

Bay View Historical Society
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<https://bayviewhistoricalsociety.org/>

Project: Bay View Historical Society 40th Anniversary Oral History Project

Interviewee(s): Ellen Tucker

Interviewer(s): Caleb Westphal and Gail Germanson

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Location: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Interview Length: 62:09 minutes

Preface: The following transcript was compiled and edited by Bradley J. Wiles in 2020 and 2021. A rough transcript of the recording was generated from an online application called Transcribe Wreally and then manually edited to ensure accuracy and completeness. The interviewee discusses her childhood and early adult years in the Bay View neighborhood and later years in Whitefish Bay, her upbringing in the Beulah Brinton house as Brinton's granddaughter, other members of the Brinton family, and her experience at the Bay View Methodist Church.

Caleb Wesphal: This is Caleb Westphal and I am interviewing Ellen Tucker with Gail Germanson as part of the Bay View Historical Society's 40th Anniversary Oral History Project. It is currently about 11:00 a.m. on August 5th, 2019, and we are conducting the interview at the Beulah Brinton house in Bay View, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Ellen has agreed to participate and contribute today's recording to the Bay View Historical Society's archival collection so that it may be preserved and available for future use as indicated on the deed of gift form received and signed by Ellen. Ellen, please be assured that we understand that your participation is fully voluntary and that we can take a break, postpone, or terminate the interview at any time of your request. We have a list of questions to help get the discussion started, but you're welcome to decline answering any of these that you don't want to answer and answer others as you see fit. We have some specific topics that we want to cover, but mostly want to hear what you have to say about your experiences in Bay View. We have a set aside one hour for this interview, with the understanding that it may run slightly shorter or longer. Thank you for your time and willingness

to share your stories with us today, and with that we'll get started.

Gail Germanson: Okay. Well, we have already established some interesting stories, but now we'll just continue and just do this real informally. Just state your name, honey, and, you know, where you live, and where you grew up.

Ellen Tucker: I am Ellen Tucker. I am the great-great-granddaughter of Beulah Brinton, the great-granddaughter of Emily Brinton Picard, and the granddaughter of Mabel Estes, the daughter of Daisy Tucker, and I was born close by but lived mainly in the Brinton house until I was five years old when my father returned from the war, and then we moved over to Verona court between Morgan and 35th, and I would live there until I was 11. During that time, I remember many incidences (sic) at the house, and as a matter of fact Gail and I were talking and up came the polio quarantine and how the both of us remembered it in the 40s—I guess it was middle 40s—it had to be 1940s.

GG: And I think early fifties too.

Tucker: And me being born in 1940, I was a little older than you—you were born in 43, right? And so we were talking about the funny situations that we had—because you don't take it too seriously when you're that age and you want to escape from that being kept in... quarantined. Yeah and you were saying about—what would you do?

GG: Oh, how I tried to escape from the backyard and I had to be maybe four—so that would have been maybe in 48, 49—and we had a picket fence and I tried to escape to the neighbors and I caught my little pudgy leg in the picket fence and we had the restaurant at the time and a delivery man came and my mother was frantic and she said "I'll get the saw." And I thought they were going to saw off my little leg and I was hysterical but they just were going to saw the picket fence.

Tucker: Well, I sat on the curb on the corner of Pryor and Superior, and I would yell to anybody who came along and especially my friend who was across the street and we try and play together, and it was so hard because we couldn't step off the curb. Mainly my grandma was keeping an eagle eye on me all the time. And so but I was so used to going on my Grandpa Estes—Ira Estes my grandpa—he would pick me up and put me on his shoulders and we would—this had to happen ten times a day because that's what I always wanted to do—we'd walk across the street and go to the Fountain.

GG: Oh the iron well.

Tucker: Yes, and I grew up on the wonderful water from the fountain which not a lot of..

GG: Oh, wonderful water? It tastes terrible!

Tucker: Oh, I love it because I grew up on that water, that's what we used. That's the water we used in the house and everything...

GG: Really?

Tucker: Oh, yeah we go fill up every day.

CW: So you'd go there every day?

Tucker: Oh, many times a day.

GG: So you'd bring the water back in then and that's what you'd use?

Tucker: Oh sure, sure, in jugs and things. So it, you know, and it had all the good minerals in them so that it was more help in immunity...

GG: When the cryptosporidium thing happened here—what was it, in the 70s?—I think that's where we got our water at the iron well.

Tucker: Sure, and I still, I have cups in my car because I'll go past in my to fill a cup and have cold water that way—I don't care for it as much warm. But I love it as a cold water. Everybody else hates the taste but I love it.

GG: Now the Estes house... was that your family?

Tucker: Oh there were many. We had a bunch of Estes. The thing is, the Estes homesteaded part of South Shore Park right about the corner of... the northeast corner. So Elijah Estes and Sabia(?) Wentworth—his wife that he met in Chicago—came up here and developed the land there and they were, they had a lot of kids and there were a lot of Estes suddenly, so there were numbers of Estes houses and we did have closer Estes family and not so close. But I remember at least three or four different Estes families that we would see all the time that were all around here

GG: The beautiful house that's still there..

