

Sun Cities Area Historical Society
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Case # 207

Interview with Evelyn Parry

September 20, 1991

Date of Birth: June 1917

Place of Birth: Janesville, Wisconsin

Evelyn Parry, the wife of DEVCO employee, Les Parry, arrived in Sun City in 1960, the first year it opened, and became an active volunteer in a number of associations.

Synopsis:

- Parents were dairy farmers. Had one brother.
- Mom a schoolteacher before marriage. Taught in a newly-built small country school with all 8 grades.
- Father attended University of Wisconsin at Madison for 2 years; studied agriculture.
- I grew up in Janesville; went to business college there for 2 yrs.
- Husband born in Dodgeville Wisconsin. Met after graduation. He was a Marine in WWII in the Pacific. Worked as mechanical engineer; supervised installation of machinery all over the country; worked out of Rockford, Ill.
- I started with General Motors as general office manager doing cost accounting right out of business college.
- First heard of Sun City when husband went west for a couple of weeks for his health; someone told him about Del Webb Company; but when he saw Sun City, he changed his mind. He liked the idea of rec. ctrs, golf, grocery stores, banks, etc.
- No one knew if Sun City would succeed. We were pioneers; arrived Feb. 1960. He met couples at their new home, would present keys after quality control inspection; assured couple would be happy in new home; started working as a key man, "inspection counselor", and invented 'key ceremony' giving keys to 16,000 homes in 15 years.
- I arrived in August, 1960 and eventually lived in 4 homes here.

- Early days: no churches; neighbors got acquainted quickly at the rec ctrs. or through the many volunteer projects
- Women joined Christian Fellowship and at holidays would set up fruit baskets and food, etc, and make baby layettes,
- I was always home at mealtime for my husband.
- We didn't see the need for incorporation. School taxes a concern for the community. We paid taxes before, think should have kept it going.
- DEVCO asked such things as 'how much money needed for retirees to live on per month in 1960?' I thought \$500 a month was good.
- DEVCO provided Christmas cards.
- As note-taker at the first Oakmont Rec Ctr mtg, I used roll of toilet paper for my notes.
- First years everyone was active. Lots of volunteers.
- My groups were: Sun Valley Lodge, baby group, Rebekah Circle, Women's groups, Information Referral Svc., Sun City Pioneers, and Sun City Area Historical Society.

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SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Evelyn Parry – Early Sun City Resident

Interviewer: Melanie Sturgeon 20 Sep 1991

Transcriber: Belva McIntosh April 2008

This is Melanie Sturgeon and on behalf of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation I am interviewing Evelyn Parry, one of the very early residents of Sun City, whose husband Les Parry was also "the key man", in her home in Sun City, Arizona.

STURGEON: Evelyn, can you tell me the approximate dates your parents were born and the places they were born in?

PARRY: About 1889 and 1892 – Mom was born in Wisconsin and Dad in Nebraska.

STURGEON: Nebraska? How did he get back to Wisconsin?

PARRY: He was brought back by his family when he was about eight years of age.

STURGEON: So what did your parents do for a living?

PARRY: Oh, successful dairy farmers.

STURGEON: Did your father buy the farm after he came back to Wisconsin?

PARRY: Yes, when he started out on his own. It is a beautiful farm. My brother is there now.

STURGEON: Was your mom a hard working farm wife?

PARRY: Yes, she had been a school teacher before they were married. It was a country school, just newly built, all eight grades.

STURGEON: Did your father go to school, I mean had he finished high school and everything?

PARRY: He went to the University at Madison for two years.

STURGEON: What did he study?

PARRY: Agriculture.

STURGEON: Can you tell me something about yourself? When you were born and where?

PARRY: Jamesville Wisconsin, June, 1917. I grew up there, went to schools there, business college. I had one brother.

STURGEON: Can you tell me a little bit about your husband?

