Okay, what is your name?

Richard B. Stranahn, better known as Dick.

What was your class?

Oh, class of '47.

What was your address during the war?

I just filled that. 800 Graceland, Des Plaines.

Okay, tell us about your parents and any brothers and sisters that you have.

I was an only. So I got the whole back seat to myself in the car. My father was a salesman. My mother was a homemaker. We grew up with my grandparents because, although it was never discussed, I am quite sure we went broke during the war- I am sorry, during the Depression. We moved an awful lot. I was born in North Dakota. We moved in with the grandparents in Des Plaines when I was four, I think. From there I went into kindergarten in Des Plaines. From there we moved to Yonkers, New York and I did first grade. Is the sort of thing you want?

Yeah.

Alright. And then we moved again, probably for another dollar a week or whatever it was in those days, to Cleveland. I did second grade there. Then we moved to Cincinnati and I accomplished third grade there. Then we moved back in with the grandparents again in Des Plaines. It was a very pleasant household really. In those days families stayed more like ethnic groups do now. But we stayed close in Des Plaines, the family did, for the most part. Sunday dinner, some of them were there most of the time. Where do you want us to go from there?

Did you have any cousins?

I had some cousins, yeah. One that graduated from Main in '43. And he's deceased. And another graduated from Elmhurst, I think it was. My mother and her two brothers all went to Knox College, as did I. But we are ahead of ourselves at this point. You asked about family.

Ye ysou said your father was a salesman. What did he sell?

Well, advertising supplies, various things. Surgical supplies. I remember one of his calls was Sing Sing Prison in New York. The summer I would ride along with him sometimes. I

remember parking in the parking lot overlooking the prison while he made his sales call, if you will, at the dispensary, at the hospital. Later on he was a regional manager for Deep Freeze Corporation.

What's that?

Deep Freeze was the first to make a home freezer. The commercial freezers were out, but there hadn't been any made for the home. And Deep Freeze was up in North Chicago, which is just south of Waukegan. And he moved to Detroit. I never lived in Detroit. I was in service or in school at that point. But I visited him twice I think over holiday. Then I went back to school.

What was your neighborhood like when you were growing up?

Well, you have a lot of the same type of homes in Park Ridge- two and a half story, expandable attic. We had a walk up attic. Never threw anything out. It was always up in the attic for me to play with. As an example, a victrola, wind it up and listen, was up there. I forgot some of the other delightful toys that were up there. After the war, we lost the maid; she went to work in the war factories. So I took over her bedroom, which gave me direct access to the kitchen or the attic, take my choice. But I think we paid the maid something like $18 a week, plus free board. She got Thursday after dinner off and every other Sunday; that was all free time. She was off on Saturday night, too. That was high school. My home was kind of the gathering place for my friends. I remember my grandfather was a regional manager for Carnegie Illinois Steel, a real good job in the '30s. As such a little bit of a stiff collar guy, but a great sense of humor. I will never forget how agast he was one day when a dump truck full of students showed up in front of our house. They came to visit me; I had been hurt playing football and I was bedridden. And they all came to visit, about fifteen of them I guess. "A truck, what's that truck doing out there?"

Did they literally come in a dump truck?

Yes, yes, in the back of the truck.

Oh my goodness. The country was coming off the Depression when the war started. What was your economic situation in your family?

Well I pretty much described it. Until the late 30s, early 40s, I just presuming, we never discussed it, but I am presuming that we went broke is why we moved in with the family again, and why we left North Dakota initially. Aside from the fact it was colder than hell. [LAUGHS]

Oh my goodness. Yeah, I can imagine.

We were well off because of my grandfather's situation, but so were most of the neighbors. The community itself (Des Plaines, Arlington Heights, Mount Prospect) was heavily German population, and we had, oh gee, Willy Lambert, Paul on one side, Duffy on the other. These were all big two and a half story homes in most cases. They no longer exist; that is all condo road down there.

Oh, okay.

The Congregational Church would be the landmark. We were two doors south of the Congregational Church. That's where I learned to play basketball. I knew about seven different ways to sneak into the gymnasium there. And of course the custodian never heard us, you know. We weren't supposed to be there, but... [WINKS AND LAUGHS]

What were you like as a teenager?

I was a bit wild. I wasn't much of a student, I admit. I just I didn't apply myself. And I had a lot of fun. Did a lot of dating. Played a lot of sports, football and basketball particularly. Swam intramurals. I've forgotten what all else now. Athletics was my interest.

