

Oakland University Chronicles

*Interview with*

**Mildred Hammerle**

and

**(Tamar) Uni Susskind**

Transcript of Oral History Interview

Interview date: December 8, 1997

Interviewer: Harvey Burdick



Published by Oakland University

Rochester, Michigan

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**MILDRED ORTALS HAMMERLE**

Date of birth: April 3, 1919

**EDUCATION**

West Philadelphia Catholic High School for Girls

**PRIOR TO OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

Lived in East Lansing with husband William Hammerle, who taught at Michigan State University.

**ASSOCIATION WITH OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

Her husband Professor William Hammerle taught chemistry, physics, and engineering from 1959 until his death in 1986.

**EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

Secretary, CIPPO (Campus Information and Programs Office)  
Oakland University

Board member and negotiating team member  
UAW Local 1925

Cub Scouts den mother

Library volunteer at Meadow Brook Elementary School

**CHILDREN**

Michael Louis • December 1955  
Patricia Ann • April 1957

*Current as of December 8, 1997*



**Photograph of Mildred Hammerle**

December 8, 1997

Photographer: Alice Tombouliau



**Photograph of Mildred Hammerle**

Photograph taken before 1959

Source: Loan from Mildred Hammerle

**Oakland University Chronicles**  
**TAMAR YOUNINAH “UNI” SUSSKIND**

Date of birth: August 28, 1930

**EDUCATION**

B.A.	University of British Columbia	1950
M.S.	Oakland University Major: Chemistry	1970

**PRIOR TO OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

Lived in Columbus, Ohio with husband Norman Susskind, who taught at Ohio State University.

**ASSOCIATION WITH OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

Her husband Professor Norman Susskind taught French language and literature from 1960 until his death in 1990.

**EMPLOYMENT**

Instructor: Chemistry  
Oakland Community College  
Oakland County, Michigan  
1965 - present

**CHILDREN**

David Lawrence • February 1956  
Robert Daniel • October 1957  
Judith Anne • June 1961

*Current as of December 8, 1997*





**Photograph of Uni Susskind**

December 8, 1997

Photographer: Alice Tombouliau



**Photograph of Uni Susskind**

Photograph taken before 1960

Source: Loan from Uni Susskind.



## **Oakland University Chronicles**

### **Interview with**

**MILDRED HAMMERLE and (TAMAR) UNI SUSSKIND**

**December 8, 1997**

HARVEY BURDICK: Today's interview is one in a series of interviews being conducted for the Oakland University Chronicles Project and supported in its second year by a special university allocation. The purpose of the interviews is to develop an oral history of the early years of Oakland University, then called MSUO. The interviews are being conducted with various members of the MSUO community: administrators, faculty and their wives, as well as students and others from those early days.

Today is December the 8th, 1997, and we are in Varner Hall on the campus of Oakland University. My name is Harvey Burdick and I am a professor of psychology and will do the interviewing on this occasion.

Our guests today were wives of early faculty members. Millie Hammerle, directly to my right, was married to Bill [William] Hammerle who was a professor of physics and engineering until his death in 1986. Uni Susskind was married to Norman Susskind, who was a professor of French in the modern language [department] until his death in 1990.

Both Millie and Uni have maintained their contact with Oakland and both continue to live in the university subdivision. I would like to welcome you both to the Chronicles Project and thank you for contributing your memories of those early years.

Why don't we start with Millie, okay? Millie, could you tell us about Bill's academic background, when you were married, and how you finally came to MSUO?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Bill was a grad student at Princeton and I was working at the Textile Research [Institute]. We met in January of 1952 and after Bill passed prelims we were married. Then in the following June when he got his Ph.D. we moved to Yale. Yale was very formal and I was surprised because new wives did not speak to faculty wives until they were properly introduced. The faculty wives would make a call wearing hats and white gloves. They didn't

care whether you were home or not, that was considered an introduction, and it was very unusual.

HARVEY BURDICK: So you were a young wife. What was Bill doing at Yale?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: He was on a post-doctoral fellowship in the physics department.

HARVEY BURDICK: And you were a young wife who had to deal with all of the others in a very formal fashion; is that your recollection of Yale?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes, it was very formal.

HARVEY BURDICK: And you were in Yale for what, a couple of years?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Two years.