Tucker: Well that, and then there was another one not too far from that—I can't remember, I'd have to see who lived where because it's very difficult for me as a child like that to remember

exactly.

GG: Now, Caleb do you notice the name she's mentioning there all streets here

CW: All streets, yes...

GG: Estes and Wentworth...

Tucker: No Brinton. But there's an Ellen Street down here and that's a Beulah Brinton daughter Ellen, and she died young... probably about 21 or something. Uncle Warry was always so upset because he forced her to marry a man she didn't love and thought he was responsible for her dying.

GG: Was Uncle Ward named after Ward Brock?

Tucker: No, he was after his father, Beulah Brinton's husband. Warren Brinton Sr. Okay, Uncle Warry—we called him Warry—because he was the same name as his father.

GG: Was that always Superior Street?

Tucker: That I can remember. I don't know what it was, because then Delaware down there used to be a river and you know, there's so much different geography around here in Bay View.

GG: Was Deer Creek still there? No...

Tucker: No, we didn't have a creek there when I was alive. But Uncle Warry and Emily and Ellen, I think, were the surviving children of Beulah Brinton and her husband because she had six kids. Three died when they were babies of whatever, probably consumption. That was with the days when... Uncle Warry was very successful—Great Uncle Warry and he worked in Chicago as assistant controller of International Harvester. And the best thing about—that was huge those days, you know International Harvester after the war just made all the farm machinery all that, you know everything. During the Depression he had forgone the salary and requested stock in the company instead. So he was wealthy by the time he passed away and nobody knew it until then. And he would sit on the front porch all the time and I'd sit with him and he was just so jolly all the time. He never married. We would play together and everything. It was just very energetic—you can see in this video that I have that he was always jumping around and laughing and teasing people and he would tease, you know, a lot...

GG: He was pretty smart too, to buy the stock...

Tucker: Brilliant, brilliant man. But not only that the family didn't like some of—here I'm telling you the secrets of family, which is great because it's really all positive. He took a trip around the world and I had his trip log at home and it lists everywhere he went. He took all of these steamers. I remember when we took him down to the train station in Milwaukee to go to New York to get on the ship. And he went to all of these strange, strange places all over the world mostly in the Middle East. He came back with a whole set of books on, like, meditation and I have all of these books, they wanted—my family wanted—to burn them because they were methodists...

GG: What time era—what time was this? When did he do this?

Tucker: Gosh, if I had that trip thing with me the log

GG: Must have been before the war?

Tucker: No. I remember going with him, with my mom to drop him off and say goodbye for his world trip and he was gone for a long time. But he brought back a lot of ideas, values, books, and things from around the world. So he was incredibly interesting and I still have them and they were, my mom was going to get rid of them. And you know, I just... But I'm a Siddhi Yoga, which is not religious, it's meditation. But I learned the true way and I think he had an effect on me to always look for similar things in other people's religions, as well as Beulah Brinton, who was always so adamant about education and educating yourself as to other people's cultures and things, which we all know this is, you know, the general knowledge of this historical society, hence the community center where she tried to bring people together and keep them from forming gangs or even even disputes between people who didn't understand each other's cultures.

GG: Your family seems extraordinarily broad minded, if that's the word I want. Very open-minded, very open to new ideas...

Tucker: For a while. Well, until they weren't. There was a lot of strong old-time Methodist influence. Hellfire and damnation. I remember every Sunday sitting right here in the chair I still have, which I will give to you—which have carved dog's head arms on it and it was horsehair—and I would sit on that chair all Sunday with all my crinolines and my fancy little dress when people would come to visit some days and after church or whatever. The backs of my legs were red raw with you know, rubbing against this horsehair—was just so uncomfortable. But now I had re-upholstered—it was totally falling apart. My mom was going throw it away.

GG: No, no don't throw it away...

Tucker: I have the original library table that was started in the library here. I have that I'm going to give to you guys as soon as the redecorating is over—you can have that and put it in here somehow and there's some painted lamps. Now, I have one left and it's a good, oh, 18 inch circumference, and it's very Art Deco, that was made by a company that my Grandpa Estes worked for. The name has escaped for a second—here, I will get it... Bridges, Mo Bridges Company and it was all beautiful glass with hand-painted scenery on the inside so that when you turn the light on see a beautiful... and that's ready to come over here too.

GG: Where was that in this house?

Tucker: The lamp was changed occasionally, but mostly I remember it in that corner. The library table course had books all over it and there were no built-ins then, it was just a table.

GG: That's what I was going to ask you: what was the library like back then? Was it just books?

Tucker: Just books hanging out all over the place...

GG: More than what we have now that... just those shelves?

Tucker: There was no shelves there.

GG: No shelves.

Tucker: There were no built-ins at the time. It was the library table and that's what people used. I don't think they ever had built-ins in those days, Beulah Brinton. But anyway, those were added... much later... way after me.

GG: Okay...

Tucker: But I have this beautiful table...