Do you have any funny stories from your teenage years that you feel like sharing?

Well, yea, I can tell you this one. [LAUGHS] I get a little riskier as we go on. On one occasion, I think it was our junior year, we decided we didn't want to go to the... We had compulsory assemblies on Fridays, and about eight of us decided we didn't want to go to the assembly. So we ditched. I had a car. My car was very distinguishable because it had no windows on the left side. The door was sprung, and in slamming the door, the glass had broken. So I put a canvas in the rear; I couldn't put a canvas front. It was a two door sedan. So the car was very distinguishable. So on this occasion, we ditched and we went over in Des Plaines and we were playing sandlot football. And one of the fellows went up for a pass up against a tree stump, came down, and badly sprained his ankle. So we had to bring him back to school, of course. Well, we were all coming back; we weren't going to stay all day. And we parked in the parking lot. And of course, Stan had to be sacrificed; there was no way he was going to run anywhere. So we dropped him off in a blind area. It was Main East now, just Main then. Went in and parked our cars in two separate areas. Well I stayed in mine. I got down in the front seat and stayed in it. A couple of guys got out and ran for it. One of them happened to be a fellow who was a state champion in track. And we had an assistant principal at that time, he was Calvin C. Legg (two G's). He was better known as Hairy, of course among the students as you can imagine. Everybody had a nickname. We had one woman who was very heavy. She was called Stonewall Jackson because of her physique [LAUGHS]. But in any case, they were building these quonset huts out where your football field is now at Main. And they had crops; Farmer May was our agricultural teacher.

What were the quonset huts for?

They were for teachers who couldn't find places to live. And yet the school had about 1,500 students in it; it was built for 1,100. So we were on kind of partial shifts. I am getting away from the end of this story, and then let me come back. So they took off and I stayed in the car. Here came the manual arts they call it now, we called it shop in those days. They had been working on the quonset huts. So they came and they had their hats, and they had their tools, they were carrying them. So I hollered at one of the guys I knew. I said, "Hey, give me a hammer." [LAUGHS] So he gave me his hammer. I walked in with them carrying this hammer. Of course, they knew. All my gang was lined up there in front of the assembly hall. Every one of them had been caught except me. So I walked on by and they all just did this. They didn't say a word. And Hairy, Calvin, knew I was guilty, knew I hung out with that gang. But he wasn't sure if I was in with the shop gang or not, so I got away with it. [LAUGHS]

Very nice.

The rest of them did a little suspension and I don't know what else; it wasn't too serious. It was punishment of some sort. You asked about some other incidents. Well, I told some of these stories at the assembly, if you will, at Main East. I said I was running with a lively crowd, let's put it that way. And it was war years. And a lot of places that served liquor really didn't care how old you were or if you had a fake I.D., which most of us did. They knew damn well. I looked twelve, if that old. In fact I will tell you a story about later years. So they'd serve us. One place I can remember was called Mon Goosemans [13:48]. It was out on Milwaukee Avenue. Her significant other, whether it was her husband or not I do not know. It was about two doors from the sheriff's department which used to be over there. I think it's a Miles Museum now. It was just very, very close. So a phone would a ring, and they usher us out the back. The sheriff had come in the front, look around, and of course nothing going on. They would leave and we would come back in. The one occasion I remember we were at Countryside, which was just about where this high school is. The longest now is about over on Ballyroad. We were in there drinking a beer, myself and another fellow, and the phone rang. We were probably seventeen maybe. Bartender answered it and went over and walked around the end of the bar. Shut down a steel door behind us. It had four slot machines behind it in that little room. Of course gambling was illegal but it was prevalent. About five minutes later here comes the sheriff, or one of his deputies. They went down to the end of the bar and discussed some things, I think. [LAUGHS] I couldn't see. And then he left and paid no attention to us at all, even though I said I looked twelve. I can't think of any other instance of that nature right now. I talked about buying black market gas.

Tell us about that again.