HARVEY BURDICK: And then?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Then Bill was offered a job at Michigan State in the physics department. Michael had been born while we were living in New Haven and Michael and Bill and I moved to East Lansing, and while we were in East Lansing our daughter Patti was born. Bill taught there for three or four years, and while he was there Woody [Durward B.] Varner was also there and spoke with someone in the physics department about this new university. He was looking for professors, and one of the professors recommended Bill.

HARVEY BURDICK: So Woody Varner got in touch with Bill?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: I was doing the laundry, hanging it out, and Woody came along and said, "You must be Millie," which was very different from Yale. I said, "Yes," and he said, "Well, I'm Woody Varner and we have this new university, and I've come to talk to Bill." And Bill spoke to him and seemed very interested and said he would think about it. He didn't think about it too long before saying yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: When was that, do you remember the month?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: That was in June.

HARVEY BURDICK: That was in June, and Bill came that very September, so this happened very quickly?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Very quickly. We spent the summer in Calumet [Michigan] and Bill made a couple of trips down to see how the university was progressing and I think he was always impressed with it.

HARVEY BURDICK: So the interview with Bill was in June, you then spent the summer in northern Michigan and came to campus in the fall, in August?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: We came down for the first time in August and that was when I first saw the campus. There were two buildings, North and South Foundation. South Foundation didn't have doors yet, and I was impressed that we went into the building through the windows. It was fun looking for a place to live, or to stay while we were here for the short visit. There were only two motels and we stayed at the Rochester Motel on Main Street for that short time and then went back.

HARVEY BURDICK: And found a place to rent during that time —

MILDRED HAMMERLE: When we lived at the Rochester Motel, we stayed for two weeks and we looked for housing in Rochester and couldn't find any. Then we went to Pontiac and found a house on Featherstone Road.

HARVEY BURDICK: O.K. So you found a place to come back to in September?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: In September.

HARVEY BURDICK: You got that solid. You are secure, you have a place to stay, you have two kids, and you're going to begin a new life in this two-building university?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: Can you tell us your reaction? Was it, “My God, this doesn’t look like a university, certainly not like Yale or MSU?”

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Oh, I kind of thought it was great. I was willing to go anywhere. If Bill was going to be happy there, it was fine with me. I thought Rochester was kind of special because the people were really very nice to us when we came—people in town, the people at the restaurants were interested in the kids—and it was very different from sort of being nobody to just being part of the community.

HARVEY BURDICK: There was a feeling of friendliness that was special—

MILDRED HAMMERLE: That was special, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: That’s interesting. Where did you go to eat?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: We ate at Red Knapp’s for breakfast and a restaurant called Gerda’s for dinner.

HARVEY BURDICK: I don’t think I know that place. Is it still in existence?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: No, it didn’t last too long after we came. It was just a good place to be.

HARVEY BURDICK: So we've got you settled in; this is in 19—

MILDRED HAMMERLE: ‘59.

HARVEY BURDICK: Really right at the beginning of the university. You and all of the students were brand-new?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Right.

HARVEY BURDICK: Let me turn to you, Uni, because you came at a different time, didn't you?

UNI SUSSKIND: A year later.

HARVEY BURDICK: Tell us about your background and Norm's.

UNI SUSSKIND: Well, I met Norman in the early '50s and he was still going to school while I had already graduated from U.B.C. [University of British Columbia], because I gained some extra years, I guess, in the process of moving. He then went to Yale as a graduate student. I would visit with him and by the summer of 1952 we got married. About 3 months after we got married he went into the service. He just simply allowed himself to be drafted, so he was in the Korean War, but fortunately he was sent to Europe, to Frankfurt am Main, because he knew some languages. So shortly after we were married he left, and I stayed behind to work in the metal finishing industry, because of my chemistry background, and lived with his parents. When he came back we moved to Yale, to New Haven.

HARVEY BURDICK: Before he went into the army, was he started at Yale?

UNI SUSSKIND: He had started —

HARVEY BURDICK: He had started, so now he comes back to finish up.

UNI SUSSKIND: So now he comes back to finish up. We spent three years, and in the meantime David was born at Grace New Haven Hospital, at Yale. We lived in the Quonset huts, which is right across from the Yale Bowl, at \$43 a month, all the coal you can burn and a little pot-bellied stove that sort of heated half of a Quonset hut. It was wonderful living there, because we were all producing babies and we all were about the same age, and we were all graduate students and wives and married students.

HARVEY BURDICK: And he finishes up when?



