



The Weston Voices Oral History Project

A Conversation with



Judith C. Albin

Commercial artist, educator, and historian of Weston's Morehouse family, which dates back to the Revolutionary War.

*Interviewed by Arne de Keijzer and Karin Giannitti
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This transcript is an annotated version of the full video interview, which, along with an abridged version, are archived at the Weston Historical Society and the Weston Public Library and also available on their respective websites.

The opinions expressed in this interview are solely those of Mrs. Albin.

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The Oral History Project of the Weston Historical Society

An Interview with Judith C. Albin

Judy Albin lives in the historic Morehouse home, which dates back to 1859. She has been a commercial artist, a teacher's aide in the Weston Elementary School, and a well-known local volunteer, including as a leader of school tours of the old Post Office and the Weston Historical Society's Coley House. She moved to Weston with her husband Ernie in 1960.

Mrs. Albin is also well-versed on the history of Weston's Morehouse family, whose ancestors fought in the Civil War. Today, Judy continues to express her creativity in her art, samples of which decorate the walls of her home. A set of photos of her memorabilia and artwork are interwoven into the original video; they are also featured in a photo gallery on the Society's website, WestonHistoricalSociety.com.

Arne de Keijzer: Hello. I'm Arne de Keijzer, a Trustee of the Weston Historical Society. With me is Karin Giannitti, a native Westonite who is deeply knowledgeable about the history of the town and was a longtime volunteer as a collections manager for the Society as well as the editor of *The Chronicle*, its historical almanac. Today is January 14th, 2016 and Karin and I are here to interview Judy Albin.

Judy Albin lives in the historic Morehouse home, which dates back to 1859. She has been a commercial artist, a teacher's aide in the Weston Elementary School, and a well-known local volunteer. Judy Albin is also well-versed on the history of Weston's Morehouse family, one of whom fought in the Civil War.

Today, Judy Albin continues to express her creativity in her art, samples of which decorate the walls of her home.

Thank you for inviting us into your home, Judy. Let me start off by asking you when and where you grew up.

Judy Albin: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania [on June 4, 1934]. I lived there until I was about six years old, when my stepfather's business -- he worked for White Tower -- moved 20 families to the East because they wanted to open up a main branch in Stanford. We ended up in Rowayton and that's where I grew up until shortly before I was married. [*White Tower was founded in 1927 as a rival to the White Castle chain. At its peak in the 1950's it had 230 restaurants; in 2016 its last remaining outlet is in Toledo, Ohio. - Ed.*]

Karin Giannitti: What were your family circumstances growing up?

Judy Albin: My sister was born two years after me, and my mother left our biological father [when I was about three]. Before she married our stepfather, we went from place to place and she had no way of taking care of us financially. We ended up in an orphanage in Mars, Pennsylvania for a period of about eight months until she married my stepfather and it was he whose company, White Tower, brought us to Rowayton, for which I'm extremely grateful, because it was a wonderful town to grow up in.

Karin Giannitti: You had one younger sister. Any brothers?

Judy Albin: One younger brother, ten years younger than I. He was born when we got to Rowayton. I was captivated by him. I was ten years old, and here's this brand new baby, a living baby doll. I was excited.

Karin Giannitti: What kinds of things did you do as a kid? Did you play outside? Did you have free range like they call it now? Free range children?

Judy Albin: We were fortunate because back in the '40s -- 1941 was when we moved here and my brother was born in '44 -- Rowayton was a very small community. We were able to get on our bikes to ride all over town. Everybody in that community knew who we kids were, knew our parents. So if we went off the tracks, so to speak, it was told to our parents.

Karin Giannitti: You couldn't get away with anything?

Judy Albin: No, we could not. One of the fun things that we did was to take a penny bike ride. That was to get on our bikes and then when we came to the end of the road, where we had to turn either left or right, we'd flip the coin. Heads, we would go one way, tails the other.

We did this all around town until we would come to a road that we weren't too sure we wanted to take, because we didn't know it, so we would cancel that coin flip. That was one of the fun things we did. And we skated at the old school pond, we went swimming down at Bayley Beach. We were just all over that town. Played ball, soft ball, and it was great. [*Rowayton's Bayley Beach and its recreational facilities are still actively in use. -ed.*]

Karin Giannitti: Were your meals pretty much the same as what you cook today, or were they more limited?

Judy Albin: Sort of. My mother was a very good cook, and one of the things she made was a good macaroni and cheese, which I in turn did for my family, which became the favorite meal here. "What are we having? Mac and cheese? Oh yes!" They would be excited.

Karin Giannitti: That seems to be universal. Was there much shopping in Rowayton, or did you have to go to Norwalk or Stamford to do big shopping?

Judy Albin: My mother went to an A&P in Darien for any large amount, or South Norwalk. We had buses that you could hop on.

Karin Giannitti: When did you realize you had a talent for art? Did you always draw?

Judy Albin: No, the only time I remember it first coming into play was when I went to the Rowayton Elementary School. An art teacher who would come in periodically. She would have a lesson, and we all would have to do the same drawing.

My drawings usually came out very well, and she would show them to the class. It got to a point where my friends would say, "Judy, would you draw this roof for me?" Or, "Would you draw this tree? I can't make it right." Paper dolls were pretty well known then, and my sister and I had our art supplies. I used to take my paper doll and lay her down on a piece of paper, and draw the outline of a new wardrobe, and color them in, and cut them out, and it was wonderful fun.

Karin Giannitti: Did you go to high school in Rowayton?