GG: So the books were on the table...

Tucker: On the table, shelf underneath and more tip books and more books probably here and there and it got too big...

GG: And no shelves, huh...

Tucker: So they took a space, you know made it Llewellyn—was it, was that the first one?

GG: Llwellyn, yes...

Tucker: Yeah. Well, sometimes I don't have all of the information, you know where it ended up but then there was a library started...

CW: Because that got started quite early...

Tucker: Uncle Warry was a reader and—Great Uncle Warry, Beulah's son—and so he had books everywhere. And of course he was alive when I was around and we always went... I remember going with Grandma to Groppi's and we would go shopping there, and we'd have those little red tokens during the war that were for meat and these were limited to a certain amount per family or whatever because meat was so scarce during the war. And so we would go and try and find as much meat as we could...

GG: So it's like rationing, right?

Tucker: It was rationing, yeah.

GG: See, I don't remember that at all...

Tucker: Well, you would be too young for that because...

GG: I guess, well my dad was you know overseas and at that point we live with my aunt and my grandmother and I was only about three or four. I don't remember that probably.

Tucker: And I only remember it because my grandma had a whole bunch of them afterwards when the rationing wasn't necessary anymore and I used to play with them. She'd put them in my little marble box or something like that, and as well as marbles I'd play with these little tokens and you know flip them. So I definitely remember that. And Groppi's was a great store and then, right beyond there was... I would walk to church. The Trinity Methodist at the time and it was much smaller then. But to this day I am a member. When we moved to Whitefish Bay when I was 11, I started with the United Methodist Church up there on Silver Spring. For many years. I was confirmed there, but I had been baptized here in the Trinity Methodist.

GG: You know, you were saying it was fire and brimstone. That's interesting because I always think of Methodist as being very liberal, now today, no?

Tucker: Yeah, today, yeah...

GG: But not then...

Tucker: And especially this Bay View church is the forerunner for the progressive Methodists and we are all-inclusive. Anybody and everybody is welcome and the United Methodists of the whole world actually, because they include a lot of Methodist churches from for instance, Africa, Australia, because there was so many missionaries that went and developed that and they don't have the permissiveness in their culture, so they don't accept. They are not inclusive of LGBT people. So they voted against having...

GG: Yeah, that's a recent...

Tucker: Yes, and it was tilted that direction because of... mostly of Africa and their cultural beliefs. So to them it was a no-no and even punishable by death.

GG: But this particular, our Methodist Church, is liberal...

Tucker: Yeah and there are quite a few of LGBT people there. A lot from Milwaukee will come in to stand there and we are extremely open, extremely welcoming. We have now—honoring Beulah Brinton—every Sunday we have what's called bread and jam, which really is a dinner—a Sunday dinner—every Sunday. We get up to 70 people over there on a Sunday. Homeless, you know people that also visit the Beulah Brinton Community Center know from there that they can go to the Methodist Church for their Sunday dinners and they're given packages of food and supplies and things when they leave and some of these people are just so so wonderful to talk to because they have the same memories that I do of Bay View very often. And I'll sit and talk to some people that have had hard times and now are homeless....

GG: So you're involved in that...

Tucker: Oh, I'm very... I've been at the choir for so many years and I am not so involved in that I go and help out but not that often. I should go more often, as we all say, you know, should do more of that. But we have a new pastor and he's extremely welcoming, which is good because we were concerned about who we might get. The Methodists always move their pastors around between five and ten years of one church date, then they expect to be put into another church and so our wonderful Pastor Kelly was transferred over to New Berlin, which is a church having troubles apparently losing, you know, parishioners, the old elderly people mostly in there. They're going and not replenishing which is very sad, but that's happening to a lot of churches and a lot of denominations. Catholics as well.

GG: Well, I grew up going to IC, right down the street. That was my church and that was the focus of our life, was IC...

Tucker: Sure, sure we built everything around...

GG: Our churches...

Tucker: And we never... I had to... we couldn't ride a car, we couldn't—on Sundays—we couldn't visit, we couldn't cook... we couldn't...

GG: Oh wow, really?

Tucker: No, everything had to be, you know, done before then and we could not play games...

GG: No kidding? It almost sounds like the Jewish Sabbath...

Tucker: You'd go to hell if you had a deck of cards in the house...

GG: Whoa babes...

Tucker: That was what the Methodists were based on, because drinking and gambling...

GG: And sex of course...

Tucker: Because that was the scourge during those days that Methodists came to being and the Methodists mainly were started—the Methodist denomination—because these were farmers and they couldn't leave their livestock and come travel into the city to go to church on Sunday and they couldn't afford what they had to pay as a tithing because there was no way that the church could exist unless people had to pay a certain amount of what they made, like 10% tithing. And so it began by the Methodist minister—and I had one over here at Trinity Methodist, when I was a little baby—and he had had a horse and buGGy and that was the way the Methodists started. They would travel around to the farms and they would go to the four corners of four farms, you know, and then the families would just connect right there. They had a lot of kids because they needed help with the Farms. So they tended to have as many kids as they could.

