

10/3/20 - TRUDY REICHERT

KG – Kayt Gochenaur
TR – Trudy Reichert

KG – The recorder is on. I just want to double check with you if it's ok if I put the audio of this interview online on our oral history project website?

TR – Sure.

KG – Ok, fantastic.

TR – It might even make someone else remember my Mom.

KG – Yes. That's one of the reasons I put these online. You can make connections, which is so cool when that happens.

TR – Oh I would love to connect. That would be wonderful.

KG – Well, let's get going. Can you just say your name and age for the record?

TR – I go by Trudy. T R U D Y and my maiden name was Ervin. E R V I N. My married name is Reichert. R E I C H E R T.

KG – Wonderful. When were you born?

TR – May 19th, 1933.

KG – Where were you born?

TR – Houlton, Maine. H O U L T O N, Maine.

KG – So tell me a little bit about your parents and how your mom ended up with tuberculosis.

TR – Well, it's quite a story I think. My mother went to Newton Wellesley Hospital in Boston to get her nursing degree. She married her love so she thought, my Dad. They eloped. His name was Roy and then they went up to Houlton to be at a place where my Dad was working. She had a best friend in Houlton, my Mom, and her name was Faye (I think) and she died while my mother was taking care of her. She died of tuberculosis. So and then my father started seeing other women. He was not a good man, Roy. He worked in different places in Maine and she recouped. She tried to get better at his mother's. Then they started trying to find a place where she could get better, a sanatorium, and she went up to Presque Isle Maine Sanatorium. They had a sanatorium up there and that didn't work. Then I think she tried another place near

Waterville, Maine and that did not work. My grandfather at that point was her father so he took her up to Trudeau and that's where she stayed for the next... I think she was there 7 to 8 years. My grandmother, Roy's mother, decided that I would not stay away from family. I would be taken care of by different members of the family. So I lived with nine different families until my mother cured. My age was 16 and I can't remember the year my Mom got out. I was 16 so I was born in '33 and you can kind of figure out how old I was because I think I was born when she was 23. I don't know if I'm giving you enough information or not.

KG – This is great.

TR – My Dad, Roy, divorced her while she was in Trudeau because at that time I'm sure he wasn't happy with anything and he had an opportunity to marry someone else. He divorced her in Nevada.

KG – What year was your mother diagnosed with TB?

TR – Well, let's see. I was born in '33 and she was 23. Probably, can I guess and say 1936?

KG – Yes.

TR – That would be pretty close. Because I was 12 I think or 11 when she said goodbye at the train station at Pittsfield when she went up to Trudeau.

KG – So tell me. As a kid, what did you know about tuberculosis? Did you know much about it, was it like explained to you?

TR – The people that took care of me – aunts and uncles and aunts and uncles and so forth – they, at that time, you didn't talk about that kind of thing in front of the children. So one of my aunts made me write her every Sunday so that she got a letter from me every Sunday, my Mom. I was so dumb. I was so dumb. I was so dumb at that age and I regret that I didn't know how much it meant to her to receive a letter from her daughter. I never saw her because most of the time I was in Oregon and California.

KG – You didn't see her until you were 16 then?

TR – You know what, I did get to see her one summer. They let the patients go and my mother was able to go to Houlton and stay in her father's cottage at the lake. They flew me home from the West Coast so I could at least visit her. I was not allowed to get close to her hardly but I hadn't seen her for like four years so and I just don't remember much. I remember before the plane landed in Houlton (if you know this town has 6,000 inhabitants and they didn't have an airport but they used it once in a while) and I remember flying in to Houlton when I was going to meet my Mom and there was nobody there to meet me. My grandfather was late getting me and there was nobody there and all the lights were out and oh my goodness... The only thing I

did to prepare myself for my mother was I had to file my nails because I remembered that she always loved her nails filed. She was a nurse by the way as I said before. I think I said that before. She went to Newton Wellesley and became a nurse, an RN.

KG – When she left for Trudeau Sanatorium did you have any inkling of how long she would be gone?