Judy Albin: No, Rowayton only had elementary school up to grade six. For grades seven, eight, and nine, we got on a bus that took us up to Benjamin Franklin Junior High in South Norwalk on Flax Hill Road. That's where we went for Junior High. After we graduated from there we went to Norwalk High School on East Avenue for grades 10, 11, and 12. It is now the Town Hall, which makes me sad because I really loved the high school, and now it's so changed. Externally it's OK, but... [*Norwalk High School moved to its present location on Country Street in 1971. -ed.*]

Karin Giannitti: Now we get into your adulthood and meeting Ernie, your husband to be. Can you tell us about that?

Judy Albin: I met Ernie when I was 13. I was in the Girl Scouts. Square dancing was very popular then, and we planned a square dance, a number of them, but the first one was in a neighbor's barn. We girls were to invite a boy to go to the square dance. I gathered up my courage because I had seen Ernie a couple of times, and liked him. He had incredible eyes but, most of all, a wonderful smile. I got courageous and I called and asked him to the square dance. He said, "I'll let you know."

Then one day he came up the road on his bicycle to help a little boy across the street whose chain had slipped off his bike. He came over and said to me, "Do you have a

screwdriver?" I thought, "Oh please God, let me have a screwdriver." I found one, thank God, ran out and gave it to him.

When he returned it he said, "Oh, about that square dance...yeah, I can go." I said, "Oh great." I took the screwdriver, managed to get into the house, flopped down on the couch and yelled out, "He said yes!"

As I said, I was at the ripe old age of 13, and when I got to the riper age of 23, we met at the altar in Rowayton and were married.

Karin Giannitti: You actually dated all that time or...

Judy Albin: We dated off and on. We were a nucleus of teenagers with an age span of three to four years. Even though we had friends at Norwalk High School, Rowayton was a community unto itself, and we did a lot of things locally. Square dancing, as I said, was popular, and they had them at the school periodically. Also, the Norwalk Recreation Commission had formal dances with a live band, done at the beach in one of the big veranda buildings. We would get together there. Canasta became popular. We went to different houses and danced, played canasta, spin the bottle, and a few others.

We had a grand time. As I say, it was on and off again with Ernie. He went to a prep school in Maine, and then to the University of Maine. I went to what is now Central Connecticut State University [in New Britain] and then to Oberlin College in Ohio.

Ernie had gone into the Navy as a personnel specialist, so our communication was through letters. He was terrible at writing letters. He would come home once a year because he was stationed in San Diego. One Christmas when he came home, after our family had moved from Rowayton to West Norwalk, he came to the house in West Norwalk. We reestablished our relationship. We had a party with all of our friends in the family room downstairs.

I didn't know it, but he had planned on giving me a ring. My sister came in with her boyfriend, and he'd just pinned her, and Ernie didn't want to ruin their hip hooray, so he waited. I went to the kitchen for something a little later and he followed. He tapped me on the shoulder, turned me around, grabbed my hand, and put the ring on my finger. I dissolved. I was so ecstatic. That was Christmas eve, and the following August 10th, 1957, we were married.

Karin Giannitti: Back up a bit and tell us about college. Did you go to study art?

Judy Albin: In high school they knew that I loved art and the art teacher was very aware of it, but in those days they didn't encourage young girls to go into a profession other than teaching, being a secretary, or nursing. I knew I liked children because I did a lot of babysitting. So I elected to go to teachers' college at Connecticut College in New Britain for two years. [*The College was then still known as the Connecticut Normal School. Founded in 1849, it remains the state's oldest publicly funded University. -ed.*] During my second year, in 1954, my art instructor was really caught up in my artwork, and he said, "Judy, you should be studying art."

He had graduated from Oberlin and so it was through him, plus our minister in Rowayton, who happened to have gone to the theological seminary at Oberlin, that letters of introduction went out and they accepted me. With much trepidation, my stepfather drove me. I ended up in a wonderful dormitory, and they actually made me the social chairman, which would have blown my mind before.

I had two art classes and I did extremely well in the one on life drawing. The other was painting class, and the instructor I had was ready to tear his hair out because I was so detailed. He wanted to stand me about 12 feet away from a 10 x 10 foot canvas and throw paint at it, just to loosen up.

At one point he said, "Why didn't you go to commercial art school?" I ground my teeth remembering back when my advisor did not encourage me to do that and do "real" art instead. I got home that summer, or beginning of summer, and I said to my parents, "You don't need to scrape the funds to get me back to Oberlin. I'm going to go out and get a job. I've got to find my niche. I've got to find out who I am."

That took me to the work force, and my first legitimate job, not babysitting, was a good job at Burndy Corporation, a company that made electrical connectors. That's where I started doing art work. [*The company was based in Norwalk at the time. It is now a subsidiary of Hubbell, Inc. and headquartered in New Hampshire. -ed.*]

Arne de Keijzer: Just to move back slightly, were you already in Weston at that time?

Judy Albin: No, this was before we were married. It was right after I finished my third year of college, in 1955. He was still in the Navy in San Diego and had just gotten back home [for Christmas leave that year]. Then, as I said, Ernie came home the next Christmas, in 1956, and we were married in 1957.

The art director in the advertising department at Burndy, knowing I was going to end up in San Diego [to join my new husband], gave me a wonderful letter of recommendation to an executive he knew in the publications department at Convair, the large aircraft manufacturing company there.

