out the

report cards and he would always remember my brother Franny, Franny Brown. He knew him. He never knew me. He never remembered my name. (laugh) And then there was, of course, Father Krebsbach. He was a character. He presided during all the graduations, and Sister would say, "Now girls if Father looks like he is kind of dosing during the graduation, don't feel too bad. You know he is awfully tired and he has to go to so many [events]." (laugh) So we all kept our eyes on him all through the graduation. (laugh) Then there was Professor Rueguers who taught the girls to sing, or tired to teach the girls to sing. He was a character too. (laugh) And of course there was the Sisters -- the Sisters of St. Francis. They were...most of them were very nice. Every once in a while you would meet one that lacked a little patience and sympathy and understanding. But Sister Lavintia was one of the earlier principals that I remember. In those days the students would come out of the classroom and form a line in the hallway. Right by the big door and right beneath the statue there was a victrola and she would wind it up and have this marching [music] and we would come forward while she was [demonstrates beating on table]. You didn't break rank until you got to the end of the block. Very well behaved.

What can you tell me about the various parish organizations at St. Leo's over the years?

Well we had the Altar Society and we had the Sodality and the Holy Name Society. Of course we always had ushers, I don't know if that was any group or not, or it just happened. And the choir -- We had wonderful, beautiful choirs.

Now were they made up of all age groups, the choir --

Yes. Of course they had the high school group, the choir. But they also had a choir for the church that were wonderful musicians. One of them was Max Frolich. He used to come and play his violin. Did you ever hear of Max Frolich? ...he had a restaurant out in South Tacoma. He was a gentleman and an accomplished violinist and he used to come and play at St. Leo's.

What do you think the rest of the community felt about St. Leo's in the thirties or forties? Was there very much interaction between the different churches or anything like that?

I think so. Father was on good terms with all the Ministers around there. All the poor people would always know to come to St. Leo's to ask for help. They did. The street people from downtown, like we call them now, they would come up to St. Leo's to get handouts.

Were there various social service agencies at that time as well or did the churches pretty well take care of the people?

The pastor did it all. The pastor did all. There was...not Knights of Columbus...what's that other saints name...St. Vincent de Paul. St. Vincent de Paul they were very active. They came out and brought baskets to people who needed help. they were real good about that. And then the ladies -- they donated a lot of things they made.

Do you remember...we talked about it a little...what was it like during the war years? Did they have your normal air raid siren drills, and that sort of thing?

Oh, yes. They had air raid wardens who went out to see if everybody's lights were out and shades drawn. My husband did that. He was too old to be in the service so he was an air raid warden. And there was a lot of activity in that regard. Scared to death we were.

You mentioned your husband and when you purchased the little hotel downtown. Was it basically like today what you would consider your bed and breakfast type thing or small motel or did you cater to business type people, travelers?

No. It was a lot of people who lived there -- lived there by the month. They would rent a room and they would stay to live there. They didn't cook or anything but they all had washbasins in their rooms. It was not a fancy hotel. The OPA [Office of Price Administration] was in at

that time and you could only charge a certain price for a room. Those were the days when you had gas and food rationing.

Do you remember how much you were allowed to charge and things like that?

Oh, \$2.00 -- \$2.50 a night. It wasn't very much, was it? No, and people were making good money in those days. They were working at the ship yards, boat building and everything. But you couldn't buy things either because you had to have coupons for shoes. You had to have coupons to buy sugar, flour, can goods, coffee, butter, almost everything. Everybody had a coupon book. One fellow, that had a hotel down the street and knew my husband from his laundry days, would give us his shoe coupons, because it was hard to keep children in shoes with just the one coupon.

Well how did the church and the school exist during that time? Were they allotted different rations?

Oh, yes. Any institution like that had more coupons than the rest of us. They managed all right. There were allowances made for that. The red meat, you know -- we only had bacon -- all those things we had coupons for. So [government] you had to declare each month, or certain periods, what new coupons were good for and how many we could have.

I am going to ask you a quickie here. When you think of St. Leo's parish what is the first thing that comes to mind?