TR – No. I was a happy person. I mean happy because my grandmother was very close to me and she was very.... She just cared for me and made sure that everybody took their years to take care of me because she was determined that I wasn't going to go into any orphanage or anything. I was very happy with my grandmother. She was loving and caring. I really had a happy life. I didn't know how unhappy I could be because I never really was unhappy, really had never stayed with my Mom long enough to really bond to her.

KG – Go ahead.

TR – I was just going to say I did see my Dad once in a while when we were in Oregon because he had met someone and married her and was making a home out there. That's where my grandmother and her children (my mother's in-laws) lived in Oregon. So I was well cared for. I didn't know any different. Now the sad part is as I look back on it and I'm an adult and I see what a hero she was – and she was to me - I can't imagine, and neither can my children because they are so.... Bill and I were a family and I had three children and they had the life of Riley. We had a dog and a fireplace and a good place in the church and a good place in the community so my children never could imagine a life like my Mom.

Then the happy ending though is when... she had dated someone when she was in nurses training (I don't know how much you want) but she had dated this gentleman. He was Jewish. He had taken me up to Trudeau one time to see her and when she cured, as soon as his mother died, he asked her to marry him. He and my Mom had a lovely life together. He was the most splendid, remarkable man. So, I'm going ahead in the story. I remember my mother telling me how cold she was at Trudeau. We were always aware that she wanted mittens and gloves and foot warmers and head warmers - everything to keep warm on the porches. She made some very fine friends there. One of whose names is Larry Doyle. Do you know that name?

KG – I have heard it and I can't place where.

TR – He was in baseball. He was quite a hero in the baseball. He was handsome because at times she would cut out different things about him. She had other good friends along with him. In fact he stayed in Saranac Lake after he cured and died in Saranac Lake.

KG – Tell me a little bit about how she communicated with you. Were you able to talk on the phone?

TR – At that time it wasn't very good because none of the people that I stayed with wanted to incur a lot of bills so mostly on Sunday night it was my night to write my Mom and tell her how my week was. She wrote a lot.... Like I just said the other day to my children, she used to put some of the red leaves that she collected out around Trudeau and send me red leaves in letters. That's just a little side thing I remember. I don't remember speaking to her and I'm not sure that Trudeau encouraged that at that time.

KG – Tell me a little bit more about what you knew about what her life was like while she was curing. How long did she have to sit outside for every day?

TR – No, I don't know that. I know she was also very, very friendly with a Helen Dufton D U F T O N. I'm not remembering whether Helen was a patient or whether she was also a nurse. Well anyway, so I know she made a lot of friends there and I know she did so much knitting, apparently they could knit and they could read and write. I think that at times sometimes they were allowed to go out for walks. I wish I could tell you more but I don't know any more about what their activities were.

KG – Do you know if she had a roommate or did she have a single room?

TR – I don't know that. I don't even know if they had a room or if they were in wards. When she was in Presque Isle I went one time to see her room and I know it was a ward, it was not a single room. It was a group of patients in one long room.

KG – Where was that again?

TR – In Presque Isle, Maine. There used to be a sanatorium up there north of Houlton. That's one of the places that they had tried to get Mom in to cure and they weren't having any success there I don't think because they moved her out. My family moved her out – her father. You know what, I read a book called Last Lambs on the Mountain. Are you familiar with that?

KG – I am. I haven't read it myself.

TR – Oh you should read it. It's so close to my Mom's situation. It made me cry when I read it because this woman wrote it.... I've written in my book cover for the kids not to throw this away, this is how your Great Grammy lived on through. This woman had a (I shouldn't tell you all this it's kind of rhetoric but...) she had a man that she loved and he was married and she thought he was going to leave his wife. Anyway, the story goes on and I couldn't and I couldn't believe that within three weeks and these people had been there for years and years and all of a sudden they had freedom to leave. It was the most amazing thing. This pandemic that we have now is horrible, I mean horrible, but I relate it back to the time when my Mom... I mean they were treated like lepers, just like people now when they are going in to the Covid part. This woman gives a very accurate... I think my Mom is like the woman in the book that she could

eventually leave the actual sanatorium and live in the houses that were like for four people in a house. I think she was able to do that but that's all I remember about that.