UNI SUSSKIND: And he finishes up in 1957. Then the first assignment he had was at Ohio State University, in Columbus, Ohio. So we moved there. I was pregnant with Bob, and my second son was born actually in Columbus. Columbus seemed like where Norman would probably land a very good job and stay. He was going to fill a position where... His work was in Romance philology and his specialty was in medieval French, but he taught beginning French for three years. It was clear that he was not going to move into his specialty.

So by the third year he was looking for work. When he went to the MLA [Modern Language Association] meeting which normally meets around Christmas time, between Christmas and New Year's, he met an old friend, Francis Tafoya, who was here in the first year. Francis Tafoya approached him about coming to Oakland University, and he described what was going on here and this excited Norman very much.

HARVEY BURDICK: He sort of told him about this new school, starting from scratch.

UNI SUSSKIND: Starting from scratch, clean slate, we can sort of do what we think ought to be done; and the fact that the faculty were going to be bright and young and virile and we can just simply build on the good foundation that they had. So it was very exciting, and shortly after that he came down to Oakland. One thing that I remember him saying, when he looked for a motel room in Rochester, there was this Spartan Motel in Rochester then, that's wherever they put the candidates.

HARVEY BURDICK: That was the name of the motel?

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes. It still survives, the Spartan Motel, and Norman, when he called up, said to the person on the phone, "I trust that your facilities are Spartan." And the telephone operator said, "Oh yes sir, yes, they are quite Spartan."

HARVEY BURDICK: Very proud of it, too.

UNI SUSSKIND: Very proud of it, exactly. Well, anyway, I think probably the facilities were Spartan but that didn't bother Norman. He looked around at the university, saw North and South Foundation Hall; that's what existed at that time, too. So within the year, I think maybe, they were starting to build the student center, but that was the next thing that went up.

HARVEY BURDICK: What year was this we're talking about?

UNI SUSSKIND: We're talking about — we came in '60, for the September of the second year.

HARVEY BURDICK: '59 was the first year?

UNI SUSSKIND: '59 was the first year; we came and Norman started teaching in '60. So we moved, actually, in June of '60. And while Norman was here, or maybe at a later visit, he looked for housing. He was offered the position clearly, and dare I say what he made then at that time?

HARVEY BURDICK: Sure, you can tell us. Tell us everything.

UNI SUSSKIND: At Ohio State, it was \$4,800 a year, and [MSUO] seemed awfully good because he was offered a job at \$6,500 a year, so that was quite nice.

HARVEY BURDICK: That was a nice raise in salary.

UNI SUSSKIND: Nice raise in salary, yes. And Norman found a house on Featherstone Road. It seemed to be [where] all the beginning [faculty looked].

HARVEY BURDICK: Featherstone, that was a very popular place to find a house.

UNI SUSSKIND: Very popular place, right across the street from the present Pontiac Silverdome. I think it was 1295 Featherstone Road, somehow that rings a bell in my head. We moved in with our two children. We were renting a house. The reason we rented was because we were quite attracted to the faculty

subdivision, but we just wanted to make sure that that was the place we were going to be.

HARVEY BURDICK: [To Millie] And you were living on Featherstone also?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: We were living on Featherstone also.

HARVEY BURDICK: And when the Susskinds moved in, were you aware of that—that you were neighbors—that you recall?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes. The Obears moved in shortly after that too. It was sort of like faculty row for a little while.

HARVEY BURDICK: Interesting, everybody sort of waiting for the [faculty] subdivision to become available for them. Is that one of the factors?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: I think that was one of the factors.

HARVEY BURDICK: Were you also interested in building a home in the subdivision?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes. It was the only place we could afford to build a home.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well we ought to spend some time and talk about that subdivision, don't you think? Let's see, I just want to make sure we've got you all together. You're here in '59, a year's gone by, it's '60 and the Susskinds come in that following September. Bill was teaching in the fall?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: He taught chemistry the first year and then physics the second year.

HARVEY BURDICK: All right, so he comes, his background is in physics, but he is also in physical chemistry and so he teaches chemistry the first year, ready to go into physics when it becomes available for him.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Right.

HARVEY BURDICK: Okay, can you tell us your impression of that first year? You came and there were only two buildings, the rest was sort of farm land ready to be built up. And you were renting a place on Featherstone. So how were you feeling in those days, do you recall?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: The students were very interesting. Most of them were the first in their family to go to college so we met lots of parents. And when parents had questions, they had no problem calling the faculty to ask if they could talk to them about it.