PARRY: Oh yes. We went to the same schools and we met after we were out of school and he served as a marine in World War II in the Pacific and I was very worried about him. After he came home he went to – was a mechanical engineer of the F. & John Barnes Company and supervised the installation of machinery all over the country from the Rockford, Illinois Headquarters. He went to college as an engineer and medicine. We both grew up in Jamesville. He was born in Dodgeville Wisconsin. He was about four years older than me. We had no children. I went to Business College for two years. I studied general office, comptometer, bookkeeping. That was before computers. My favorite work was in the cost accounting department at General Motors, cost of assembly and proof of production on a monthly basis and I had four or five very nice girl helpers. Our reports went into the main office. I did that about ten years. It was a really interesting place. It was one big room, we had 100 girls and 50 men and we really worked hard to do a good job. There was a Fisher body assembly line and the bodies came right off to our Chevrolet Division and that is where they completed the cars, right off the line and then they were shipped all over the local area. Those Jamesville Chevrolets were about the best around. Les and I were married before the war. By the time we had been married five years he had been away half of the time. He enlisted in the Marine Corps. I was with him in San Diego until he had to leave. I stayed in Wisconsin while he was overseas. When he came back he went to work for the engineering company.

STURGEON: Would you tell me a little about what Jamesville was like when you were growing up?

PARRY: Jamesville was a very nice place. As I recall it was about 23 or 24,000. A nice high school, we were all friends and we have had our fiftieth anniversary. There were other smaller communities all around but Jamesville was the center of Southern Wisconsin. It was a combination industrial and farming company. We had General Motors and the home of the Parker Pen. We knew the Parker's. There was a ----- Woolen Mill that made this beautiful woolen fabric for the automobile industry. We had a business college, and at Melton, Melton College. That was a nice school. There was a teacher's college nearby and then Madison was of course forty miles.

STURGEON: Did you live in the town or out on the farm?

PARRY: Out on our country farm home until I was about thirteen. Then we moved into town. We lived with friends in their home. I loved reading and sewing. Mother taught me how to sew. I was involved in school activities, like the bookkeeping club and some of the activities that way rather than athletic. We were involved in church activities. That has always been a special part of our family, my parents were very generous. Many blessings to be thankful for. My husband was a very generous person too. Mother was involved in church. There were lots of church suppers for the visiting ministers. It was a great life. There were always neighbors and friends. If ever anyone had a problem or needed help there was always someone to help. My Dad was always willing and helpful. He was involved in the church. They were involved in activities in town too. They weren't involved in politics. My Dad was on the school board.

STURGEON: Do you remember very much about the depression? You must have been about sixteen when it started, or fourteen maybe?

PARRY: The depression didn't concern me like it did many of my friends because from the country – I recall one Thanksgiving we all brought something for the baskets for those who needed help. When I said my folks would bring a chicken the other kids thought that was wonderful to contribute meat in the baskets.

STURGEON: Do you know what the working conditions were like for some of the parents of your friends?

PARRY: I think they had prepared a little bit for that rainy day. That went to General Motors when they started, there were college graduates who wanted to go to work and they would stand in line waiting hours to have the next job or chance and probably produced the best Chevrolets around. They took pride in their work. In our little bank in our homeroom it would be down to pennies to deposit on bank day where it used to be a dime or a quarter. That is about the best I remember of my friends.

STURGEON: Do you remember how people felt when they were talking about Social Security?

PARRY: No, I don't recall anything about that. I didn't seem to have any worries as a youngster.

STURGEON: When you started approaching retirement age what were some of the concerns you were thinking about?

PARRY: I think I just retired into volunteer work. I was always hoping that our health would be as good as possible. We have always been blessed with friends. My husband is a very friendly person. My husband always wanted the best for me and I think we never worried about it. We weren't spendthrifts but we had lots of nice trips and about anything we wanted.

STURGEON: When you got ready to retire, in addition to Social Security, did you have any other pensions or benefits to help you?

PARRY: No, none at all. At General Motors we had a chance to contribute a portion of our pay and they would match it and then as I left, they didn't want me to leave but Les was here and that was where I wanted to be, and they gave me General Motors stock and bonds, but no pension. We probably converted them to some other help.

STURGEON: How did you first hear about Sun City?

