

Chuck Ely interviewed 8/11/88

Interviewer: Lois Winters

CE: Chuck Ely

D: Dale (joins interview later)

CE: Jack Hoffman was here and we started remembering people's nicknames.

Int: Oh my gosh.

CE: That was something. Everyone in Northville had a nickname.

Int: Everybody had a nickname?

CE: Sure.

Int: Why don't you tell me some of the nicknames of...like, what was yours?

CE: Of course, mine was Chuck. Oh my God, I don't remember them now. See, some of these names people might take exception to. We didn't think too much about it when we were kids, now, that poor guy's dead and gone.

Int: OK, why don't we talk about, you got expelled from high school in the twelfth grade.

CE: Yeah.

Int: Then you went to Ferris?

CE: Well, so I finally got me a job...

Int: And it was in Walt's Garage in Novi?

CE: Yeah, and I worked there, I kept getting more money all the time. Hell, I never had it so good.

Int: But you still had to pay your ten dollars at home?

CE: I must've. I don't ever remember paying my mother, but I must've. But I never thought of that before. I don't remember paying, like most mothers, she'd probably never ask you for it and then it got to where my mother said, "Take the car," she got tired of taking me and going to get me. Then my dad said, "Tell Mr. Tuck to get himself another boy 'cause there's a place up in Big

Rapids called Ferris Institute for just such guys as you.” So he said, “You come back and peddle ice and then this fall, I’ll take you up there.” And that’s what happened. I graduated from high school that first year, went on with Business Administration the next year and that’s where I met Margaret. She’s from Rogers City.

Int: Oh is she?

CE: You know where Rogers City is?

Int: Yeah...

CE: I had a very uneventful life.

Int: Well, you met Margaret. When did you get married?

CE: 1933, this is 1930 when I got out of school.

Int: And then so, you get out of school, did you come back to Northville?

CE: Sure.

Int: And then what did you do?

CE: Started peddling ice and shoveling coal.

Int: For your dad?

CE: Sure, somewhere or other I worked down at the Globe, for Ransoms, after Charlie Galt. And he found out in later years, hell they was going busted and my dad paid the wages, just to keep giving. And I came home one day and what do you know? “I’m working in the office.” “Is that right?” “Yeah.” “Well, that’s pretty good.” I neglected to tell him I was washing windows.

Int: So then how long did you work there?

CE: Not very long.

Int: Did you and Margaret start a family by then?

CE: Before we married?

Int: No, you were married in '33. Were you working at the Globe then?

CE: No.

Int: No? OK, I'm lost here.

CE: Well, I'm a little bit confused. I don't remember whether I worked...no, that was before. When did Lindburgh....

Int: '27... '27.

CE: That's when I worked at the Globe. I remember talking about it...I was up on top of the east lawn there with a light when that happened...the kids, we haven't driven back and forth, oh hell, four or five years, this spring, the kids were doing something, so they told us to get home the best way we could. Well, Dale had his wife die in January, so he didn't get to Florida until the first of March. Well, his daughter and granddaughter brought him to Florida on Pine Island. We're right next to...Santabell Island which, hell, you can almost see where he lives but to get there is a forty mile drive, so they brought him to Florida, dumped him off, and said, "See you, Dad." Hell, he winds up on Pine Island with no car, no nothing. Took him about a week, ten days, to find out what the hell was going on, so he rents himself a car, and then I said, "How you going to get home?" He said, "I don't know." By this time, we knew that we was going to have to drive the car home, and we said, "How about riding with us?" Which we did. He had us up one night—it takes us two nights.

Int: I don't like to do it that fast. OK, well, let's get back to Northville. After you worked at Walt's Garage, you went to school and graduated in Business Administration, met Margaret. Did you come back to Northville?

CE: Yeah.

Int: Then what'd you do?

CE: Shovel coal and peddled ice. I'll never forget the time one of my old schoolgirls peddled ice here...

Int: Did you get ice from the pond?

CE: My dad did, but the second year he owned the business there was no cold weather, so we didn't have any ice that summer. That's when he built the ice plant.

Int: And that was located where?

CE: Well, it's a building right next to Cloverdale Dairy. What's in there now? Real estate, or something.

Int: Insurance.

CE: The other way from the insurance business. It's Northville's Cloverdale.

Int: Would that be a beauty shop?

CE: There's a couple little stores in there.

Int: Well, that must have been rather unusual to have an ice plant. Was it the first one in the area?

CE: Sure.

Int: The only one?

