Interviewer: This is an interview on the Annie Wittenmyer Oral History Project. My name is Pam Noll and I'm interviewing Sandra Turner. Today is Wednesday, July 13, 1994.

Interviewer: Sandra, can you tell me where you lived at the Home? When you lived at the Home?


Interviewer: Ok, and how old were you when you were there?

Ms. Turner: I was about three.

Interviewer: Three to five years old?

Ms. Turner: Right.

Interviewer: Which cottage did you live in?

Ms. Turner: I don't remember if they had numbers or anything, but I lived like in one next to what I called the cafeteria.

Interviewer: Sort of like the main, one of the main buildings then?

Ms. Turner: Right.

Interviewer: Ok, what was the cottage like? Can you kind of take me on an imaginary tour?

Ms. Turner: Let's see. What I can remember is it was to me anyway. It was a white cottage. When you go in the front door there was like a family room or living room. And then when you go through these other doors, before you go up to the stairs, there was, uh, cabinets for you to keep your coats and your hats and all that other stuff and then underneath you had drawers. Ok, then you go upstairs, this was the bedroom. And then they had about, I think it was about twenty beds up there. Then I can remember off in the corner that's cabinets up there where they kept the sheets and stuff. And then off in the other corner they had like a, a stall for the bathroom. It was just like a toilet then, that was all, it was just like a little stall right there. And then right next to the stall is a fire escape, it's a big old square one, and then you open it up and go down the great big old round . . .

Interviewer: Down the round chute?

Ms. Turner: Right. And that's all I can remember about the cottage.

Interviewer: Ok.

Ms. Turner: Oh yes, they did have a back porch. I remember we were back on the back porch quite a bit (on the steps?).

Interviewer: It was like an open porch then or screened?

Ms. Turner: No, it was closed, it was closed in.

Interviewer: Closed in?

Ms. Turner: Uh, huh.
Interviewer: Ok. Um, what about your clothing you wore?

Ms. Turner: I don't remember too much clothing. The only thing I remember about clothing is when my adoptive parents come to get me, I remember I had on a plaid dress. That's the only thing I can remember.

Interviewer: Ok.

Ms. Turner: Clothing wise, no, I know I think we wore dresses, real dresses.

Interviewer: That they just gave you or came up with someplace?

Ms. Turner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember your housemother or your housefather?

Ms. Turner: I don't remember, face wise. But I know we had an older one and a younger one. And, uh, I didn't care for them. (Interviewer laughs) Not the older one anyway.

Interviewer: So they were both very stern?

Ms. Turner: Not so much the young one, the older one was, very stern. Very, very, very stern.

Interviewer: Really very disciplined then?

Ms. Turner: Very disciplined.

Interviewer: So what was a typical day like then?

Ms. Turner: Well, I do remember going to school, um, playing out in the yard, and watching TV. I remember doing that.

Interviewer: So they had a TV like in the living room?

Ms. Turner: Uh, huh. In the family room, what I called the family room. I remember watching that.

Interviewer: And going to school. And did you have to do jobs?

Ms. Turner: That I don't remember doing.

Interviewer: Being as little as you were . . .

Ms. Turner: No, I don't remember doing any jobs.

Interviewer: When you went outside to play then did you play with kids out of the other cottages too?

Ms. Turner: Well, we were allowed to play with other kids in the cottages and stuff, but it was me and my three sisters. Me and my older sister was in that cottage and then the other cottage was the two younger ones. And we were so close that we bonded.

Interviewer: Bonded?
Ms. Turner: Yes, we didn't play too much with the other kids, we played with each other.

Interviewer: Yeah, I can understand that. Um, so when you went to school, do you remember much about it?

Ms. Turner: Oh, I loved school. I guess I was in kindergarten, or what I call kindergarten, but I guess it was sort of like a Head Start type thing you know. And I remember it was in the basement, and I remember we had pallets on the floor for us for nap time. And our tables, I can remember that because we had bottled milk then, we didn't have cartons, so there was a place for that, I remember that. And then they had a log cabin. It was a toy log cabin down there big enough for us little kids going and playing. I remember, I loved that log cabin. (Interviewer laughs) I loved school.

Interviewer: Was the school right on the grounds then?

Ms. Turner: Uh, huh.

Interviewer: So you just had to walk over to the . . .

Ms. Turner: Right, the cottages were right here and the front door. So it would be off to your right.

Interviewer: Ok. Um, and so basically you were there all day.

Ms. Turner: Yes. That's how I can remember.

Interviewer: Because you had pallets for naptime.

Ms. Turner: Right.

Interviewer: Do you remember getting a summer vacation then or did they go most of the . . .

Ms. Turner: No, uh . . .

