

Oral History Project
Interview with Mollie Alstott
Interviewer: Duane Sycz
October 30, 2003
Cleveland, Ohio

Duane Sycz: Okay, What is your name and can you please spell it.

Mollie Alstott: My name is Mollie Alstott, M-o-l-l-i-e A-l-s-t-o-t-t

DS: Thank you.

DS: What are some of your early childhood memories in Tremont?

MA: Oh, I remember as a very happy time, busy time, there was a depression going on when we were growing up going to Tremont schools. I had a younger sister and we both had our own friends and as we got into high school that was really definite, she had her friends and I had mine. And also, it was like a small village, because I lived on Professor Street and that was parallel to West Fourteenth Street which both of those streets were business streets in Tremont. We had practically everything that was needed there was a butcher store, there was a grocery store, hardware store, doctor offices, funeral parlors, and many churches And it was very diversified neighborhood because it had a lot of different kinds of nationalities groups living there. And to this day they have many churches there. When I went to church I went to Saint Peter and Paul on West Seventh and College Avenue And at that time there were more churches in that Tremont area than any place in Ohio so church was important. Another reason was we had a lot of social activities at church. The folks were from Ukrainian descent so Saint Peter and Paul is a Ukrainian Catholic Church. And after going to Tremont elementary school most of the day we came home and had a bite to eat and we went over to the church, because there we learned about Catechism and, bible church, Ukrainian language , and arts and culture to. So, to this day I have friends from that era, in fact, at this age I still meet with high school kids , some of them were from Tremont so often times we would talk about this.

DS: What did your... Where did your parents move to Tremont and do you know why they moved to Tremont?

MA: Well, my Dad and my sister have the exact dates, I'm a little hazy about that. But my Dad and Mother both came from Austria, Hungary Empire at that time. That was the section of Poland, Hungry, Ukrainian, the Slovic areas that was under Austria, Hungary Empire. And then after World War the countries were divided again. And even after WWII they were divided again, but both of them came from Western Ukrian into Poland and southeastern Poland. My Dad came, because everybody that came at that time, pre world war days, knew that, heard about people going to America and earning money and making a livelihood , freedom of religion, and it was just an opportunity they thought they would like to take rather than staying at home and probably becoming farmers and

not having much of a future there .And of course, earning wages was a very very level there, so he came and he came through New York , stopped in Port Jervis because he had a sister living there. Most of the people that came here had relatives already, so they were able to visit them and the relatives in turn would try to find jobs for them or at least find a place for them to live. With my mother she came directly to Cleveland and she had a sister that lived across the street from the church and she was able to live there until she found some place to work. And they met at church. My mother and Dad married.[inaudible]And so from that , both of them worked and my Dad had a variety of jobs. And he learned English quickly and he became a businessman Worked at city hospital it was called then, it's now General Metropark. General Metro Hospital I think and that gave him a good background to. And then eventually he was able establish his own business and became a prominent member of the community of the church and the bank. My mom was a homemaker like all mothers were in those days.

DS: You mentioned he spoke English and he learned it quickly, did he speak another language? [Dog barking]

MA: Yes, he could talk Polish, a bit of Russian, English and Ukrainian. [Dog barking]

DS: Did he teach that to you and your sister?

MA: No, actually we learned Ukrainian at school, but when you live in a neighborhood like that you hear a lot of people talking in different languages and you pick up on some of that. I could understand Polish pretty much, to speak it no, but even my Ukrainian isn't that great but I still remember a lot of it and I can read some of it to. [Dog barking]

DS: You mentioned the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood, can you mention all the different nationalities you can remember?

MA: Well, right in our block we had Polish neighbors. The funeral director, the second door over, was Ukrainian and we had a nice Jewish man that had a department store there and he was very good to the neighborhood, in fact, he would give people credit. They can purchase things they needed and eventually they would pay him whatever they earn, whatever they needed to. Then across the street more Polish people, but there were Italians, a Greek family lived on the other side of us, there were Russian people, Slavic people, Slovak is guess what I should say and also Czechoslovakians. German people... So it was very mixture of people.

DS: You mentioned your sister Irene, is that your older sister?

MA: That's my younger sister, yes.

DS: No brothers?

MA: No brothers just the two of us.

