



Cleveland State University  
**EngagedScholarship@CSU**

---

[All interviews](#)

[Cleveland Regional Oral History Collection](#)

---

3-12-2003

## Agnes Kasper interview, 12 March 2003

Follow this and additional works at: <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/croh000>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#)

**How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!**

---

Subject: Agnes Kasper  
Interviewer: Ellen Anderson  
Date: 12 March 2003

Ellen Anderson: Please state your name and spell it for me.

Agnes Kasper: Agnes Kasper. A-g-n-e-s K-a-s-p-e-r.

EA: Mrs. Kasper, when did you move to Tremont?

AK: Twenty-six years ago.

EA: Where you an adult or a child?

AK: Adult.

EA: Why did you choose to live in Tremont?

AK: That's a long story. We went to the Bishop and asked where we could move to work with the inner city poor people and he sent us to Tremont.

EA: Oh, beautiful.

AK: So, we sold our house and moved to Tremont.

EA: Oh, so where were you coming from?

AK: Seven Hills.

EA: What are some of your first memories of Tremont?

AK: Disaster, (laughter) it was terrible!

EA: In what ways?

AK: The houses were all terrible and the people who were here were scared to live here.

EA: Around what year are we talking about?

AK: Oh, what would that have been, 1976-1977.

EA: Did you struggle to stay here, did you ever want to pack up and leave?

AK: Many times. Many times. It was not very good.

EA: Did you raise children here?

AK: Yes, I raised five children here, I have ten.

EA: I see. And that did not come into play?

AK: I sent them to catholic school.

EA: What Catholic Church are you affiliated with?

AK: St. Augustine's.

EA: Was there anything you liked about Tremont?

AK: Oh yeah, I loved the house even though it was totally beat on and ruined we loved the house, built in 1864.

EA: What did you do to the house to make it livable?

AK: We gutted the whole thing. We put all new walls, we kept all the antique things but, we put all new walls, all new plumbing, all new heating, all new electric, new roof.

EA: Wow! So, your children went to school in Tremont and you went to church in Tremont? Correct?

AK: Yeah, well, my high school kids went to St. Joe's on the Lakeshore.

EA: Tell me a little bit about the neighborhood, was it ethnic?

AK: Well, the part that was pretty good was ethnic. Otherwise it was very, very rental, whatever.

EA: O.K., when you say ethnic what type of - -

AK: Many, many Ukrainian people and Polish people.

EA: Anybody else?

AK: NO, that's what I noticed mostly.

EA: Where there many Blacks in Tremont?

AK: There weren't a lot of Blacks. There were Blacks down in the projects on West Fifth Street. Many, many Puerto Rican people.

**AGNES KASPER**

EA: Was there, O.K. Did they move in the same time you moved in?

AK: They were moving here, moving in, yeah.

EA: Did they tend to cluster in different areas in Tremont.

AK: Wherever they could rent.

EA: So, they were not homeowners?

AK: No, not very many. Now they are homeowners, but not very many then.

EA: Would you say they were transient? Did they come and stay?

AK: From Puerto Rico. Many of them went to the schools my kids went to and I think most of them stayed.

EA: Where there many different churches here?

AK: Oh, this is the biggest group of churches in an area , in Cleveland.

EA: What were the more popular churches here?

AK: Well, St Augustine, Pilgrim Congregational, Zion, St. George's Orthodox, St Theodosius, St. John's Cantius , Our Lady of Mercy.

EA: Wow!

AK: That's just within two miles of here. Oh, and St. Michael's.

EA: So these were well attended?

AK: Yeah, people came from the suburbs to go to the churches here.

EA: What suburbs did they come from?

AK: All over, all over, cause if you were Polish you came back to St. John Cantius, if you were orthodox you went to St George's and then Theodosius, that's the big one.

EA: Would you say that is the most popular church?

AK: That was the one the big movie was made of. I don't remember the movie but, it was made of.

**AGNES KASPER**

EA: Now did the people from these different mix together well?

AK: No, no.

EA: There were problems?

AK: There were problems but, now its very good, in fact during lent we are going to go every week to a different church for different services. It is very, very mixed now.

EA: What was the problem before?

AK: I don't know, people kind of stayed in their own little group, in their own church.