CE: Yeah, there was ice plants in Detroit, wind up sending an ice truck out, and it got where we could buy ice from Detroit City Ice and Fuel for cheaper than we could make it and for four or five years, that's all we did was transfer ice from Myers Road and Grand River to Northville. Sixteen miles you know, an hour and twenty minutes round-trip, and just like clockwork, and every day, all summer that sixteen miles. We'd go through a rainstorm or evidence there'd been a rainstorm between here and Myers and Grand River.

Int: How did you come out from...what route did you take?

CE: Right down Grand River to, sometimes we'd go, how'd we get over on Schoolcraft. Actually, didn't make too much difference, it was always the same.

Int: When did you start seeing a change in Northville? Because obviously you must've started to see some growth?

CE: Sure has been.

Int: OK, when did your dad move from Center Street over to where you are now?

CE: In 1935, the Detroit City Ice and Fuel, God bless their souls, were looking to buy out all these little places and they bought a lot of them. They'd loan you money to build a plant and then

you couldn't pay them, and they'd take it over. So my dad didn't own that piece of property down there and I'd always remember telling my dad, "Well, Dad, we shouldn't move down there. People up in Orchard Heights aren't going to walk way down there to order a ton of coal and buy a ice book or pay a bill. There's enough people from the north side to support us." My dad said, "Hell's fire! In less than five years, no one is going to be walking." I always figured he was the smartest guy in the world. To begin with, he kept two boys to home and not fighting. That's quite an accomplishment.

Int: Your brother was Ivan?

CE: Uh-huh. He went to school with Zeep, to Michigan State.

Int: Oh, did he really?

CE: Uh-huh. But peddling ice and this woman's husband came home and she was kind of bent over in an uncompromising position and he gave her a little love pat. And she says, "Fifty pounds, Chuck." Oh hell, he went right down to Turnbull's and bought her a Frigidaire.

Int: So then, what did your dad do? He's still in the fuel business though?

CE: He got in the fuel business in 1940. Much against...the first winter of 1930 that I came home, we'd run thirty cars of coal, thirty cars of coal. By 1940, we were up to 250 cars of coal, and...

Int: Where'd the coal come from?

CE: Well, from West Virginia and Kentucky.

Int: Came by railway?

CE: Oh yes, oh yes. And we handled...we had about seventeen different sizes, shapes and descriptions of coal. And we couldn't stock all these in 25 cars and for that reason...it would take three weeks from when you ordered a car of coal to when you got it. You had to be right on top of that business all the time.

Int: Where did they unload?

CE: Well, up on the railroad tracks. You know the underpass, you know where Clancy's boat plant is, it goes on up that road farther and that was my...See what it says on that little box, that glass box?

Int: Northville Famous Coal Man.

CE: That's me!

Int: That's you? Oh, OK.

CE: My first love was the coal business and we revolutionized the delivery of coal, folks what say, "What the hell good did it do for you to go to college to come back shoveling coal?" Well, to begin with, financially, things became a lot better from 1930 to 1940. But they all had to burn coal, even in 1930. But there were two other coal dealers in town and they weren't buying from us but we just did things differently than the old tobacco-chewing coal here, that squirting out tobacco, and he told the woman of the house to open the coal window 'cause he had some coal to deliver.

Int: We had a coal cellar.

CE: Sure, and it was a service. I remember my dad saying, "There's no product involved. Ice is ice and good coal is good coal. It's just service, that's all you're in, it's the service business." And that's what we've ever been in. There's no product involved. You could buy the same thing we were selling in a hundred places, service.

Int: OK, were you the only coal man in Northville?

CE: No, there were two others.

Int: Two others. Who were they?

CE: Forny and Knolls, but...

Int: But you were the Coal Man?

CE: As far as I was concerned. When we peddled ice, and you at this house, you better believe that we showered you with service peddling ice, so then we'd start selling you coal. When we filled your coal bin, we'd go to each one of your neighbors and sell them, too. I'll never forget that time, when the hell was it? It was at Foster, a Saturday afternoon, he said, "OK, I'll buy ten ton of coke from you, but I want it today. Saturday afternoon, a hot day, break off peddling ice to deliver ten ton of coke, peddled ice to ten o'clock at night. Northville's been awful good to us, awful good.

Int: Well, I missed the hardware store. When did that come about?