DS: With the two of you, what size house did you guys live in?

MA: Oh, Well our house is still standing today, in fact, it's Edison Pub. It's one of the popular places where people to play darts I guess. I guess, it's a bar, it's quite popular with the younger crowd. My Dad had a confectionery store up front and we lived in quarters behind it, so we had two bedrooms, a bathroom, a living room, and kitchen. We did have a back porch and it overlooked the backyard and we even had flowers in the back and a garage. And hmm, upstairs, up front was a dentist office and he was good for the neighborhood to Doctor Stoufer, I think he was Hungarian. And then there were quarters for another family behind him. So they had two bedrooms and a bath, just the same set up we had downstairs. With the doctor offices I don't remember to much about them, but there were several rooms there.[Dog barking]

DS: You had two bedrooms, did that mean you had to share a room with your sister?

MA: Yes indeed, and sometimes we had a few arguments, getting into each other's clothes. I often accused her of taking my sweaters to school. In fact, at Lincoln High, when you get to that grade sometimes you don't have a first period, you go to second period whatever. I can remember Irene always avoided me because if she had something of mine on, she tried to cut into the hall so she wouldn't see me. because that presented an argument. [Laughing]But most of the time we got along pretty good. But at home ,our bed, we had a double bed, I remember drawing an imaginary line down there. Don't you dare touch that line or go over it. We had separate drawers and we were very careful about that. But like I say, Irene had her friends and I had mine and we all got along well.

DS: Did you ever get married?

MA: Yes, After Lincoln High I went to Kent and I met my husband, Louis Alstatt. I was a freshman and he was a sophomore and by the time I became a sophomore, it wasn't eminent that the war was approaching, but the government, our government was really interested in getting young men interested in flying and into the services. So Louie joined... I don't remember the exact title of that program, but he wanted to study to be a navy pilot. And even in college he took flying lessons and he entered that program and he went on with training.

DS: Do you remember where your reception was at?

MA: Well, we had a very fast marriage because after we got in , we got in June 41', the war started December 7, 1941.He was a cadet at Corpus Christi and I was at Kent and our plans were to marry after he finished and I finished school , but unfortunately it didn't turn out that way. He became an Ensign and when he got leave December 1942 he proposed, and of course he was in uniform, and he was just on a short leave but we decided to get married in January. January 31,1943. He went out to war, I started to go back to school but I thought it was time to get out a job and earn some money for our future. With that I worked at Navy finance downtown.

DS: What church did you get married at?

MA: We got married in a Methodist church in Cuyahoga Falls .So he was a different religion and that presented a problem, but eventually we were remarried in a catholic chapel in Norfolk so we were good and married twice.[Laughing]

DS: Did you have two different receptions?

MA: Receptions not really, although my folks gave us a reception after, let's see, after the marriage and it was at Hotel Cleveland I think and it was just close friends and family, it was a small reception.

DS: Do you remember what kind of food was served?

MA: No, not really. No that's...I have pictures of it and it was a nice group of people. It wasn't like the usual marriages in the neighborhood. Because when we were children we remembered attending a lot of weddings, in fact, there was they called in Colonial Hall on college and it was between the polish church and the Ukrainian church and that's where everybody had there wedding receptions. It was always like a Greek wedding, it was a real wild time sometimes. But that's where my sister and I learned to dance. Because the kids would be off in another room Polkaing and then when I grew older maybe 5th or 6th graders, Dad would take us to the dance floor and waltz us around so we felt like we were really getting there. And of course when we were at Lincoln, now this is Tremont, now Lincoln was in Tremont, but that was a happy time in my life to.

DS: Do you remember what kind of music was played at the reception?

MA: At the reception? Waltzes and Polkas. This was like the late 30's and into the 40's. We didn't have that wild music that you do now. [Laughing]

DS: Where did your parents work?

MA: Work?

DS: Right.