GG: So what you're saying is those itinerant preacher would go around...

Tucker: Right...

GG: And they didn't have like a chuchu, they would just... probably use a barn?

Tucker: No. Four corners out there, in the snow, in the rain, in the you know, whatever and preach hellfire and damnation like you're going to go to hell if you know if you gamble if your drink if you do this you do that and it was... difficult. But these were the times when men would go out and get drunk and gamble all their money away and then the kids and the wife would starve and it was really very very bad in those days. But then, with two other churches, Trinity Methodist was born and I always thought of it as the three churches made the Trinity but they're telling me no, it's just the religious connotation is the Trinity. But I always thought of it as because there were three different churches involved and that's all that they could afford. Three got together and built this little church.

GG: You know you were talking about on Sunday how you couldn't do anything. I remember even when I grew up, everything closed on Sunday, or they closed at noon. The A&P, you couldn't go shopping... Everything shut down on Sunday.

Tucker: And how about your restaurant?

GG: Well, we were open. We were open at 4 o'clock. And we'd go to mass, we'd go to noon mass. My dad would take a little nap and then open up at four o'clock. Yeah, we were open. But everything else, I don't know how we worked around that. Well the Catholics weren't so strict on not doing anything on Sunday. Not that I can remember.

Tucker: You talked about the Methodists now being liberal or progressive. They were the most demanding. Well, not more than Catholics because there were other things that the Catholics would demand of you

GG: Yeah, no meat on Friday.

Tucker: Oh the things that you have—the saints and we couldn't relate to the pope and the saints and stuff like that. But we were related to the land and the farmers and what was the most important to deal with at the time.

GG: Could you date a non-Methodist? Because Catholics could not date a non-Catholic. And I married two of them.

Tucker: (Laughs) Well, anyhow, it was in high school. And I remember that Catholic kids would tell me that I was going to hell....

GG: Oh sure...

Tucker: Because I wasn't Catholic and I wouldn't be able to pray and reach God unless it was through a priest. That people can't, you know...

GG: Right...

Tucker: Anyway, so I always, in my church and family, says well, "I'm never marrying a Catholic because..." Anyway, that's the way they feel so yeah, you know.

GG: My first childhood sweetheart was Lutheran and I was going to St. Mary's and he brought me over to the house to meet his parents. I thought his mother was going to die. There I am in my little Saint Mary's uniform obviously Catholic and she told Dean if he married me she would, they would disown me and such nonsense.

Tucker: Yeah...

GG: And he died quite young and then I married another Lutheran...

Tucker: Well, I always seem to get involved with Jewish men, Orthodox Jewish men. So that was the story with my parents, you know, because they didn't... Buelah Brinton wouldn't have...

GG: But you are allowed as a Methodist to date non-Methodists, right or no?

Tucker: I always dated non-Methodists. I never heard that I couldn't. No, there was never any restriction except for the Catholics didn't want to get involved.

GG: Well, we couldn't honey under pain of death. You could not marry...

Tucker: I know, I know...

GG: Such nonsense. Such utter nonsense.

Tucker: I had a friend who I lived with in New York that I went to Northwestern with and we were friends and roommates and so on, and she was so held back by all of that. She once had—I think she ate meat on a Friday and...

GG: Oh God! 27:00

Tucker: She got so sick. I mean she was really totally sick. And then she fell in love with this parent. I don't know why she did but she fell in love with this Catholic guy, but made—no he yeah, he was Catholic, I guess. He was married and had two kids and she was in love with him and he was going to get divorced and they worked for years on an annulment and broke up because they couldn't get it annulled. And he didn't want to anyway and his wife was just desperate not to have him get an annulment for their marriage because that would make their kids, you know illegal...

GG: Illegitimate...

Tucker: Illegitimate, just so so painful all of this...

GG: Essentially so stupid...

Tucker: Well, look at the Methodist have their stupidities... and the hellfire and damnation thing was very very difficult and it scared the hell out of me all the time. The church was a frightening place for me because it's yell and scream, you know, and they even had that old fashioned thing where if you fell asleep they hit you with a stick.

GG: No, no...

Tucker: Well, I did, we did. Because you know, they watch you and see if you fell asleep in the sermon.

GG: We had Father Ryan when I was growing up and he said the fastest mass probably in the country. Everybody would go to the 12 o'clock mass because Father Ryan would pull that sucker out in 45 minutes, maybe even less. He was so fast. He broke through that Latin because he had to get home to be able to watch the Packers. But Father Ryan was the best and he just... yeah fastest mass. You couldn't fall asleep. It was so fast bam, bam, bam.