Oh, it was a beautiful parish [church]. It was lovely. It was filled with statues and it had a homey feeling that we all felt whenever we left and came back. We all felt we belonged there. That was up to a certain period. Then when the Vatican II came along we got some different priests -- we got liberals who were more interested in social reforms, social welfare and all that sort of thing. That's when I started loosing interest in St. Leo's.

About what period of time was that, do you remember?

It was when Rita [youngest daughter] was about -- let's see she was getting ready to make her first Communion and they [priests] all took off and went down to California to help the lettuce growers. So, that was about -- she was born in 1960 -- probably she remembers to the minute -- but about the 1970's.

Do remember the priests that were at St. Leo's then? Did they institute this? Who were they?

Father [Bill] Bichsel and Father [Pat] Hurley. He [Father Hurley] is the one that closed the school. ...I can't think of the other ones. Father Purdy was a real nice guy. He was there when we first built the rectory. He was good but he cracked down on everybody to pay their tuition. He was tough on that but then I could understand why. Things were getting more expensive all the time.

So you kind of lost interest in them because they wanted to institute so many more changes. Were these changes a direct result of the Vatican or do you think it was their personal mission that they were trying to institute?

I think it was the Jesuit's idea to change things and to bring the priests closer to people. Now a lot of the things they do are good. You know, Father Bichsel worked with some people that the other priests probably would never have anything to do with. Although, Father [A.J.] Krebsbach always gave handouts to people and Father Purdy [did also] but to work with them and to help them in their own personal life -- I don't think they did that. So I can see where they are coming from. But in so doing they stripped the church of all its niceties and changed the way they did things. They had different homilies and they didn't speak of mortal sin or anything. [Speaks about a particular sermon.]

So was it more along the theological lines that the priests changed the way they were instructing or preaching as far as religion itself goes?

Oh, definitely...a different outlook all together. Then they started -
- took away all the communion rails, took away all the statues --

At that time, aside from these instances, did they do things outside the parish? Did the mission of the parish change? What did they do there?

They opened up houses for homeless and to help the people who were having trouble which is good. But instead of concentrating on the school and the children, they let it [resources] start going to all these other things. Then it necessitated the closing of the school.²

How did the parishioners feel about that?

Oh, they were unhappy. I was president of the school PTA... mothers club is what I was president of. And we fought tooth and nail. We wrote to the bishop and we did everything we could but we could not change things. We could not stop them from closing the school. It was economics.

What reason did the priests give for doing it.

Too expensive to keep up. It wasn't fair for the parishioners to subsidize the school.

Did the population of the parish change at that point?

People started moving out. Lots of people left the parish at that time.

And did they move out of the area or did they just move, just change churches, change parishes?

They changed churches [parishes]. A lot of people changed churches at that point. You know they were all looking for something that they were accustomed to and they couldn't find it [at St. Leo's].

² This section is a bit misleading. In actuality, the school was closed due to declining enrollment and economics, not because the revenues were being concentrated on social justice issues.

So from your knowledge and the people you knew at that time, many of them are now relocated in other parishes, so that most of the old timers, not too many are left in the parish at this point?

Right. There were some that stayed. Mrs. Brewer...she stayed right until the day she died. She felt the world and all of Father Bichsel. He was good to her. He came to visit her and brought communion to her and everything. I'm not faulting him for anything it's just that we have different points of view.

How long was Father Bichsel at St. Leo's?

He's still there. He is still associated with St. Leo's but he runs Guadeloupe House or something like that. He does a lot of good. He takes retarded people and he helps them find jobs. I think he was only an associate pastor at the same time Father Morin was an associate pastor.

What did you think of Father Morin?

He was nice -- he was a nice guy. He was real friendly and helpful. He visited all the children and was good to all the kids. ***The kids liked him?*** Oh, yes. Dance -- you would go to skating parties and there was Father Morin skating with everybody -- just having a great time.

Were his theological views different than Father Bichsel's?