Interviewer: You just remember going (laughs).

Ms. Turner: Just going to school (laughs). I imagine we had summer vacation, but I just don't remember it.

Interviewer: Did you get recess at school then too, I assume?

Ms. Turner: No, see, I don't remember that. I remember just playing down there in that log cabin.

Interviewer: That log cabin, that was a neat one. Um, do you remember your teachers then when you were in school?

Ms. Turner: No.

Interviewer: The log cabin was . . .

Ms. Turner: That's it.

Interviewer: That's the center. Or discipline or anything like that?
Ms. Turner: Well, I knew that there was a teacher, and I don't remember who she is or what she looked like, or her name, but I remember she made sure we took our naps. Cause if you raised your head, "put your head down", or anything, or go to the bathroom or whatever, "you get back on there", I do remember that.

Interviewer: Get back down and get your head down.

Ms. Turner: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was it like on weekends then? Do you remember weekends?

Ms. Turner: Weekends didn't consist of anything to me, I mean one day was another.

Interviewer: So it didn't really, didn't really matter.

Ms. Turner: No.

Interviewer: Um, do you remember going to church then on weekends maybe?

Ms. Turner: I don't remember going to church at all. I know we did, but I don't remember doing it.

Interviewer: What brought you to the Home? Under what circumstances I guess?

Ms. Turner: I really don't know the truth. I hear so many stories, that you really don't know the truth. All I know is that from what my mother said is that she went to Social Services to get help for us cause we were without food and stuff. And at that time, there was a great demand for blonde, blue-eyed girls, and, um, she said they just took us from her. I don't know if that's true. It don't sound true, but you know, there must be something in the past, that she don't want you to know.

Interviewer: That she doesn't want to talk about.

Ms. Turner: And don't want to bring about, you know. Maybe something that she did do or something. I mean that's what she told us.

Interviewer: Yeah, and so what, when you left, what were the circumstances around you leaving the Home?

Ms. Turner: When I left the Home?

Interviewer: Uh, huh.


Interviewer: You got adopted out?

Ms. Turner: Mm, Mm, all four of us did.

Interviewer: All four of you did? Ok.

Ms. Turner: In separate homes.

Interviewer: To different homes, so there were three sisters and you, there were four sisters
Ms. Turner: Right.

Interviewer: And you all got adopted out?

Ms. Turner: Right. All to different homes.

Interviewer: All to different homes, so where did you end up going?

Ms. Turner: I ended up going to Des Moines, my oldest sister went to uh, it starts with an O, it's not Osceola, but it's Oska, Oskaloosa, and my sister Mary stayed here, and my younger sister, Cathy, that we have not been able to find yet, so we don't know where she went. But someone said that when she got adopted, a private plane took her somewhere in Iowa.

Interviewer: So was Cathy the youngest one?

Ms. Turner: Yeah, she was the youngest one.

Interviewer: So she would have still been?

Ms. Turner: Oh God, let's see, I was six. Five, four, three.

Interviewer: Three, yeah, so she would have been really, really young.

Ms. Turner: Right.

Interviewer: Um, what did you like most about living at the Home I guess?

Ms. Turner: School? (laughs)

Interviewer: The school was a plus, yeah.

Ms. Turner: And being with my sisters, that was it.

Interviewer: So what did you like least about it I guess?

Ms. Turner: (laughs) The mothers, or whatever you call em.

Interviewer: Were so stern?

Ms. Turner: I remember one time, I didn't know how to tie my shoes. So she stood over me in the corner where the stairway is, I remember sitting right there, and she made me sit there until I learned how to tie my shoes. And when I didn't, she, she hit me with a yardstick.

Interviewer: With a yardstick. On your knuckles?

Ms. Turner: On my legs, until I learned how to tie my shoe. And I also remember, that when you go to the cafeteria they said you had to eat everything on your plate. Otherwise you get a spanking. The only time I got a spanking was when I, I hate spinach (laughs).

Interviewer: (Laughs) So every spinach day was a spanking day?

Ms. Turner: Yeah, yeah.
Interviewer: Um, but I mean you obviously had some fond memories of your home life?

Ms. Turner: Oh yeah, I remember . . .

Interviewer: Before you went to the . . .

Ms. Turner: Oh, my home? No, I don't remember nothing. The day my mother brought us there, I don't remember nothing. I don't know if I just wanted to block it out, but my sister tells us, cause we got a picture of all four of us before we went to the Home, the same day that we were going to the Home, that they took a picture of us all together. And I have that.

Interviewer: And she says she remembers that day then?

Ms. Turner: But I don't remember that day.

Interviewer: Ok, how do you feel like living at the Annie Wittenmyer Home has affected your life since, you know, since?