HARVEY BURDICK: They called you at your house?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Sure.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well that's nice and informal.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: At your home or at the office, whichever. And Woody was very good about having meetings with students' parents and involving the faculty. We had parties for the students and there were several joint things like picnics that included students and faculty. And Mrs. [Matilda Dodge] Wilson was very much into enjoying the students and the new faculty. Our first year here she had a formal dinner for the faculty which was great fun.

HARVEY BURDICK: Formal dinner, and you got dressed in gowns and —

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Oh, we didn't wear gowns and tuxes but we had quite a lot of waiters, I think one waiter to each five people.

HARVEY BURDICK: Held where?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: In Meadow Brook Hall, and she served fillet from her own cattle. She was very delighted to surprise us with meat that she had raised on her farm in Howell.

HARVEY BURDICK: It was a fairly small faculty and you could gather together at Meadow Brook and feel very intimate with one another. Did you know all the wives of the other faculty?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: We knew all the wives, and our first faculty directory listed all the children and their ages, because there were not too many children in the neighborhoods where we were scattered. That way, if you needed a playmate you could call and say, "How about Tuesday afternoon to play in our yard?" We sort of traded off and on with the kids.

HARVEY BURDICK: That's nice. So there was right from the beginning a sense of family —

MILDRED HAMMERLE: — of family; it was very informal, very friendly, and living in Pontiac was not a hardship at all.

HARVEY BURDICK: When the Susskinds came, did you make an effort to make Uni feel at home? Was that part of the tradition?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: I can't remember what we did exactly. I think everybody knew when a new faculty person came in, and I think they were included in whatever was going on.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, maybe let me ask Uni. When you came did you have a sense that you were welcomed by the other faculty wives?

UNI SUSSKIND: Hammerles — they lived about three blocks away from us — were a little further away than a few of the others that were closer. But we certainly were aware of that. There were, I think, the Strakas were here —

MILDRED HAMMERLE: The Strakas lived two doors from us.

UNI SUSSKIND: He [Gerald Straka] taught in history, and the Obears were two doors from us, so we did know exactly where they lived and we did see them quite a bit. In fact, I remember the Tombouliaus; I was babysitting for them or



they were babysitting for us too, as I recall, in the early days. And in fact Jeff was born – when was that, in '60 – and Jeff was just a little baby, and we switched babysitting right there when I lived on Featherstone.

HARVEY BURDICK: We had talked earlier, and I remember you mentioned something about the faculty wives club. Maybe you can talk a little bit about that, because that's sort of being in contact with one another, right? What kind of things did this club do?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: They had everything.

UNI SUSSKIND: Gourmet clubs, bridge clubs. I think they probably helped in – there was square dancing, not a club, but we met for square dancing once a month.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: There was a book exchange. If any of the faculty wives were sick or needed help, the others wives would pitch in and do cooking or babysitting. They were very helpful.

UNI SUSSKIND: We were small enough so that we understood our interests. And I think there were people who played recorder. We had recorder get-togethers and music and readings.

HARVEY BURDICK: I also have the sense that you were all of the same generation; you weren't exactly the same age, but you were close to the same age, weren't you? So you had a lot in common.

UNI SUSSKIND: Within 5 to 10 years, I think, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: And a number were young, giving birth, so if they went into the hospital, would you bring the potluck for the family?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: For the family at home.

HARVEY BURDICK: So really there were lots of factors that brought you together. Not only were you brand-new at this brand-new university, but you were of the same age, had a lot of the same interests or common interests.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Right.

HARVEY BURDICK: And that generated what? Give us a sense of what that community felt like to you; can you?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Well, to me it was a sense of belonging. You were at home wherever you went on the campus or visiting other people. Mrs. Wilson was part of the bridge club. She always drove her own car and she always took her turn at having bridge at Sunset Terrace. She was great fun to play with and she was a marvelous bridge player. She enjoyed the students, she loved doing anything that involved the students. She was interested, I think, in the children of the faculty, and if you had a problem she would listen.

HARVEY BURDICK: It was if she had made a new family for herself, in a way. She sort of worked with the wives and the other people at the university, the students and so on, and was open to them.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: So did you play bridge with her also, Uni?

UNI SUSSKIND: Oh yes, she was in my house after we moved into the [faculty] subdivision, so I remember that very well. And we were – as Millie said – we played bridge with her at Sunset Terrace. Those were in my bridge playing days; now I play once every five years, if I can remember. We did play bridge and it was fun.