MA: Well, I don't know all the jobs my Dad had, but I know he worked at the hospital for one and I don't know if he worked for the railroad or not I'm not sure about that. And with my mom, I guess she did various cleaning but the job she talked about mainly is being a cook over at the Hallie Brothers. She really became a favorite of the families they had one chef there, cook or what you want to call it, a baker I guess that was really terrific with pastries and she learned to make pies exceptionally well. Everybody that knew my mother knew she made the best pies in the neighborhood, but she told us a story about the fact she didn't know a lot of English when she first started, when she first worked downtown. And she knew she had to transfer cars so she took the streetcar from Hallie's to Public Square and then she would transfer to another streetcar to take her

down to Tremont, and she forgot which number or letter was on . So she got to the square and there was a seat there and she felt she could just sit there and maybe eventually she would find somebody that spoke a language that she knew. And sure enough there was a lady talking Polish to another lady so she interrupted them, because she understood Polish and could speak it so she asked them to please help her get to the right streetcar. How wonderful she was able to do that, because if that happened to me I would probably panic and not know what to do. [Laughing]

DS: When you lived in Tremont, where did you play?

MA: Well, we played in our backyard, we took walks, we ice skated behind Lincoln Bathhouse, because they had flooded that field there for the kids to use there. We played in our basement because we had a great big basement and I remember that Sam Rothman, a fellow that owned the department store, he gave us some great big old boxes we could play with so we took them down there and made, we separated the basement into rooms, we had different rooms to play in .And occasionally he gave us some old shoes that were not sale able and we got clothes from our parents and from some of the ladies and played dress up in high heels and long dresses.

DS: Did you play any other types of games?

MA: Well, we played the usual tag, hide and go seek, and all that. And just chase around the block I know a lot of people thought Tremont was a not a very safe place to grow up in, because there were reports about some gangsters living down near 5th Street, closer to where the factories were. There was a well known gangster that was suppose to have lived there, but you know with our parents, I guess they kept an eye on all the kids, because we knew we couldn't go further than this block or that block and if we did we had to go in a group, so we were pretty aware of it, but just growing up there we knew we thought, we never even heard about it, robbing some kids. It was funny because the people next door their quarters were very close and sometimes there was only that much room [Mollie showing about a foot] a foot away from other residents. And summer night with no air conditioning you could hear each other snoring, that's how close some of the houses were. And that area in Tremont originally had some beautiful homes on West Fourteenth. And then as immigrants came in two different waves, they found they needed more housing so the houses that they had, like maybe around Eleventh Street and Tenth Street they would build a second house on that property because they had space there. So you see a lot of that in Tremont.

DS: You mentioned earlier the church that you went to, can you please tell me again what the church name is?

MA: Alright, it's Saint Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic Church. Actually, it's a Greek Catholic church. So it's Saint Peter and Paul Greek Catholic Church.

DS: Did you go to church with neighbors or by yourself?

MA: With my sister always, sometimes with my mother and special holidays my Dad, I remember he would like to go to church, he liked to sing although his voice wasn't that good, but we always tried to go up in the choir. And you can overlook the church, you know Greek Catholic Byzantine churches are very, there really beautiful with their icons and paintings you know.

DS: What language was mass said in?

MA: It was said in Ukrainian for a long time, then eventually they started having English masses because they knew as the children grew up, if they didn't have English as a second language there they would lose a lot of their parishioners because other churches were starting to have English masses and services also.

DS: Growing up can you remember what kind of food was your favorite?

MA: Oh, yes. Chicken was a good favorite and stuffed cabbage was very good. Homemade chicken soup was delicious and we had vegetables, desserts, apple pie especially. Occasionally, we would have some Chinese food, that was a real treat for us that meant somebody had to go out and get it because there was no Chinese restaurants in the neighborhood. Then when we went to some of our friend's homes sometimes we would get a taste of what they had like spaghetti, cabbage, or perogi. Do you know what perogis are? [I shook my head, yes] On Easter it was always an established meal. It was always ham, stuffed eggs, sausage, and potatoes.

DS: Do you remember what your least favorite?

MA: Actually, I like pretty much everything, but I discovered I'm allergic to shrimp so that was really an eye opener, because I thought everybody likes this shrimp everybody keeps talking about but it never stayed down for me.

DS: Did your mom teach you how to cook? And the bakery, her specialty pies?

MA: No, she never sat down and said this is the way you do it, but as we grew older we would help her and ask her for some help We would always ask her for proportions and it was always a little bit of that and little bit of this and a cup of this so it was always really from memory, trials and tribulations.

[Tape stopped]

[Tape on]

DS: When did you or your parents grocery shop?