Tucker: Well I left when I was 18 here. Actually, I went to Northwestern between my Junior and Senior year at Whitefish Bay High School and I had taken all the AP classes and math and science and so on. So I was able to go to a summer program at Northwestern. It was called the National High School Institute, and I was in the radio and TV area and I just came alive. I just couldn't believe that there was a world where I could actually do things and get somewhere and move forward. And I just got so much energy and I did very well there. I had never thought I had had a very high IQ. First of all I was female and they wouldn't let me take physics in high school because it would make me look masculine. And besides I'd be the only girl in class. So I did this National High School Institute, and then they asked me to come back now. My grades weren't

great in high school. I didn't think I'd ever be able to get in but when I went there and I really performed—and we had classes all day. You know, it was very strenuous and actually it was even harder than my freshman year when I went to Northwestern. They said here's an application just sign it and send it in and you're, you know, and you can come. So that's what I did and I went there for four years, but I took... I didn't have to take the basic math class because I'd had the AP already but I took physics, I took astronomy and I did a lot of biology and chemistry because mostly they didn't believe in a theater degree that it would get me anywhere or do anything for me. And of course this is the way I lived all my life—I've used my degree all my life, but you had to do it at night. You had to be in plays in the evening and go to rehearsals and stuff like that, but you had to have more of an education then...

GG: And then you kind of blossomed, right?

Tucker: Oh, I did. I really did. And I found out that my IQ is very high. So it gave me more and more confidence, you know.

GG: They would never tell us our IQs because I went to St. Mary's and they would just say, oh, well your college material, but that was guarded like a secret. They would never tell you your exact IQ.

Tucker: Yeah, I know that... Later on when I was in my 30s and I had, he was... I say boyfriend, he was a doctor at UCLA. He was a cancer pathologist at UCLA Medical Center and then later became head of the Children's Hospital in Long Beach, California. But he said I have a suspicion that you're a lot smarter than you think you are and so he's brought home from UCLA their standard IQ tests, and I mean, he was, he had Asperger's which I don't know if you know what that means.

GG: Yes, yes.

Tucker: Okay, so he had said that we would be getting married in two years because he would be through with his divorce and his mind about that too. But he had never asked me you know, it was just one of those brilliant, you know, men who are just I don't know...

GG: Yes. I know. What Asperger's is...

Tucker: Okay. So he had a timer and the pencil and papers...

GG: And he gave you an IQ test?

Tucker: Yeah, but I said, okay but what is this? I said sets, I don't understand what sets are because I don't know the new math. He gave me a whole thing in the new math

GG: Oh God, I hated the new math...

Tucker: I love math. I do ten sudokus a day... Anyhow, this doesn't have anything to do with this except that I was always told that I didn't have a brain because I was a woman and that I was not allowed. My dad was an inventor and an engineer and luckily, pervasively, he—in whatever I was doing—he treated me just as he would a son. And so he would say what did you do today? And I'd say oh I learned the the slide rule—remember them?—and he'd say okay down in the basement. So we go down. Okay, this is a fraction, this is how these work, this is how you do your math, this is how you... you know, he was always ahead of the school work and he was always ahead of anything that I wanted to do. I had to know what a hundred percent... physics I want to take physics, he said okay come on downstairs. This is how a refrigerator works. He said I'm installing one at the back bar downstairs—this is in Whitefish Bay—and he said so this is how you line it up... so this is where I got my physics, was at home.

GG: Cool...

Tucker: Plus I was champion ping pong player there in school because he taught me and he would not let off...

GG: Wow, honey...

Tucker: And I got my driver's license at 16 and I said “passed my driver's test,” I said, “now I can drive,” and he said “no you can't, not until you pass my test.”

GG: Oh, wow. Now didn't Beulah Brinton have ping pong tables here?

Tucker: I don't think so...

GG: Or tennis?

Tucker: Tennis... and she had a clay tennis court out there, which was wonderful later my dad built one down on the corner of... down in Oklahoma and Verona court—a corner there—and he built a whole clay court. But no, he would teach me—he taught me to sail and he built a boat in the basement and I had to hold it and help him put things together. It was a sailboat and was like 14 foot long, 12-14, and of course we had to put it together in the end outside in the backyard. But then we took it out to Lake Cottage and Lake Sinissippi in Hustisford where his family built

a log cabin on the island out there. My grandma Clara, my father's mother, was head cook at South Division High School and her husband was principal—my grandfather, who I never knew, he died before I was born. Anyhow they built a big, you know...

GG: This was your father's side?

Tucker: My father's side, which I rarely heard about—it was always my mom's side...

GG: Yeah, right...

Tucker: And so I ended up with the all women sailing crew on Marina del Rey. We were in the Wednesday night races in Marina Del Rey and we sailed four or five of us. It took a 36-foot islander. I was at the helm because my father taught me how to feel about, how to listen to the boat, how to know if it was well made, that you could trust the boat to sail itself...

GG: Your dad sounds very cool.

Tucker: He was, he was incredibly cool, but very very strict. And so it was always a kind of a you know, iffy situation

GG: You ever sailed on the South Shore?

Tucker: Not really, because I wasn't here. I used to sail the ocean—we'd sail to Catalina and back and it's much easier. The ocean is much much easier to sail, of course unless there's a squall that comes up and I've run into that before. It's a miracle we didn't miss Catalina a couple of times.

GG: Well, they say the Great Lakes are more dangerous because...

Tucker: Oh, all those boats and ships down there..