Ms. Turner: When I left the Annie Wittenmyer Home, that's what I did, I left it. I did not think about that place ever again, until I got older. Until I wanted to find out who my parents were. See, I didn't know who my parents were or why they put us in the Home, but the only reason I wanted to find my parents is not so much curious of who they were, but find out why did you do it? I was more hurt because they put me there, or put us there. Because my parents that adopted me, that's my Mom and Dad. I found my Mom, my real Mom, and then my real Dad had died, he remarried and had eight, no he had nine kids when he got remarried. But he died before I got the chance to meet him. But we found my real Mom and my older sister and my sister younger than me, but like I said, it was the youngest sister that we haven't been able to find yet. And what we're thinking is that they probably changed the name, because, uh, my sister Mary, is not her real name, it's not her given name. So when they adopted her, they changed her name. So we figure they changed the youngest one's name too. And it's going to be hard to find someone when you don't know their name.

Interviewer: Well, and if she was only three, she may not really remember being there.

Ms. Turner: That's true too. And maybe they didn't say nothing to her. That's why I wish they would open up the files, especially in our case. The father's gone, we know who the mother is, and we know all three of us. Why can't they contact, at least contact her, and tell her, and maybe she'd want to get in touch with us.

Interviewer: Yeah, I don't know. So do you feel like it's had any influence on your life or you just basically blocked it out.

Ms. Turner: I blocked it out, that was the past that I did not want to remember.

Interviewer: Do you remember what you did for recreation when you were there?

Ms. Turner: Oh yeah, I remember the playgrounds and the swings and the merry-go-rounds. We all played around there.

Interviewer: Did you get to go on trips? Do you remember that?

Ms. Turner: No, I don't remember trips. I remember sitting in front of the TV, in the living room, and I was so engrossed in a cartoon, that I bit my fingernail completely off. And I remember a tap
on the door, and I looked up and there was this clown. And I couldn't figure it out. "And don't forget to come to the fireworks." Well, behind the boys' cabins, there's a great big hill and we all sat back there and they would shoot fireworks. I remember that, on every Fourth of July. So, I do remember that. That's the only holiday I remember.

Interviewer: So, do you remember Christmas at all?

Ms. Turner: No.

Interviewer: Not much for presents then obviously?

Ms. Turner: There must not have been (laughs).

Interviewer: I know all the girls were in one set of houses and the boys were in the other, did you get to socialize between the two?

Ms. Turner: I don't remember seeing boys at all. Not at all. All I remember is girls.

Interviewer: With girls and with your sisters then?

Ms. Turner: Right.

Interviewer: Ok, were the girls in your house mostly the same age then?

Ms. Turner: Uh, huh. Around that yeah.

Interviewer: All around your age, it wasn't older and younger together then?

Ms. Turner: No.

Interviewer: Ok.

Ms. Turner: I remember getting a spanking one time because I was socializing with this one black girl that was in our cabin. They did not approve of it. So I got spanked for it.

Interviewer: So you got spanked for it. So there were minority children?

Ms. Turner: Yes, I remember. And alot of times we would sneak off and go play. That's the only time I actually was not around my sisters is with her. We were buddy buddy. Then we would sneak off and go out the back door, and right behind our cabin was, I guess you'd call like a nursery like thing, where they have flowers and stuff, back there. And we got caught in there and we got spanked for that. Then me and my younger sister Mary, which was Linda then, would slide down the fire escape (laughs). We had a ball going down that, then as soon as we hit the bottom, there's our mother, housemother. Well, you got a spanking, got punished for that. Then another time, we got punished for was if you ever peed the bed, you had to change everybody's sheets. Everybody's, not just mine, everybody's. That's twenty beds you got to change. And I remember doing it one time, and I took my sheets off, when up into the cupboard, and got clean ones down. But she found out, because they count the sheets. So, I got in trouble for that. And then for one punishment she put me right, she knew I hated the fire escape at night time, she put my bed there. I would cover up my head and I was scared to death. I hated that. So she was being mean to me that way. I remember going to the hospital they had there. We were all in back snapping beans, and I lost my balance and fell on the stairs. Down the back steps. I think there were about maybe three of them. And cut my head. So I remember having to go to the hospital and they had to put stitches in and I had to stay there over night. I guess to keep an eye
on me. And then I remember looking out the window and seeing my sisters waving up to me and I cried, because I wanted them to come up and they wouldn't let them come up. And I remember that you go down in the back of the hospital and that's where you get your, oh wait a minute, maybe it wasn't the hospital. Behind a building over there by there is where the doctor's office is, I think. And that's where you go get your shots. And they said if you don't cry, you'll get a treat. So I'm telling everybody, "Don't cry, don't cry and you'll get a treat, you'll get a treat. Don't cry, don't cry." And I remember one other time, is where they put, to me it was like adhesive, white adhesive tape, and they put like an "x" mark on your back. I don't know if back then, that's how they did a TB test or what. But I remember they did an "x" mark on your back with white adhesive tape.