Well, you know, you are sixteen years old and you are driving a car and you are dating. There is no way you are going to give a sixteen year old a driver's license and a car, and not have him get gas. Well I think it was seven gallons a week that we were allowed as an "A" card. My grandfather was (it was a paying job, but he took it as a volunteer, as a dollar a year man) head of the regional ration board, where you appealed if you needed tires, or you needed a "C" card, which was more gasoline, or "B" card which was a little less. So I had to be awfully careful. My father was aware, I'm sure, that the car was building up mileage, but never was anything said around the house. We paid I think fifty cents a gallon; it was exorbitant in those days, because gas was running seventeen and a half, eighteen cents a gallon legitimate. And there was one down on the corner of Ozark and Northwest Highway, is the one I remember in particularly that we used to frequent. We would get our little extra gasoline here and there to keep us happy. I mentioned looking twelve. I'll jump ahead for just a minute to when I was in service. I knew every inspection we had that the inspecting officer, be it a captain or an admiral, was going to stop in front of me 'cause I looked twelve still. And I knew exactly what he was going to say. He'd stop up in front of me and say, "Hmm, son, how long have you been in this man's navy?" And I'd answer whatever it is. The last time was three years. "Hmm" and walked out. I'm sorry, I got off the track of high school for you. What other questions do you have for me for high school?

Can you tell us a little bit about, you said something about how you went in shifts for school?

Oh, yes, I'm sorry. If you're in athletics, because you had to have time for practice after school, you went in at, I think, I'm a little hazing at these times but correct me, but I think you had to start at 7:30. And other classes started all the way up to 9 o'clock, every half hour. And the lunchroom was on shifts also. My recollection was that we had twenty minutes in the lunchroom and another ten… Excuse me, I'm sorry…

That's okay.

Another ten minutes, they had you come down from the lunchroom. In those days in Main East, it was right over the gymnasium was the lunchroom. And there was a stairs that came down into the gym. And they had a jukebox in the gym. So for that ten minutes we would dance or listen to music or whatever. But it was only thirty minute lunch period all totaled, and you were expected to be out of there in twenty minutes to make room for the next group coming in. And then you got out anywhere from 2:30 to 3:30, 4 o'clock maybe, depending on when you started and how many study halls you had. They'd cut into a study hall too if you had athletics as I recall. So you'd get out on and you were out on the athletic field at three o'clock without any… in gear not just in the lockerroom.

I'd have to say I like that schedule better than ours.

[LAUGHS] What's your's like?

Everybody starts school at 7:45. And then everybody has a lunch period somewhere between 10:30 and 1:30.

Oh, okay, so you are in shifts also.

Yeah, and we have about twenty minutes to eat. Fifteen or so.

That sounds familiar.

Yeah, and then you have classes, everybody has classes until 3:15. And you don't get to leave early or come in later, unless you are a senior and you have a study first or last period.

It seems to me that- my son went to, we talked about earlier, he graduated here in '79- it seems to me that he started at 8 o'clock. Although his freshman year I was dropping him off at seven, because I thought school started at seven. Turns out he was doing detention for an hour before school. He never bothered to mention that [LAUGHS] to me anyway. He may have told his mother. It was about a month before I caught on what was going on. He was a little mischievous too.

A chip off the old block.

Though he was a very good student. In fact he is a physicist at this point.

How many girlfriends did you have? [LAUGHTER]

Well, I don't know how to answer that. How many dates or girlfriends?

Either or.

I went steady with about five different girls. And I can recall all of them I think, where the freckles were and all that stuff. But I dated, you know, some others. It wasn't a gang, like I see, like my son, a gang of them would go out together. We had specific... Boys would go out by themselves too. And, anyhow, we'd go up Red Road. There was a tavern up there we liked. Fox and the Hound is what it's called. And sometimes the girls would come up there. In those days, incidentally, ladies, it was legal for the women to drink at the age of eighteen, whereas men had to be twenty-one. So the ladies had a lot fewer problems than we did in bouncing around for a beer, and we were pretty much all beer drinkers. The proms, we'd go down to Congress Hotel. I've forgotten what the name of the room is, the Sherman? We'd go down the ballrooms there. And of course we are in our dress clothes. And they'd serve us liquor. There was no question, you know, it was our high school prom. I'm sure they'd watered the drinks. But I'd order a whiskey and water, and would always get water. But they didn't… it was just a different atmosphere. First of all, there

weren't that many cars on the road, particularly during the war. And secondly, they were built like tanks. You really had to work at denting one. So the safety factor was a little better or a little less, whatever you want to call it. We used to drag toboggans behind cars down the streets of Park Ridge just playing. Nobody ever stopped us. Skate on the river. That was the greatest goal to get on Des Plaines River in just galoshes. My ankles were just like this. No way I could ice skate on skates, so I'd wear galoshes and play goalie. Believe me, that puck stung when somebody hits your galoshes with it. [LAUGHS]

Oww.