HARVEY BURDICK: And Woody Varner's wife, was she also involved in these sessions?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: She was involved in everything. She was very charming, she was a delight.

UNI SUSSKIND: I think Paula and Woody were such wonderful hosts, and Woody had an uncanny memory. He remembered everyone's name and the wives' names so it really felt like a big family. When he had the faculty over to his house at the beginning of the year he would mention everyone's name. It was amazing to me. He also remembered what you wore. He was also attuned into something that was new, and I remember him saying, "You have a new dress, Uni, I can see that." It was sort of amazing to me that there was this welcoming and feeling a part of [the group]. He was not at a different level in any sense of the word. This is a university that was being put together by everyone there, and I think the wives felt that: that sense of pioneering, of building something, of starting from scratch.

HARVEY BURDICK: And very informal with one another in contrast to your experience at Yale.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: So you called Woody "Woody," and Paula "Paula," but Mrs. Wilson you called "Mrs. Wilson," I bet.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Mrs. Wilson was always "Mrs. Wilson."

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes, I think so, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: Go on, tell us about the kinds of gatherings. Were there lots of people giving dinner parties at that time, a sense of people gathering together, doing things together socially?

UNI SUSSKIND: Something was happening all the time. That's the way that I remember it.

HARVEY BURDICK: A week wouldn't go by without something happening?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: That's right.

UNI SUSSKIND: Right, that's right.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: One of the things the wives did together was to have international coffees. And Mrs. Wilson allowed us to use either Sunset Terrace or Meadow Brook Hall for those, and all the wives made special cookies or something, and we did a cook book. Then with the money that we made on that, we used that toward a scholarship fund.

HARVEY BURDICK: These are the faculty wives again.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: The faculty wives again did that.

HARVEY BURDICK: Those were the faculty wives across wherever they were living. Now you are starting to live in a particular subsection of the university, the subdivision where it was set up for administrators and faculty, right?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Right.

HARVEY BURDICK: And Uni, you were very quick to move in, into the subdivision.

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes, I think because of David. By that year we were thinking about his going into kindergarten, and I just wanted to find a school and wanted to go into the Rochester school district. We figured that after a year we probably would want to know where we'd live, and this faculty sub looked very inviting. The choice lots, I think, were taken by the time we were there, but we still found a lot that had a couple of good-sized trees, because the center lots did not, they were very clear. The choice of the lot we made was partly because of the deer we could see from our potential window, kitchen window; there were always these deer that we could see from across the road.

HARVEY BURDICK: These were the deer that go with —

UNI SUSSKIND: —with Mrs. Wilson's estate, the white deer. So we chose a lot and we actually started to build shortly after that in the dead of winter, in February, hoping to move in by May of '61, because I was pregnant with my daughter. I didn't know that she was a daughter at that time, but she was due around May of '61, and so was the house. We managed to move into the house about a week before she was born.

HARVEY BURDICK: So by the end of your very first year, you had moved into a house in the subdivision?

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes, we stayed at Featherstone Road for one year and by the end of [that] year we were—you're right, by '61 we were there.

HARVEY BURDICK: Yes, because you came in September of '60 and by —

UNI SUSSKIND: —by May of '61 we were in [our new house], that's right.

HARVEY BURDICK: [To Millie] And you continued to live at Featherstone for a while?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: We had to move from Featherstone to Bay Street, but it was still in the same area. We had wanted to build a house sooner, but I think the cost was over the amount that they had as the top limit for houses in the sub at that time. Then after a while we finally had an architect who was willing to build it, because it was a different sort of house. When they started working on it, they started in April and it was supposed to be finished by September, but they didn't finish until December. So we moved in the middle of a snow storm.

HARVEY BURDICK: Wow, that's never much fun! There was something special about the buildings in the subdivision—you didn't own your [lot].

UNI SUSSKIND: The lure of moving into the subdivision was that actually we didn't own the land, we leased the land for 75 years. And the lure of getting into the subdivision was the fact that we didn't have to buy a lot for three to four thousand dollars, so that you could spend that money on the house. Now the



top limit for a house in the subdivision was \$25,000 and we, I think, paid \$23,000 for our house, and finished some of the things ourselves so that we wouldn't get close to that limit. But there was indeed a top limit, which at that time didn't trouble us at all. When you take a look at houses now you —

HARVEY BURDICK: It's another world.

