

So what's your name?

Clarence Herbst.

And then what class were you in?

1946.

What was your address during the war?

206 Merrill Avenue.

In Park Ridge, right?

Park Ridge.

Right. So tell us about your family.

One sister graduated three years before I did from Main Township. And that's it.

What did your dad do?

My dad was a chemical engineer. Worked for the Economy Fuse Company in Palatine, Illinois.

And your mom?

From those days, a housewife.

Was there anybody else living with you during the war?

No.

So tell me about the neighborhood you were growing up in. What was it like?

Lovely. Park Ridge in general was a great place to be born and raised. The people were good. Teachers were good. We had homes and food. Although some of my classmates from kindergarten, their parents lost their jobs during the Depression, '33-'34, and that sort of thing. So there were some tough times. But Park Ridge was a fine place to be raised.

So you mentioned the Depression and everything. How was your family affected?

My family was affected in kind of a strange way I think. My father had a job, and it was a good job. And he provided clothing and food. We had a nice home. But he worked all the time. Never took a holiday during the '30's and all the way through the war. I don't think he took a week off until I was in college. And never attended a football game where I played or a swimming meet. And we never had a picnic, a family picnic.

Really?

He was a workaholic.

Was he?

Provided for us, but my mother was the opposite and provided a lovely home.

Right, yeah. I can understand that. You get a little fearful of your job back them.

Some were, some weren't. Lots of fathers came to the football games, but not mine, which was disappointing for a kid.

I can imagine. So tell us about what were you like as a teenager.

The thing that we remember, my pals that are still alive and I, we didn't smoke and we didn't drink anything, not even a beer. And it was wartime and it was certainly available. We had an old saying "we don't smoke and we don't chew and we don't go with the girls that do." We've thought about that and the girls have thought about that, too. I think the answer of why we didn't is we were just having too good of a life and time doing what we were doing, going to school, playing sports. We just didn't need it. And I find that a very positive part of the life I have been allowed to live.

What did you do in high school? You played football?

I played football all four years. Of course freshman ball and then varsity. And I was a swimmer. And I was on a track team. And I was so bad that four of my pals challenged me to a race on the quarter mile track and they would run backwards. And I lost to all four of them.

Really?

[LAUGHS] I was not too swift.

Were you on the light or heavyweight team?

Heavyweight.

Okay. You sounds like you were very busy. What kinds of things did you do for fun with your pals?

Sports. We played baseball in the street and touch football. No basketball. We didn't have baseball at Main in those days. I wanted to pitch; I was a good pitcher. Oh and then we had softball up at Hinkley. Hinkley Field?

Hinkley Field. Or Hinkley Park.

I was a lifeguard up there are Hinkley for a few years, which was fun looking at the good-looking girls. It's fun to see that it's still there. The disappointing thing is the diving board and the high dive are gone for safety reasons. But now we have skateboards and that sort of thing, which are a lot more dangerous than the old diving boards.

I agree. I miss it, too. I liked those myself. Did you have any other jobs other than the?

My father had a manufacturing factory over in Skokie, and he put me to work summers and Saturdays. That's how I earned my allowance.

Oh okay.

It was interesting because lots of kids didn't do things like that. I did work for the Railway Express downtown Chicago Christmas time a couple of years, unloading freight cars. And then we unloaded a freight car, a couple of them, of fish from Wisconsin, iced in wooden boxes. And then we got on the train coming home with commuters at six o'clock in the evening, and they all wanted to push us away because we just stunk of fish. [LAUGHS] Learned some things there. Some of the guys worked for the post office delivering mail. And then there was a mail delivery, Park Ridge Herald, which isn't the Park Ridge Herald anymore.

Yeah, the Herald Advocate.

So I delivered for that on Thursdays. We had plenty to do.

You were pretty busy then.

Yeah.

Do you remember anything about the start of the war, about the beginning of World War II? Do you remember when it started?