But the river froze over north of, our skating rink was north of Rand Road on the Des Plaines River, in there. Somebody put up lights, too, so we were there at night.

So was that the school hockey team, or was that just guys getting together…

No, there was no school hockey team. The baseball had been suspended during the war years. They started baseball again my senior year, spring of '47. And as I recall, they played their games over at the Croatian Home, which was across the street from Main East I am talking about. That's now a condo complex. But a lot of our athletes came from that Croatian Home. It was for either total orphan children or broken families or dad was in the war and there was no mom, or whatever it was. The most delightful guys in the world. Some of them were a little rough. But they had a gymnasium and a swimming pool. And they played a lot of tackle football just for fun, you know, without any equipment over there. So they were all, almost all of them, great athletes. And they would fill our basketball particularly, and football teams as well. Tomich, Pashovich, Kaluzavich, Panich- those are some of the names that I remember. They were all ended in ICH, most part. There was one girl named Rosemary too, and I've forgotten what her last name was. She was a good student. Their problem, they hadn't had… The grammar school was done there at the home, and then they'd come into high school with us. And they were behind in their English courses particularly. So they had some trouble picking up there where the rest of us had had pretty good basic. I know I did. There was no excuse for me not being a good student, because I had a good elementary school education and I did well in elementary. But I fell in love in high school, and that was one of the problems. And of course there were more athletics than there were in junior high. All we had in junior high was a swim team, no football, no baseball, swim and gym. I think that was it. And we'd have a play day once a year. And we'd go up against Lincoln Junior High in basketball, swimming, ping pong, I think that was it. They'd pick their team, we'd pick our team, in junior high. It was called Jefferson Junior High in Des Plaines and it was Lincoln in Park Ridge. And in fact I was in junior high when the war broke out, seventh grade. And the principal brought us all into an assembly in the theater building. And we listened to Roosevelt's address declaring war on the Japanese. That was the Monday, I think it was the Monday after the Sunday. I came home from the movies on the Sunday and my folks were, my grandparents were gathered around the radio listening. Of course I had no idea

where Pearl Harbor was at that point. And that's when I had heard about what had happened. Of course it didn't immediately… And we didn't have television. We didn't fight the war on television like we did the Vietnam War and since then. You'd go to the movies and they'd have newsreels, heavily censored newsreels, that they'd show. And of course they only showed us winning. [LAUGHS] You can imagine. I'm sure they'd just change uniforms for the Germans and have them winning and showed them in Germany. I digress. Go ahead. What's the next one?

No, keep talking. It's okay. I was actually going to ask you about the start of the war, so you're good.

Well, that's what I remember. I'll go on with what we did as kids. We had a civilian defense program. My dad used to refer to himself as a blockhead. He was a sectional warden, I think that's what they called them. And he had three or four wardens around Des Plaines that were supposed to report to him. And I was his messenger. I had a little band on my arm with a lightning streak down it. And I guess my job was supposed to be go and link up the wardens if they bombed Des Plaines [LAUGHS]. I don't know. We did have one… We talked about the fake air raid we had, where they dropped balloons with various colored objects on the end. And the object that was dropped, the color of it, determined what size bomb was dropped there. And they can figure out what the damage area would have been. And the homeowners were supposed to turn those in and tell them where they were dropped. They flew over Piper Cub [29:10] and dropped these things.

Oh, okay.

I say Piper Cub, it was a small aircraft anyway. And we went to classes at the junior high. We actually… Because during World War I, poison gas was very prevalent, and used quite a bit by the Germans. We only heard about the Germans; I suspect we might have used a little cyanide gas ourselves. So we were drilled in what type of gas. They had simulated scents for mustard, I remember. That's the only one I remember now. You'd sniff this bottle and you'd know what mustard gas smelled like. It was not mustard gas, of course. And then another kind of cyanide and whatever else. It was one of the courses they taught us. Of course then there was some kind of aircraft, I think, or air recommendation, IFF, identification friend or foe.

Now this was junior high?

This was junior high and early high school. 'Cause the war ended the end of my junior year. And my junior year, I turned sixteen. And aside from the exciting experience of getting my driver's license of course, I also went to work in a war factory, part time while in school and then full time in summer. I was Ricky the Riveter. If you see these pictures,

they've seen the pictures of the C-54? That's what we were building out there at Douglas Aircraft.