Interviewer: But you don't remember what else they did then?

Ms. Turner: No. I know we had to wear it for a certain amount of time or length. My sisters had it on too. So I don't know if it was some kind of a test back then or . . . I have no idea. I remember having it on there.

Interviewer: I don't know anything about that one.

Ms. Turner: No.

Interviewer: So you do remember snapping beans though, so you must have done some things to help out.

Ms. Turner: Yeah, I guess so.

Interviewer: Do you remember doing it with your cottage group?

Ms. Turner: Right, just our cottage, right.

Interviewer: Got to snap beans that day?

Ms. Turner: Right.

Interviewer: But then you ate in a cafeteria?

Ms. Turner: Right. It's like we had a overpass, you'd come out of the cottage and you'd go like an overpass and then continue and go into the cafeteria. I remember one time it was pouring down rain, but we didn't get wet because we had that overpass.

Interviewer: Ok. Anything else you remember in particular?

Ms. Turner: Oh, well, I remember getting our haircuts.

Interviewer: Did your house mother do that then?

Ms. Turner: No, we went to a barbershop there, it was behind the main building. And that's where the treat place was too, because I remember we must have got allowance or something, because we'd always go down, on the bottom was a candy store, and up on top was the barbershop.

Interviewer: So you must have gotten some kind of money that you could spend in the candy store.
Ms. Turner: Right. And we all had like Dutch boy's haircuts. (laughs) It seemed like they put a bowl on your head and . . .

Interviewer: And chopped it off?

Ms. Turner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Not very exciting haircuts?

Ms. Turner: No, we all had that.

Interviewer: But you'd go over as a whole cottage, I suppose to do haircuts and to do treats?

Ms. Turner: Right. And I remember my adoptive parents coming to visit me. And they took me around Davenport, and they took me out to eat, and then I remember eating everything on my plate and lifting it up and showing it to them and says "I cleaned my plate."

Interviewer: (Laughs) Because that's what you had to do when you ate in the cafeteria.

Ms. Turner: Right. And I only remember doing that, and then the next time they came, they took me. And that's the only thing I remember, I don't know how many times they were supposed to come or what, but I do remember that.

Interviewer: Did you know that they were thinking about adopting you when they took you . . .

Ms. Turner: Yeah, because, uh, uh, I don't remember exactly what I said or did, but I remember they got me ready, they got my hair cut, and they bought me this new plaid dress, I remember that, and some new shoes. And they picked me up, and um, they said I grabbed their hands and said, "Let's go Mom and Dad." (laughs) So I guess I . . .

Interviewer: (Laughs) You were ready!!

Ms. Turner: I was ready!! (laughs) I was ready! I remember saying goodbye to my sisters, I think there was two of us that went that day, and two of them went the next day.

Interviewer: So you were all adopted out in the very same timeframe?

Ms. Turner: Yep.

Interviewer: That's amazing.

Ms. Turner: And I asked, later on, I asked my Mom and Dad, "How come you didn't adopt my sisters?" And they said, "Well, we didn't know you had sisters." So, at that time, I guess they weren't really interested in keeping siblings together, like they are now. They just wanted to get everybody adopted out. And, uh, my sisters have more information about things than my parents got. My parents hardly didn't get any information, all they got was a little square picture of me when I was in the orphanage. That was weird. See, I didn't even know who my real parents were then. And my Mom and Dad said they thought my last name was Heinz, but it's not Heinz, it was Hein, H...E...I...N.... and, um, that was weird. I knew my father's name was Jack, but I didn't know who my mother's name was, so I don't know. Weird. I think I blocked out all, I tried to block out alot, I really do. Sometimes, um, me and my sister thought maybe we'd go to a hypnotist and see how far back we could go. But I don't remember nothing before the orphanage, nothing. And my older sister, Peggy, she can remember alot of things. She was Mr. Holmes' pet. She went home with him alot. I think that's why I didn't play too much with her, I was always playing with
my sister Mary because I don't remember her being in the cottage, because she was always with him, at his house.

Interviewer: And then, did she get adopted by him?

Ms. Turner: No, she got adopted by other people.

Interviewer: By other people?

Ms. Turner: Mm, mm.

Interviewer: But she was one of the teacher's pets, so . . .

Ms. Turner: Yep. It was weird. That's pretty much about all I remember or care to remember about that place. (laughs).

Interviewer: (laughs) Ok. This is the end of the interview.