MA: Well, I know once a week, at least once a week mom would go to the West Side Market and my dad had a car and if he was busy with his business, the confectionery store. Why there were some young men. Remember this was the depression days, and

there was a lot of people out of work and sometimes there were these young men who were out of work, that maybe helped my dad carrying things inside the store for business. And they just kind a hung around to see if they could be of any help. Well, one of them was trusted, my dad depended on him, so Harry would take my mom to the market and we would go with her. But if we had daily things to get there was a grocery store a block away and a dairy store across the street , so my mom would send us over for incidentals and stuff.

DS: You mentioned the West Side Market and you mentioned some other stores, so you primarily stayed in the neighborhood for shopping?

MA: Yes, like I said that whole area, Tremont area, was almost like a little village, because you didn't have to leave it except maybe for in cases like you wanted to go downtown or to the West Side Market and that was close enough. People, actually people walked there.

DS: So for the most part everybody walked everywhere? They didn't have to drive or take a streetcar?

MA: Yeah, I remember Irene and I and with our mutual friends this time, one of the biggest thrills, was to walk across the old central viaduct which is gone. So it was 14th all the way across the flats to downtown and we would walk to the Hipodome Theater and go to the movies or whatever they were playing. I remember my dad and mother would take Irene and me to the vaudeville shows there. That was a lot of fun, because it was so different for us and a lot of children didn't have that opportunity. So we started enjoying the theater at a very young age.

DS: Did you have refrigerators?

MA: I had an icebox. [Mollie laughing]

DS: So if you bought meat, you bought it everyday?

MA: Yes, although my parents got a refrigerator as soon as they came out, because they were able to do that. But a lot of people had to rely on getting ice from the ice man , who came around periodically , and he would know how much ice to bring up the steps maybe by a tag that you put out in the front window. I remember 25, 50, 75.

DS: You mentioned earlier about Easter, do you remember what other kinds of foods were served during other holidays like Christmas, or Thanksgiving?

MA: No, I really can't although I think it was more American food than anything. I know during lent, lent before Easter we really fasted a lot and often times we couldn't eat any meat , no dairy products on good Friday , church restrictions, so I remember that . A lot of people still do that yet.

DS: Any certain foods served during the weddings that you attended?

MA: It was always ethnic affair. It was stuffed cabbages, sausage, ham, chicken, potato salad. Just the usual affair that you have even now at weddings.

DS: When the Abbey Bridge was out, did it make it difficult to go shopping?

MA: No, because then we used the bridge going across from University Drive across over to West 25th because that was closer for us anyway to go to the market.

DS: What was dating like when you were a teenager?

MA: Dating like, well, we started or I started dating about I guess the 10th grade. Prior to that, we were in mixed company and we enjoyed playing with the boys, ice skating and things like that, but by the 10th grade you kind a separated and you went to dances that were held at the school or churches. Saint Michael's on Scranton Road was a good place to dance and they had school dances also. So by that time to maybe even in 9th grade we started dating, but I could remember my first date in the 10th grade and it was George Surdockis, a handsome Greek.[Mollie laughing]

DS: Do you remember other places you went on dates?

MA: Movies,movies, sometimes to the library , but mainly movies and also dances. Once in a while there was a birthday party, I remember I had a party I think in about 10th grade, and I asked my dad if I could use the brand new garage because the garage was built later.It was nice and new and fresh.It had threee doors and I wanted this to be for my friends and my sister and her friends were sneaking around to see if they could peak in and see what we were doing,because we covered the windows. We were just dancing and having some soda pop and things like that. Nobody was drinking in those days or even smoking. But you know by 11th and 12th grade some of the girls and fellows were smoking by then.

DS: When you went on dates were they individual dates or were they group dates?

MA: Usually group dates, but to the movies it was single.

DS: What can you remember about Lincoln Park? Any good memories?

MA: Yes, I can remember walking around Lincoln Park with the lady that lived upstairs behind us, she kind a looked after us when mom and dad were busy with the business. And she loved to walk ,so every so often she 'd say let's go take a walk and we would walk from Professor over to West Fourteenth and go entirely around the entire park I remember a snowy nights, it was really beautiful because they had bushes around the entire park, now they are all gone. You know, to see the pretty snow on the ground and it was so peaceful.