GG: Right...

Tucker: But my family sailed—and that's why I'm getting to that—Uncle Warry was a big sailor. He owned a boat and he was part of the original South Shore Yacht Club...

GG: That's what I was wondering about...

Tucker: And so was my grandpa...

GG: There was big involvement...

Tucker: Very big involvement. My dad was always involved with sailing and because of that I also—I extrapolated a little bit—and I would go sail plaining without an engine. I don't know how I did that, but you'd get towed up 5,000 feet.

GG: Oh, honey.

Tucker: And what was scary was the part where you get towed up and it's just by a water skiing rope, you know that's tied onto the the plane with the engine and in the front of the ring in the front here, and of course, it's this big—right like this. But I had an instructor in the back because I never got my solo license—it takes forever to do that. But I was able to do it.

GG: How often did you do that?

Tucker: As often as I could afford it.

GG: Good lord...

Tucker: Pearblossom was in the North California desert and I forget the name of the southern one. You'd get towed up and get at that height and it was a lot of bouncing around because of the towing... I'll never forget the time he first said okay, there's a red knob in there, just grab it, it's a knob you pull it and it says release, you know, pull this. I said put your hand on my shoulder because I'm going to faint if you don't. The plate just settled and it was like this. Absolutely nothing, but you could hear the wind...

GG: Yes, you would probably hear me screaming...

Tucker: Just like a sailboat. It was just like a sailboat and I wish that my dad could have done that because he would take me out in bad weather up in Lake Sinissippi and he was just bored and my mom would get upset—really upset—because I'd come back and my hands were bleeding and everything, because I was in charge of the jib and he would have the mainsail and what you call—I don't know what he called—a jenny on the side, not a spinnaker. He didn't have a spinnaker, but a jenny. And the wind was blowing like crazy and we'd get in this little boat and there's no place to sit because it was built for speed. You couldn't get comfortable in that boat at all, because he built it totally for speed, and we beat every other boat on the island—the catamarans, everybody. So he'd be back there with the tiller in the mainsail and he'd get ready to go and he'd say “okay drop the center board” and I had to pull the little key out and it dropped down and you could start to hear that—I still hear it in my mind—and all of us in this house

would sail and you could hear the center board humming and it would start humming and humming because it was vibrating in the water because it was pushed so fast, you know. And it was everything I could do to hold on to that jib and he wouldn't let me wind it around a winch—you know winches, it was just a little you know hooks and things like that—and I couldn't really wind them because he was constantly correcting direction, constantly. And coming about was this huge major thing where we were just like that and that, and my mom would stand there watching. Anyhow, that was my dad and he had lots of patents to inventions that he made, and he learned a lot of that from this family because...

GG: Well that's what I was going to say that, you know, usually the emphasis is on your maternal side, the Beulah Brinton side, you don't hear too much about your dad's side.

Tucker: Well...

GG: Now we do...

Tucker: My dad's side was very very strong, but he also learned a lot from this family because he went to college on the GI plan and he became an engineer...

GG: Was he in Milwaukee at this time?

Tucker: Yeah, he lived over—you know where that ambulance place is on KK and Wilson?

GG: Yeah...

Tucker: Yeah, right behind there, one of those little Bungalows. That's when they grew up...

GG: That's what I was going to ask: was he an all-time Bay Viewer then?

Tucker: Yeah. Oh, that's where they met, in the Trinity Methodist choir—mom and he met in the choir and he played the violin and would be in the young people's orchestra and my mom sang and played the piano and so they were you know... but she wrote for the *Journal*, the Milwaukee *Journal-Sentinel*. She was a feature writer for them and she taught at Marquette University. She taught English literature and journalism.

GG: When did—well they're probably before my, because I went to Marquette—but she wouldn't have been there...

Tucker: Oh, after. Yeah. No, probably...well...

GG: 60s...

Tucker: Yeah. No, after... Yeah. But she was teaching at University school first, then she got her Master's in English literature and then went to Marquette and taught journalism. Now interestingly enough, my dad couldn't write a sentence and my mom couldn't add two and two. So they were a perfect match.

GG: Where did your dad's family come from? Were they second generation, first generation Bay Viewers?

Tucker: My grandma, his mom, was first generation from Berlin...

GG: Berlin, that's right he was German...

Tucker: She had quite a heavy German accent. It was very difficult during the war because people weren't supposed to speak German and I wish that I could have learned it, but we were told not to speak it.

GG: My grandmother was German and... well, they came over in World War I and my mom had been learning German in school in Oshkosh and World War I hit and they dropped all the German studies. So she never learned to write in German. She at least spoke, still spoke German, but she was learning all the fancy—what do you call that German writing? There's a term for it... the old fancy German...

Tucker: Oh, calligraphy...

GG: Well, kind of. Because we have some books here in the library written in that old German and now nobody can read it, you know, the old fancy German. But anyways...

Tucker: I never had a German history and neither did you really, because of our age.