PARRY: The dampness in the Midwest was not agreeable to my husband's sinus and so we had to find – Arizona had this soft and more agreeable climate and when he came here in a couple of weeks he felt fine and when he came home it bothered him so he said he was going back. He came for the climate mainly and he met this gentleman who told him about Sun City, Del Webb, he had never heard of Sun City before. Sun City was new, it was just opening and they said why

don't you go to work here, and my husband thought it was not enough pay and then he came out to see Sun City and he changed his ideas and he felt better and he wanted to go to work and be a part of Sun City. There were too many things he liked about Sun City – the recreation centers, the golf courses, the swimming pools and the banks and the grocery stores were all here. Well they were here and the people just moved in ready to enjoy it all. It just made every body happy.

STURGEON: When he took the job did he think it was going to be successful?

PARRY: I don't think any body knew. We were all pioneers. By the time I got here there were a lot of friends. He came here in February 1960. He had the appointment with the first couple who were ready to move into their new home. He met this couple at their home and he would present the keys after a quality control inspection to see if everything was all right – no broken windows or chipped woodwork and assured them they would soon be happy in their new homes as soon as they got settled and met their neighbors. His card says inspection counselor but he was affectionately known as “the key man”.

STURGEON: When you came out to join him did you feel strange, being so young and moving into a community for retired people?

PARRY: Oh, no. I didn't talk about my age. Everyone was nice. I got interested in golfing which is lots of fun and then came a volunteer project. I volunteered over at the Northwest Hospital because that was before Boswell. I was there and then I became a leader with the Girl Scouts. Were they surprised to have someone who didn't have youngsters. I was a leader for about three years. I did reading in one of the Peoria schools. When they were giving me the briefing they said it is a pretty little school. It is way out in the open and you can see it for miles and now you can hardly see the school for all of the homes. It was a pleasure to see them gain a grade or two. I came out here in August 1960.

STURGEON: When you first came out here were you worried at all about moving to a town that wasn't like the town you grew up in?

PARRY: No, it was just all interesting and exciting. I had come here in March. That was a beautiful time of year. We saw a rodeo parade. We looked around at other different places but this was just like a magnet to us. Les was feeling well and liked what he was doing.

STURGEON: Now, are you still living in the first home you bought?

PARRY: No, we moved around. I think we had four homes with three cars with a one car garage to begin with. That is where number two came in and then the third one – Les came one night and said there is a beautiful place there. You can see the mountains all around. So we moved. He could put an addition on the side of the yard for another car and a shop. And then we went to Cinnebar and that was great, it was an acre with the white post and the redwood and he put up a building. He had it designed just to match the house and he had the equipment that he had collected through the years and an overhead door so he could work on a car, besides the double garage. He had his desk there and a television. He said some men have a dog house, this is my poodle palace. After his death I realized that place was larger than I needed or could really

take care of. One day when I was over here at the exercise class I saw the sign and I thought that looks like a nice little home for me. I called the realtor, she had just put the other place up for sale. It was the first time I hadn't had a new home but it has been a nice home and the neighbors are great. It is quite special.

STURGEON: Can you tell me what it was like in the real early days in Sun City when people were moving in from all over and they didn't really know each other?

PARRY: I think the neighbors got acquainted real soon on both sides, sometimes adjoining. In the community centers and the churches they had all this help.

STURGEON: When you first came here they didn't even have a church did they?

PARRY: That's right. That is when Dr. Witt and his wife Gladys really guided us. He guided our new congregation in fellowship. He went around and organized little neighborhood groups and they invited us to their home and Gladys baked cookies. That was nice.

STURGEON: Did you get all involved in helping organize the church?

PARRY: Well, that was a little difficult because it was daytime and Les was working. But we were charter members when that time came.

STURGEON: Because Les worked for the corporation did you have much interaction with Del Webb?

PARRY: No, I went to work as a secretary at one of the Webb buildings and it was always nice to be involved. Like when they built a new building in downtown Phoenix we were all invited. That was his work and we had parties.

STURGEON: I know that when you first came it was just getting started really, how did you get involved in so many clubs? How did those get organized?

PARRY: I was busy over at the Northwest hospital. There were ladies, one was from San Francisco and one was from Montana and they started the Ladies Federated Club. But I was having so much fun playing golf that I was a year late instead of being a charter member.

STURGEON: I know that Dr. Witt started a lot of volunteer groups. Were you involved in those or can you tell me how that worked?