KG – I'm curious about I guess the tone of the letters that you got. Like when your Mom wrote you back.

TR – Back then she was going through a divorce and her hatred of her first husband was so flammable. All her life she resented the fact that he would say to her "Well I'm coming up to see you Sunday" and never show. He eventually divorced her, which I think she had bitterness the whole time and I'm sure that didn't help her attitude at all. But her letters to me were full of encouragement and they were not 'poor me'. I never felt that she was... she would say how cold she was and how lonely she was but she was never.... I lived with her sister for a while. During the winter months I lived with her sister sometimes and she would write her sister and then her sister Gerry would tell me some things like my Mom was sad about my Dad, Roy. I think that was very hard for her to go through – losing a daughter and a husband and I'm sure she was down about it but she didn't ever tell me that she was. She wouldn't tell a 12 or 13-year-old anything to make me sad. And I wasn't sad. I was sad for her but I was so dumb at that age. You are just so self-centered. I just regret so much.

KG – Can you say more? Do you regret not writing her as much?

TR – I wrote her every Sunday but I regret that I didn't like to do it very often and I regret that I didn't know... I have a picture of me and my Mom at the railroad station when my grandmother was taking me away from her and my Mom was going off to Trudeau. It's a very sad little face that I have. My mother had a coat with a fur around the neck and I loved to put my head in it and cuddle. But it's a sad picture of us saying goodbye – she going to Trudeau and me going with my grandmother. It's one of the few pictures I have of us. No, there are more but that's one of the most, that's one that sticks in my mind the most. One time she kept a diary and I think when she became....she had Alzheimer's at the end and I think she threw them all away. I thought I had them and then when I looked it was just some after she had gotten married the second time, which is when she wanted to remember mostly I think. She had happiness. I can't really get over the fact that she only had one lung. She had a pneumo...

KG – A pneumothorax?

TR – Yes. She would go swimming after that and I couldn't imagine how she did that because she did have a big rattle when she breathed. After she cured there was no residual. My kids sent me a picture of me and my Mom and this was after her grandchildren were born (my children) and we were together in Erie. (This is where I we live) We had so many happy times and I was an only child so my children were her only grandchildren so she delighted in them and so did my step-dad. He was a wonderful man. I get off track here every once in a while.

KG – I'm curious about after she cured and she returned and you were a little bit older, did she talk about her experience with you?

TR – There is a woman named Beverly Jameson and she befriended her. Now whether Beverly was a nurse there or whether she was a patient I don't know that, but I know she made deep friends with Beverly and when they were told they could go home from the hospital, from Trudeau, my Mom went to work in Boston at the Women's TB Hospital because when she was at Trudeau as she became a little bit better, they let her work as a nurse like two hours a day, and then they let her work like every other day, and then all of a sudden she could work every day so she became used to working a little bit instead of just sitting or laying. So she worked at that hospital in Boston, TB hospital, and had an apartment with this Beverly Jameson and I could go down and see her when I could get somebody to take me or when I was free. She would come up to the cottage in Maine after that and visit. Then she got married to the man that she dated when she was in training for nursing. He waited for her and wanted her to marry him, which she did finally. Oh and she worked in another hospital too while I was down there.

I went to school in Boston after I graduated from Houlton High School. There wasn't any money but my grandfather said "Do what you're best at" which happened to be typing and shorthand and all that so I went to Fisher. I got a scholarship for \$75 and I worked in a home that had six children. She was working at a hospital in Alliston, just outside of Boston. A L L I S T O N. I don't think it had anything to do with TB. I think it just was a hospital. She lived about two blocks away so she could walk to her hospital and back. She didn't need a car. She didn't ever learn how to drive. I tried to teach her once and it almost gave me a heart attack so I couldn't do it.

KG – So when she got out of the sanatorium you were still staying with family up in Maine?