Ernie and I drove out after we were married in a brand new car that his parents gave us as a wedding gift. His Dad didn't want us driving back in a rental car, or a secondhand car, which Ernie had been planning to get. We got a brand new Ford, a Ford Fairlane. Anyhow, I did get the job at Convair, and I really, really liked it.

I was in publications, and they gave me pen and ink, and I worked on the galley drawings for this 880 aircraft which I don't think ever was constructed. I don't know what happened, but I know I did something that I loved. [*Convair built 65 of them between 1959 and 1962 but withdrew from the market due to lack of demand. -ed.*]

However, I came back East in March, 1958 because my sister was getting married, and I was expecting our first child. Ernie's ship was going to be going out on maneuvers and then up to Mare Island, [*the Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, California. -ed.*]. All in all, it indicated I should come home. He was due to get out in the following November. It was only for a short time.

Arne de Keijzer: After he got out of the service, he came home to Rowayton and then you moved to Weston?

Judy Albin: What we did, we found an apartment because we weren't sure what was going to happen.

[Clarification: When Judy came back East she moved into her parent's house in West Norwalk, where she and Ernie had gotten engaged. But, desirous of down-sizing, her parents sold the house mid-year and Judy was invited to move in with Ernie's parents in Rowayton instead. She began looking for an apartment and they moved into one when Ernie came home that November. --ed.]

[Judy then shifts into the story of how she and Ernie came to live in Weston, where Ernie's family's ancestors had lived on the Morehouse farm --ed.]

In the meantime, of the family up here in this house [*that is, where she lives now. --ed.*], the only person left was Mary, one of the three children that Ebenezer and Nancy had, and the only one who got married.

She married a Nathaniel Hill. They had one child, a daughter, who in turn married a George Albin. They in turn had one child, and it was Ernie's father. That's how this house ended up in just Ernie's father's possession because he was the only survivor, the only child.

Grandma Hill, as everybody had called her, was up here and she fell. She had no phone, no plumbing, no wiring, no nothing. She fell in the side yard. Fortunately, a milkman had come. She heard him and she hollered. He went next door to Elizabeth Morehouse, Minerva Morehouse's mother, where she had a telephone. They called and asked for help.

Long story short, Ernie's parents decided this was not the place for Grandma to live by herself. They took her to Rowayton. She was there for several years before she passed away. The house sat across from where it is now. It sat on 170-some-odd acres. Here, where the house is now, there were 55 acres. Ernie's father was the only heir to this acreage.

It was draining him because it cost him property taxes but no was money coming in. He decided to put both tracts of land on the market, which he did. The larger tract sold. Buyers were not interested in the farmhouse. They were going to tear it down.

Ernie and I were married. We had our son and were expecting our second child when Ernie's father came to us and said, "Would you be interested in the farmhouse in Weston?" Ernie had never been inside, except into the room in which we're sitting right now, the dining room, but which the family used as their sitting room. They came up every Sunday to help the family with whatever they needed.

When Dad offered the house to us, Ernie and I came up, walked through the house and I said to Ernie, "We'll never need any more house than this. This is perfect." We told Dad, "Yes, we would be definitely interested." His comment to us was, "We have to get it off

the property it's on. I'll pay for the move. You pick where you want the house to sit. Also, getting the plumbing, wiring, heating and foundation will be up to you."

That's what we did.

Arne de Keijzer: [...What year was this?]

Judy Albin: Let's see. Dad proposed this in early 1960. We came up and looked. The house was moved the same year.

Arne de Keijzer: I think he told me before that the whole house came as is, with all its furniture and everything else in it.

Judy Albin: Absolutely. I have on the counter a bowl that was in the house. I've got pieces of china in the cabinet here that were in the house. That white pitcher that I adore was in the kitchen of the house. None of that was broken.

They moved it as if it was a new child. That's all I can say. It was lifted up, came across the road, down the driveway. They had to stop at one point because there was a cedar tree that knocked out the first pillar on the porch. Then they turned the house around. The hydraulic jack had a turntable, so they were able to do this. They set it down on the foundation and removed the big beams. It was fascinating. We had a whole bunch of people out on the road that came to watch this maneuver. It was incredible.

Arne de Keijzer: Now you found yourself in Weston and raising your children, but at some point you went back to work. How did that come about?

Judy Albin: [In 1967,] when my oldest was in first grade, his teacher sent home a note with him, telling me that there was an opening down at the school. Would I be interested in finding out about it? If I was interested, would I apply?

It turned out it was cafeteria aide. They had had volunteer mothers come into the cafeteria. They found that not all the mothers were reliable, or something would come up and for some reason, the mother couldn't be there. Trying to find substitutes was hair-pulling. They decided to throw it out and see if they could find somebody. When I found out what it was, that I would be monitoring about 165 kids in a cafeteria, I thought, "Oh, no!"

But I thought I'd give it a whirl because I'd had my fill of house care, laundry, kids, repeated day after day after day. I knew there was more to life than this. I wanted to taste it. I said, "Yes." I applied for the job and I was hired. It turned out to be a lot of fun. [Judy ended up working in the Elementary School for fourteen years before taking a job with Roger Core Advertising in Weston, where she worked for four years. -ed.]

One thing I clearly remember is that there was a Public Address system. I could use that to remind some of the kids what they were supposed to do, but I also found it was a tool that got them under control because I would say to them, "The first group at a table that is sitting quietly and all cleaned up can come up and use the speaker to do riddles and knock-knocks jokes." They thought that was the coolest thing.

