

Violet MacArthur (Farnsworth House)
Interviewed by Zena Nieves (2001)

My name is Violet MacArthur. I was born in Maine on November 15, 1921. My mother was very sick when I was growing up, and I was the only one at home because my brothers and sisters were all grown up. So, one day my mother asked me to stay home from school and make her a cup of tea. I did the dishes and made her a cup of tea. She asked me how it felt to be able to stay home and take care of her when I was only in the third grade? I didn't know I could do that!

When I was in sixth grade I threw a spit ball at the teacher and it hit her. In those days they would "strap you." She took out the strap, but she didn't use it. I guess because she had all of my brothers and sisters in school before me. She asked me to walk home from school with her, and when I did she asked me why I did it. I said I didn't know! So she said 'well don't do it again.' And that was the end of it.

My mother had a parakeet. He could talk! She use to put his food up overhead, and he would go up and get it and drop it on the table. One time she was doing the dishes, and he dove right into the middle of the dishpan and got all wet. Later, when I would come home to visit, he'd say 'Violet's coming home,' then he'd go into my suitcase and pick stuff up for me. He liked to play peek-a-boo, but instead of hiding so I couldn't find him, he'd hide and say 'peek-a-boo' so I COULD find him. He lived to be 15 years old!

I was married very young. I was 19 when I got married. I met my husband, Carl, when we were playing Spin The Bottle. After that we went together steady, then we got married. I've been a widow for a long time now. But I have my daughter. She'll be 60 on June 16. And I'm almost 80 years old.

I lived most of my life in Maine, and I haven't traveled much. My husband died when my daughter was just a girl, so I had to work to support us. I didn't have a chance to travel. I moved to Boston from Maine. My mother had lived here before me. She told me how it was. I liked Boston. It was different from my hometown in Maine, but I liked it. I worked at Beth Israel Hospital in the housekeeping department. I had wanted to be a nurse, but I had back problems and couldn't pass the orthopedic exam. I worked there for 20 years.

I owned my house in Maine. I even painted that house., right to the tip of the roof. But it would be hard for me to live there now. You have to have a car to get around, and I don't drive.

My brother is an architect, he's still living. His wife is a teacher. He can do almost anything! When we were growing up, he was always good at building things. He's a good brother. One story about my brother was that the older children had to take care of the younger ones, and he was older than me. One day we were all shelling beans

together in the kitchen where my father had just painted the ceiling. I said to my brother let's try some of the grape juice that my father had made. When I took the top off the bottle, it splashed up on the ceiling and stained where my father had just painted. When he got home I said: 'Pa, you said if we always told the truth, we wouldn't get a lickin'. I splashed some grape juice on your clean ceiling.' But my brother was so scared he ran upstairs and hid.

I had a beautiful cat, but he didn't like music. I used to play the harmonica, so one day the cat came up and took the harmonica out of my mouth and put it on the table! How many cats would do that? That was funny. I learned to play harmonica in sixth grade. I can play the piano, organ, and harmonica by ear. I like any kind of music. I used to really like Perry Como's music— he just died. And I liked Gene Autry and Dale Evans. I use to watch all those programs on TV.

The most important things in my life were wanting to be a nurse, and playing music, and that's still true. I had a close friend that I took care of for thirty years. I had to learn everything there was to learn about nursing so she wouldn't have to go in a nursing home. She just passed away recently.

One of my good friends is Mrs. Wilson. We've been friends for years, she's very nice. All of us here try to keep together and take care of each other. We all have each other's telephone numbers, so if we have trouble, we can call each other. I got to know Melvin (Roche) through the Lifeline. He's the person on duty over the weekend. I have it because I live alone. It's like a box that you use if you have a medical emergency; you press the button, and two nurses will be at your door right away. One time I pressed it accidentally! Before I could call to say it was a mistake, the nurses were at the door in one minute's time! I was so embarrassed.

I've lived at Farnsworth House for 11 years. The property manager Mr. Dean, and Meriwether are so nice You can always go to them, tell them anything. It's beautiful here. They have a birthday party every month for everyone. They have a Thanksgiving party, they even have a garden out back. If you want to have a garden, you can go out and make your own part. You have to be 62 to get in here. Or, you have to have something seriously wrong, a disability. My daughter wants to move in here, too!