

Katherine "Kit" Newport – Oral History Transcription

Interviewee: **Katherine Newport**

Interviewers: **Jenifer Baker** (Deputy Archivist), **Tori Roberts** (Archives Technician)

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List of Initials: JB = Jenifer Baker, TR = Tori Roberts, KN = Katherine Newport

Location of Interview: Warren County Admin Building in Lebanon, Ohio

Transcriber: Ted Hitchens

[Begin transcript 00:00:01]

TR: Okay, so my name is Tori Roberts and I am the archives technician for the Warren County Records Center. Today is July tenth, twenty-nineteen and I am here with Jenifer Baker, our deputy archivist. And we are doing a oral history on Mary Haven, also known as the German Orphanage and Asylum.

KN: And my name is Katherine Newport; go by Kit. And my maiden name was Young. And I live here in Lebanon.

TR: Perfect. So when and where were you born? Year specifically.

KN: Well I was actually born at Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton, but I was born uh- I was raised in Lebanon (*TR: Okay*) until I was ten, then we moved outside to Oregonia.

TR: And when were you born? If you don't mind my asking.

KN: September of nineteen fifty-eight.

TR: Okay. So you grew up in Lebanon with us. So where all have you lived? Have you stayed around this area?

KN: Uh, I've lived in Charlotte, North Carolina and I've also lived in Bonita Springs, Florida.

TR: Sounds pretty. So what jobs have you had over the years?

KN: Oh good grief...

TR: You can give us a couple. Give us a bunch, up to you.

KN: Yeah. I was gonna say when I was a kid, my first job was at Burger Chef here in Lebanon on Columbus Avenue, and then uhm I've worked at King's Island, and then once we moved to Florida, I was an (*indecipherable*) for a nice company. And now I am full-time caregiver to my father.

TR: Gotcha. So what is your dad's name?

KN: My dad's name is Richard Charles Young.

TR: Does he have any siblings?

KN: Yes he does, and their names are Adel(?) Sylvia Young—

TR: I'm gonna write this down if I'm gonna do this.

KN: -- then there was my father, then he had a sister named Frances Jean Young, and then he has a brother named uhm, oh god, Russell Dale. I know him by guess, he was also- his nickname through school was 'Hippo.' He was the basketball star at Lebanon High at the time.

TR: So, when was your father born? Nineteen twenty-eight?

KN: Nineteen twenty-nine.

TR: Nineteen twenty-nine. Okay.

KN: January of nineteen twenty-nine.

TR: Gotcha. So when was your grandfather born? Your father's father who we will be talking about.

KN: Okay, his name was Charles Young and he was born – they have down August twenty-eighth of eighteen ninety-seven. But during my research, I found out he was actually born August fifth of eighteen ninety-seven. The twenty-eighth is when they reported his birth.

TR: Oh gotcha. And did your grand- I know you mentioned to us earlier that your grandfather had siblings. How many siblings, and what are their names?

KN: Okay, he had five siblings. And his- he had a brother named Miles, a sister named Evelyn Ella Young, then there was Mabel Elizabeth Young; and I'm gonna screw this name up – Ne- Neva, N-E-V-A – Young. And then there was Clara Edna.

TR: Gotcha. So that pretty much covers our general background questions. So now we'll kind of get into the actual discussions about the asylum. So, when did your grandfather enter the children's home and how long was he there?

KN: He entered uh- he was signed in in 1902. Come in as some of his siblings. He was there approximately – at that time he was five years old – approximately six to seven years because at that time, I hate to use the term, but it was called farming out the children. And old Doctor Harvey that lived here in town, his brother took my grandfather out. And my grandfather stayed with them until he was seventeen years old working on their farm.

JB: We recently did research at the Historical Society and we found a lot of people soliciting the children's home for either children to help them in the house, or on their farms. So, that fits—

TIME 05:00 MARK

KN: I note two of his sisters that were in there that were taken out. None of them were adopted.

JB: Right.

TR: Okay.

KN: They were just taken out either to help in the house, or a family would feel sorry for them and they couldn't have kids of their own so they would take them there, but they were all here in the Warren County area. They were all born in Lebanon, and they never left uh the Waynesville-Lebanon area.

TR: Yeah. We even had an individual yesterday who we did an oral history on – not pertaining to the orphan asylum – but his father actually ended up adopting a child from Mary Haven. So, it covers more people than I ever anticipated. So, did your grandfather or his siblings attend school while they were at Mary Haven since they were right at that...?