EA: So, it is better now?

AK: Oh yes, much. Much better.

EA: OK. Where did your children play in the neighborhood? Did they go to parks?

AK: Well, we had a trailer. So, that would be where we spent a lot of our summertime. They played ball at different parks, they were on teams and my older kids went to St.

Joe's on the Lakeshore and they used their sport facilities and St. Michael's, they went to St. Michael's, they have a big playground for school. But, I did not allow them to go to Lincoln Park and those places because it was drug infested.

EA: So they had quite a few friends to play with?

AK: From the schools they went to, right.

EA: were there certain hangouts they would go to like when they were teenagers?

AK: We were in a Christian community so our community did everything together. We picnic, we had parties together.

EA: were these groups that put these together?

AK: It was the SON of God community which was a charismatic community formed before we all moved down here. About a hundred families moved down here.

EA: At the same time you moved down here?

AK: Yeah, right.

EA: And you would say this is in the mid 70's.

**AGNES KASPER**

AK: Yes.

EA: Now you talked about teens where there drug- -

AK: A lot of it.

EA: Underage drinking?

AK: All kinds of it. Lincoln Park was very bad. There were many robberies. They stole our batteries, break in our cars, all the time. They stole our cars out of the driveways. It was hard to stay here but, we did because we knew God wanted us to so- -

EA: OK< very good. What about unwed mothers?

AK: Many, many, many. We run a food program at church and we have a free luncheon thing and we often have almost 300. Many, many, many teenage girls you see walking with their strollers up and down here.

EA: So this is not like years ago when they got married, but have the babies and keep them.

AK: Yes, get welfare and food stamps and go to church and eat.

EA: I see. Now you mentioned sports. Were sports big with your children?

AK: Not a lot because they are small, but they love sports and my husband went, most of my older children were raised in Seven Hills and my husband coached them in baseball and all that kind of stuff. But, my two that were raised here were very little and they were not into sports but, they do like them. They have Brown's tickets and everything.

EA: Yes, I was going to ask if - -

AK: And they are crazy about the Indians and our priest has, what do you call that pass for the whole year and they often go to the ball games. They went to the wrestling Wednesday night.

EA: So how old are your children now?

AK: From fifty to thirty, ten of them, yeah, and I have two who are living here, single boys that are thirty-nine and thirty-seven. And my grandson lives here, moved in a couple weeks ago he is going to Cleveland State engineering school.

EA: Do you see these children staying in Tremont ?

AK: Oh, always. I have a single daughter who teaches in Shaker Heights and she would never move out of Tremont.

EA: And your sons?

AK: No, my sons either. My one son runs the credit union at church and teaches retarded adults and my daughter teaches disability in Shaker. But, they travel. My one son doesn't drive he walks there everyday.

EA: Now what about your husband?

AK: He died twelve years ago.

EA: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

AK: Yeah.

EA: So you see your children staying here and getting married raising children here?

AK: I don't think they will marry, they don't date.

EA: Would you like to see them stay here?

AK: Oh yes, yes! I LOVE TREMONT, I would never move. Well, I might have to. I have an eight bedroom here. And if they weren't here I could not afford to live here. I had a three hundred dollar gas bill. So- -

EA: Now what about your friends, did they stay here in Tremont?

AK: No, many of the younger ones moved out. We have three families left here that are really dedicated. Many of them stayed with the parish, but moved because it was very hard to raise children here twenty-five years ago.

EA: Why?

AK: Not many places to play here, who, were hanging around were not good.

EA: Did any of their children go to the public schools?

AK: No, I don't think so. The schools are BAD!

EA: What have you heard about the schools?

## **AGNES KASPER**

AK: They are terrible. I taught at the, substituted a couple of times at the Lincoln Junior High. It wasn't a school, it was just terrible.

EA: What was going on?

AK: They were sleeping, and I even thought I saw one of them smoking and eating, yelling, it wasn't even school I don't think. I was appalled!

EA: Is that right?

AK: Now that was a long time ago. I substitute taught to pay tuition at Saint Michael's and that was very good.

EA: But, that was a Catholic school

AK: Yeah, right.

EA: How many Catholic schools are here?