One child came up and used the speaker and said, "What do you see when you look through the knees of the devil?" Nobody could answer it. I looked at him and I said, "You'll have to help them." He said, "Great balls of fire!"

I took the microphone away from him and thought, "Oh my word! What have I done?"

Arne de Keijzer: Oh, boy! Then actually, you went on to teaching, correct? Or being a teacher's aide?

Judy Albin: A teacher's aide. I did an auditory discrimination program for kindergarten and first grade because the speech department was overloaded and found that a lot of these kids had baby talk that they were carrying over. Once they were made aware of the correct initial sound for certain words they were fine and did not need to go to "speech."

As a helper I created a puppet out of a sock. I named him Mr. Meers [to rhyme with "ears"] with remarkable lime green listening ears because I had lime green felt. The kids thought he was great. As I would introduce a new sound, I would make Mr. Meers' ears wiggle and I would say, "He's listening." That worked. I did that for a couple of years.

They also had me go into a classroom as an aide to help. For a few years they had two grade two's together, with the two teachers working together. I would go in and help there. For the last few years there, they had me become a math aide to help kids who were struggling in math. I could identify with their struggles because that was one subject in school I hated and I never did well. To this day, I hate math.

Because of my art, I was able to create some fun board games that they really liked. Gnomes were coming into fashion then. The kids loved gnomes. I created a "number gnomes" board game. I ended up in a small room over in the bottom of North House. I called it the "Number gnome home." Every once in a while, I'd add a new gnome. I'd wait to see how long it took somebody to notice.

More importantly, I also had a box that I called my "energy box." Because we were scattered in three different buildings, if the kids didn't remember or the teacher didn't remember that they were supposed to send so-and-so to math, they would have to use the speaker and break into the classroom, "Would you please send so-and-so to math?" I didn't want that to happen.

In this box I had chocolate kisses, banana chips, raisins and other things that I knew kids even with allergies would still like. The deal was, "If you use your energy to remember your math day and come over and do just what I ask you to do, I'll replace your energy out of my energy box." They could open it up and take one packet of whatever they wanted, which they thought was great.

After a few years of this one teacher came to me and said, "Judy, you've changed the status of supportive math. I've got more kids saying, 'When can I go to Mrs. Albin's math class?'" That was good to hear. That was a feather in my cap, so to speak.

Karin Giannitti: I bet you continued your hobby as an artist during all of this.

Judy Albin: Yes, because once teachers knew I could draw, then it was, "Could you do something? Could you do this, could you do that, can you help with that?" Grace Sartor is one person that sticks out in my mind right now. She was teaching the kids about wildflowers. She had me draw wildflowers, one on a page, and then the kids would color it in, learn the name of it and print the name on their book, and then they would have this book of wildflowers.

Karin Giannitti: Did you have any time to do your own artwork?

Judy Albin: I did some, but not as much, since the kids were still young and I was busy over at the school. We had our kids active in sports as well, so that's a lot of the time, too. My art, as such, was in sewing something for my daughter for Christmas, or Ernie and I would make something for one of the boys. Every once in a while, during the summer, when the kids were home, I could sit at the table, either here in the dining room or the kitchen, and do something simply because I was just interested in it, or wanted to do it. It was relaxation for me, and I needed that.

Karin Giannitti: I presume it was your living in this historic house that started your interest in the Morehouse family, its original owners.

Judy Albin: Yes. The interesting part was that we really didn't know how very interesting it was going to be until after Ernie's father had died. [It was not until later], in 2001, or 2002, when Ernie's mother said to him, "There's a box in the attic. Bring it down, because I think you and Judy should go through this. It's material that we took out of the attic in Weston."

Here, on this very table, this big cardboard carton sat. Ernie would be busy upstairs, but I would pull some of the things out. One of the things I pulled out was Ebenezer's letter from California.

The first letter I read was dated August 10th, 1851. I pulled out this letter that I now have here, and began reading this beautiful manuscript. This cursive is gorgeous but his spelling was atrocious. I got goose bumps when I realized I was holding the very paper upon which he had written, and it was from "Murderer's Bar," August 10th, 1851. I gasped, and went "Oh my word," and I put the paper down on the table, and took my hands away from it, and I thought, "What do I do? I don't want to ruin it."

It's not ruined, because it's still here in acid-free folders. Then we found another letter that told about when he went to California. He went through Panama, he didn't cross the U.S. I actually got a map, and wrote down what he wrote, and identified his route here on the map, and put it in writing so I could easily track it. There was no Panama Canal then, so there was quite a bit of work getting over to the West Coast. When he got there he wrote, "I finally arrived in the Golden State in the wonderful city of San Francisco."

[Mrs. Albin subsequently checked Ebenezer's diary and reported that he had sailed from Havana, Cuba on May 4, 1851 and arrived at the port of Chagres (Colon) on the north shore of Panama on May 9. He traveled south across the isthmus to Panama City, first by whale boat and then by mule, arriving there on the 11th. He then sailed for San Francisco on the 15th. While not noted

in his diary, it generally took about 17 days to do that last leg. Although this was the fastest route to the gold rush at the time, travelers faced tropical diseases that claimed many. -ed.]

It took a while, many years, before I researched Murderer's Bar. I had always heard of stories in bars, drinking bars, where men who found gold would fight over it, and they would knock each other silly. They would steal each other's gold, or gamble it. Murderer's Bar, I'm thinking, "Oh man, Ebenezer was there?"