KN: Actually, you know, I would say that the- yes, because it was you know pretty starch about doing that, so whatever school was here at the time – Pleasant Street or, you know, like that – but he didn't go past the eighth grade. Most of the kids didn't go past eight grade. As long as they were able to write their name, read, and do some uh math to get through life, that's about it.

TR: So if he wasn't in school long, you may not be able to answer this. Was he ever singled out at school for living at the children's home, or did he face any...?

KN: At that time it was commonplace. So, you know, especially with the large German community, it's like they knew people would have so many kids (*and*) they couldn't take care of them. Or like with my great-grandparents, my great-grandfather died in uh in December of eighteen ninety-nine and my great-grandmother actually held onto the kids for three years before she ended up turning them into the orphanage- less than a month or so after she turned them in, she passed. So it was just sign of the times at that point.

TR: Yeah. So, since he did have siblings that were there, was he- did he ever mention anything about being able to see his siblings or visit with them while they were there, or were they separated?

KN: My father's- well, the babies were always separated. They were put in a nursery-type area to keep an eye on them. But the older kids, they interacted with each other. So, that wasn't too bad because, you know, my grandfather was born in ninety-seven – eighteen ninety-seven – and he had uh one sister that was born two years after him so she was in the infant-type situation.

TR: Were you ever described the setup of the building at all?

KN: No.

TR: Potentially not, okay. Do you happen to know if there was a garden?

KN: Well yeah. At that point in time, they had huge gardens where they canned and everything else. That's when my grandfather got the 'love' for gardening.

JB: We're trying to put together the setup. Like clearly we know how the building, you know, where that was set up but there's a lot of land around it, so we've just been trying to kind of recreate what they did with the land or like how big the farm might have been—

KN: It was- it was basically just the building, barns, and farms – farmland. Because they raised their own animals, they raised their own garden – at that point in time, you didn't have the convenience of Cisco to come in and drop off food. They had to can it and that was the kids' responsibility to take care – go out and hoe the gardens, pick the produce – you know, they wouldn't do per se the canning – maybe the older ones that were still out there would help out with the canning. But they would do the gardening bed and coming in and- and snapping the beans or sowing the peas, whatever, and then turn it over to the cook staff.

JB: Right. We've been able to put together the history of the Warren County infirmary and the fact that that was a big farm and they produce their own food and they also sold it, but for the children's home or the asylum, it's not been as- as easy to find that information, so we- I mean we assumed that they did that on the grounds but we- (*TR: Can't prove it*) we were just—yeah, we were just looking for—

TIME 10:00 MARK

KN: Well back in the- from the time it was set up through the time that my grandfather would be there, yes they would do their own stuff. Then later on (*JB: Right*), you know, the government got in there and was doing the Cisco and- and that kind of stuff. Because I actually had quite a few friends from high school that were- went through Mary Haven when it became that.

TR: Okay. So you already answered my next question of animals. Did he ever describe what the building conditions were like? What it nice, was it clean since it was—

KN: Their- their jobs there- their chores there is they had to help with the cleaning. They of course had, you know, a housekeeper per se. But when it came to keeping their areas clean, helping with the bathroom situation, but of course when my grandfather was there it was outhouses (*laughter*). So, you

know, that was separate from the house. You know, they'd have the girls and the boys and that kind of stuff.

TR: Right. So, what other type of chores did they do besides farming and cleaning, like was there random things that they had to do, like did they also help with laundry, or...?

KN: Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge, that's usually what the staff did because of the ramifications if the child got hurt.

TR (*whispering*): That was pretty roughly eighteen-hundreds, early nineteen-hundreds. Did they do the chores that they did perform on a daily or a weekly basis?

KN: I would ... That was always saying that my grandfather was out in the garden, you know, from sun-up to sundown through the entire spring and summer and fall. Uh, during the winter of course they had to continue with the animals and that kind of stuff. But the inside chores, I think it was done basically a couple times a week, you know, they had what they called inspections. And they would go in to make sure that each child's area was clean and, you know, well kept.

TR: So this- this is a new question I'm making up as I go: Did your grandfather ever say anything about how the bedrooms were like? Did he share a room with numerous kids?

KN: Oh yes, it was community (*TR: Okay*). It was community- boys in one section, girls in another section.

TR: Because we know later the rooms weren't quite so expansive. It was more like sectioned off and it'd be a couple kids per room. So...

