

A Fascinating Story

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One of our most popular books at the Oral History Project is *Tod's Point, An Oral History*, a wonderful compilation of highlights from sixty-seven interviews. And one of the most interesting sections is about VETAPTCO, the organization responsible for converting the Tods' mansion into housing for veterans returning from WWII.

A fascinating and heartfelt addition to these recollections is the interview of Martha S. Hankins, conducted by the Oral History Project several years ago ("Tod's Point," August 11, 2010). In this colorful re-creation of events long past, Ms. Hankins tells of her family being the first to take up residence in the recently converted mansion. Ms. Hankins' reminiscences of her family's time there are idyllic, from her description of their apartment encompassing the first floor:

We had about five rooms. We had French windows that went from the ceiling to the floor. We had a wonderful mirror that was twenty-five feet tall with the Corinthian columns along the side. We always had our Christmas tree in front of that mirror, and it was just gorgeous.

[...] to her recollection of childhood experiences:

I was always on the beach... When it got cold enough so saltwater would freeze, I could skate out my front door, which was outstanding. [laughs] Then one day I found out that when the ice would start to melt, you could bounce on the ice, and saltwater doesn't break; it'll bend. So I used it as a springboard and jumped up on the dock. So my mother was a little worried about that one.

Ms. Hankins tells of roller-skating in the mansion's ballroom, a space she and the children living there appropriated to become their own private indoor roller-rink. On New Year's Eve the great room provided space for a big party, all the residents invited to attend.

It is with some sadness that she describes her last days in her grand home, and then going back after all the families had left, to see the mansion abandoned and vandalized, its floors littered with broken glass. When the mansion was finally torn down, Mrs. Hankins reflects sadly that she would not go back again to see the empty space that had once held her home. Too many good memories, best left for the mind's eye to preserve. And fortunately for us, memories now preserved by the Oral History Project.

It is easy to imagine, after reading Ms. Hankins' interview, a filmmaker or novelist being inspired by her memories. Indeed, artists searching for inspiration may well

consider delving into the many topics covered in the Oral History Project's collection. Or they, and the rest of us, may do it solely for the pleasure of a good read.