AK: Urban community and St. John Cantius is closed now. But, St. Michaels, that's Metro Catholic now, kind of combined and then of course Central Catholic. A couple of mine went to Central Catholic High School and the two boys that live here went to St. John's on 8<sup>th</sup>.

EA: Now when they went to elementary school here, did they walk to school?

AK: Oh yeah, to St. Michael's right here on Scranton.

EA: So it was close.

AK: Yeah, they walked.

EA: Did they come home for lunch?

AK: No. They stayed there.

EA: Now were you home with them?

AK: Oh yeah, always. Never worked.

EA: You never worked outside the home?

AK: Well, other than teaching, substitute teaching to pay tuition.

**AGNES KASPER**

EA: Did you find most women did that as well?

AK: No. Many, many worked. There were many women at St. Michael's so they worked to probably pay tuition.



EA: Did your husband work outside of the home?

AK: Oh yeah, he worked Ohio Nut and Bolt in Berea for forty-five years.

EA: So he did not work inside the Tremont area he traveled out and came back everyday?

AK: Yes.

EA: Now would you say family life is different in Tremont?

AK: Yeah, there is a lot more property owners instead of renters, there are some but, it is much improved.

EA: Do you think it makes a difference when a person owns a home here in Tremont?

AK: Absolutely!

EA: Why?

AK: They take care of their property and they work and fix things up. Its just a different "ball game" (laughter).

EA: A different attitude?

AK: Oh yeah, yeah. I own a double across the street that my daughter lives in and a friend, but before when we rented it was just terrible.

EA: What kinds of problems?

AK: Oh, gang related, they broke the windows and wrecked the houses that we had to have them done over. It was just horrible. And my sister owns a double on Lincoln Park and she has lots of trouble. In fact, I'm sure she is going to sell them maybe. Yeah, its just terrible.

EA: Well, you said it has turned around quite a lot.

AK: Yeah, a lot of people have bought houses now. Do you know what any house is worth, about two hundred thousand.

## **AGNES KASPER**

EA: What did you pay for a house?

AK: Ten, and we put about thirty in it.

EA: Wow, and it is estimated now at two hundred thousand!

AK: I had a guy walk in last year and offer me one hundred and fifty.

EA: Wow!

AK: Property is very, in fact if you read the newspapers Tremont property is the most up and going.

EA: What do you think turned Tremont around, other reasons?

AK: The yuppies moved in because they want to be close to downtown and they don't want to drive these freeways and they started to fix things up. We got a lot of new buildings, lots and lots of new property so then you pay two hundred thousand. Many of the condos are two hundred and fifty thousand. They've moved in, there are different people at the park and being that it got fixed up and there is more police and you know. Safer for one thing.

EA: Would you go out and walk?

AK: Oh yes, yes I would and my kids walked to St. Michael's, but I wouldn't walk in the dark, but I wouldn't walk in the dark in Parma. So, it doesn't matter.

EA: OK, good.

AK: You don't test the Lord, you trust him. That is what we always believed in and always told the kids that. And we drove them most of the time. They walked to school. They didn't always walk in the morning but, they walked home at three o'clock in the afternoon. I watched for them. My one son got beat up and almost killed the first year we were here by a gang.

EA: How old was he?

AK: Fourteen.

EA: What happened?

AK: The gang just jumped him. Beat him with beer bottles and almost blinded him. It was terrible, terrible.

### **AGNES KASPER**

EA: Was this an ethnic kind of gang, was the gang from Cleveland?

AK: I think it was Puerto Rican fellows, most of them were.

EA: Did he know them?

AK: No, no never saw them.

EA: He was a random victim?

AK: Yes, I think they wanted his money maybe. It was terrible.

EA: Did your other children have any problems?

AK: No, no problem ever, ever, oh no, I'm lying, my one son a year ago, somebody put a gun to him and took his billfold up by St. Augustine about a mile away from here. But that would happen in Parma town. That is how we thought.

EA: Now do you see gangs here?

AK: Not so much now anymore. Well, we see them.

EA: So you see gangs here?

AK: Oh yes, yeah.

EA: There are gangs here now.

AK: Yeah.

EA: Do they deal with more of the drug trade here?