DS: What High School did you graduate from?

MA: Lincoln High School

DS: Did you have any favorite subjects?

MA: Yes, I liked even at Tremont history and geography terrific teachers. In Lincoln it was journalism for one, literature and English. I didn't especially like Latin, it was too tough, but we had a lot of fun. Photography, I helped the photography teacher with developing film and all of that. Gym was fun too.

DS: Were there any subjects that the boys were separated from the girls?

MA: I think we had a personal hygiene class, but I don't remember that too much and of course gym was separated too.

DS: Do you think Tremont was a good place to grow up at?

MA: Oh, I do. I really do, for one thing, with so many different kinds of children coming to Tremont they had excellent teachers. Sometimes children came that didn't even speak English and they went to those schools. Discipline was terrific, I don't know how those women managed except in those days you didn't have all the distractions that you do now and when you had a homework assignment you went home and you did it. And you just had so much time, no television sometimes no radio until you finished your homework, so the parents were very good to keep track of the kids and their behavior. And the teachers were very talented, I remember that we did water colors in the 5th grade, I wish I had that one, I can still remember a picture of an iris and hmm we did what do you call that, it wasn't needlepoint, it was hucking a lot of people don't even know what that is, but hucking is almost like needlepoint we did that and we had the opportunity to make a putting green. What do you call when people go to play golf? [Duane answers miniature golf] Okay, we made a miniature golf fair, because Mr. Beckla, I think his name is, I don't remember, anyways the girls and boys both did sawing and painting and getting the things all together.

DS: Lots of crafts.

MA: Lots of crafts, lots of crafts for the children and they also had Merrick House, which was a like a social community center for children that maybe wanted to learn how to cook, maybe wanted to learn better English, Merrick House and Pilgram church are excellent in helping out the neighborhoods with things like that. Better opportunities to learn crafts and they get people involved in programs where they need funding or things like that.

DS: Do you think Tremont is better or worse right now than before?

MA: Well, I really can't answer that because I don't live there anymore, but I do visit often. Now, there is a influx of different kinds of immigrants, they have more, I guess, Spanish people coming in, maybe Korean, maybe Korean because they have a Korean church there now so it's a little bit different. And they have two different Spanish churches that we never had there before. So when you visit the neighborhood, it looks pretty good and I think they did a terrific job with keeping it safe. I know they have block meetings. Every two or three blocks they have a meeting and they go over what's important, are there any problems? And the police help them out quite a bit, I think it's patrolled pretty much and if something arises where it's a problem I think the councilmen will help them out.

DS: I'm going to stop the tape.

MA: Okay.

End of side 1

DS: You mentioned, do you still keep in touch with some of your old neighbors or anybody in the Tremont area still?

MA: Yes, I kind a initiated reunions. We had from Lincoln High School we had our 25th anniversary, no 27th, we didn't have a 25th a 27th. We did this at Saint Mary's , but in later years, I think our 50th we had about 50 high school graduates come down to the zoo, we rented a special room there and that's pretty amazing considering that we had only 141 kids in our class from Lincoln. Okay, and then after that we enjoyed it so much we continued with another reunion in Tremont. We had it at Kosta's, Kosta's was on 11th and Fairfield, it's gone now it's empty but we had a great time there. Just recently, we decided to meet, whoever was interested and there about a dozen of us, that meet every other month for lunch. From the Tremont group, almost all the people that we meet that meet now, are from Tremont originally, Tremont through Lincoln.

DS: So you've been back to the neighborhood frequently?

MA: Frequently, yes, in fact, I go back for fund raisers and I give tours there

DS: How do you think about, what's your opinion on all the new restaurants in the area?

MA: I think it's wonderful. I think it brought back a lot of money and growth to the neighborhood. I think it brought back a lot of people that are building there, they have townhouses and apartments and it's kind of a trendy neighborhood now. I think a lot of the younger people that maybe work in town live there now and even the churches are sprucing up and they have good attendance. When you consider that some of those churches date back to 1850 there still being used , in fact, some of them started being a

Methodist church , Saint George for one, that was a Methodist church and now it's a Lebanese Orthodox Church .Pilgrim church always been a congregational United Church of Christ. Across the street from them, that was, before that was a Baptist Church and now it's a Spanish church. So churches are making an impact there to. A lot of people that moved away come back to church their because they still enjoy going to their original churches.