KN: Yeah and back then there was an awful lot of- of German orph- orphans in there. And they didn't do the- let's put, you know, one or two per room.

TR: Yeah.

KN: So...

TR: Good to know. So what all was the asylum providing for the children? Was it providing all their clothes, (*KN: Yes*) their blankets, just everything?

KN: They had to provide everything because the kids were there because they had nobody. So, you know, they taught the girls to sew, they would help out making clothes—uhm, the- of course the boys didn't do that. That at that time was beneath the male species. Well, actually back then, the girls didn't help in the garden. That was taboo. So- and it carried over with my grandparents. My grandmother and my two aunts- (*they'd*) go to the edge of the garden where my father, his brother, and my grandfather would have the baskets of produce there; they were never allowed to set foot in the garden.

TR: Interesting.

KN: Yeah, well, I'm not gonna tell you why on tape. But ... (*group laughter*)

TR: That's entirely up to you.

JB: Did he uh- did your grandfather ever talk about the quality of the clothing? Or what type?

KN: It was just basically work clothes. I mean they did their church services there. So they didn't go out to a "traditional" church and sit in a church. They did that out there and so... They didn't have to have, you know, a nice set of clothes or- or anything else, they basically just had work clothes.

TR: So was this church services within the building itself or we've heard that there may have been a church on the premises.

TIME 15:00 MARK

KN: That I'm not sure (*TR: Okay*). That I'm not sure if they had a church on the premises, but in a way I would believe that they would have and had it out there, you know- of course they're gonna start with them inside the- the facility, but as it expanded because there was quite a few buildings out there, so there could have been one out there.

TR: Gotcha. So if they provided clothing and shoes and all these personal items, were the children given any toys or anything that what children now would have for fun or did they- what did they do for fun?

KN: Used their imagination.

TR: We like that!

KN: They- they didn't have the, you know – they get a hoola-hoop. And they would play their little games with sticks, you know, rolling and (*TR: Oh yeah*) that kind of thing, but to really say that they had store-bought toys- a lot of times the girls would make dolls while they were sewing.

TR: Were there ever any events or activities that were organized for the kids such as like – I don't know, a picnic or going to the fair or anything like that—

KN: At that point in time I'm not sure because I don't think that the Warren County Fair was going at that time. It might have been, I don't know.

TR (*to Jenifer*): Do you know when it started?

JB: I think it was at that time, uhm...

TR: It was weird. It was at a different time of year than what we're accustomed to now.

JB: Right, it was in September.

KN: Yeah. That's because the festivals and fairs and things like that were set up that way for harvest because they would take their animals there to sell them.

JB: Well and that's the reason I- we included that question is because with the infirmary again they would participate and show what they had grown at the infirmary at the fair each year, so uhm... But like I said, we haven't been able to put that- that history together for the children's home, so...

KN: Yeah. My dad could not remember, he was very spotty. But being ninety years old he's gonna be a little spotty.

JB: Well right and it was just what grandfather shared with him as well, so...

KN: Yeah, and he didn't share an awful lot about his childhood because he was basically what they called an "indentured servant." Because he- he hadn't had parents- but then, you know, he didn't have parents and he was just more or less farmed out to- to work in somebody's field, and actually he got one of the best families in town to take him out uhm – like I said, old Doc Harvey's brother took him out and he was out there until he was seventeen, so about five (or) six years. And he- that's where he got a lot of his love for this community, I mean he was born here. But you know, as you grow you would want to get out of where you live (*TR: Right*). And he never did.

TR: Gotcha. So how did they spend holidays? Do you know?

KN: It was just another day.

TR: Gotcha.

KN: They might get, you know, little treats – a piece of candy, a piece of fruit and they might have had a special meal. But for a holiday it was basically--

TR: Another day...

KN: Another day. They had chores they had to do on that day.

TR: What was the staff like? Like the superintendent and the matron and the—

KN: My great-grandfather and my grandfather never had a bad word about anybody out there. He said they always treated him good.

TR: Nice. So it sounds like your grandfather had a good experience but did he- did they have any form of discipline for the children that stood out?

KN: He said he never- he never witnessed it. He said he never got any beatings or- or anything. He uh was there, did what he was told to do. But you gotta remember, Germans did that. They were raised very strict, very German.

TR: So, your grandfather was lent to the family of Doctor Harvey's brother. If the individuals weren't given for farmhands to someone else in the community, did they have jobs outside like older children, if they weren't sent out, could they like get a job—?

TIME 20:00 MARK

KN: Not until they left.

