

This is August 3rd, 1989. I'm Marian Zayti doing an interview with Ed Bender for the Northville Historical Society Oral History Project.

(Well, Good Morning, Ed.)

Morning, Marian.

(How'd you like to tell us a little bit about your life in Northville?)

I'd be elated to do that.

(Good!)

It'll probably be the shortest tape and the shortest story that anybody could ever get because I'm good at short stories.

(You're good at stories, I know that.)

My name is Eddie Joseph Bender. I was born 1915 in the city of Detroit, moved to Northville about 1919. As a native of Northville I grew up hating my childhood, and the reason that I hated my childhood was because of the fact that my parents were Polish, and we were Catholic, and people hating the Pollocks, and they hated Catholics. So being in the middle of all this was very, very hard growing up in Northville.

(You certainly had a lot of friends, Ed.)

I developed many friends as years went by, but at the very beginning they were very, very bad. We ought all the way to 440 Dubuar Street at lunchtime, and they waited for me on the way back. Mostly because of the fact that I was not able to talk English until I was about nine years old, and during that time my schooling was sort of limited. We had a Superintendent by the name of Thad Knapp, who was a gruff old guy. And he kept me in the sandbox for three years. During that time I learned a great many things. And some of those things were to fight back.

(Good!)

And when I fought back, and I got a black eye or a busted nose, and it was busted 2 or 3 times, I got home and told my dad, and damned if he didn't give me another beating. So I learned to keep my mouth shut very, very quickly. Upon going into school, many things happened that are both good and bad. Some of the good were that the Health Department at Halloween-time gave us a warm warm welcome. And the reason they did this because we were eliminating many outhouses that stood behind the houses, and by doing this, we helped put indoor plumbing into our houses. And at that time we had no indoor plumbing. We, at my house, had no telephone. We were lucky to have lights, in spite of the fact that my father worked hard all of his life at two and three jobs. During the Depression we were never on welfare. We were always able to manage some way or other by hook or by crook. As we went on through school, and they found

out that I should be in the first grade at about age eight or nine, then I was on my way. Mrs. Ida Barley Cooke was my mentor for many, many years and watched very carefully over me in spite of the fact that I had been eliminated from the classroom by her many, many times.

(That's the story of a great many in Northville – the boys particularly.)

That's very, very true Marian.

("Eyes in the back of her head," someone said.)

This lady was the most tremendous person that was in my life. There was another fella by the name of Theodor Watts, who was my high school football coach, who I still keep in contact with, during those days. And we, we haven't seen each other in many years, but I plan on it very shortly. During my growing-up days, we had a class – graduated class of 1935 at about age twenty. I think at that time I didn't play my last football game in spite of the fact that I was Captain of the team my Junior year – they eliminated me because I was too old, which proves that I'm in the sandbox three years. We – during our growing-up time -- we had several incidences that were sort of bad. One of them was that we put a wagon, 4 wagon wheels on the top of the Presbyterian Church on Main Street, and it was called one of the greatest engineering feats of that time.

(How many helped you do that?)

There were several of us that were there – 5 of them got caught. They were put in jail. I was not one of them but I did get into it because I had a little money that I was working – I had to help them get out of jail, and they never repaid me, incidentally.

(That's a good memory.)

Now, after graduation from high school, I attended Con--- Eastern Michigan University, and at the end of the third semester, they said, "Ed, you like socializing more than you like books, and as a result, we ask you to leave." So, E. J. Bender was on his way to greener pastures. At that time I went to a school at Athens, West Virginia called Concord College. My high school football coach, William Stevens, and his friend, Vic Kool, asked me to go there. And in 1937, I matriculated to that school. During that time I met my lovely and beautiful wife, Mary Kathryn Connolly Bender, who has been with me these last 49 years.

(Good years.)

And we soon celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary.

(Congratulations.)

Thank you, thank you. We have three youngsters – twin boys, Pete and Tom, and Michele Dorrington, and two grandsons, Patrick and Michael Dorrington. We also have two daughters – Amanda and Meredith Bender.

(They're your granddaughters?)

These are my granddaughters – that's true – thanks folks.

(Which son?)

My son, Peter, has the girls, and my daughter has the boys. We will regress just a little bit because at my graduation, being President of the Junior Class, my classmates voted me least likely to succeed. I need to add that in there.

(They were certainly wrong about that, Ed.)

I made a point to prove them wrong, and to this day, every five years we have a class reunion. Mary Kathryn and I organize it and invited everyone, and I make sure that they still remember that I did graduate from Concord College after five years, and we –

(Do you think Ida B. Cooke was the reason you wanted to get into education?)

She certainly, Marian, had a tremendous impact on me because she was stern, and she was firm, and she was not afraid to use the paddle.

(I thought in my remembrance, she – I believe – one of the greatest educators that have been in the Northville School System.)

Absolutely right. Marian, we go back a little bit, and I'd like to regress back to my high school days. I give a tremendous credit to Mrs. Barley Cooke, as I did once before earlier. And during my high school days, she was really responsible for my getting into education, and in high school I did a great many things. Besides playing football, being on the basketball second team, cheerleading for the varsity, having a band – a high school band called The Blueroom Syncopaters.

(What instrument did you play, Ed?)

I played the lead – I was the singer, and the lead, and the announcer. I'm also the fellow who got the jobs. And by getting the jobs, we played for four hours at several gigs. We got \$2 each, and the band leader got \$6 because he made all the arrangements.

(Was this Depression time about?)

These were definitely Depression days – my Sophomore, Junior, and Senior years. As we went into college, into the Army for five years, back out of the Army, back to college, and then coming home. During those Depression years, my father worked at the Ford Motor Company

for fifty long years. At the very beginning, our family – Polish and Catholic – were poor. We were so poor that the poor people called us poor. But as time went on, we did get a little better, and we made a little money, and we worked our way through school every single day of our lives – both Mrs. Bender and myself.

(Mary Kathryn, you've been really quiet doing this interview, and I think it would be a good spot to get you to say something. Now, I do know that summer times you never miss a reunion down at your home college. Maybe you tell us a little bit about that?)

MK – Yes, we go to our homecoming every October. We've been going for the last 47 years. We missed twice – one time when I was in the hospital and couldn't make it, and we look forward to it every year, meeting with our college classmates. And we always have the parties for everybody.

(I imagine there are lots of parties, Mary Kathryn?)

MK – Oh yes, lots of 'em. Tailgate.

(Does it bring back your romance, of when you met Eddie right down there in that school?)

MK – Oh yes, we met my second year in college. He'd already been there one year when I arrived, and we dated through college and was married at the end of our college years. And next year will make our 50th year of married life together.

(That's fantastic. Thank you, Mary Kathryn.)

In conclusion, on this tape, I want to thank the committee and especially Marian Zayti for her warmth, congeniality, convivial attitude that she has, and we're extremely grateful to her since we've known her all these years, and have been very warm and friendly. Her husband was my grandson, which I'm – I'm his Godfather, I guess I should say, not grandson but my – I'm his Godfather. Kind of breaks me up a little bit to think that he's now gone. We've lost another classmate. And to thank everybody that's connected with this, and I hope that we are in the archives for years to come. Thank you very kindly.

(Thank you, Ed, for being a great one to interview, and believe me, there will be many people listening to this, and thank you, Mary Kathryn, for your hospitality and allowing me to come over here and spend the morning with you.)

MK: Our pleasure.

We've enjoyed it very, very much Marian.