GG: But yeah, they were learning about that then had to stop because of the war but that was World War I. World War II, I don't remember... well, I was just a baby, but I don't know my mom ever talked about being discriminated against because she was married at the time and didn't have a German name.

Tucker: Well, my mom was embarrassed with my grandmother's German accent. So we didn't have my Grandma Claire with us that often and I would get so angry that, you know, that she

would allow that to happen. And a little later when I understood what the family was all about, and I would start channeling Beulah Brinton... Well, she said, this is different, this was war, and we were at war with, you know, Germany, and I don't want people to know that we have any German Heritage.

GG: See I didn't think it was that rampant here in Milwaukee, which has such a big German population. I didn't think there was that much anti-German bias...

Tucker: Maybe not in Bay View, but in Whitefish Bay things were rampant. Like the first black people that came in... it was a Brave. His parents wanted to live there and he bought them a house... Aaron... Hank Aaron. The first black people in Whitefish Bay—usually called White Folks Bay

GG: Well Whitefish Bay is heavily Jewish too, isn't it?

Tucker: Oh yeah. The high school was a huge population. My best friend at the time—Barbara Sherman—I'd go over to her temple on Saturdays. Sometimes I'd go because I was curious and I wanted to know all about her, about the Jewish religion, and then I would, but she never came to church with me. I think she did once. Anyway, we were very close and there didn't seem to be any—it was between the Catholics and the Methodists...

GG: My dad was Ukrainian and they spelled their new last name was Ridonsky with a y, and he told me about all the Jewish prejudice back like in the 30s where he couldn't get a job—you would be careful because they wouldn't hire Jewish people. I was so shocked as a little girl that why would they hire Jewish people? He had to change—he was going to anglicize his name to Ramsey and my aunt told him... you don't change your family name. So he dropped the Y to an I. But I told you the story before, I think. My parents had a bar on Mitchell Street, World War II before he entered the war, before he went to war, and the German Bund came in—the swastika, the whole German Nazi Milwaukee style, the Bund—and my mom was behind the bar and they said we heard your husband is Jewish. And my little mom was like five-two, she just tore into them. She said, we're not Jewish, we're Catholic, you get out of my bar and I'm not going to wake my husband up. He was up since 3:00 in the morning... and she chased those guys out of there. But there was a heavy Jewish prejudice on the South Side of Milwaukee, which is interesting, while you're growing up on the Whitefish Bay...

Tucker: The northeast side, yeah... that's why I was always very... actually there were a lot of things about the Orthodox Jewish religion that I preferred to the Methodists. So at Northwestern especially, I went to the rabbi over there. Rabbi Skirble(?) was his name. Now I get red in the face and embarrassed when I think about what I did; I said, you know, it's very hard for me to

swallow the whole thing about Jesus, and I said maybe I should be Jewish instead. So I said I don't believe in hell and I don't believe in the devil... and I can believe in the in Genesis, but, frankly, I said I think of Jesus as a teacher and I do not see the spiritual quality that I have to believe in to be Methodist.

GG: And how old were you when you said this?

Tucker: 18, 19, 20.

GG: It took me a little longer.

Tucker: Well, I was so close to the church. I was president of the MYF, the Methodist Youth Foundation there. I did all kinds of things... volunteer work and so on. But to be confirmed there pastor... Pastor Buxton, oh I'm getting old. Anyway, he was the best Reverend I've ever met and he frankly, Rabbi Skirble(?), said to me, you know what?—three times. I knew this you have to go to a rabbi three times and request to be Jewish before they will even consider it—anyway, so he said I think you should go home and talk to your pastor, Reverend Buxton. Okay, so I did, and I sat down with him and he said how many people in this congregation do you think are so Methodist that they believe everything that the Bible says about Jesus and all of... he said we don't turn you away, said you did if you don't believe in the devil, you know, that's fine. He said, you know, but I would encourage you to learn more about this and educate yourself. So I did take the course in Judaism and then later on at the Silver Spring Church when I came back here when I was 45, 47, I took a wonderful course in Methodist beginnings and so on from a professor from Marquette that was just excellent and I still have all of that—the whole big packet of that—and decided that after all I probably—everything considered in the big picture family included—that I probably was a Methodist more than anything else. So...

GG: Are you familiar with the Messianic Jews, the Jews for Jesus? I have a cousin who actually married a Jewish man, who is a Messianic Jew and they believe in Jesus. It's kind of an interesting thing.

Tucker: That seems an oxymoron to me...

GG: It's interesting...

Tucker: Belief in Jesus doesn't mean they thought he was holy but more of a great teacher and...

GG: I actually can't wrap my mind around it, but they're very Jewish. She was Catholic but then became a Messianic Jew. They do a lot of the Jewish traditions, but they believe in Jesus, so I

don't understand that, but you never heard of that?