UNI SUSSKIND: It's another world, it's another world.

HARVEY BURDICK: There were other limits on the housing because of the fact that you didn't own the property; you were restricted on whom you could sell the house to.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: We had to agree to sell the house to other faculty or administrators from the university, but one of the good things about it was that if your house was up for sale for six months and you hadn't sold it, then the university was obliged to buy it back, at fair market value, you hoped.

HARVEY BURDICK: But there was a restriction in the selling.

While we're talking about the Meadow Brook Subdivision — what I heard is that there was a very close relationship among the people in the [university] community, even though you were living in different parts. And now you're coming together, all living in one small area. One would think that maybe it's a little too much, you know, it gets a little close. What were your experiences over the years?

UNI SUSSKIND: Well, Harvey, I think that people thought that that was going to be the case, or people who refused to think about living in the subdivision felt that that would be the case. But honestly, I have to tell you that even though we did — or the professors did — work in one place, we managed to keep a wonderful, comfortable distance because we knew everybody there. We didn't have to learn our neighbors, we knew our neighbors in one sense. So the regular over-welcoming did not have to be, but you simply welcomed your neighbors but then kept your distance.

I think that there were other very positive things with the neighbors in the subdivision. For example, when we found that we couldn't afford a lawn mower, some of us chipped in and shared the lawn mower and other things. But the constant coffee klatching, constant seeing of neighbors did not happen, and I'm very happy about that. And frankly, my friends were not just subdivision people, they were all the faculty, so it was not just a unit within a bigger unit, we just happened to live there.

HARVEY BURDICK: Okay, so the fact that these people came close together in living did not change the nature of the relationships. You were just as friendly [with people] living elsewhere as you were with the people in the subdivision.

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes, that's right.

HARVEY BURDICK: Was that true for you too?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes, that's true.

HARVEY BURDICK: Although your children—I mean you have to admit that the children, because they were close together, became friendly with one another.

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: Were there, you know, was there a lot of back and forth with the kids coming, visiting and so on?

UNI SUSSKIND: I think it was rather nice to have the children in the subdivision that were the same age as ours. We didn't have to drive them back and forth, which I had to do when I lived in Pontiac. So that was nice. I think the children had probably a much tighter community than the adults.

HARVEY BURDICK: And they could go anywhere, there was —

MILDRED HAMMERLE: They could go anywhere, there was a feeling of safety. They just felt they could wander around in the field, or down near the lake, or wherever they felt like going was fine.

HARVEY BURDICK: So there was a nice lake in your division?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: Oh, and nature walks that you had?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Well, they weren't formal nature walks but you could find skunks and raccoons and foxes, deer.

HARVEY BURDICK: Ah, so the kids were like Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn in the faculty subdivision?

I don't know why I call it the faculty subdivision, really, because it was made up of the administrators and faculty. Was it restricted to administrators and faculty?

UNI SUSSKIND: I think at first it was.

HARVEY BURDICK: Not that anybody could live there, just simply because you worked for the university.

UNI SUSSKIND: Right, and then it was opened up into the AP [administrative-professional] level, is that right?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: That's right.

UNI SUSSKIND: And then I think, now more recently it's —

MILDRED HAMMERLE: CTs [clerical-technical employees] can live there now.

HARVEY BURDICK: The "lowly" CTs?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: The “lowly” CTs.

HARVEY BURDICK: I remember from when we were talking before the interview, there were some hard times financially, people weren’t getting significant raises, and you were telling a story about, I think, the Varners.

UNI SUSSKIND: In the summer of ‘61, the raises were not particularly good. Woody Varner came to the subdivision, and I remember him knocking on our front door, and he apologized for the meager raises that year. And he said, in an effort to do something about it, “Why don’t you come out to the garden, our garden is not far away,” (they lived on Butler Road) “and we have some plants there that you’re invited to dig up.” From that incident I had a double French lilac bush and about five spireas that still thrive today. So that was rather unusual, and it was like “who cares whether we got a \$200 raise or \$400 raise?” These were special and it really did make a difference—his individual call to the house, and the fact that we were all sort of digging these up from his area.

HARVEY BURDICK: It’s interesting how much of money is tied up with symbolism, so he just took away the feeling that somehow “we don’t care about what you get.” He cared a great deal—

UNI SUSSKIND: —a great deal.