TR – Yes. My first father's brother I stayed with there. Actually I stayed with Mom's brother too you know and then he moved and so then I went into my Dad's brother's care. I had like nine different families that I stayed with.

KG – Were they all over the country?

TR – Yes. They were in either Maine, or Massachusetts or Oregon or California. Every time I went back and forth and I went back and forth a lot of times before I was a teenager. I've been by train, by car, and by plane. I guess that's it. No bus.

KG – Were they ever extra concerned about you catching TB?

TR – I always test positive. I can't even give blood. Even at this old age of 87. I mean really? Every time I get a test - I volunteered at the local hospital and I had to have a TB test but it was all positive. The minute I say my Mom had TB they won't let me give blood in the bloodmobile or anything like that.

KG – Did they do annual X-rays on you?

TR – They did a lot of X-rays yes. But it never appeared. I get pneumonia a little bit and I'm trying to get my shot this Fall pretty soon. There is probably a little scar tissue there but I don't have any X-rays anymore. I don't have to anymore. So that's good. Most everybody that I stayed with – aunts and uncles and aunts and uncles – are all deceased now and in one family (my mother's sister's family) there is one child left. Well he's not a child anymore, he's 70. They did take me on because I would be a help, which I was. But that's ok, I think my mother was proud of me and happy that I could do well.

KG – Did you ever live with her again?

TR – No. I stayed with her on the weekends sometimes. I would be allowed to go down to Boston and stay. We'd go shopping and we'd go to the bookstore and we might even see a play. That was lovely. After she got married to my step-dad I did live with them until they got married for about six months I think. But to really stay with her? No I didn't. I would have times when I was able to and that made me happy. She would send me clothes. She loved to send me clothes and because she didn't know me sometimes it was not good. One time I had to make a speech at high school and she had sent me a dress and there in the front of the place where I was speaking I saw a girl with the same dress. We never got along – that lady, that girl. That wasn't a good thing. One time she sent me a dress for a prom or something and it was a like a baby girl dress so I ended having it made like I wanted. Those are little things.

KG – Tell me a little bit more about what she was like. Tell me about her personality.

TR – I would say that she was an optimist. I think that she loved making friends. Her nursing career such as it was – nursing her best friend until she died – I think my mother was a very giving person. She certainly loved being married to my step-dad and he was very good to her and she had a lovely life. They built a home in Brookline and then he built her a home on Cape Cod after he retired. They weren't wealthy but they were able to do well. That never hurt my family either because they lived on Cape Cod my children were old enough to want to go to the beach with grandma. Actually, they all called her Grandmother. And Grandfather. They had no nicknames they called them Grandmother and Grandfather and they loved them so much. It was just lovely to see her bloom. She smiled and laughed a lot. She could (if you want to know this) she could land a zinger every once in a while but who can't. We used to take our dogs and our kids and think it was a lot of fun. Now that I look back on it I think now what a lot of work that was for her but she loved it.

We had our wedding – my husband and I – he graduated from MIT and I used to work there as a secretary. That's how I met him. He was wonderful and my Mom loved him. That was a lovely thing that I married somebody that she cared so much for. We've got a lot of fun things going on like when I asked Bill (my husband Bill) where he was going to go for Thanksgiving and he said "Oh I'll probably eat peanut butter in my room." So I called my Mom right away and said "Can we have Bill home for turkey dinner?" and she said "Ok" so he came out and had dinner

with my family. Anyway, that's the kind of stuff that happened after she cured. She had a lovely home in Brookline which is nothing now, it's awful. We've been by and it's awful. They had a lovely home on Cape Cod. Every time we would go out to see my half-brother – I have a half-brother that came from Roy – and he lives on Cape Cod so of course I go by the house and take pictures and remember the times when my kids would visit down there.

KG – When did she pass away?

TR – She was 83. She passed away in 2000.

KG – And she never had more complications from TB?

TR – No. Isn't that great?

KG – Yes. Do you know if she received antibiotic treatment or was it the early type of fresh air cure?