CE: Later, we had two boys. Ivan had a boy and I had a boy. They didn't like the idea of working seven days a week, seventeen hours a day, and as young men, they started bucking and they didn't want any part of the garden center business. By that time, we quit the ice business, that was a funny thing. I called up Ivan one morning, about two o'clock in the morning, 'cause here we was home Saturdays and Sundays, doing all that woman's work, washing windows, mowing lawns, putting up screens, storm windows...you know, all that stuff. Here we were used to working seven days a week, so I called him up and said, "Hey, how about a garden center?" Never entered our mind that we didn't know the difference between a pansy and a petunia, that was a small...never entered our minds. Well, after seven, eight, ten years, I became an expert and I knew the difference between a pansy and a petunia. But that's when the kids...we were still running the fuel oil business.

Int: Which was in the back of the hardware store?

CE: Yeah, up in the front was the garden center.

Int: Right, I remember that.

CE: And then Mrs. Ely had the Christmas shop and so we sold the fuel oil department to the two boys and Ivan and I, we kept right on drawing our same wages and driving Lincolns and Cadillacs and that first year we lost \$25,000. I said, "Hell, we can't keep this up!" So we had to do something. And no one started in the garden center business and Margaret says, "You're right back working eight days a week again." Of course, I was happy then, everyone was doing their own, putting up screens and storm windows. But, in the late twenties I had seventeen blind pigs. On my suit, I was the only one who could get them all on the same day.

Int: Where were they?

CE: Oh, down Eight Mile Road, down Farmington Road, down Six Mile Road. Arnold Dell, Dell knows them all...and Five Mile Road. That's where the turkey farm is now.

Int: The turkey farm—did you know the people who own the golf course there?

CE: That's...which way is that on Five Mile? Idyl Wyld?

Int: Idyl Wyld.

CE: That was long before that was ever started.

Int: Was it? My folks know the people that owned it and I can't think of their names offhand. But tell me some of the things...let's talk a little more about Northville. Of course, you've got a lot of friends here.

CE: They're getting few and far between.

Int: Yeah, they sure are. Maud Mankin, was he a friend of yours?

CE: He was a bootlegger.

Int: Oh, really?

CE: Yeah. Whatever happened to Charlie Mankin? That was here husband—he lived up around Salem. I don't know what happened to Charlie, Russ the boy, Pauline the daughter, and Virginia.

Int: Where was their speakeasy?

CE: Oh, Six Mile Road for a while, then up around Clement Road.

Int: They move out of one place into another?

CE: Oh sure...might as well get the seedy side in there as well as the good side. Sure, Dell Wilson, out on the corner of Yerkes and Eight Mile Road, Dell Rally in the Alley, back of the barber shop. That was n Northville. Was that the only two in Northville? The only ones I can think of...Oh, Bill Smith, how long was Harry Sowers out there? I never knew he was...they didn't start business until after the bars would close, about 2:30 in the morning, they started beating their door down. Of course, Meadowbrook was the biggest bootlegging joint in the world.

Int: That's been there a long time.

CE: Yeah, well, you know, across the road from Ed Jergansan's folks...that big old house across the road, Curtis, that was big in there for awhile. It's hard to remember—that was a long time ago, young lady!

Int: I guess they had them when I was growing up but I really didn't know anything about them.

CE: How old are you?

Int: I'm in my sixties.

CE: You are?

Int: Uh-huh.

CE: Well, you sure don't look it. No, I thought she was going to say around 45 or 46.

Int: Thank you, that's very nice. Well, you don't look your age either, Chuck, so let's face it.

CE: 78 years old.

Int: Well, Fred's 75.

CE: You know, he told me that. I told you that I didn't think he was that old.

Int: Well, he was quite a dickens in school, too.

CE: He was a brain.

Int: Was he really? He never told me that.

CE: Oh, hell, I don't think he ever made over \$25 a week in his life. Sent those three boys all through college, two of them to U of M, Zeep up to Lansing. And you know, Fred showed me a picture of Don with a bunch of professors at U of M, of course, "Can you find Don in there? Can you pick him right out?" Well, if you didn't know, if someone said, "What's that guy do?" you could say, "He's a college professor." Of course, Dick...

Int: Don was the dentist?

CE: Yeah, Don was the dentist. Dick taught in both medical school and dentistry school at U of M.

Int: Oh, both?

CE: Sure, and Don, he was a dentist. He came back from the War, I forget what dentist shop he bought out or started, but he wasn't here long and moved to Ann Arbor because he was noted for his oral history and dentistry. Well, Zeep here, he went to work for Standard Oil. What's the name of that company, that subsidiary...

Int: Exxon?

CE: Oh, no. Hell, this is fifty years ago, Secoa? No, down in Venezuela, and...Fred will never hear this, will he?

Int: No, no.