AK: Oh yeah, just Tremont West we got, across the street there was a guy selling drugs and we watched him and got the phone numbers. A lot of people have block club meetings and we work at that and the police got them he's in jail. They evicted him and he moved out.

EA: That's good!

AK: But we watch.

EA: You have a neighborhood club?

AK: Yes, a block club.

**AGNES KASPER**

EA: Do most of the blocks have them?

AK: Oh, there is about six of them.

EA: Do they have block parties?

AK: Yes, they have big parties, we had one here in the summer in the parking lot here. We had a big Christmas party. It is very good. Better than Seven Hills was with involvement.

EA: You feel like your neighbors are kind of looking out for each other?

AK: Oh, yeah.

EA: People do care and are willing- -

AK: Yeah, yeah.

EA: What about politics here? I know Dennis Kucinich is from here.

AK: Oh, we love Kucinich. Oh yeah, he got us Cleveland Public Power and I pay a fourth less, who they won't put Cleveland Power, its SE, over across the street and we can't get Cleveland Power cause they claim its not enough, whatever. But, it is a big savings. I went door to door with him trying to get Cleveland Power and our priest is real good friends with him.

EA: Did you watch his rise from this area?

AK: Oh yeah, yeah.

EA: So you know him personally?

AK: Kind of. No, that's a lie, as a politician we know Joe Cimperman.

EA: Tell me what you think of him now that he is running for- -

AK: Oh yeah PRESIDENT! Yes, he'll never get in ,oh, he is to controversial, to right , to good, to much. Politicians don't do that. Whatever.

EA: But, you did watch him and watch him mature as a politician?

AK: Yes, and they made fun of him and all.

EA: Do you remember when he became mayor of Cleveland?

**AGNES KASPER**

AK: Oh yeah, yeah.

EA: Did Tremont feel good about that?

AK: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I think he might be from Tremont.

EA: Yes, my understanding is that he is.

AK: Oh, OK. He comes to all of our festivals. He is always there. He is just a very decent man. How he has lasted this long, we just don't know.

EA: Well, he has made a big comeback.

AK: Yes, he fought for the hospital, and fought for seniors and steel workers. But, you don't get to far (laughter).

EA: Right. What other politicians can you think of?

AK: Joe Cimperman. He is very, very into Tremont but, we are a little disappointed in him because he didn't fight for our woman's shelter at St. Augustine, all the women who have no place to go, we were going to put it in St. Augustine and , but the people who have all kinds of money, the Yuppies didn't want it and we lost.

EA: It is interesting that you say there are a lot of Yuppies here.

AK: Urban professionals, I should say.

EA: Right, right. I understand. Its interesting you say they like to live here because they can commute.

AK: Oh yeah, but they did not want homeless women taking their kids to the park where their kids had to play.

EA: I see.

AK: Too bad. Notice where I'm coming from. (laughter) We would fed people downtown, the homeless, went from eleven thirty at night, there were so many people, and we took soup.

EA: This is in Cleveland?

## **AGNES KASPER**

AK: Yes, soup and sandwiches and stuff. My husband and I and another couple had a shelter for women, but we couldn't get a director so we couldn't do it because I had so many kids and the other lady had seventeen.

EA: Wow.

AK: So we had to close. We worked with the homeless for a longtime. And we thought he was really for us, you know, but, it kind of changed we think.

EA: I see.

AK: The diocese was going to pay for it even.

EA: Is that right.

AK: Yeah.

EA: Now you have this going on in Tremont?

AK: No, well we don't have it, we have to send them downtown or wherever they can go. Now I understand the diocese, somebody gave them property, and going to start, they are going to build a shelter for the homeless and we are hoping to send the people, we are trying to raise them up to get jobs and that type of thing, be plugged into that.

EA: You seem to be very active in the community, what other things do you do, what other organizations, groups that you belong to?

AK: Nothing, just the working with St. Augustine, and they work with the homeless and the poor, and the deaf and the blind. Well, my son runs, the boy who lives here, runs the camp for the disabled in the summer, my two grandkids work there. My daughter works there as a counselor. We work a lot with disabled.