That changed because of a field trip to the old post office in town [*a 1790 building that became the official Weston Post Office in 1883. It is located at the corner of Weston Road and Newtown Turnpike -ed.*]

I had pinned Ebenezer's letter up on the board and told the kids, "When you go into the post office, you will see up on the board three letters that are dated 1851, and they came from California. One of them says it's from Murderer's Bar." They just looked at me, and I said, "But, I'm not going to tell you about it. You ask your teachers to see if they can find out for you about Murderer's Bar."

In the meantime, I had to find out the information for myself, of course. I Googled Murderer's Bar, and it was very simple. When he got to the American River, [*which runs from the Sierra Nevada to its confluence with the Sacramento River -ed.*], there was the north branch, middle branch and the south. He went on the middle branch. The water would cascade down from the mountains, hit a level area where some of the soil would collect, and then it would cascade down another, and down another.

At one of these locations, there was a pile of bones. They weren't animal bones, not wild. They were human bones, and so they deduced that there was quite a fight there, because it's where men would pan for the gold.

Ebenezer was there, and he found good gold in Murderer's Bar. He sent it home. He was out there from 1851 until 1859. He was 21 when he went out. His mother and brother were in a small house, and he sent money out for them to have a larger house.

Their father had died when Ebenezer was 17, and his older brother, David, was with their mother. The first house was built, which is now at Morehouse Farm Park. Then, he had this house built. Both houses were built with very similar layout. We figured both were built by the same people.

Then Ebenezer came back in 1859, and he married Nancy Bennett Rowland, who was the eldest daughter of a Judge Charles Rowland here in Weston. I assume that they knew each other earlier, and when he came home, they became reacquainted, married, and then had three children.

Karin Giannitti: You mentioned that Ebenezer had sent back gold nuggets, and you were able to get access to them for some use in the schools.

Judy Albin: Right. This is when we got the material from Ernie's mother. But we didn't get the gold first. That came later. When we did get it, we were ready to start a field trip

with second grade. One of the second grade teachers had started a program, "Weston, Then and Now."

It was wonderful, and based on that, we used that theme, bringing the kids to the Coley House, because we talked about how they lived now, and how people lived then, a long time ago.

Arne de Keijzer: The Coley House is now part of the Weston Historical Society's grounds?

Judy Albin: Yes, the Coley House was already part of it. When we had the field trip, I would show the children a picture of the farmhouse and tell them, "This was 150 years ago. Your house, does it look like this? What don't you see, or what do you see here that you do have at your house?"

[The Coley House was built in 1841 by David Dimon Coley. Five consecutive generations of Coleys lived there until it was bequeathed to the Weston Historical Society in 1981. -ed.]

I did the same thing with a picture of a school that showed kids on a roof, and kids outside. "How is this different?" What I wanted from them, and finally did get, "No playing fields, no school buses in sight, nothing. Kids on the roof. Can you get on the roof at your school? I think you'd get into a lot of trouble."

We did that sort of thing, and then I told them that the house we saw in the picture was built by a man, Ebenezer Morehouse, who was my husband's great-great-grandfather, and that I live in that house today, the one he had built with gold rush money.

Then, in my hand, I would hold out this gold nugget, and they would look at it and go, "Oh." I'd say, "Now, I'm not sure how heavy this is, but it's heavier than it looks." I would let each of them get a chance to hold the nugget. That was spread around by that first group of second graders like wildfire.

"We get to hold real gold." This particular nugget Ebenezer had fit with a pin so his wife could wear it at the top of her blouse. I removed the pin because I knew children were going to be holding it, and I didn't want pricked fingers.

Also, Ernie's mother had this other nugget on a charm bracelet. This was probably on a chain that she could wear around her neck. So knowing you two were coming here to interview me, I went to the safe deposit box and got them so that you can see them.

At another time, Mr. Mike Chappa, a science teacher at the high school contacted Ernie and me and asked if we would bring the gold nugget into his class so his class could see it. We did. He happened to have a class of seniors, and the larger nugget was the one we brought in. It was passed around so every student had a chance to hold and examine it. And then when it got back to the teacher he showed several different methods for weighing: displacement, as well as on a scale and something else.

Then Mr. Chappa said to us, "Do you know if this is really pure gold? Have you ever had it tested?" Ernie said, "No, we just assumed that it's pure gold." He said, "Well,

would you let me test it?" We said, "Absolutely." This was the new wing of the science department, and it had a closed-off wall compartment where he could put chemicals that could be harmful to the class. There was a hole with a glove so he could reach in and do things. Our nugget was placed inside this glass compartment and Mr. Chappa put his hand in there, and he went to one of the bottles and got something out that he began to drop on the gold nugget.

We were all gathered up like kids in a candy store, with practically our noses against the glass, watching these drops of liquid. Mr. Chappa said, "So, what is happening?" There was silence, and finally one kid said, "Nothing." He said, "Well, what does that mean?"

Then several said, "It's pure gold!" He said, "Absolutely." With that, you know they all kind of, "Wow, terrific, real gold." It was solid. There was much excitement. Then, when Mr. Chappa finished and returned the nugget to Ernie, he said to him, "There's a little piece of gold sort of hanging off here. Could I break that off and have it for future testing with the kids?"

Ernie said, "Absolutely," so he let him break off that small bit of gold that was big enough so that Mr. Chappa could again test and say, "It came from somebody in Weston, who went out West and found it."

Arne de Keijzer: Wonderful. You have other important documents that you brought out to show?