DS: You mentioned you give tours in Tremont, where do you take these people and where are they from?

MA: Alright, there are many different groups that give tours, but I do it for metroparks because I got involved with our zoo originally, I've been a volunteer at our zoo for 22 years, so once Canal, I always forget, Canal Center opened they started giving tours of different places in Cleveland, Tremont was one of them, a friend of mine got me interested in helping them out she and I , Rosemary Portacar, she and I do tours for Nancy Desmond the manager there. We do them twice a year. We decide where we want to take a group of 20 people , you have to sign up for these and but there are other people that do tours, sometimes you have to pay for them and sometimes you can get Lolly the Trolley, a group of people that way to, but we don't charge of course.

DS: When you give your tours, what stops do you take these people to?

MA: We usually start at Lincoln park and go down Jefferson, we always go by Tremont because I have little history of Tremont when it was built and all that, then we'll down to Jefferson, clear down to Gospel Union Press Building. Are you familiar with that one? [Duane answers no] Well it's a great big complex and at one time it housed people that published Gospel Union Press and when we lived there it was kind of secluded, the kids are always curious what was going on in that great big building. They wanted children away from there garage and driveways or whatever. I'm losing track now. We would go down to 7th street over to Saint Peter and Paul , but mainly we would go down Professor because West 14th and Professor were the two main artaries of business and activities. Sometimes we will work ahead and try to give one of the churches to give us a private tour, so we've done Saint John Cantius that way. We would walk down Professor and point out all the restaurants to the people. Sometimes we would walk all the way to University Drive, you can see the outline of Cleveland, the skyline of Cleveland. Sometimes we go down Fairfield, we've been inside the Greek church. And also Saint Mary's it just depends on the mood were in and what day it is and the weather and all of that , but we try to do something different every time.

DS: You mentioned earlier, your Dad ran a confectionery store, can you remember what you can buy for a penny or a nickel?

MA: Yeah, the confectionery store had canned goods. That's one other reason we didn't have to go out to shop too much. Canned goods, lunch meat, cheeses, bagels, pickles things like that. Cleaning things. I remember the refrigerator, or the ice box we had there and then a candy area where they had a lot of goodies. I still have the little plates my Dad

placed chocolate on. I have little stand that were candlestick holders, but they held up these pretty dishes just to make them attracted. I remember we were always tempted with the candy of course, and lunch meat.

DS: Do you remember what it was like during the depression? Did you help each other out?

MA: Yes, I know that we were very close touch with my cousin who lived on Jefferson and it was very difficult for them because their dad wasn't around and there mother had to work and the three girls really helped with the cooking and cleaning. I know Dorothy often times would be invited to go on trips with us , to eat with us, and did things she ordinarily wouldn't be able to do, so she was a close cousin of ours. Like I say, we were fortunate because my dad had a car, so we would often take rides to Edgewater and also we went to see my Aunt Sophie, who lived in New York, and that was a trip in late 30's and my dad had a old Chrysler. One time my sister took her best girlfriend on a trip to Niagara Falls with us, so we did things like that and also I know my dad helped out an awful lot people with money and food.

DS: When you went shopping for clothes, was there a clothing store or did you have to go downtown for clothes?

MA: We went downtown with my mom and she would us, she would really select them for us and once in a while there were a lot of dress makers in the neighborhood, you know that was a livihood for a lot of woman, we would have clothes made to.

DS: When you went downtown, did you take the streetcar or drive?

MA: We took the streetcar. We took the streetcar with my mother.

DS: Did you have the opportunity when you were growing up, to go to any amusement parks?

MA: Oh yes, Yeah we went to Euclid Beach Park and there to I remember taking a streetcar out there just briefly one time and I don't know who I was with, but usually my dad or one of his workers would take us to Euclid Beach Park. When we did that my mother would invite her sister and my cousin [Mollie Come on in] so it would be and we would always take a lunch basket with us.

DS: Is there anything else you would like to add?

MA: No, except that I'm really happy that Tremont turned around and is becoming such a popular growing area. People are really enjoying it and because I know there were times in the past where it was really going down hill, like in the 70's.

DS: Thank you very much.

MA: Okay.
End of interview.