EA: That's beautiful. Sounds like your whole family is oriented- -

AK: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah and the young urban professionals said that they didn't want their kids, and I should have stood up and said, I didn't, but I should have stood up and said, it certainly didn't harm my kids. We always brought them home with us even. I don't know if that was right or not but, when you see a lady seventy years old, freezing we often brought them home. But anyhow, it certainly didn't harm my children because they are all- -

EA: Yes, willing to give.

## **AGNES KASPER**

AK: Oh well, we had yesterday, Sunday, my daughter had one of the little boys with cerebral palsy all day long and we hauled him to Applebee's and we took him, he couldn't walk, can't talk, can't eat, can't move, but she is with him all the time. And my boy teaches adults that are. He is their computer teacher.

EA: Do you think your children, being very open and able to help others, do you think that came from being raised in a place like Tremont?

AK: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, it certainly didn't harm them. I have seven out of ten that graduated from college, so it didn't hurt them at all. I wanted to punch them. (laughter)

EA: And none of them had any major, major problems outside of the one boy?

AK: And he stayed here.

EA: He is still here?

AK: No, well he got married, but he stayed here five years after he got married, but he bought a house in Cleveland and I have a boy in Lakewood and another boy in Cleveland in South Hills, and my oldest boy is a nuclear physicist in Washington.

EA: OK, and this came from the education they got here.

AK: Well, no, no, no, no. A lot of my older ones went to St Cantius, Padua, Ignatius, Nazarus, Normandy high school. Some of them went to public schools when we lived in Parma, and we ran out of money, but they almost all went to college on their own and worked and got grants and so forth.

EA: OK. What do you think is different between Tremont and Parma, Tremont and Seven Hills?

AK: The people.

EA: Just the people?

AK: A lot of it is the people.

EA: Well, what is the difference?

AK: Well, money was a big issue and you know and so forth.

EA: How would you say, this is a working class neighborhood?

AK: I would not say so. I would say it's a poor still and rich. You can't buy a two hundred and fifty thousand condominium if you don't have a big job.

EA: Right, right.

AK: In fact the fellow who was so against our shelter was a lawyer, or I think his wife is a lawyer.

EA: OK.

AK: So they are choosing this.

EA: So you see Tremont really changing into being a more upscale.

AK: In certain sections, very much, very much.

EA: Now a lot of cities have people who come in and buy houses and push others out, do you see that happening in Tremont?

AK: Yeah, oh yeah. Like you can get a lot of houses for sale. It is very tempting to make a lot of money.

EA: You mean to buy them, fix them and resell?

AK: No, I see a lot of them buy, fix'em and stay.

EA: Oh, ok. So you don't see a lot of investors coming in?

AK: No, not like Ohio City.

EA: OK, ok. The people are staying.

AK: I think a lot of them are. I'm not out there as much anymore because I am seventy-one. I have diabetes and look at this I just had major surgery so I am not walking around. Now my kids, because they run the camps, take the kids to Lincoln Park to the swimming pool and that's not always super. But, the people with money will have the swimming pools and take them someplace else.

EA: Are the yards here big enough for swimming pools?

AK: Well no, no, I'm lying no the yards down there are very small, two hundred and fifty thousand and I swear there is not fifteen feet between them.

EA: Wow.

AK: It would be interesting to ride down therer.

## **AGNES KASPER**

EA: Yes, maybe I will just to see. Now you said your home was about ten thousand dollars. Was that the going rate when you bought?

AK: Oh yeah. Many in the community bought. We bought beaten houses and never ever pushed anybody out and we made a commitment to that. It was empty and all the pipes were frozen and mold all over everything.

EA: So let me ask you this, you and your husband looked at this house with your five children and this water and pipes and you were how old?

AK: Forty something.



EA: When you were in your forty's and said - -

AK: We knew we could do it because my husband restored a house when he was a kid.

EA: Oh, ok.

AK: But, we had a community of one hundred and fifty people and every Saturday morning we said we would get together and restore everybody's house. We worked together and I had seven sons that helped.

EA: Now when you say community, you mean a church community?

AK: Yes, a Catholic community, we were sent to St. Augustine, we were a prayer group first and then it grew into a group that wanted to work with the poor.

EA: OK. So you would say you had a lot of support when you moved here.