Tucker: Well, I was engaged to an orthodox Jew in New York and was for years and we did USO tours together. So we were very very close and were just a perfect fit. Yet my mom said to me, oh Ellen, why can't you find someone your own kind as if we were different animals, you know? Like dogs breeding with cats or something, you know, that was the intimation. So it started to disappear, but I would go to visit his parents in Long Island. They were very poor Jewish people and we'd walk to temple and he'd put on his yarmulke, and the two men would walk ahead, and his mom and I would walk back behind. I was just totally enamored by the difference of it, and yet the similarities: everything about the services and everything that wasn't in Yiddish or Hebrew or whatever, I understood and I'd heard already, you know because it came from the first testament and a lot of that. I wanted to be more like Beulah Brinton and concentrate on the similarities rather than the differences. And in the end I did walk away, which is too bad because I think that that was the best fit I ever, you know could have made in a best friend, best companion...

GG: Who did you actually end up marrying?

Tucker: I didn't

GG: You never did?

Tucker: My mom asked me why have you not married? She said, are you a lesbian? I said no and she said well, why was it? And I said, well because nothing helps...

*****Loud phone call noise temporarily interrupts interview*****

Tucker: That's my son but I'm not going to answer it. I'm sorry. She was laying on the dying couch in the dining room. For quite a while...

GG: What was it called?

Tucker: The dying couch.

GG: The dying couch? As opposed to a fainting couch.

Tucker: Will that's totally different... fainting was theatrical...

GG: The long kind of...

Tucker: No, it was just a plain old, plain couch that had a good cushion on the bottom and because she couldn't make it up the stairs she would just lay there and she couldn't even get up and had to be fed...

GG: The dying couch...

Tucker: Well, that's what the family used to say...

GG: No, but I never heard that expression...

Tucker: She died there, Uncle Warry died there, Beulah Brinton had died...

GG: Died here? Died in this house?

Tucker: Yeah, yeah...

GG: That explains all the mysterious stuff that happens here. You ever experienced little haunting things?

Tucker: I've channeled her many times and I've had miracles and my mom did too. When the car broke down it started when she asked Beulah to start it. So, you know this is absolute and we usually kept that all kind of quiet...

GG: I know but I've felt that here...

Tucker: Well, I have definitely used the connection. Although it's not anywhere near as strong like what my mom had with her because she knew her. Beulah Brinton died when she was 11 and Uncle Warry died when I was 11. But he was brilliant, absolutely brilliant, Uncle Maury. And smart, smart cookie.

CW: You said he lived in the house when you were little right? Just he lived here at that point or did anyone else?

Tucker: Oh no, his sister Emily and there were four generations of us here at the same time...

CW: At the same time, okay...

Tucker: Great grandma Emily and Great uncle Warry, were the two children of Beulah Brinton

that still lived.

GG: So there were what, 3-4 bedrooms upstairs?

Tucker: Yeah, four bedrooms. Mom and I were in the little one up here. It was bigger because they moved, you know, the panel of the room. It's that weird half window here and a half window there. That's why it was farther back. So that was three bedrooms is what it was and the back one up there was a sewing room. It was so small. You couldn't do anything.

GG: Where the bathroom is now?

Tucker: Yeah. Yeah, that's what where the sewing room was and we had a foot pedal sewing machine, she taught me everything.

CW: So your grandparents lived here at the same time.

Tucker: Oh, yeah.

CW: So, Mabel and Ira?

Tucker: Great grandmother and her brother Warry, and then my grandparents Mabel and Ira Estes. They have a fun story because they were 18, and they were so much in love, and they decided that Beulah Brinton wouldn't allow them to get married. So my grandpa put a ladder up there and my Grandma Mabel ran away and they got married.

GG: Woah, people actually did that?

Tucker: And then everyone was so scared that—oh yeah, a lot of people did—and then they got so scared that Beulah Brinton was going to kill them. Then when they finally told her she said, why didn't you tell me? She said, well if you're married you have to be together here, you know. So that was when they were in high school, Bay View High School. And so they moved in the back bedroom. Uncle Warry's bedroom was here. Grandma Emily was on the dying couch and Mom and I were in this bedroom.

GG: So she actually stayed down here on the dying couch?

Tucker: Pretty much. She couldn't make the stairs.

GG: WAs there a bathroom up there then?

Tucker: We had... no, there wasn't a bathroom, there was a potty. What do you call it... a bowl.

CW: A latrine...

Tucker: A latrine that you'd go in...

CW: Because you're still getting all your water from down the road...

GG: Oh, whoa...

Tucker: No, there was an actual bathroom here...

CW: Oh, okay...

Tucker: But not upstairs. That little spot, where you walk down a step? That's where we had also a tub for me to have baths in when I was a kid, and also to go potty there. And they had a portable ceramic type bowl of porcelain. What do you call those things?

GG: Yeah, there's a term for it...

Tucker: But then all those stories about the ragman coming.

GG: I still remember the ragman...

Tucker: Do you remember the iceman too? When he'd come with the big tongs and he'd bring a big block of ice...

GG: And the knife sharpener?

Tucker: No, I don't... oh yeah, but I don't remember him so much, but this is already recorded. I think we have all of that stuff, especially in the video and everything.

GG: That'll be cool, that video.

Tucker: Yeah, when it's full, the video. Did you give some things on there? Kathy was great talking about things.