TR: Not until they left?

KN: Not until they left because they- they were more valuable to Mary- uh, to the asylum for the sheer fact that they could run the equipment. They could work longer hours out in the gardens and take care of the animals and things like that. And most of the time – by the time they were sixteen, seventeen years old – they were gone. They left. If they were female, they met a boy, they got married. And if it was a male he either went into service, or he just- he wanted out and wanted to go on his own.

TR: At what age were the children allowed to leave if they wanted to?

KN: My grandfather had said at one point in time that a little girl at the age of thirteen left and got married. And that- that was quite common. If they didn't like the structure, the first guy that said "will you marry me" they were out the door. They thought it was going to be a better life. And fifteen kids later..... (*group laughter*)

TR: So many children! So once your grandfather left, what was his life like after living in the home? Like did he go on- obviously he married—

KN: Uh, he went and he actually worked for the City of Lebanon. He is the uh city employee that graded the Lucille Berry uh football field (*TR: That's fun!*). Got that all ready. He worked for the (*indecipherable*) as a foreman ... maintenance there. Uhm, but my grandfather died in fifty-six. So uh, it was a family-trait; my father, at ninety, actually is the oldest living young male ever...

TR: Oh wow. So—

KN: German heritage. No, no that's what it was because we found out that in our family, the males uh have aneurysms that just sort of sneak up. A mystery aneurysm – and they found it in my father, they also found his high blood pressure and his uhm diabetes. When they found the aneurysms, they had my uhm, my brothers tested and his brother tested, and his brother actually had seven to eight aneurysms...

JB: I believe that is hereditary.

TR: Oh for sure.

KN: Well especially with the high blood pressure and the diabetes in Germans, it goes undetected. They just think that they had, you know, a common illness and they just let it slide.

TR: I'm glad they found it in your dad.

KN: Oh yeah.

TR: So, your grandfather lived there from 1902 to roughly 1908, nine. How long was it after he was seventeen that he got married? *(Pause)* Or just what year? Whatever is easiest.

KN: I didn't write that one down, let's see. They didn't get married until after he came back from the war.

JB: I was going ask if he served in World War One.

KN: Yes. And actually I don't know he contracted some sort of illness while he was in the service, and he was someplace for like a year or so to get over. And my grandmother waited for him, and she worked at the powder factory.

TR: Oh!

KN: Yeah. What a job! (*Group laughter*) But she worked at the powder factory waiting for- for him to get done. And he come back and they were short (*buzzing sound*) - let's see, my father was born in twenty-nine, that's my phone, uh- uh my father was born in twenty-nine, his sister was born in (*nineteen-*) twenty, so nineteen-nineteen was when he got married.

TR: Gotcha.

KN: Had to stop and think.

TR: Do you happen to know if your grandfather ever ran into in the public like other children from the home, like years later?

KN: The only ones- because, you know, when he was taken out and a few of his siblings were taken out, now he connected with them. But as far as knowing friends that he had out there if he ran into them, my grandfather was pretty much a loner. His life revolved around his family and his work, so – he might have seen them in passing or whatever.

TIME 25:00 MARK

TR: Gotcha. What has been some of your biggest takeaways from your father talking about his father at Mary Haven? Is there any particular memories that your dad seems to share more because his father shared them more with him, or—

KN: My grandfather was very closed-mouthed about uh his childhood. Uhm, his world started in nineteen-twenty when my aunt was born. It was just all that – you would ask him questions – he actually died two years before I was born – and uh my mom said that when she came into the family she would ask questions, you know, about it and he was pretty closed-lipped uhm, my grandmother would just look at her and say “he doesn't talk.”

JB: Do you think his valuing of his family came from his time at Mary Haven – or at the asylum?

KN: Yeah, because he- he saw uhm ... he saw what it did to the families. And, you know, when he was farmed out to- to the Harvey family, he didn't get to go back and see his siblings and he actually did not get to see them until he was older and they had, you know, grown up to where, you know, they could meet and things like that. Because I know for the longest time, his one sister, he didn't even know what family she went to. But if he's taken out, he's not going to because he went to the Harveys and he stayed at the Harveys.

TR: Right. Do you think your grandfather's time at the home – obviously it impacted the family values – did your dad then kinda keep a lot of those values and then instill them in you?

KN: My father killed himself for the family.

TR: So yes.