PARRY: I think that was for a singles group right off. That very first year I was with the board of Christian Education and we heard a siren go by and that sort of stopped us all. He said well there have been no deaths this first year and there are very few churches that can say that. Some of our ladies joined the Women's Fellowship right after they came and that is doing work to help others. At the holidays we would set up baskets with fruit and food. Well, The Federated Women's Club did the baby layettes and the nursery in Phoenix would call with the names of the most deserving. So I made my little kimono and I asked the ladies if they would please help me.

And they did, they would embroider them. I would go into Phoenix and they would give us the diapers they couldn't use any more. So that helped the budget. We would go out and deliver them.

STURGEON: Did you help with the Sun Valley Lodge when they were organizing that?

PARRY: Not at the time but I am there now with the auxiliary. I tried to be at home at meal time for my husband. Oh I like this – "I must do something for someone today. Round up my love and give it away. Telephone a friend just over the hill. Write on my heart several things to be done. It will be such a pleasure not to mention the fun. Write a few words on a little note to make someone glad I wrote. Remember a friend if I can't be there. Open my heart and just say a prayer. The day moves on and getting in high to give away love and friendship which money can't buy." In a way it is my theme song.

STURGEON: If you can think of something that I am not asking you that you think is important just let me know.

PARRY: I want to tell you about this little radio jingle. It is called "Wake up and Live in Sun City". It goes "Wake up and live in Sun City for an active and new way of life. Wake up and live in Sun City Mr. Senior Citizen and wife. Don't let retirement get you down. Be happy in Sun City, it is a paradise town. Wake up and live in Sun City Mr. Senior Citizen for the rest of your life. Mr. Senior Citizen and wife." That was in a story from the New Yorker and it told about Les. He went along on an appointment in 1964. The Sun City Pioneers Club was born in 1973. "Of the unique groups who received keys to their homes in 1960 and 1961 originally and membership opened to those who moved here in 1962, 63, 64 and 65. Members meet to reminisce at the annual anniversary luncheon. And then the Jubilee, the 25th Anniversary of Sun City book is wonderful, written by Jane Freeman and Glenn Sandberg.

STURGEON: Did you meet much with Tom Austin or have a lot to do with him when you were here first?

PARRY: No, we knew who he was. He was a friend to everybody. Les worked mostly with the people when he came to their home. Sometimes he would set up condo groups. I believe Tom Austin was with the recreation centers. Les had several ceremonies to give keys to the people. He saw that everything was OK. He had a sheet and when he had spent a whole hour with them he would mark it all down on a sheet. He was very busy. He handed out more than 16,000 keys in ----- years. Usually he was the only one doing that. He worked very conscientiously about it all. He retired in 1975 about the time they were moving over to Sun City West. He was having a minor health problem about then and so it was just a real good way to ease into retirement. We liked everything here and everybody. He mostly enjoyed his workshop.

STURGEON: But in the early days he was not just doing Del Webb things, he was also involved in organizations, wasn't he?

PARRY: Yes. His work took most of the time. He had cameras and equipment and when Freichres had the newspaper he would go around and take some of those pictures. And really, the Sun City Players, that was the beginning when they had the minstrel show etc. He was active with them just the first few years.

STURGEON: Did any of your friends move out here from Wisconsin?

PARRY: I wish I could claim more than have moved out. They used to like to come visit us and they liked everything they saw but I guess the roots of home were too strong.

STURGEON: Well, when you look back at Sun City how has it changed over time do you think, or how you looked at it?

PARRY: We have always lived right in this area and I think that whenever people come or move we just claim them as friends, enjoy their friendship, our church is right near by. We could always get out and get away and do a bit of traveling on weekends.

STURGEON: What about Sun City getting very large? Did you think that changed the city at all when it started getting so big?

PARRY: There were some who were really bothered about it. Sort of a North and South area. We never got into any of those things at all.

STURGEON: What were some of the things people were upset about?

PARRY: Probably the recreation rooms – using one here, or going to another one. It was probably petty.

STURGEON: Since you have been retired now for a while have your financial concerns changed over the years?

PARRY: No.

STURGEON: When you first came to Sun City how did you finance your home? Were you able to pay cash or did you get a loan?