Judy Albin: Yes. I brought this because when we went through all of these material, we came across a leather diary and Ernie opened it up. He was shocked, because it was dated January 01, 1863. It was written by Rufus King Rowland. At age 17, he went into the Civil War. [We figured he was part of Nancy Rowland Morehouse's family and that's why the diary was in this house.]

Rufus writes that he is part of the Banks Division. [*Nathaniel P. Banks (1816-1894), a notable Massachusetts politician, was appointed a general in the Union Army by President Lincoln at the start of the Civil War. -ed.*]

The first entry is dated January 01, 1863 and he goes on until August. In the course of his descriptions -- and he writes about every day -- he tells about the dysentery in the division he's in. He's down in Louisiana. He talks about digging up turnips and sweet potatoes in fields, because they have no way of refrigeration. They hunt for food as they travel. Anyhow, there's one entry that moved me immensely. Is it OK if I read this?

Arne de Keijzer: Please do.

Judy Albin: He talks about the weather every day. He said, "Cloudy and hot. Got off the cars again, this morning and cooked coffee. Don't know whether we are going anywhere or not. On guard all night. In the evening, I happened to think that it was my birthday and there I was on guard duty in the rain."

Oh, that hit my heart and I thought, "Oh, my gosh. He turned 18 and he's by himself, on guard duty in the rain in some forsaken place down south. Amid the horror of the Civil War." That really, really bothered me.

His last entry is dated August 19th. He writes in pencil this time. Most of the entries lately in this last part are pencil. He writes one sentence. Then he writes "The" and another letter and the pencil slides down. There's no more entry. We knew he passed away that fall.

He's buried in the Weston cemetery just above Weston Gardens along with the whole family, Ebenezer, Nancy, Charles, Mary, and Carrie.

He does go into quite a detailed skirmish that occurred. I would read it, but some of the writing is difficult. I would struggle. If I had redone it so I could read it clearly, I would do it, but that's hard.

Karin Giannitti: Is this what precipitated you and Ernie doing that nice award for history given to a graduating senior at the high school?

Judy Albin: No, this had nothing to do with Rufus.

That came as a result of Ebenezer's son, Charles Morehouse. In fact, when he was born, Nancy and Ebenezer named him after her father, who was Judge Charles Rowland of Weston. He is known as Charles Rowland Morehouse. He was a very good student and ended up teaching at the academy here in Weston. [*The academy reference is to the former Jarvis Military Academy in Weston (1835-1888), now used for town offices. Whether or not this is the same Charles Rowland Morehouse who ran for the Connecticut House of Representatives in 1904, 1906, and 1908 could not be confirmed -ed.*]

During the course of his studies, he received many certificates of merit, which are these.

When we got involved at the Weston Historical Society with the second grade field trips [in about 2002] I made colored copies of these certificates and gave each teacher enough certificates so that each of the children in her class could earn it. They had to do something that the teacher thought was worthy, whatever it was. It could have been a kind deed, it could have been, "Gee, you did well on that paper." It would be up to the teachers.

There was also a Fun Farmers puzzle that I copied for the kids to do. Then when the history award was being awarded at the high school, they asked if we would be interested in doing anything there. So, to honor Charles Rowland Morehouse, Ernie and I decided that we would honor his memory by giving the History award at the high school. We've done it about every year since then which is very nice. It makes me feel good.

Arne de Keijzer: I can certainly understand why. Let's turn to a different part of your life in Weston. Tell us about the friends you and Ernie had, what it was like to live in this neighborhood, things like that.

Judy Albin: It was interesting because when we moved in on December 11, 1960, a Sunday. The last few pieces of furniture that were brought in had snow falling on them. The next morning, Ernie got up to go to work and he drove up the driveway. The snow was so deep it was as though he was driving a snow plow. When he couldn't get the car any further he gave up and stayed home that day.

We had no neighbors except the Morehouse Family across the way. Blue Spruce Circle had just been started and it reached to the top of the hill. There was a family in the first house up there and that's all there were. That Spring, a friend of mine from Norwalk came up to visit me. We had coffee while sitting in the kitchen. She said, "Judy, how can you stand living up here? There's nobody. No one around. Nobody to sit and have coffee with." I said, "Caroline, I love it. Every single window I go to I look out and see God's greenery. I don't see any other woman's laundry flapping in the breeze. I don't hear any other mother calling her kids. I've got nature and I love it." She thought I was loony.

It was not long before Blue Spruce Circle grew. As each new family moved in we would have either a luncheon or a tea with the mothers if they were home so they got to know their neighbors. Bit by bit, that got to include husbands and wives, and we would have weekend parties. Whether it was the holidays or the doldrums', it was informal: "How about coming down Saturday night?"

In this way I got to know the Brookover family very well and Margaret was like my sister, my right arm. She was always there when a crisis occurred. Many times she would call and say, "Judy, what are you cooking for dinner," like on a Sunday. "What are you cooking for dinner tonight?"

Then I might say, "Oh, I'm not sure. I'm probably going to throw some steaks on." She would say, "Bring them up, because we're going to have the grill going." I would take what we were going to have for dinner, and add it to their meal, or vice versa. I would call and say, "What are you doing about dinner? Oh, you're making that. Bring it down and we will add to it."

The Brookover and the Albin families were very tight knit. It grew to other families, too. It was a wonderful neighborhood. Over the course of years, it got bigger and bigger. People moved away and the people who moved in weren't interested in connecting. We sort of lost that intimacy for the most part. There are still some people that we keep close tabs with, but basically that's it.