Yeah, I was in the basement. My father was painting something on December 7th. We were in the basement working and he had the radio on. That's how we heard about the war starting.

How did your dad react to that?

What we accepted what I now consider... because I consider myself a citizen of the world. I've been everywhere twice. All through Russia and Pakistan and India and China. If you study history going back thousands of years, you find that the winner of any conflict writes the history; the loser does not. And the loser's position is always false and the winner is always great. What I've learned over a lifetime is not everything we heard in the '30's about and during the war about how things was going is true. And that is a very important lesson for today's people because there is a spin on everything. You have to try and unspin it, whether it is in today's world from Putin in Russia or from Obama here. You really don't know what the truth is because you weren't there.

Sure. Right. Did your father or mother say anything to you? Do you remember what they... What were they like when it...

About the war? My answer is no. My father was always at work. Got home at seven at night and was out of the house at six thirty in the morning. I cannot remember discussing the war. We followed it as young people. Some of my friends had brothers that were killed and that sort of thing.

Did you have any relatives nearby?

None in Park Ridge. I had three uncles and aunts and two cousins in the Chicago area.

Did any of your relatives or family that you know go into the war? Were they...

No. My father and his three brothers were just too young to get into the First World War. And my group, we were just too young, class of '46 and even some of '45, were too young to get into the Second World War. We just passed it by. However, when I graduated from college in June of '50, the Korean War started the next day. I did not have to seek a job; the draftboard caught up with me very quickly. I was in the Army for two years.

Back then during the war there was rationing. Food was rationed. How did your mom or your family cope with the rationing?

My answer to that is just fine. We did have a little plot garden up on Eastman Avenue, up on the north end, and grew vegetables and that sort of a thing in our backyard and some

up on that plot. I don't see that we had any hardships, which sounds strange with rationing and that sort of stuff, but we just didn't.

And gasoline rationing?

Gasoline was tougher. Tires, I think, were the tough thing. But again there wasn't enough money to really in the '30's to travel. In fact I am disappointed that we do not have any class pictures from our kindergarten, first, second, third, up through sixth grade. Our reasoning is that our parents couldn't afford to hire a photographer. But again, possessions posses, even pictures. We just had a great life.

So your mom, she didn't go to work during the war, did she?

No.

Okay. Tell us what was the atmosphere was like when you started... What year were you when the war started? That was in '41, so you were in like in eighth grade probably.

Yeah, seventh or eighth yeah.

So when you went into high school, how did the war affect the atmosphere in high school if at all? Or how much?

Being 86 my memory isn't that good. But I do think that it just didn't affect us. Like not smoking or drinking, we were busy. And we were enjoying life and we were studying and doing our homework. Not nearly as much homework as they have today. But I don't think the war affected us.

So tell us about your friends that you would hang out with mostly.

Well, Gordon Nelson, he was student council president our senior year in the high school. And I still see him. Had dinner with him Saturday night, he and his wife. And I see Roof Harold Dumand from my kindergarten class of '33. We skied together and hiked together, played golf together in the early days because there were lots of golf courses around. See Bob White in Prescott, Arizona and Carol Prebe Stayat in Payson, Arizona. Those are the two friends that I still visited.

Who did you hang out with mostly during high school? Who was your closest friends?

Well, Bill Gambell, Bob White, Bob Crumbweedy, Ray Chansen, Charlie Canoosen, Jim Barbieri. Ten guys and five are gone, two have Alzheimer's and one doesn't travel think now (well, I know he doesn't), and there are two of us still ticking around, still travel.

So we've heard different stories about how people had gotten into a little unofficial like escapades, like rationing siphoning gas or any high jinks like that. Were you guys do anything...