So where were you working at?

At Douglas.

Oh, you were. And you were a riveter?

I was a rivater, yeah.

Oh, okay.

Believe it or not, I was small in those days, thin. And guys like me, they'd take us and thin women. And sometimes you would get a thin woman in with you, which wasn't bad. We had to climb up in the inlet area where the landing gear retracted. It was an area about that size. Climb up in the wing and test for gasoline leaks, because the wings were the tanks. And they'd seal the tank, the wing rather, and pump it full of air, and then you'd soak the outside of the plane and mark the rivets where it was leaking in the rivets with a grease pencil. Well then the exciting part was for a guy like me to climb back in there with no ear protection of course. You had air hose like you have at the gas station to put air in your tires. You brought that in with you for a little air circulation. And the guy on the outside would count. And you would start at a certain place, count down, and he'd tap twice where there was a bad rivet. And you had a steel bar of various shapes that you put up against that rivet and he would bang it again from the outside. So it was a little noisy in there. To try to and keep count of where you were, because every sixteen inches probably there was rivets and all the way around the wing. It was interesting work. [LAUGHS] We were sacrificial lambs is what we were. And I had the laziest leadman in the world. He'd send me up in the wing and then nothing would happen. I kept waiting. Finally I'd climb out. He was gone. He'd taken off to go do something else. There was a lot of that shirkey [33:09], I guess you would call it. Guys that just really hadn't had jobs and didn't like this eight to five stuff [LAUGHS] and being forced to stay at a workstation. Us young kids, we were more eager. And women were younger, of course.

How much did you get paid? Do you remember back then?

I got all the way up to ninety cents an hour.

That's pretty good.

My first job was at the.. was it the Tally-ho - where the bank is now, the bank parking lot - was thirty-seven and a half cents an hour.

Was it the Tally-ho.. what kind of…

It was a restaurant. It was a tea room type restaurant. And the ladies would go eat the stuffed tomato and play bridge afterwards. They set up, they got them in there to have lunch and let them use the tables until dinnertime I guess if they wanted to. The ladies like my grandmother who weren't working or doing anything, elder women for the most part. And I was a busboy there. Another friend of mine, he got to be out front. I was a potato peeler and dishwasher pretty much. But he got to be out front; literally he got to wear a white jacket and the whole thing. He came home one day and told his mother he had bread and buttered Jeanette MacDonald. Now Jeanette MacDonald you've never heard of, I'm sure. But she was a singer of that operatic type singer back in the... But he was all excited. He'd bread and buttered. As a busboy, they put out the bread and butter and water and all that stuff. He was all excited he'd seen a celebrity. [LAUGHS] From there, I worked at an ink factory down in Belmont. These are summers now. Sanford Ink. My dad would drop me off in the morning and then I would have to find my way home from Belwood down Manheim, and I would hitchhike. Course hitchhiking was not uncommon in those days.

Really?

Because not everybody had a… First off, many people had put their car in storage 'cause it was too expensive to keep it. They'd put it in storage in the'30s because they couldn't keep it up. And secondly you only had those seven gallons. So it wasn't uncommon. And then of course military would be picked up immediately. And young decent looking fellows like me, at least that's my own opinion, were easily picked up too as hitchhikers. But I had all the colors of the rainbows on my clothes from all various colors of ink that I'd been bottling that day. And every so often one would break as you were putting the top on and you would get sprayed with ink. So I was the hitchhiking rainbow. [LAUGHS] But I am trying to think whatever jobs I had. After school I had, I mean after high school I had some other jobs, but I think that was pretty much it in high school. Any other?

After the start of the war, did anyone in your family or any relatives join the Army?