PARRY: I think we paid cash for it. My husband always wanted enough of the best for me but we never really had concerns after we first got started. We pay as you go, we never owe.

STURGEON: Did you ever get involved in those arguments they had early on about whether or not they should incorporate?

PARRY: No. We never did see any reason.

STURGEON: Why did they want to incorporate in the first place? Do you remember?

PARRY: It seems to be money and I have never figured out why they wanted it.

STURGEON: How about school taxes? I know there were really some great concerns about the residents of Sun City having to pay school taxes.

PARRY: Oh yes, there was a lot of fussing about that. I think we have paid part of those school taxes right along. It seemed like much ado about nothing. Even though we paid school taxes before I think we should have gone right along and kept paying them.

STURGEON: I know you have been very busy in lots of organizations throughout the years and I was wondering if you are as busy now as when you started?

PARRY: I am sort of easing out of it. I don't know if this would be a good one to say or not. Because when I got to ten project involvements I thought, that is just too much. "It is a great misfortune to be of use to nobody, scarcely less to be of use to everybody". I had a tendency to get involved in too many things. They said you have to learn to say no. I volunteer at Sun Valley Lodge. On Sunday evening at supper time I help with the water and coffee, fruit and vegetable juice in the dining room, and information and referral, that just kind of follows along.

STURGEON: In the early days of Sun City they used to take surveys of people who lived here. Do you remember filling out one of those? What kind of things did they ask you, do you remember?

PARRY: The first one was how much money you should have to live on for a month. We sort of decided that \$500 would do it, and at that time in 1960 that was a good moderate, reasonable amount. They ask if you would want more cupboards or different room arrangements. I never had any problem with that it because you could choose it or fix it up. I thought they were all nice models.

STURGEON: You were telling me about the Christmas cards they used to give you. Did they have anything on them about Sun City?

PARRY: Oh yes. The one I recall best was one with a gate, it was green and white and when you opened that there were pictures of Sun City like the churches and some of the rec centers. They had boxes and we could go over there and they gave them to us. I don't recall any post cards.

STURGEON: Was it hard in the beginning not having a post office here and just the one shopping center?

PARRY: The shops had pretty nice things and we could always go to Phoenix. There were only about two stop signs before the big highway was finished. We could run to Park Central real easy if there was something I couldn't find here. At Christmas time over by the Safeway by the post office boxes piled up by the fence. Everybody was sending gifts back and forth. Our parents came to visit and they loved everything they saw.

STURGEON: When you moved out here how many people lived out here?

PARRY: There were very few. (end of side one of tape) (start of side 2) "British TV wants to film you for a documentary about Sun City if possible. Will call back around 9 a.m." This letter is dated April 1974 from Mr. & Mrs. Earl Morene and she writes "Hi, you won't remember me but I will always remember you. You were always so gracious to us when we came to Sun City for our key inspection. I was so appreciative of your sharp eyes noting what needed to be done. Then a week later we again had you when we stood in for our friends home for key inspection. Your sense of humor stayed with me. So glad you are getting recognition at last as unofficial ambassador, it is a good name. We are now here three years as of Feb 21, 1974. It has been a lovely three years and we are glad we came. Hope every new owner you give a key to will find as much happiness as we did. As Mr. Webb said, Bless you. Signed, Mrs. Earl Morene." The first Sun City amateur players presented Minstrels performance in May 1961 and Les was end man, Mr. Bones. Later on the Sun City players presented light opera "Martha" plus variety revue "Café Scene" where he was cast as comedian and master of ceremonies.

STURGEON: Did you know he had all that talent?