We didn't. One of the interesting things though, we had... I think our high school class was divided some into those that did drink and smoke (I'm not necessarily calling them bad people or bad guys). But our group, most of the athletes and that sort of a thing and class leaders, we didn't. One of the interesting things that happened was that a gang came up on Merrill Avenue in Park Ridge and they threw cabbages through the picture windows of my home, which was rather nasty. Then Bill Gambell had a four door convertible, a great car, a bit old obviously. They cut his tires and cut the roof of the convertible. Now who they are I do not know. We had words that it was x and y, but we just do not know. It was pranks, little bit bigger time pranks than you would like, but they went on.

You mentioned, you told us about what kind of work you did. You were very busy with athletics and working. Did you do any volunteer things? Did you have time for any of that at all?

I was chairman at Park Ridge collecting money door to door for a new football stadium that we were going to build, which never was built. I have no idea where the money went. But volunteer work for a church and for others, no I can't remember any. But I am very involved now with Avenues to Independence. You know Avenues.

Yeah.

Because in my lifetime growing up in Park Ridge, during the '30's and '40's when I was around, the people that were developmentally disadvantaged really had no place to go. And the parents really put them out of the house during the day so they could wander. And they were up and down Park Ridge, up and down the streets, cold, rain, whatever. Not that they were put out as punishment or anything, but it was kind of a break for the family to let them lead some type of a life by letting them wander around the town. That really... They were not accepted in schools. And that is really the reason that Avenues to Independence exists now, to do a better job of that, taking care of those people.

Thank God you are doing that. I appreciate that.

Well, it's a duty. Park Ridge has been good to me, and life has been very good to me. And that is due ninety percent to luck, not to my good moves. I've made some good moves; I've made some bad ones. I've been very fortunate and the town has been good. My goal in life at this stage, at 86, is I'm going to die broke and I'm getting very close to both. I've given away almost everything I have.

So getting back here. Did any of your friends leave high school early to enlist?

No. Some of our class did, but none of my friends did.

We had heard stories at Main...

[VIDEO BREAK]

Even if we graduated in '45, the war was over. Maybe some guys got drafted. No, no, no. My mouth works too fast sometimes and too slow sometimes. From '45 and even from our class of '46, they decided to drop out of school and go into the service. But they got in the service and the war was immediately over. Then they fiddled around for six months and were discharged. I know two I think that joined the reserves, and of course, BANG, in Korea they got nailed again. But I was in and I was discharged. That was yesterday.

I forgot if I didn't ask you is. You graduated in '46. Did you go in the military after that?

I went to college, and I graduated college from in June of '50. The Korean War started the next day.

But you weren't drafted? You are on now.

I'm on camera. Oh good grief.

So you were not drafted?

Yes, I was in '50 I was drafted. The Army was a catastrophe at that time.

Yeah, you told me about your experience with that. So, Clancy, you were telling me about the variety of jobs you've had in high school.

Growing up in Park Ridge was interesting. It was a great town. Most of the people had jobs. The students in those days, we had clothing, we had food on the table, we had a home to live in in Park Ridge. It was very nice. Park Ridge was very nice. But then the Depression took hold when we were two, three, four years old. So things changed depending on our father's ability to keep his job or have a job. And I happened to be lucky in that case; my father did have a job. Changed my life because he became a workaholic and wanted to protect his job, but spent absolutely time with his children. No picnics in my lifetime. I played football and was a swimmer in high school, and he never came to a football game or swimming meet or anything. He had bread on the table though and a nice home. So it was a strange time.

Yeah.

The types I had, I think I mentioned them: unloading freight cars downtown for the Railway Express Company at Christmas time; delivery newspapers, mainly the city paper that's still available (that was a one day a week job); of course cutting grass and shoveling snow with Bill Gamble, a friend of mine; and working at the Park Ridge Country Club as a caddy. That was a very good job. Sometimes on a Friday night in the summertime still get a round in with somebody and Saturdays and Sundays. It was a good way to earn a few dollars. And of course our parents didn't have money to give us substantial allowance. The way to get money was to go to work for the bloody stuff. That worked out very well. There was one family that was in... the youngest son was in my kindergarten class in '33, and his father lost his job early in the Depression, probably around '33, '34. That was tough. But they had three boys in the family and they all caddied. And I think they kept the family alive and in Park Ridge with their outside work, meaning caddying and other things. Then there were people, and I talked to two of them last night... One young man, he said he didn't work during the war. His father had a good job. But the main reason he didn't work was his brother was drafted into the service and got some kind of a disease and died within six months of being in the service. Never got overseas. So my friend didn't work. That's not the excuse. But the main reason lots of them, lots of my friends didn't work is we were having too good of a time. We didn't realize what the world was, how it was. We knew there was a war going on, but... But.