CE: He's so goddammed tight, you know? He met his wife down there, from Missouri, teaching school, and of course they were both fifty years old at that time, and they were going to get married. He was two days late getting home for his own wedding up in Missouri, 'cause he wouldn't pay anybody and he was always stealing rides from some boat or airline or something. One time, I always thought the Curt family was the richest family in Northville. They all just sent their money home to their mom and how much property did they own? I don't know. They might not even know themselves. Well, they know, Dick was married and had a family of his own.

Int: Don was killed in that automobile accident.

CE: Yeah, that's right.

Int: So, there's just Fred and Cootie left now. He lives in Livonia. Well, when did you and Margaret get married?

CE: October 1, 1933.

Int: Then where did you live when you came to Northville?

CE: 519. No, hell, no, yeah, 519 Main Street. Had a fire and that's where we got our start. Then moved on down to Judy Lapham's, paying \$15 a month rent. Paid five months' rent in advance, five months up, Judy says, "I got to have more money." Raised it to sixty. That's when my dad and I bought that house down on First Street. Sold it for \$4500 and that's when we bought that place up there for forty-five, forty, or something. This place belonged to Ada Pickle. Bill Higgins was her husband. That was the city dump.

Int: Right next door?

CE: Yeah, it was quite a long time ago (*portion cut off paper*)...track, dozen names on it.

Int: Was it signed by John Quincy Adams?

CE: Geez, I don't remember that.

Int: Well, it might have been, well.

CE: See, Northville started in 1825. That house was built in 1826 or 1827. They owned it.

Int: But that house is no longer there.

CE: Sure.

Int: Which one is it?

CE: Side of this house. What the hell's his name? Hendrickson.

Int: Hendrickson. I know Sally and Wes.

CE: Yeah, yeah.

Int: Then they practically own one of the oldest houses in Northville.

CE: You got that right.

Int: Well, then when did the Canterbury house go in? And Kriegers' house? I thought Kriegers' house was old.

CE: What Krieger are you talking about?

Int: The one on Randolph. Bob.

CE: Bob Litzenberger?

Int: No, Bob Kreiger. He has the salt box type.

CE: That's Canterbury.

Int: It's down past High Street. Now I'm confused.

CE: Well, John Tinham lived there. He was a big friend of Henry Ford.

Int: Oh, was he?

CE: Oh sure.

Int: Did Ford ever come out here? Truly come out here, ever do square dancing or anything?

CE: Sure, with this John Tinham that owned this place where Canterbury...

Int: Where did they hold their dances?

CE: Probably in their house there. The Botford Inn. The old Forester Hall, too.

Int: Dale, how long have you owned Chuck? All your life?

D: No.

Int: I haven't really got much of you on here. We'll have to do you another day.

D: He's more interesting anyway.

Int: Well, you can help fill in.

D: I was ten and you were twelve or thirteen when I moved to Northville. You're eighty and I'm 78, so you're two years older than I am. I didn't know they made them that old. His daughter Margaret says he drove all the way.

Int: You drove up from Florida this year?

D: Sure, brought us up.

Int: Wow.

CE: The only thing wrong is that he twitches when he drives.

Int: We all have funny habits, Chuck.

D: We live out on Tower Road, before you get to Brookfield. We leave there Saturday morning, like twenty after six, Sunday afternoon at four o'clock we're in Florida buying groceries.

Int: You didn't get any tickets?

D: Nope, praise the Lord, I was lucky there. You have to drive our way, not your way. OK, We'll drive your way.

Int: But now, you're going back and forth again this year? (*Phone rings.*)

D: Want to answer that phone? The one right in the bedroom? This is Miss Winters. This is my daughter and Margaret.

Int: Hi, how are you?

Unidentified voice: Fine, just fine.

Int: I'm just doing an interview with your husband here.

Unidentified voice: He didn't fill out his...he got into a mess with me.

Int: Reminiscing, you have to think back awhile. This isn't your daughter?

Unidentified Voice: Yeah, this is St. Martins. We've been around and around. I've seen things in Northville I've never seen before! I haven't been out for three weeks. All set for dinner?

(Discussion amongst group.)

Int: Fred said that on Main Street, that the buildings stopped at Northville Pharmacy, that was the last of downtown. Is that what you recall about downtown?