HARVEY BURDICK: And got concerned. And that generates a different kind of feeling among the community, doesn’t it? Made you feel like you were—

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Well, I think the faculty and the students probably would have done almost anything that Woody requested. We just felt that he always did everything to help us and so we would do anything at all for him.

HARVEY BURDICK: But he also, obviously, created an atmosphere of family, willing to work together and willing to sacrifice, and do things that you wouldn’t do if you were at another, large university?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Right.

HARVEY BURDICK: That sense of early commitment—I think this is the feeling that makes Oakland very special in those days.

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: [To Millie] You moved in, what year did you get into [the subdivision]?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: In '65.

HARVEY BURDICK: In '65, so that's about three and a half to four years afterwards. So your kids [to Uni] were really growing up in the subdivision, your kids [to Millie] were a little older, right?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes, but it was good for them, too. Michael and Bill built a kayak, and they learned how to roll the kayak over in the lake in the subdivision, which was kind of fun.

HARVEY BURDICK: Okay, so you made use of the lake then?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Oh, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: The people didn't swim in that lake, did they?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: No.

UNI SUSSKIND: No, they tried to fish, I guess.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Bob McGarry, little Bob, was an expert fisherman in that lake.

UNI SUSSKIND: But in the wintertime the kids ice skated on the lake.

HARVEY BURDICK: Oh, the ice had frozen over.

UNI SUSSKIND: Frozen over, yes and it was fun.

HARVEY BURDICK: The kids got along well?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: I wonder if they still are friends. Are they still friends, do you think, to this day – those kids growing up in the subdivision?

UNI SUSSKIND: Absolutely, absolutely. I think that what's happened with the friendships that were developed during that time—I know my children, they're in their 40s and late 30s, and they still keep up with the people that were friends in the subdivision. They have real lasting friendships.

HARVEY BURDICK: I know in those early periods, the administrators and the faculty were essentially one group. And they had parties and so on, not everybody with everybody, but there were cliques with small groups that developed, weren't there, after a while? That some people were friends, others were not?

UNI SUSSKIND: The first year I think when something big happened it was for everyone.

HARVEY BURDICK: Everybody?

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes, but then it got burdensome. We got too big for that, and I think that, yes, other kinds of groupings developed.

HARVEY BURDICK: Was there ever a split-up between the administrators and the faculty? Did that develop or was that never really [seen]?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: During the first strike I think the feeling between the faculty and the administrators was not a very happy feeling. Amy Torch came over to our house one day, to ask if it was okay or whether she'd be allowed to play with Patti. The reason she was worried was that her father [Reuben Torch]

was an administrator and Bill was a faculty member. I assured her there was no problem. We didn't care whether he was an administrator or not. She could play with anybody.

HARVEY BURDICK: That was a few years later, that was about 19—.

UNI SUSSKIND: '71.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: '71, when the first strike was on.

HARVEY BURDICK: That was really the first major split and everybody probably was quite disturbed at it. Because before that time friendships crossed, there were no borders between administrators and faculty.

UNI SUSSKIND: No.

HARVEY BURDICK: It was one sense of family.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: Uni, I couldn't help but notice that you brought a photograph. I recognize Norm but I don't recognize that other figure; what is that all about?

UNI SUSSKIND: Well, I think we have a female figure— who knows, maybe it's a male, I can't tell from the back here. This is part of the "slave market" that the students used to do in the spring; this is spring of '61. Faculty were sold on a slave market so students would bid on these faculty. I think that Norman is trying to do a belly dance similar to the belly dancer who's in this picture. Now, other things that faculty were asked to do were like maybe wash cars for a month.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Do housekeeping.

UNI SUSSKIND: Do housekeeping, and you said that Bill was asked to—

MILDRED HAMMERLE: — Bill was asked to crinkle potato chips.

HARVEY BURDICK: Because of his specialty in physics or something?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes.

UNI SUSSKIND: But the point is, I think, that there was a very good friendship between faculty and students, and they were able to do this. Everybody was involved and everybody knew about it.

HARVEY BURDICK: You can't do it unless there's a good feeling between the students and the faculty.

UNI SUSSKIND: That's right, exactly.

HARVEY BURDICK: It makes faculty seem silly, doing odd things like that.

You know, the image that comes to my mind when you come here with your husbands, the university is not fully constructed, only a few buildings, there's a farm there—I almost imagine you coming with covered wagons to this new strange territory. So I think of you as pioneers; is that crazy?