I only had one first cousin, I had one first cousin who was caught in the Philippines, Lieutenant Billy McGill. And he died in a prison camp in the Philippines. His brother-in-law was an agetant to MacArthur, Colonel Moore. And Colonel Moore went on to become the, I don't know what the title was, the administrator anyway of Okinawa after he left MacArthur's staff. He was a cousin-in-law for me. My cousin on my mother's side, Bennetts, he went in, he spent the war in school. I'll swear he went from one to another to another to another. Bowden, MIT, Illinois State. Lord, I know there were five or six different colleges he went to in the V-12 program, which was naval officers. And he ended up on an auxiliary boat in China somewhere after the war as a radioman, or radio officer. And he never saw any action. And I was in service, and I never saw any action. I

went in before… I went 1948. I was frustrated. I had been a year in college. I hadn't done well. I hadn't been yet thrown out, but I was on that road. And I joined the Navy for a year. They had a program, they were desperate to keep these naval stations running and operating to keep the pilots flying because they wanted to keep the flight squadrons active in an emergency. Well they didn't realize it, but they did need them. And so I enlisted for a year at Glenview Naval Air Station, where for three months they put me on the line working on airplanes just starting. And I was basically the guy standing by with a fire bottle to put out the fire because these things would backfire and catch fire quite frequently when you'd start them up in the morning. These were propeller planes from World War II was all we had. And then they decided that summer was over and most of these squadrons were not coming in anymore and they banked a lot of the planes. They didn't need me anymore on the line. They didn't need a lot of us on the line, as it was called. So they pointed to me and another fellow and said, "Report to the dispensary. You're going to be cormen." I tried everything I could because I'm not good around injured or wounded. But I couldn't get out. So I spent my year. Then I was inactive reserve. I didn't go to drills, I didn't have to do anything, but I still was subject to call in an emergency. Well, emergency came in a little over a year after I got out and I got called back in during the Korean War. And that point I said I've had enough of this sticking needles in people and picking up bodies. Because basically that's what they gave me because I wasn't skilled but I could do that. [INAUDIBLE 40:12] accidents but there was some atrocious ones.

Were you in the Korean War?

No, well I was in during that period, but I finagled my way out of flight Marine force. The Navy Cormen were the medics for the Marine Corp.

Right.

And that's where I was headed when I was called back. And the senior medical officer, who I, I won't get into details, ladies, but who I had done some favors for. He said, "I've got your orders here to go to Great Lake." He said, "You want to go." I said, "Hell, no I don't want to go." And he said, "Well, okay, I can keep you here a hundred and twenty days." I said, "That's a start." 'Cause I still had three years left on my enlistment. So at that point I took the… One of the other officers said to me, one of the new medical men that came in, "You ought to be an officer. Why don't you try flight training?" I said okay. So I did. And once you passed your test for flight training, you were locked in the base where you were stationed. So they didn't have to go find you was the idea. So from January to May I was, well from November 12th until May, I as back at Glenview again. And then I went to Pensacola and had trouble getting the wheels on the right side of the aircraft. Sometimes I had them up, sometimes I had them on the wrong side. Flipped the plane, ground looped the plane, tried to land with the wheels down. An instructor finally said that's it, as desperate as they were for pilots. [LAUGHS] They didn't figure I was

going to be much of a doer [42:11]. So we were literally losing the Korean War when I was discharged in February of 1952. Shows how valuable I was to the war effort. [LAUGHS] I'm sorry, I run on. What else do you have?

Main High School had assemblies when student soldiers were killed. Do you remember that?

Do what?

They had some assemblies when some of their former students were killed in the war. Do you remember any of that?

No, I don't.

No, okay. The war bond drive to buy a C-54 happened in 1944, 1945. What do you remember about that?

Well, I think I was the room stamp guy or something like that. And I'd forgotten, the stamps started at ten cents I think.

I think that's what we've heard.

Yeah.

Ten and twenty-five. And some of the parents would buy a war bond. 18.75 bought you a $25 war bond as I recall. And ten or twenty years maturity. Doesn't matter. I was in the classroom, our homeroom, I was the stamp guy. So I went to that ceremony out there at O'Hare when we dedicated the plane. For the life of me I can't find myself in those pictures, but I remember the situation.

What do you remember about VE Day?

I was on the golf course at Rob Roy when the whistles started blowing. Or was that VJ Day? I know VE Day. I remember riding up and down Harlem Avenue, which was a two lane road in those days, up to what is now, would be Niles and Touhy in that area, Touhy and Harlem in that area. And riding on the hood and on the top of a '32 Buick. And the fellow's name who was driving it was Stateler. He was a year old than I was, because I wasn't old enough to be driving. But we were just all cheering and shouting. And I got home at... the busses had stopped running. And I was in serious trouble at home, let's put it that way, for not having reported in and it was getting daylight. I walked from Park Ridge to Des Plaines. [LAUGHS] Took Bussy because that was the shortest way rather than going Northwest Highway to Dempster. And there weren't any cars out to hitchhike a ride from. But I had been spending time with one of my girlfriends.