Yes. After Father [Paul] Buchanon was killed, Father [Gerard] Morin took over for a while as pastor. Then Father [Gerard] Evoy came and Father Morin was the associate pastor. Father Bichsel was there [at the same time] and there were a couple of other ones [priests] who were real nice. But...they were more of the liberal ones also.

So that was in the 70's? Did it remain that way throughout the next period of time or how long or has it stayed that way?

It has stayed that way. They are still into social justice and helping people.

Do you think its changed at all since this began? Has it become more moderate at all?

It's just different. It's just different.

Do you know anyone who is still a parishioner there?

Yes. A girl I went to school with...started to school with in 2nd grade. She still goes there and there are other people, yes. Can't name them right now...or I'd say, 'Hi there. How are you?'

Do you remember if the Jesuits, who were there over the years, had have much interaction with the community aside from St. Leo's?

Oh, I'm sure they did. I was young in those days. I'll tell you one thing that happened. I knew there were a lot of Jesuits in that rectory. My brother had a bike and we lived on 11th and Ainsworth. So he took me to school on the bicycle, going down the hill, down 11th Street and down 13th Street. Just as we turned in the alley behind St. Leo's, between the church and the rectory, I put my foot in the spokes and tipped and fell. I didn't hurt myself, but boy he [brother] was mad. I wrecked the spokes and we tumbled right there between the church and the rectory. All the priests came tearing out. (laugh) We went to school. Now days they would probably take you to the hospital, but it didn't hurt me any. Hurt the bike.

Do you remember any members of the community of Tacoma itself that had some type of specific impact on St. Leo's, rather it be within the city government, or businessmen, or anything like that? Do remember any interaction that would have made some significant change or impact on the parish?

Oh, there probably were a lot but I can't think of them right now. There were a lot...the Pessimeirs and the Gaffneys...and a lot of those familiar names are parishioners or have been parishioners at St. Leo's.

I'll ask you a couple of more things and just throw out whatever comes to your mind first. What do you think the saddest day for St. Leo's was?

Closing the school. Closing the school.

What about the happiest day?

Well -- when we celebrated the golden anniversary of the founding. That was a real happy time. ***What did they do during that period of time?*** Oh, they had a program and they had dinners and all of that hullabaloo to show the past and exhibits in the auditorium. St. Leo's used to have a wonderful auditorium. You know, of course, they use it for TAG [Tacoma Actors Guild]. So you know it was good. When I was little, they used to have the Ancient Order of Hybernian -- now that is Scottish, I believe, isn't it -- or is it Irish? I don't know why that stuck with me. But they used to have plays and put on shows there and have wonderful high school plays there also. They used to have wonderful elocution contests. Have you ever heard of an elocution contest? My brother was in them and my nephew was in it also. It was wonderful. They would recite all these lovely poems that we don't hear anymore. In those days we were familiar with them -- like Edgar Allen Poe's the Raven. That was fun and people would just flock to the auditorium. It would just be packed with people to see it.

What period of time would this have been?

1934 to 1940-45 in that area. ***And would the community as a whole come to support this?*** Oh yes, there would be a lot of people from all over. All the relatives [would come] and they belonged to all the different parishes. (laugh)

What do you miss most about the past at St. Leo's?

The way it used to be. The way it used to look. It was a beautiful church inside -- lots of pretty altars and pretty statues and lights, and,

oh, it was nice. It was homey. Have you been to St. Leo's lately? Well, it didn't look like that. Margaret's [daughter] wedding pictures show how it looked before. **Lot of changes over the years?** Oh, definitely. Definitely.

What do you feel the future of St. Leo's will be?

I think it will continue to serve the social outcasts of the community and serve as a gathering place for a lot of different activities. One thing about it -- they have made it handicapped accessible, so that is a plus. There are not very many churches that do cater to handicapped people and pay attention to them.

Do you feel that they do a better job at that than many of the other churches?

Yes, I do.

If St. Leo's could be remembered for just one thing, what do you think it would be?

Probably elocution contests and wonderful plays and old plays. They [St.Leo's] used to be a hub. There used to be four and five Jesuits in that rectory. It was just an old house, you know. They were all young Jesuits and the pastors. There were a lot of things going on.