UNI SUSSKIND: No, no. I think we had a dream, or there was a dream. And there was the pioneering spirit that we were cultivating a garden, that somehow we're going to have something that is truly fine, because the faculty were really fine faculty there. They came from the best schools, they were all about the same age and they came with vigor and with a dream.

HARVEY BURDICK: So you had a dream, you had that sense after you came here?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes, Bill came because he thought that this was going to be the best university in the country, and his reason for coming was that he was coming to the best there was.



HARVEY BURDICK: And that carried over to you as a participant, and you were willing to give your energies and efforts to —

MILDRED HAMMERLE: —to whatever was going on.

HARVEY BURDICK: Quite different from MSU, isn't it?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: And different from Yale.

UNI SUSSKIND: Very.

HARVEY BURDICK: And different from Ohio State.

UNI SUSSKIND: Right. As a matter of fact, as a faculty wife [at MSUO] I did have a degree in chemistry, I had my masters except my thesis at that time. I was able to be part of the community and I was helping out in the laboratories, helping grading papers, and I really felt that I was part of it at the time. So that was nice, they were able to use the talents of the faculty wives, and it felt like I was part of the family.

HARVEY BURDICK: So you were sort of chipping in with your hoe and your shovel?

UNI SUSSKIND: Exactly.

HARVEY BURDICK: Breaking new land up into parcels.

We were talking earlier, Uni — you ended up being a faculty member at another school nearby?

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes, nearby. In 1965 I was charter faculty at Oakland Community College. And although that was sort of an exciting venture I never ever got the feeling that I was part of any other community but Oakland University. Oakland University is still my community. I feel that way, and

Oakland Community College is a place where I work, and I'm fairly successful at it and I think it's fine. But it's like I go to work there, and I do good things with students, but my connections somehow are still with Oakland University.

HARVEY BURDICK: So from those early days, that early commitment has stayed with you. And you also, Millie?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: I think one of the best ways I could explain Bill's feeling about Oakland was that he said he thought he was the most fortunate man in the world, to be paid for doing something he enjoyed so much. He said, "I would work here for nothing if that became necessary."

HARVEY BURDICK: And sometimes we almost did.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: But he did think this was really the best place that he had ever been, and he did not want to leave.

HARVEY BURDICK: OK. So that leads me into my final set of questions about overall. Looking back over the many years that you were here, and of course, unfortunately both your husbands have died, but was it a good choice coming to MSUO?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: It was a very good choice.

HARVEY BURDICK: You feel that way?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: I don't think he could have made a better one.

HARVEY BURDICK: You feel that strongly?

MILDRED HAMMERLE: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: If you had a choice to go to Yale or to Harvard? I'm making it difficult.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: No, you're not making it difficult at all. That's an easy choice.

HARVEY BURDICK: Uni, how about you? Did you think it was a good choice coming?

UNI SUSSKIND: I think the choice at that time was the right one, but if Norman was to make a choice today, I'm not sure Oakland University would pass the test, because it isn't—I don't think it is—quite what it was. I think we remember that because it was so powerful. And I think Oakland did not quite live up to the original things of, you know, no sports and all the other things of the lure of Oakland University, or MSUO I should say. I don't think it would be quite the attraction that it was then. Not that it was a bad choice.

HARVEY BURDICK: Yes, but you had chosen a different school, essentially, you say, than it is today. It was a different school at that time.

UNI SUSSKIND: I think so, yes, but my connections to the old days and to my friends are still there, and I think that is what keeps me in. They were very important to me because those were my, I think, my formative years. That was the beginning of my career, Norman's career, and everything else. I'm nearing the end of my career, so it doesn't really matter.

HARVEY BURDICK: Interesting. I think that's an interesting point, that Oakland today is, perhaps, sort of the regular kind of school, a reasonably good school, but it's different from those early years. Those early years were special.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: I think Bill had a love affair with Oakland and he loved it, warts and all. I think there are things he would have changed if he could, but since he couldn't, it was alright.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, warts and all, as you look back it was a good choice, both for Bill and for Norm, and for you, Uni, and for you, Millie.

MILDRED HAMMERLE: A very good one.

UNI SUSSKIND: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: We certainly appreciate your coming today and sharing those recollections. I think you've rounded out areas that other people have sort of put to one side, so we can't thank you enough.

**Oakland University Chronicles**  
**MILDRED HAMMERLE and (TAMAR) UNI SUSSKIND**  
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