What do you remember about VJ Day?

I think it was VJ Day that I was on the golf course, on Rob Roy. And the whistles started blowing. And we all, again...

You mean factory whistles?

Yeah, factory whistles, sirens, that type of thing. [COUGHS]. Excuse me. About anything that would make noise. I got home late that night too. [LAUGHS] Different girl. But I really don't remember any specific celebrations other than my own. That's about all I can recall. Oh, I know this, within two days I got a phone call telling me... Oh no, I'm sorry, I reported to work the next day at Douglas and was sent home. They closed the factory. All but supervisory people were turned away because they weren't going to need any more airplanes like they were turning them out there. And I was told I would get a phone call within a week and given a specific time to come pick up my personal things and turn in my tool chips. You had a little, much like a shower hanger that you had little yellow chips with your number on it. And any time you checked out a tool from the tool crypt, you had to give them one of those chips and they would give you the tool. So they knew where it went, that was the idea. It still disappeared but I didn't get any of them. That wasn't my intention. So I had to turn that in and I had tools in my locker. And I had a jacket in my locker I recall. And I had to come back and turn that in. That's about all I remember of that time. Oh, I do remember, my dad and I, we were originally going to take the train. My dad's home was Fargo, North Dakota, and we were going to take the train to Fargo. His mother was living there, his mother and sister. Within a couple of weeks, they took gas rationing off the board and we ended up driving up to Fargo instead. It took us an eternity because these old tires, I don't know how many flat tires we had on the way up. In those days you had tubes, in those days you just kept putting a new tube in the old tire.

Oh, right, and you probably couldn't get tires back then.

No, and if you did get, they weren't new tires; they were retreads.

Right. Yeah.

Trucks still use retreads now. You'll see the alligators in the road sometimes, as the truckers call them, where the retreads has come off.

So when they laid off all the people, did that affect, I mean… how about the jobs and everything?

At sixteen, you weren't interested in the economy.

Right.

You know, you were interested in yourself and your girlfriend.

Sure.

My dad wasn't affected, my grandfather. My grandfather had retired from Carnegie Illinois Steel, which became U.S. Steel, or was absorbed by U.S. Steel. He was gone a year, and they asked him to come back to work because all of the people, the fellow that had taken his job and the salesmen had all been drafted. So he came back and worked a year. Then he came back and volunteered to take over the regional head of the draft board after that to keep himself active. He was also very active (the whole family was) in the Congregational Church in Des Plaines. It would be hard not to be if you lived two doors from it.

Do you have any advice that you'd give the younger generation?

Don't screw up like I did. [LAUGHS]. Ladies are wonderful, but don't let them be your whole life and then screw up your academics. Or let athletics do it either. You can do both if you put your mind to it. And you can do a very good job with all three if you put your mind to it. But don't forget everything else like I did. I got out of college eight years later. I was in and out of college three times. I got married finally my junior year of college; I was twenty-five. My wife was twenty-one. In the meantime I had settled down, and I finally graduated with a B+ average, inspite of all the D's and F's I'd gotten my first year and a half. So I was very proud at doing that, but I was a little old too. I was the only veteran in school at that point. But when I started, they were almost all eighty percent veterans coming back from the war in college in the fall of '47. But when I left, I was the only veteran in school. Now this was Knox, college of 900 students probably.

Where's Knox College?

Galesburg, Illinois.

Okay.

And in fact I was back there weekend before last for a fraternity reunion and college reunion also. My fraternity, like me, has been expelled from campus. [LAUGHS] It was a Phi Delt, which is a national fraternity. And they did all the things we used to do when I was 18. And it didn't fly a few years later. Finally even the national took their charter. Because the fraternities these days, at least sum in total, don't allow liquor in the fraternity houses anymore. And they didn't allow it then, but they winked at it because most of the guys in the fraternity house were in their mid-20s. They could go anywhere they wanted to. Or some of them were 19 or 20, but they no problem getting drinks in the service. So they winked at it. We'd have a party and they called it the Bowery party.

Everybody came dressed as a bum or there abouts, and your dates. Course of the punch was spiked. You always had to have a faculty member and a representative from every other fraternity on campus at all your parties. I mean, it was just a courtesy thing. So we knew which faculty members to invite. And then, if you can imagine… This is off the record now I hope.