Having my kids grow up in Weston was fantastic. The kids could go out and ride their bikes all along up on the [Blue Spruce] Circle, down Valley Forge. I never worried about them. Today, I would never let a child ride on a bike other than where I could see them. *[Judy's property lies across the street from Blue Spruce Circle and occupies a large lot by the intersection of Newtown Turnpike and Valley Forge Road. -ed.]*

Ernie and I bought an above the ground pool and put it into use. Nobody in the Circle had a pool. I made up an invitation and put it in everybody's box, inviting them to come

down to the pool. I didn't realize that we would end up with a "Summer Day Camp for Boys."

Although it was mostly boys, this house rocked with kids. Then, we would have parties. Our chandelier was raised up, our table was taken apart and stored in the laundry room. We would dance. We had some people who played guitar and sang. We had live music, and if the party wasn't at this house, it would be somewhere else in the neighborhood. We just had great times.

Arne de Keijzer: How about some of the other people you knew in town, like people who volunteered, or were firemen. Did any of them stand out in your mind?

Judy Albin: We would see them but we did not socialize that much with them. One of the things that did help keep a connection with them, though, was that Ernie became a member of the fire department, and an EMT person. So there would be affairs dealing with them, and we got to know more of that personnel. The fire department used to have their fireman's ball once a year, which they don't do anymore. They stopped that a long time ago. We got to know people through that, and then church. We became members of Norfield Church, and got to know people there. Our kids went to Sunday school. They went to confirmation class.

Through my job at the school I got to know some of the parents, but our tightest social group was really here in the neighborhood for the most part. Bit by bit it spread around and grew in a different direction.

Karin Giannitti: Looking back, I know you came to Weston because of the Morehouse family. What do you think their impact on Weston was, and what did they do to make this money, and to become so successful?

Judy Albin: From what little I have been told about the family, Ebenezer and Nancy, and them raising their children here, bit by bit, they bought more land, and they raised potatoes, and onions, and did a lot of haying. They needed to do what they could do to supply their needs. They also had their own garden.

Charles, as he got older and got into teaching, was able to contribute to the family too, but in the meantime farming was kind of going downhill. Charles got into the timber business because he began buying land that was well wooded. At one point, he had about 2,000 acres between Weston, Easton, and Fairfield.

Arne de Keijzer: This was before Valley Forge was dammed, right?

Judy Albin: Yes. Although in the book *The Village of the Dammed* there is a section where they talk to Charles. He recommended that the dam be built, because he knew that it was going to help in the long run, not hurt. The people living down in the valley were hurting. In fact, one of them from one of the families actually came up and stayed at Lizzie Morehouse's, Minerva Morehouse's mother, and stayed with them for a period of time. She would come and go, but she was hurting, [having a hard time] being able to keep herself in good health. [*The book reference is to The Village of the Dammed: The Fight for*

Open Space and the Flooding of a Connecticut Town, by James Lomuscio, a journalist and Westonite, which chronicles the fight against the building of the dam.]

Karin Giannitti: Charles was the one who began to sell it off?

Judy Albin: Yes, he began to sell off after he had timbered it, and bit by bit it was sold off. I can't remember much about when he died. I just know it was in the early 1920s, '30s. I have the dates written down, but I just can't call them to mind.

Arne de Keijzer: Minerva ended up deeding the property to Weston and that became Morehouse park?

Judy Albin: She had watched the houses go up on Blue Spruce Circle and was very against it. She did not like it. Unfortunately, some of the kids that lived in those houses would come into her property and they would wreak havoc. In fact, one kid started a fire and I remember standing in the front yard looking at the flames thinking, "If the wind picks up, the flame goes across to pine trees." We had a lot of pines and I thought, "We could lose our houses if they can't control this fire." It was huge.

One of Minerva's friends, Ruth Robinson, lived up on Godfrey Road. She was a good friend of Minerva's and she came down with cat boxes because Minerva loved and owned many cats. She had about 9 or 10 of them. They had to get these animals out of her house because they feared her house was going to burn. It turned out this whole thing was started by one of the kids of the Circle who was playing around, and it got out of hand.

Arne de Keijzer: Eventually, she decided to deed the property to the town?

Judy Albin: What happened was that Minerva had begun to fail mentally. We all knew it, but what can you do? You can't go to somebody and say, "You can't live here anymore." Somebody tried that, and Minerva's temper came to the fore. Talk about fires. Phew.

Anyhow, it came to a head when a postman came to deliver the mail, and he saw her. She was not properly dressed as she was waiting for the mail. She just did not present a good picture, so he called the police and said, "This is not good."

Karin Giannitti: Then the police and everybody else got involved.

Judy Albin: Yes, she got a lot of people involved. Because of all the houses being built, she was adamant that she didn't want a single house built on her property. No way. One of the things that she would tell Ernie and me when we would be talking to her, she would love to see kids playing, and hear laughter, because she, as a child, played in the fields. She was an only child and had a horse and she would ride through the fields. She loved this, and she felt good.

Knowing that if kids were there, having fun, and playing games, she thought that would be great. When the town approached her, she agreed to deed the property to the town

for athletic fields, or even a school. They tried the school bit, but that didn't work because of water problems, I think.

[She agreed] that the playing fields would be great. I know that after the fields were in place, and I would be outside and Ernie too, and we'd hear laughter, and the kids cheering, and I'd look up at the sky and say, "Are you happy Minerva? Are you happy with what's going on, on your property?"

Arne de Keijzer: She must have been.

Judy Albin: She must have been.