KN: Yes. Uhm, my father worked uh some six, sometimes seven days a week and gave us a core to go around which means that we, you know, family is everything. And uh that's like "I take care of you." So I mean, he's never gonna go in the nursing home. I will always take care of him. He took care of me, he gave me what I needed in life and I'm gonna make sure he gets it. So...

TR: So right now we're done with our listed questions. Is there anything you would like to share with us that you think would be important or interesting or—

KN: Not actually – you know, like I said, I did know other people out there at- when it turned into Mary Haven. But, you know, teenager. The only bad thing that- that stands out is a friend actually committed suicide out there. And uhm – never really quite understood what it was that caused him to do it. But one day he just got up, went out, threw a rope over a beam in the- in the barn and hung himself.

JB: I think we found that in our research as well. I'm sorry.

KN: But, I always looked at the building going, you know, if those walls could talk and the stories that they would give—and I had always wanted to go in to see what it was like and see what my grandfather went through in the place and just walk the grounds, but you could never get up there especially after they closed it down.

TR: Right.

KN: But when they closed it down it went from Mary Haven to a all-boys thing, uhm (*TR: Yeah, I don't know what it was called*) - it was for- for unruly boys, you know a boys' home. And uh so you know and then all of a sudden it was just shut down completely.

TR: So if you've never been inside and your grandfather was very (*indecipherable*) ... do you happen to know if anybody who would have photographs or anything from that time period?

KN: If I did, you would have them.

TR: We appreciate that!

TIME 30:00 MARK

KN: Actually uhm – I was looking for it when I left home and I can't remember where I placed it – I actually have part of the ledger of where my grandfather was signed in by his mother. But uh pictures of it, you know, I would give anything just- just to see how it was set up and see what he, you know, went through at that point in time.

TR: We are- that is definitely one of our biggest hurdles at the moment is trying to find some form of photographs or personal accounts or anything like that because no one seems to have photos. We as an institution do not. We do not collect- we have not collected those in the past. With our new boss, she's instilling a system that we hope individuals from the community will help donate to us so we can help really preserve Warren County's history, but that hasn't been happening until she started here in twenty-thirteen so we don't have anything.

KN: Have you talked to Mister Zimkus? (*John Zimkus, historian and education director of the Warren County Historical Society*)

TR: Yes. She (*Jenifer*) was there last week--?

JB: Yeah, we've had a little bit of contact. So, we're trying to find...

KN: Yeah uhm – my father had been uhm been real close friends with the form- one of the former – I don't know what you call them –

JB: Superintendents?

KN: Well of- of the-

TR: Oh, the historical society?

KN: Yeah.

TR: Their directors are historians. Zimkus is the historian and Vicki Van Harlengen (*spelling?*) is the director.

KN: Okay, this gentleman had been the director and his name was Maple Dixon – uh, Dixon Maple. Sorry.

TR: I would not have known otherwise (*group laughter*).

KN: But yeah, he did it and him and dad would sit and talk and things like that. But, you know, the kids from the generation of my grandfather, they don't have pictures and most of them are gone. I mean it's just my father and his brother, and his brother just turned eighty-one. So, most of the ones that would have those pictures – and know the value of the pictures – aren't with us anymore. And now it's the "me" generation so we really don't care what happened back then. Except I've got two girls and one's thirty-eight and one is uh going to be nineteen and both of them know the value of family history. So—

JB: I do feel like there's a resurgence of that, hopefully.

TR: Yes. It's coming back. I'm twenty-five and I'm right there, I'm like "yeah!"

KN: I'm still prodding the nineteen-year-old. The thirty-eight year-old, she is- likes to know where she came from. Because I mean, we're eclectic and we've got German, we've got French, we've got Irish, we've got Scottish, we've got English – we have a little bit of some sort of Jewish in there. You know, you've got all this stuff and my oldest wants to travel to every country that we came from.

TR: That'd be exciting.

JB: Well and you can actually put names to those origins as well which is always helpful to know that stuff along with where—

TR: And like, know what section of a country you're from.

JB: Right.

KN: Yeah well, my youngest, her- her middle name happens to be Ines. And we've had an Inez in the family and I found a picture of her. They look almost identical (*JB: Wow*). I looked at that picture and I looked at my youngest and I looked at my picture again, and I went "wait a minute. You have Cuban in you, she doesn't." (*Group laughter*) So it was the German factor.

TR: Yeah! Well I guess at this point, that about wraps it up. So thank you for coming to talk with us today.

KN: No problem, I enjoyed it.

TR: Thank you.

[End transcript 00:34:15]