

Lillian Little (Farnsworth House)
Interviewed by Shaunté Smith (2002)

My name is Lillian Marie Little. I was born in Boston in 1928. That was right before the depression, but I don't remember it because I was so young. I grew up in a family of five ... I lived with my parents and my 2 sisters. So it was a small family. My parents didn't have jobs that paid too much, you know. Both of them worked and we were on the Welfare, like everybody else. My Dad worked — he emptied the trash, and my Mother did house work.

One of my most happy memories from when I was really young was when my Dad took me to see a parade. He got me a balloon, but I lost it. And we were poor, so that was a big deal ... but he got me another one! He tied that one to the button on my coat so I wouldn't lose it.

My nickname is Ririe because that's what my younger sister called me. Then all my little cousins and nieces and nephews started calling me Auntie Ririe, so in my family, that's my nickname. When I was young we had longer winters and it was really cold. I know we had more snow than we do now. I remember the snow being so deep that you couldn't see across the street. We loved it ... we could play in it, build igloos— things like that. We ice skated in the parks, roller skated on the sidewalks ... we didn't have rinks like they have now. And sometimes I'd go home crying from being so cold because I'd stay out too long!

Going to the movies was my favorite thing to do. We'd go to the movies on Saturday afternoons. We'd have some money from baby sitting. There was this woman who would give me the show money every week — I got to see all the movies — because I'd pick her up a china plate. You know, she'd get a set of dishes with fourteen caret gold decoration on it! Some weeks you'd get a plate, or a cup, or a saucer or whatever. And I got to go to the movies just for picking up her dish each time.

Back then you got two movies. You got the news reel. You got the serial with Gene Autry (a cowboy) or somebody. You got a cartoon. You got coming attractions. And, you got two feature movies. It was good. And then, of course, what were the movies then, ten or fifteen cents? Do you know that popcorn you get now? That big bag for three dollars— that I don't buy. Well, back then I got a big bag like that for a dime or a nickel.

When I was young, I played piano, and we had dances with names like the Huck-A-Buck, the Apple Jack, the Camel Walk, and all that kind of boogie woogie dancing. It was fun. I also like knitting ... that was a favorite pastime. We had cats when I was growing up, and they had long, funny names: one was Seymour, another was Maximillian, and another was Webster-Wilkins. When we were going somewhere we got around by street car (you call them trolleys!), or by walking. My family couldn't afford a car. and I didn't own a bike, but sometimes I rented one if I had the money.

There wasn't too much money for us kids to spend, you know. But I always liked having money. And, I always had a little root beer barrel bank under my bed that had a few pennies in it. To earn money, I had customers that I sifted their cinders. At that time we had that stove in the middle of the kitchen. People bought bags of coal by the hundreds of pounds, you know, and you'd sift their cinders.

I also had my paper route, for The Chronicle. and there was another paper called The Guardian. I sold them and I won a pair of roller skates from The Chronicle. I was proud of that! When I got some new customers, I was paid a nickel. I made two cents and I gave three cents to the paper. I had other customers that I'd go to get The Daily Record for ... that's The Boston Herald now. It was two cents! So I'd go get their Record every night when it came out, and at the end of the day I had made a dime. I could rent my own bike too for a quarter. I knew how to ride a bicycle, over to Columbus Park.

All my life, I've always had money in the bank. I was able to go Christmas shopping. and I could buy everybody a Christmas present. Well, at that time, you could get things for a dime or fifteen cent. So everybody got a Christmas present from me because I had money in the bank.

But I was also a kid who saved and I spent and I gambled. I put a nickel in the gum ball machine, you know, you had ones with the circles around them, that was a nickel candy. Cheez-Its were five cents for a big box. They had gum balls that if you put five pennies in the gum ball machine, sometimes you could get three good gum balls. And, it was two cents for speckled gum balls. I was economical with them. If I made out good on my gambling I'd spend one gum ball a day. I was really a hustlin' kid.

When I got to be a teenager, in the summertime, I'd go make up beds over there on Beacon Street ... fifteen dollars a week. You'd work six days during the week, and you made fifteen dollars. I remember one pay day I bought a bathing' suit, a skirt and a blouse, and gave my mother some money too. You could do all that. Things were so reasonable back then. The cost of living at that time was cheap. I do remember that. I didn't mind sifting the cinders. I would clean myself off in the basement before I would track it out. I was that kind of a little girl.

I've always lived in Boston, even though I've visited other countries, I've always lived here. I went to regular public school until the eighth grade, then I went to trade school. I liked some of my teachers, but not all of them. I liked spending time by myself, so I was kind of a loner. After school, I got married ... I married very young. I was only in my second year of high school. The second world war was happening at that time.

The seasons? I like them all. There's something good about all of them. I like swimming and camping in the summertime. The Fall is my favorite season because I enjoy watching the leaves change. And Spring is my favorite season after Fall because I like

to see things waking up ... I like the smell of Spring. It's sweet! My favorite color is purple.

Now I'm never home! I love to see shows in the theater. I went to see Aida in New York, and I'm going to hear the Three Tenors tomorrow ... I like to go bowling, I take ceramics classes, I love dominos, and I play every Friday with my friends.