TR – I think she was better before they came out with the cure. I think she was not quite as down and out because she was at a point where she was coughing blood. I've heard this. I've heard this. I don't remember and I never saw. They never let me be around her. I did tell you that they did let her work at Trudeau part time after she got it where she could stand it and when the cure came she started a new life. I think it came from the drug (I read the drug name but I can't think of it right now) but by the time she had the drug and was out of there it was like a miracle.

KG – Where was she born?

TR – Oh my gosh. Just outside of Houlton. I don't know if I even know where she was born. It was northern Maine and it wasn't too far from Houlton.

KG – Tell me her name. I'm not sure if I've gotten her name yet.

TR – Phyllis. P H Y L L I S. Her maiden name was Shean. S H E A N (Irish). Then she married my Dad and then became Ervin and then she married my wonderful step-dad and his name was Weinberg and he was Jewish. W E I N B E R G. But she wouldn't have been Weinberg up there. She didn't get married until the cure came.

KG – When she came up here do you know if she went straight to the Trudeau Sanatorium or did she spend time in any other cure cottages or sanatoriums in the area?

TR – I've seen the pictures of a big porch. Does that help at all? Or were they all porches? She went right into the big porch area and stayed there. I wish I could tell you that she had a little house with other girls or ladies but I don't know that. There is nobody left in the family to ask.

KG – I'm curious about your childhood memories. Do you remember much of WWII?

TR – Well I do because this wonderful man that became my step-father served in Germany and France. I think he was part of the Omaha Beach. His story is remarkable because he had boys in his unit that were from Tennessee. A lot of his boys in his unit had never had shoes on. They were like hillbillies. They didn't know that war was going to be so lonesome. So my Dad in his sweet way took a lot of them under his wing and they began, my mom and dad, (I call him my dad – my mom and my step-dad) would go to a reunion every year with these guys that were part of my step-dad's unit. I'd go with them sometimes and so would the grandchildren go with them sometimes. They went to Florida and different places for reunions. It was lovely. My Mom was so proud of her family, her child and grandchildren, and so I can tell you her life after Trudeau was blessed. She married a man that truly loved her. They were married 45 years.

KG – What was his first name?

TR – His name was Philip. P H I L I P. Just one L. His last name was Weinberg but that wouldn't be when she was at Trudeau.

KG – Do you remember Philip telling you any other stories about what it was like to serve during WWII?

TR – I know they wrote each other a lot. I think he carried a picture of her all the time. I was 16... No I was 17 when they were married. I don't know, I'm awful at math but anyway I was still a teenager when after the war was '45. So I do remember him in his uniform. He brought a lot of gifts back. He brought me a concertina, like a little accordion. I loved it. I gave it away! I can't believe I did that. My husband bought me an accordion so I guess it's alright. Anyway, he was a very generous man. After Mom died – it was so awful when she was senile. It was so awful. Because he blamed the nursing home. He blamed everything. He just couldn't get over it. She couldn't stay home because she wouldn't swallow and she was violent. That's the way it goes sometimes. Alzheimer's is awful. Thank goodness I'm still ok. So far so good. Those last years were happy years for her, which makes me happy that she got that happiness.

KG – Did you ever visit Saranac Lake?

TR – Yes. A couple of times. Her husband-to-be took me up there to visit her once. I remember it was on a hill. I remember we walked. We didn't go inside so it must have been either late Spring or early Summer and I wasn't in school so.... He did take me up once and I think that might have been the only time I went up. Money was definitely a problem because I don't remember that Trudeau... I don't know how they took money or how they charged people but it couldn't be free so if my father, my grandfather (her father), I think he paid for all her expenses, which was costly.

KG – Do you think that... you touched on this a little bit but I'm curious if you have more to say about if this close connection you have with tuberculosis has influenced the way you're thinking about the pandemic today?