Right.

We were all involved in athletics in high school, and with training for football, swimming, and track. By the end of the day it was seven o'clock, you had to do your homework. There was no time to really work. So that's kind of an excuse but a reality in those days.

That's right. So with the war going on, as far as at the country club, was it much busier because people didn't have this much money to spend on anything else?

Well the country club seemed to be busy. Not enough caddies because the young guys were off in the war and college students in those days were off in the war. So lots of times we'd carry four bags down the center of the fairway. The players would come and get their own clubs from us because there were no carts.

I see. So since there were no golf carts back then, so...

No, if there were a bunch of us (two, three, four) caddies sitting there, maybe you'd carry two bags and spread it out. But when you were out on the course with your pal, my pal, and my pal is all out and the next caddy had to carry four.

That's a lot of bags.

It's a lot of bags but they weren't like they are today.

I suppose so.

These things today and all the clubs you couldn't handle them.

So that's how come you made so much money because you were carrying four bags then.

Oh, yeah. I don't remember what we got per golfer. I have no memory of that, but it was not bad money. Because where else were you going to get money? Movies, we went to the movies on Saturday during the winter and the fall, spring. I remember that was ten cents. And there were two movie theaters- the Pickwick and the one on the south side just across the tracks, if you go south on Prospect and cross the tracks and immediately turn left.

That's right. And was an ice rink too at one point?

They made an ice rink out of it later.

I know of. I've seen pictures but I don't know the name.

It was movie theater.

Did you go there, too?

Yeah. And there was a bowling alley above the Pickwick. I don't think that is active anymore. But my father was in a bowling league.

Are you sure there was a bowling alley above the Pickwick?

Oh, I'm absolutely sure.

I didn't know that.

You go around behind in the alley and...

Oh, behind it, not above it.

No, it was above it. Whether it was above it or next door above it. Because the Pickwick I remember has a high ceiling. So it was probably off to the side, to the south side. But there was probably eight lanes up there. I went up there with my father many times to watch him bowl in the '30's.

So I heard there was some rumor that some of the caddies might bring their girlfriends occasionally on the golf course.

Well we would go wandering out there and smooch a bit. Why not? Nice walk.

So there is some truth to that.

Oh, yeah. I'll admit to that. But smooching in those days, it's different than smooching today. I'll put it that way.

Got it. I understand. That's good. Well thanks a lot, Clancy. I appreciate your time.

Yeah, I'm not sure what other stories I can tell you. Except repeating again a marvelous place to be lucky enough be born and raised and to have associated with the people that I have associated with. I told you just a minute ago I had dinner last night with a girl from my kindergarten class of 1933. But I know seven women from that class that are still class that I communicate with. Some I see, three I think. But the others I write to because I keep track of my high school class. Monday of this week I sent out my June mailing of pictures and things I collect when I hear from somebody. But it's amazing to know seven women from '33.

Sure. I don't know too many myself, so I admire that.

I think I know four men. Most of the guys are... four or five are dead. But I think I still know four.

That's great.

It's been a good life. For any of you watching this at some future date, Park Ridge was and I think still is an excellent place to live and raise your children. That's why I support a place called Avenue to Independence to help other people that haven't been as fortunate as I.

Thanks a lot for that, Clancy. Thanks for your time sharing your stories and your memories.

Okay, thank you.