PARRY: No it just kept showing up, always, all our lifetime through. He was great about whatever was happening. He was very generous about my volunteering my time with our Federated Women's Club. It started in September of 1960 and I joined in 1961. They had a variety of choices; the bridge games were always fun, but I liked the welfare and even then there were babies that needed layettes and a nurse from Phoenix would refer names. So when I held up the first little kimono gown these ladies came right to help. They made them and the little blankets and quilts and we would deliver them to appreciative mothers. I had a time working at Savings and Loan in investments for a short time. Also I was at the Post Office for Christmas time rush. Sorting the letters before all these automatic machines came. Later when I got caught up I did secretarial work. Now my total time is volunteer work. I alternate with the church and community. Very interesting activities. The Historical Society is meaningful, especially to us pioneers. It has been a wonderful time here in Sun City. We had a pretty pink and white "Shoplifter". Here is a picture of it. "Unable to resist testing its comfort Mrs. Lester Parry and Mrs. George Mallard, both Sun City residents ----". "Transportation throughout the Sun City area was inaugurated this week as a Shoplifter. A 25 seat open trailer began making the rounds picking up passengers." It was in September 1960. "Designed to provide easy transportation for people who do not drive or have no other means available, the Shoplifter, provided by the Del E. Webb Development Company is pulled by a jeep. Routes and scheduled times are being worked out, reports Tom Austin, Sun City activity director. It will be made available to residents as soon as possible. Because of the large area to be covered we will be unable to give house to house service, Austin said. Routes will be worked out at key points to the best advantage of all residents. The Shoplifter, custom built, is patterned after similar conveyances seen at such places as Disney Land. It is equipped with seats covered in all weather plastic and roofed over completely with a colorfully striped canvas canopy to afford passengers protection from the elements. The conveyance is equipped with passenger signals to indicate stops." Then they started closed buses, then we had taxi cabs and now they are doing bus routes again.

STURGEON: The thing I wanted to ask you about Les was about the ceremonies. Aside from asking them what was wrong he must have made the key ceremony very special. Do you remember anything about that?

PARRY: Yes. Everyone told me how he just made them welcome. He was their first friend here in Sun City. He went through the house and somebody said, well aren't you going to write down this little scratch or something? And he said, I will. When he was all finished and he wrote everything down on his little sheet. He went through each room, checked all the windows, checked to see the oven had all the proper racks, then they could have two trees I think it was in the lawn. So they really had a nice beginning and it was a pleasant time for everyone. If there were neighbors Les would introduce them. The recreation centers were there and the golf course, swimming pool, shopping centers were not far away and the churches. He was involved with Fairway West – I believe there were over fifty homes under that condo roof and Les set up the meeting with their officers and advised them to keep the rules simple because they been added to. I thought that was a great start for the beginning. Fifty couples met and had that to work with however they wanted, besides the quality control inspection. He was called the unofficial ambassador. He always kept a sense of humor and when people would stop by our home he was always kind and helpful to them. He liked people and he knew where most of the people came from all over the states. He was a nice friendly man.

STURGEON: Since he started in so many of these minstrel shows do you think he was sort of an actor while presenting the keys to people?

PARRY: He was very sincere in whatever he did, and that was just the first and only minstrel show. I believe they tried to have a key man in the other Sun Cities. I don't know if they could ever fine one quite like our Les. And I think this is the favorite Sun City. I was hostess occasionally. My favorite time was over at Fairway East. I believe it was the day of the first meeting when Sun City Arizona went on the big board and they would sell stock. Mr. Del Webb was here and the color of dress I wore that day was the color of the apartment and that was where I was hoping Mr. Del Webb would stop by and everybody else wanted him too. Some of our ladies went to Sun City California to act as hostess and they would be in the new homes. Some of those first homes were open for our historical homes on the 30th anniversary. Everybody takes such a pride in their yards and their homes here and sometimes they would put a little additional something. Remarkable. Les retired just about the time Sun City West started. Les enjoyed retirement. We had the ranchette and he put up this building 26x32 with all the mechanical equipment that he had for his work before he came to Sun City. It was designed and built along the design of the house. He could do anything.

(There was much talk about her life as a little girl on the farm. I chose not to transcribe it all. Much of it has already been said.)

PARRY: Youngtown had a nice grocery store. The King's Inn as a good place to go eat. There was something about the beginning that was so special. People would speak to everyone they would see on the street. There are now many clubs, and our Information and Referral service started in 1978. That is a terrific resource. The United Church was a very friendly church right from the beginning. I am still involved in church. Until just recently our Pioneer Club was

active. When Les died I had a big decision to make – whether to stay here or go back home. I decided to get a smaller home and stay. I had so many friends here and I loved the weather.