TR – Absolutely. Absolutely. How could it not? I mean it's the same if maybe when we had tuberculosis it was so catching and if we had worn masks maybe it wouldn't have been as awful as it was. Because it was catching because of the sputum or the drops from your mouth from sneezing or coughing, mostly coughing with tuberculosis, but it is very similar I think in how people are treated. I don't go anywhere or near anyone who has it and I'm stuck because I was a real active person about four months ago. I was down at the hospital working and I have a group of women who help people, girls, get – it's called P.E.O. Have you ever heard of that?

KG – No I don't think so.

TR – It's a group of women all over – well it's Canada and the United States - that sponsor by either scholarship or loans for outstanding women who need money. I was just really active. I could go to my son's every Sunday for a family dinner. I could go shopping. I don't do any of that anymore. I have my groceries delivered and thank God I have a little dog. She keeps me in and out, in and out, in and out. I don't walk much anymore. I've got a cane. She is the light of my life, one of them. I have a daughter and a granddaughter that work at the hospital so I pray for them all the time. I have a son who was just notified that he was with somebody that has Covid so he is on quarantine now in his house for two weeks. He is praying. You know how every cough and every sneeze you think oh my gosh is it going to be me next? Pray not. Have I being helpful at all?

KG – You've been very helpful. This is great. This is a wonderful interview.

TR – Oh really?

KG – Yes.

TR – I just loved that book – Last Lambs on the Mountain – and I've given it to several of my very close friends to read just so they know when I talk about my Mom that that's who she is, my Mom. I would encourage you to read it because it's a keeper. I don't know where you live. Do you live in Saranac Lake?

KG – I do, yes.

TR – Oh good, so you know about the museum?

KG – Yes. I work at the museum here.

TR – Did you ever talk to me about that pin? You sent me a newsletter (or someone from the museum I think) and it had a pin, like it had a flower in the center like a daisy and it had a wire stem that came out in a little stem-like with flowers on it and then another stem at the other end of the flower. I thought wow that might be a fun... it's in your museum. It would be fun to make a silversmith make few of those and let us donate because I would love to have that pin to pass on to my kids.

KG – Yes, Temming's pins. Well I covered all of my questions. Is there anything else you want to tell me that I missed or didn't ask about?

TR – Yes I would like to know. Did I tell you Larry Doyle stayed there after he cured? He stayed in Saranac Lake and died there. I don't know if I told you that.

KG – Yes, I think you mentioned it.

TR – His tombstone might be there. So, yes, and there was something else I wanted to ask you. Oh I know. I just got a picture from my son that had my Mom and me. I could take a picture of it and send it.

KG – That would be great!

TR – Do you have a text number?

KG – It's 518-

TR – Wait, let me get a pen. Ok. I forget your name?

KG – Kayt.

TR – I like that.

KG – [redacted]

TR – Ok. Thank you.

KG – I would love to have a copy of the photo. That would be great to see.

TR – It won't be the greatest copy because it's a copy of a copy but it was sort of a nice, clear picture of sometime when she was visiting me after the kids were born. She and my step-dad were visiting and it's a good picture of her.

KG – That would be wonderful.

TR – I've got more. We've taken a lot of pictures in our lifetime.

KG – Well if you have any of those older ones close to when she would have been curing or anything like that.

TR – Oh I have when she graduated from nursing school.

KG – Oh that would be great! If you could just send me a photo of the photo that would be fantastic. Well, thank you so much for doing this interview.

TR – Can I call you?

KG – Of course, yes.

TR – Oh boy. My friend told me about the brick. She was up there visiting her cousin. She's a good friend of mine here and she went out and visited her cousin and her cousin lives there and so she said: "Would you like to see Trudeau?" and my friend knew that my Mom was there and she said "Oh I'd like to see it." They told her that you could put \$100 and she would get a brick. So I did that and that's how I got back involved in it. My friend was going to take me but I'm not in good enough health to travel that far now. I'm sorry to say but I'm really in not that kind of health now. I regret that but anyway. I'm so glad to talk to you and to tell my Mom's story and hopefully she knows it somewhere.

KG – Yes I'm very grateful that you're willing to share it and that I get a chance to record the story. I'm going to turn off the recording now.

END