AK: Oh, yes and a lot of, seven sons, who could do a lot. It was a very big job though. To this day it is a big job to keep up.

EA: How long did it take you to get this house exactly how you wanted it?

AK: About a year.

EA: A year? That's all?

AK: Oh, not even a year. We did a lot of houses. We paid to have an electrician, we paid a roofer, my husband did the plumbing and we did all the walls, we kept the wood you know and a lot of it we had to strip, it had fifteen layers of paint on it, and so forth, and we put a new kitchen in and what else, we carpeted a few times and painted and yeah we did lots of work, but I loved it. When I saw the wood and everything the real estate agent  
**AGNES KASPER**

said, only you would say , praise the Lord when you looked at this place (laughter). Ten thousand we paid.

EA: And you were not alone doing this because other families were also doing this.

AK: Yes, and my husband did a lot of work on their places and a lot of the young people, we sold our house in Seven Hills, which was really nice. We had a built in pool and whatever, but anyhow we sold it and bought some houses for the younger people.

EA: That's nice.

AK: And then they moved, many times we didn't get anything back on 'em, but sometimes we got a little bit. And then I bought the double from across the street from one of them and restored

that and then a gang ruined it and then my boys do all the work and did it over and my daughter moved in and she's not going anywhere.

EA: Is that right?

AK: Oh, no, the Shaker Heights people say to her, "You live in Tremont!", ha,ha they use to us, "you live in Tremont". My mother about died when we bought, oh my God, she about died. My brother was head of the community and moved there but, he had just rented and she had a fit about that and then when she saw this she just about died, and then she gradually loved it.

EA: Is that right?

AK: Yeah, before she died she loved it.

EA: So she saw the same things that you saw?

AK: Well, she knew that we would fix it up because I like nice things.

EA: I mean she saw the whole idea as being a good thing?

AK: Oh, yeah, well it is a good thing to work to help people and we had the philosophy that if we moved in here and lived here and fixed things up and were nice to people all around, it would give hope. The older people. Hope, imagine when they have their windows closed up and scared to death to live here. We had, we believed the good Lord wanted us to give them hope so we made our yards nice and my yard is real nice and I fixed and decorate for all the holidays and the kids love it. So, we hope that we made some kind of hope. But, many of them moved and in a way if I was young maybe I would. My daughter lived and restored a house across the street that way and then left, she had five kids and she didn't leave because she didn't like Tremont, because she loves St Michael's, but she bought her dream house in Norwalk, Ohio. A Century home with an

#### **AGNES KASPER**

acre of land and that is what she wanted. A lot of my kids lived out here when they first got married definitely and fixed up their houses and then moved.

EA: Tell me a little bit about the businesses here in Tremont. Where did you go grocery shopping?

AK: Well I NEVER went to the little stores. That's another sore point for me. They go to Aldi's, I see the guy up there and buys fifteen gallons of milk and sells them for three dollars and buys them for a dollar sixty-nine because these people don't go there. And when you get food stamps you don't care if they pay two dollars, three dollars or one dollar. But I do not go but we have a Tops up here. I didn't drive til I was fifty, so I hauled the cart and my kids took me a lot and I went to Tops and I went to wholesale places.

EA: But you never frequent the little stores?

AK: NO NEVER! And I can't frequent the restaurants because I can't afford them, UGHHHH!

EA: What kind of restaurants are they?

AK: On they are the top ten in Cleveland.

EA: Can you name them for me?

AK: Lola's, Costa's, Miracles, oh what the heck, oh the Treehouse, the, the Fat's, Fat Cat's, whatever its called there's about five new ones I have never been in. There's some without prices on their menus in Tremont. My son always says, "do they know that Mercedes is still parked in the ghetto?" HA HA. You know down at fifth where the project is its terrible there. Its pretty bad, pretty bad, but they have security walk around to protect your car.

EA: At the restaurant?

AK: Yeah, Ha so funny, very ritzy, very ritzy.

EA: So now when did that start to move in?

AK: Oh, I would say, well Miracles maybe fifteen years ago but the rest were within maybe ten years and there is still more and more. In the Sunday paper they ar always written up. My sister says', "Oh, there's another one"

(Phone rings and AK answers, interview is ended here for subject to tend to other obligations)  
END