Right.

But then after that, in my first couple of years, we'd rent a tavern or roadhouse after one o'clock because they had one o'clock closing. And we'd continue the Bowery party there 'till God knows when in the morning. Of course the sheriff never realized and saw all those cars in the parking lot either in those days. It was a... You had some normal students and some normal people. I can't say I was typical. Although the group I ran with, none of us went to jail. Although I did spend one day in the brig, but I wasn't guilty. We were cleaning barracks, and they came back to check on us and they found some clothing stashed under the stairway. So they backed up a semi-truck. There were probably about twenty of us working in the building cleaning out lockers. The building was supposedly secure. But if there was a locked locker, you were supposed to leave it alone. And put us all in a semi and drove us over to the brig and unloaded us. And I had no idea why we were there. Until somebody came clean, they just kept us there. All punished for one. That was the military. Patrol your buddies. Now, once again I... go ahead.

I think I'm done with questions. Do you have any?

[FEMALE VOICE] Did you say your mom went to Knox College?

She did. My mom and her two brothers.

Can you tell me what they studied?

My mother graduated from Main in 1923. She graduated from college in 1928, so you can see she took after me. Well, it was only five years for her. [LAUGHS] My mother was very musically was, well most of my family was on my mother's side.

So did they take music classes?

She did, and she was quite active in that school shows, that sort of a thing. In fact she wrote some music for some of the school plays. I was told, I wasn't there obviously.

What instruments did she play?

She played piano. And if you'd hum it, she'd play it. She'd play anything by ear. Which I guess, I never realized it because it happened all the time in my house, but I guess it's quite a talent.

My other question was what was your opinion of the war? What did you think of it and how did you feel towards it?

I don't think we had any choice. There is no question in my mind as I look back that we were enticed into it by Roosevelt. It wasn't the right thing to do the way he did it, but we should have been involved before. But we had isolationists; Taft is an example, voted against lend-lease for Russia and Britain in 1940. You know, how could you not see the need for our help for them? Well, his idea was neutrality at all costs, like the Swiss. Politically my family did not like Roosevelt. [LAUGHS] We were staunch Republicans. I have since - this is not part of your discussion - but I have since changed my attitude and I am voting for the candidate, not the party, these days. In fact I voted for Obama (I'll tell you). I voted for him twice. It wouldn't have been my first choice. My first choice wasn't running. And I didn't like his opponents at all.

After college, what career, what did you spend most of your time…

I was in sales, industrial sales. We manufactured brass and copper for industry. Automotive radiators. In those days they were all copper and brass. Poleline hardware, connectors. I'm trying to think of some of the main markets we had. Caskets, casket liners. That was pretty much it. I was here in the Midwest the whole time. Worked for two different companies, one for 29 and a half years. And they reorganized the whole company and spun off two divisions and laid off about a hundred people in the sales department. As you say in the educational business, I was riffed. I went work for another company, a smaller company, made only one product line. That was wire, brass and bronze wire. And I was regional manager for them and did an awful lot of traveling for then. Thankfully we didn't have the hassles at the airports like you do now trying to get through security. In fact when I first started traveling, you could… it was government controlled. The fares were and schedules, the whole thing. You could buy a ticket on one airline and go on another one. There was no charge. Fares were all the same. The decentralized… I forgot the word.

Deregulated.

Deregulated, thank you. And still there was no check security of any sort unless you looked funny. And you could switch within your own airline. But now they've got all sorts of.. I got caught in one a few years back. It almost cost me $700 until I pleaded my case. Security made me miss my flight and they made me by a whole new ticket because I had a non-changeable ticket, round trip ticket. This was the back end of it. Well, I appealed it and finally got all buy $50 back. You got any more?

Just on the quonset huts, they were building those for the teachers during the war or… ?

It was right after the War

Oh after the war.

...when people were coming home from the war and had no place to live. They were expanding the staff here to meet an ever increasing enrollment. As I said, we had 1700, I think it was, or 1600, in a school built for just a little over a thousand.

Yeah.

Again, I am back at Main, not here. My son went here. And I lived in Park Ridge for 36 years and grew up in Des Plaines as I told you. But after we were married and moved back to Chicago area, that's when I came to Park Ridge. Let me ask you girls some questions, can I?

Yes, let me just turn the camera off because we're almost...

You've been recording all those droodlings.

Yes, yes.