Karin Giannitti: Going back to your art work, what types of mediums do you prefer? Do you do oil painting? Water colors? I think you do everything but...

Judy Albin: Interesting that you ask because oil paint is the one medium I stay away from, primarily because it takes so long for it to dry in between different colors. I found that because of my daily life schedule, I didn't have the luxury of that kind of time, so I went to pen and ink and I went to colored pencils.

When acrylics came out, I loved those, so I used those, and then got brave and started taking some classes in watercolor. I have just loved doing water color. I was also introduced to etching on a fungus. A friend of my in-laws down in Rowayton had known about this, and he gave me my first piece of fungus. He told me how it had to be really firm. It couldn't be this soft spongy stuff. Bracket fungus is what it was called.

Back in the days of the native Americans, on some trees they were able to use it like step ladders. It was on so firmly and to get it off, you really had to whack away with an axe and clear the tree. He told me how you could etch with a sharp pointed instrument, and it would look like Scrimshaw. I was absolutely captivated by this, and I have done several pieces. In fact, one of the pieces I'm most proud of, I have a picture of it up there, a pair of mallards. That fungus, it was big. It was sitting on this chair where the photo was taken, so it's as big as the seat of the chair.

When [former First Selectman] George Guidera owned Cobb's Mill Inn [2006 until 2010 – *ed.*] and I had no place really to put it here, I remembered that Cobb's Mill had ducks at one point, mallards. I talked to Ernie, "Let's go see George, and give him the fungus." George took it, and he had it in Cobb's Mill until he left. He took it with him. I was pleased that he took it because I gave it to him, not to Cobb's Mill.

I used a pen and ink, and also did some *scherechnitte* which is cutting out paper in layers to give a three dimensional effect. Blake Hampton, an incredible artist in town, was doing this, and he did one of Norfield Church. I would stare at it when I went to the church office, and stare at it, and examine it. Finally I decided that I would try and do this myself. So I did, and I did one of our house. It's small because it requires a deep frame and it was the only one I had.

Arne de Keijzer: In concluding, please tell us some of your favorite memories...

Judy Albin: When I worked at Norden Systems [in Norwalk from 1985 until I got laid off in 1990], I was in publications, and loved every minute. I managed to do one project that won an award for me from the company, for which I got this plaque, and a financial certificate. [*Norden Systems engineered and built radar equipment and satellite systems. After being acquired by Northrop Grumman and a decline in defense contracts it closed its plant in Norwalk in 2014, leaving close to 300 workers without jobs. After leaving Norden Judy was asked to return to teaching at Hurlbutt, which she did until retiring in 2000. -ed.*]

It was all for this book, "Productivity Team Skills," which Norden used for productivity team improvement and was produced outside the company. Then this one woman decided that they would do it in-house. She came to me and asked if I'd be interested in working with her on this project. I said, "Sure. Why not?" The book contained a five day training program, Monday through Friday. I developed a character, which was used on the cover, and then all through the book.

It was a challenge to come up with something that fit the topic, and then to come up with an illustration that would work, whether it was a technical illustration or these characters. I wanted the character to be not feminine, not masculine, just a character, because men and women were involved in this. It was so successful that they had the pattern department cut the character out of a piece of plywood, 4 by 8.

Then they had a contest to name the character. The person who won named the character "Pip." Norden was part of United Technologies [at the time], and they had to send this whole deal up to headquarters to get approval of the character itself and the name "Pip." A letter came back and it said that, "Unless somebody outside disagrees, go ahead and use the character as well as the name Pip." That's what happened. While I was there, I got to do fun things for the productivity team, and these are copies of some of the posters that I did.

Here again, "Productivity. Potential, from the acorn to the mighty oak." These are all things that I created. My creativity was growing, my creative thinking, because just as with anything else, the more you're asked to do, the more you do it. The more you do it, the easier it becomes, until it's worn out.

Arne de Keijzer: We can certainly see why you have such great pride in your art and your creativity.

Judy Albin: I've just always enjoyed it. I've always enjoyed using it wherever. After I left Norden, I worked 10 years in kindergarten as a kindergarten aide [at Hurlbutt]. I loved it. I would whistle my way in and think, "Gosh, they're paying me to do this?"

Dr. Tomasello, the principle of the Elementary School at the time, realized that new kindergardeners can't read yet, and here they were going into Ms. So and So's classroom, or Mrs. So and So's, or Mr. So and So's. He said, "You know Judy, maybe you could help me out. Suppose we go to each teacher, have them decide what book character they really like that's on their level."

Ernie made wood plaques for me and I painted the characters on the plaques. They were mounted just outside the kindergarten doors, so the kids got to know, "Oh, I go to the

class with the big red dog." "I go to the class with..." It worked, and Dr. Tomasello was so pleased with the result.

Arne de Keijzer: You're giving us a really good glimpse into your creativity, in your work with children.

Karin Giannitti: And your love of Weston and its family.

Judy Albin: Oh gosh, yes.

Arne de Keijzer: Now leave us with a few words of wisdom. What would you tell someone growing up today?

Judy Albin: Just very simply, follow your heart. You know what makes you feel good, and you know is going to create good, and make you feel proud of having done it. What else can you say? We all have to work, we all have to live with one another. We all have to contend with things, and so just do the best you can, and do what you love doing. When you make others feel good, that makes you feel good.

Arne de Keijzer: That's wonderful. Thank you, Judy.

Karin Giannitti: Thank you very much. It's been wonderful.