

ORAL HISTORY

of McCormick House

Betsy Goltermann (BG)

**Interviewed by Dave Oberg (DO), Elmhurst History Museum
Executive Director**

DO: Well, welcome. I'm wondering if you would mind sharing with us your name and tell us where and when you were born.

BG: My name is Betsy Goltermann and I was born in Berwyn, Illinois in 1958.

DO: And what is your relationship to the McCormick house?

BG: I'd say most significantly, I am the daughter of Marcia and Bob Goltermann, who have the close relationship with the McCormick house because they were neighbors. They lived next door to the McCormick house from 1984, when they moved in there, until when they moved the house in the mid-90s. I think it was '95 maybe they moved it? Yeah, so I grew up in Elmhurst, and being the daughter of Marsha, who's been I'd say very oriented around the arts and architecture, she would call it the Mies house. And it was one that when we would drive by, before we lived on Prospect Avenue, and look behind the landscaping and the thick trees she would point out, there's the Mies house, it's a glass house. Of course I being a young person always thought people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones and there's a glass house. So it was unique in that sense and then my parents moved next door to it in 1984 and my husband, Ed Mumpkiss (sp) and I also lived on the same block. So our address was 326 Prospect. They were 295 Prospect. And we were having children at that time, in the mid-80s, and our children would go back and forth between the two homes walking up and down the block. And so we would walk by it a lot and having it there, behind the trees and the landscaping, the stark glass and the white steel frames for us, it was just an unusual piece amongst the other architecture in town. And my children grew up with it, they noted that it was different and appreciated it. One of the odd things about it, the house, that I've said to a couple of people, was the Ficks had it landscaped so that they had this pink-colored gravel driveway. And I always thought it was one of the most outstanding kind of unique things to go with the architecture.

DO: Do you have any other favorite memories of that house that you would like to share with us?

BG: Well you know I was only in it a couple of times but I knew the Ficks through my parents and would hear stories about them living in the house. And I think folks need to kind of realize that this house and how it was built was really on the edge of technological advancement at that time with glass and steel. And there would be

stories about Ray Fick talking about how it was always too hot or too cold and having to deal with those practical things of life. One of the things I remember was the moveable walls and how whether or not they utilized that, I can't tell you, but there was a discussion about how it was built so that the configuration could be changed easily.

DO: Interesting. So how has this house changed since you've known it and what are your thoughts and feelings about those changes?

BG: So I echo my mother when she says it has evolved beautifully. That, there it was, at a place in Elmhurst that was not appreciated and that the folks that rallied around that, that were able to raise the money to preserve it so many years ago, move it to this location, built the museum around it. And I think that the museum that they built was incorporated and was the right thing at the right time. And then using it, using the house, and promoting it, having it become known. And then in the last few years, the idea of separating it and making it a standalone piece of art has been just a wonderful thing. And I think as Mies became more prominent and there is greater and greater appreciation of him and his work, and what is available here in Chicago, I think it's just evolved beautifully.

DO: Do you have any recollections of how the community reacted to this home when it was built?

BG: Not when it was built right, since it was built in the early 50s. As I was growing up in Elmhurst, I don't think folks really—there was not a lot of recognition of it. I also was out of town when they moved it but there was a lot of buzz around it and people were talking about how they were going to get helicopters, to move it with helicopters. Yeah, it was a big deal. Did I answer your question, sorry?

DO: Yes, absolutely. I'm curious about any public reaction when this was turned into a space to exhibit art.

BG: I think that there was a strong support and appreciation. And maybe a questioning of whether or not a place like this could remain economically viable. A standalone, 501(c)3 that needed the support of not just the community but of patrons and supporters of the art. I give the folks that came up with that concept and that have been sustaining it over this period of time, just a lot of praise and kudos that this museum continues to exist in this day and age.

DO: How would you like to see the house changed for the future?

BG: It would be great if we could recreate and get the funding to put back the furnishings and the kitchen like they were when the McCormicks bought it and

furnished it in the early 50s. So I think that's a goal of the museum and I think that would add just another dimension to what we've been able to do so far.

DO: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

BG: Nope. I think that's it.

DO: Alright. And, again, remind us of your connection to the Elmhurst Art Museum.

BG: So most importantly I'm the daughter of Marcia Goltermann. And my father, Bob Goltermann, but most importantly the daughter of Marcia Goltermann who was on the board here those six years. And then when she went off the board, I am on the board now so I'm a board member here at the museum. I've been a neighbor of the museum and my oldest daughter got married in the museum.

DO: Tell me a little more about that.

BG: Yes, so one of the opportunities that the museum provides for folks is that we do have the ability to host weddings and/or events here. And there's not a lot that does happen, maybe, I really should know but don't, maybe six times or ten times a year there's an event. So she got married on August 16, maybe August 6, of 2016 and we had about a hundred, hundred and twenty people here, and she was married in one of the galleries that was able to accommodate the ceremony at that time and then the reception was here. Yeah, it was a great event.

DO: Great backdrop I'd have to say. Anyone else that you think we should talk to?

BG: I think you should talk to Doug Fick who lived in the house and is one of the surviving folks—he is the son of Maryanne and Ray Fick and I know he lives up in Milwaukee and the museum and Joe's been trying to get in touch with him so hopefully that will happen. And then as my mother suggested probably the directors going back to Neil Bremer who was one of the first directors and then Phyllis O'Neil and then, of course, Jenny Gibbs.

DO: Well, very good. Any last thoughts on the importance of this house to the world?

BG: Yes, I think that it's important to Elmhurst and provides for Elmhurst a unique place in the Chicago area. When you look at other suburbs that Elmhurst often compares itself to, perhaps Oak Park or Naperville, or maybe some of the—I could name maybe ten or so, I think it brings an architectural backdrop and emphasis that is modern and is different and its unique and I think that in and of itself is a promotion for the city of Elmhurst that should continue to be sustained and enjoyed.

DO: Well, thank you very much for your time.

BG: Thank you.