



from left to right: Sam Norwood, MBA'94, Elisabeth Palmer Norwood, Mary Harvey Kindel, Jessie Kindel Palmer, and Bob Palmer

Mary Harvey Kindel is flanked by her granddaughter and husband on her right and her oldest daughter and her husband on her left.

Born: April 9, 1907

Death: January 8, 2001

(A large part of this interview tape was inaudible and therefore not transcribed.)

Mary Kindel considered herself “one of the most fortunate people on the face of the Earth with [her] connections in Chicago.” She was the daughter of a father who was a faculty member at the University of Chicago School of Medicine and a mother who had a “great interest in the arts.” “With a father and son-in-law (Robert Palmer) and his family, Walter Palmer (94, retired faculty member, at the time of this interview), we could have a member of the medical faculty at [University of] Chicago for 89 consecutive years,” Mary said. Furthermore, with her father’s (B. C. H. Harvey) medical knowledge and interest in English literature and her mother’s (Hoult) interest in music and French, “. . . it all fit together so beautifully with the Kindel family and their interests. It was wonderful. I’ve been a very fortunate lady.”

Until she was 12 years old, Mary visited Grand Rapids, MI, every summer as her mother’s aunt, Mrs. Millard Palmer, lived at Oakwood Manor and her father, Charles Hoult, lived in Cascade Township with his trout ponds. Through this aunt, Mary was related to early settlers of the area. In 1834, Mrs. Millard Palmer, a member of the Seymour family, came to Grand Rapids. At that time the Hinsdill family had built the first factory in the area. It was a wool mill, but it soon burned down. Nevertheless, one of the Hindills married Henry Seymour, and they lived in a log cabin where, at the time of this interview, the Morton House stood. According to Mary, in a letter that he wrote from Lansing, MI, where he had gone for a meeting, Henry wrote, “Be very careful. Don’t let the children out to walk up the [Fulton St.] hill because the bears and the wolves were particularly dangerous this year.”

The Seymours eventually moved from their log cabin to a house. They built it on a hill, “which was then the NE corner of what is now Seymour Square,” said Mary. Mary Seymour, who was

Mary's namesake and grandmother, married Gaylord Hoult of Cascade. The Hoult's were among the early pioneers of that area.

For her early education, Mary, along with "all the faculty children," went to the University of Chicago. "It was just a little tiny, wonderful oasis in the center of Chicago," recalled Mary. "There were always fascinating, interesting things going on, and being part of the faculty, I knew practically all of them [e.g., Dr. James Breasted, who was on the team to first open King Tut's tomb in Egypt]." For eighth grade, Mary went to a boarding school, but then she "went back to the University to college, and [she] loved it."

Other influences in her life were family friends. For instance, during high school, one summer her family stayed at Mr. Edgar Goodspeed's summer home. He was working on his translation of the Bible. Mary remembered being "bored almost to death" every night, listening to him read from his manuscript. At the time of this interview, however, she realized what an incredible experience it had been as Goodspeed's translation was used by many college students "because it was the most understandable in our time."

On one of her visits to Oakwood Manor, Mary met her future husband, Tom Kindel. They were married on June 24, 1930. At that time, he and his brother Chuck owned Kindel Furniture Co. They were the second-generation owners. The company had been started by their father, Charles J. Kindel. The company had a long history in Grand Rapids furniture making. The family was particularly proud of the fact that the company never closed even during the Great Depression. About her marriage, Mary said, "Tom and I were very happy, and he supported me in the things I was interested in [in Grand Rapids]."

And Mary was interested in many community organizations. "For a little while," she was on the board of the Art Gallery. Then, she was "asked to be the chairman of the nursing school committee of Blodgett Hospital." Over the next 19 years, Mary, with the help of her father and the University of Chicago School of Medicine, worked to have Blodgett receive national accreditation. She referred to this accomplishment as one of two challenges that she met while on this committee. The other was dealing with shortages of doctors and nurses during WWII. For these two achievements Mary earned an "alumni citation" from the University of Chicago.

Mary's other long-term commitment was to the founding and support of the first Planned Parenthood facility in Grand Rapids. She was on the investigating and planning committee at Fountain Street Church. For 2 years, Mary "went to every clinic in Michigan, Chicago, and New York, to ask about how you should set up a Planned Parenthood." Her husband donated the first money for the project. In 1965, "it was formally organized as Planned Parenthood Grand Rapids," said Mary. "And I am the last remaining founder. The rest of them are all dead or gone." She was on the board for 27 years and secretary for the first 12 years. At the time of this interview, the organization had been renamed Planned Parenthood of West Michigan and had expanded into eight counties. There were then three clinics in Grand Rapids, one of which had been named for Tom and Mary Kindel. In 1989, 22,000 people were seen, but no abortions were done. "We do no abortions. We never have," said Mary.

Even at the time of this interview, Mary was still active in Planned Parenthood “because [she felt] very strongly in the need for it. . . .” She explained, I think Pro Choice and Pro Life are wrong. I think the emphasis should be on prevention and education. . . . That’s what I try to promote and . . . mostly what I know.”

For 60 years Tom and Mary were members of the Fountain Street Church. They were both active on the board, and Mary was also involved in Sunday school. The couple had three daughters— Jessie (1931), Mary (1933), and Katy (1945). In 1965, at only 20 years old, Katy was killed instantly in a car accident. The Kindels also had five grandchildren.

In 1960, “Tom got these terrible physical problems [detached retina],” according to Mary. In 1965, he sold the business and said he would like to see the world. So the couple traveled to 47 different countries.

After his death, the family established the Tom Kindel Student Loan Fund at the Grand Rapids Junior (now Community) College. “Over 16 in one year used that same money, and 15 paid it back,” said Mary.

For 5 years, Mary was on the Aquinas College Emeritus (now OLLI) board. She was on the committee that started the annual award dinner. Mary had a connection with President Jerry Ford through her husband. When Ford was 13 years old, his first Boy Scout master was Tom. Mary wrote a letter to Ford to ask him to be the first speaker, and he accepted the invitation.

Mary also recalled teaching First Aide classes during WWII and afterwards at East Grand Rapids High School, St. Cecilia, and Burton High School. Furthermore, the family supported the following organizations: the Salvation Army, the Eye Research Institution and Retina Clinic in Boston, the B. C. H. Harvey Loan Fund at the University of Chicago (named for her father), the Grand Rapids Symphony, and the Art Gallery.

After fighting for 13 years, Mary’s mother died of cancer. During that time, she was treated by Dr. Charlie Huggins, who received a Nobel Prize for his work in hormone treatment for cancer. Mary called her mother a “great human guinea pig.”

Near the end of this interview, Mary mentioned again how fortunate she had been in her life, except for the tragic death of her daughter Kate. In particular, because her family members no longer lived near her, she had this to say about her friends, “I love my friends, and they’re all so . . . good to me. I just can’t get over it.”

Other Resources:

<http://kindelfamily.org/Kindel/html/I9.html>

Excerpt from the book, *The Education of Gerald Ford*, by Hendrik Booraem V:

https://books.google.com/books?id=JQHsCgAAQBAJ&pg=PA52&lpg=PA52&dq=Mary+Harvey+Kindel&source=bl&ots=GxwJiJQt_x&sig=BZv4Bw8WwLPhDIQ_k2LDFKIo6OOQ&hl=en&s

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