CE: Doc Nickles, Nickles? What was that guy's name? Nable, Nable, Nable...he was a doctor down in Redford and Daisy Martin had a rooming house. And I'll never forget the time peddling ice there, way way back, they had a gold cure place for drinkers. Northville was full of them. This guy up in Sessions, "You couldn't give me a pint, could ya?" So he gives me a five dollar bill, and I said, "I'll bring back the change." And he said, "Just bring me back the pint." Of course, every day I'm getting five dollars and it only cost me two, two and a half. I'm making more money buying a bottle of booze and I never asked him why he was up at Sessions Hospital for and he was getting a cure. This goes on for a couple weeks and the doc says, "Aha! I should've known." They couldn't figure out how this guy was getting drunk every day. He says, "Knock that crap off."

Int: Sessions was the house...where the wishing well is now?

CE: That's right. It's got a new name now.

Int: Since you weren't born in Northville, where were you born?

CE: I told you...

Int: Farmington, I know, but where in Farmington?

CE: Right next to Steinkopf Nursery, that old farmhouse...

Int: OK, you were born at home?

CE: Sure.

Int: So was my husband.

CE: And they knew Halley's Comet was coming and so my dad and mother were walking down the lane, that was never quite clear to me, to get a better view and my mother says, "I think we better get back home." At that time, they didn't know for sure, my mother knew she was pregnant all right but didn't know when I was coming or supposed to come or nothing. They didn't keep track of those things very closely. My sister, Ada Rose, was four years older than I.

Int: She's now still alive?

CE: Sure!

She's in Women's Club.

CE: She's only got one speed and that's full speed ahead.

Int: Where's her place in Florida? Stewart?

CE: Sarasota.

Int: Is she down there all the time or does she come back?

CE: They were up here for a month in June and they went back, when the hell did they go back? About the first of July.

She became a member of Women's Club in 1929.

CE: I'll be darned.

Int: That's your sister?

CE: Yeah!

Int: I didn't realize that.

CE: I never said too much about it and she sure as hell never owned up to that, I was her brother. I called her a little while ago. Her daughter was there, they weren't home.

Int: Do you have any other brothers or sisters? That was the only one?

CE: Well, Ivan.

Int: Ivan passed away?

CE: That was '61. He was 59.

Int: Well, can you think of anything else of interest that went on in Northville that we could...

CE: I could tell you lots of things. He had this Ford agency out in Farmington. In 1918, he sold out. Thirty-seven years old, married, wife and three kids, moved to Florida.

Int: Do you remember anything about the Depression?

CE: I know one thing. I never knew I was poor. I never went to bed hungry or cold, that wasn't my own fault. My brother and I, we had a moving business. We'd move everybody in Northville. Anytime, anybody...hell, it was kind of nice. We knew when everybody was going to move and we'd move all the furniture in the house for two dollars, two and a half. And if I got the job, I got the two and a half and my helper (which would be Ivan, by brother) would get all the money he found in the back of the seats. Sometimes there was more money there. Finally, my mother said, "That's stealing." "How do you figure that?" For a long time, I didn't realize that maybe that was stealing because I said, "Who did we steal from?" "The people that owned that furniture. Maybe they didn't lose it." We had a lot of logical...we could make more money delivering ice and coal than we could moving somebody's household goods.

Int: What was the first car you owned?

CE: I never owned an automobile.

Int: What did you own?

CE: I owned a company. The corporation always furnished me with an automobile.

Int: OK, what was the first automobile you remember the company owning?

CE: A 19--, that they gave me? A 1934 Ford.

Int: I'm trying to remember back. The first car I can remember that my dad had, had a rumble seat.

CE: Ha! Model A. I know there was Warren LeFevre, Flossy Murdock, and myself, probably Ed Horton, we was riding around and we found these license plates lying in the middle of the road, so we jumped out and tacked them on the end of a fence post. So-and-so's got that old Model T that we can buy for two dollars. If that license plate is still there tomorrow or the next day, we'll go get it and buy that car and put it on there, which we did. Old brass radiator, Ford, hell, that thing could be worth \$50,000 today. You got your three dollars cheaper. I paid five dollars for my first Model T. You probably didn't dicker. We went to get license plates from Ed Perrin. He said, "Is there a lien?" I said, "What do you mean lean? They's not leaning up against anything!" Of course, you had to know Ed Perrin. I could tell you the things he would do—you could tell it was Ed Perrin.

Int: Now, that's not any relation to the Perrin that's running this business on Main Street?

CE: I didn't know there was one.

Int: OK.

Side B

Int: It's a Michigan/Michigan State that's...they're selling...It's a store that sells memorabilia for the colleges and the Tigers and Pistons and stuff like that.

CE: The Wagon Wheel down there at the old Globe factory?

Int: Down near the Gitfiddler.

CE: No, way around the corner.

Int: OK, wait, the one on the corner and Center and Main? I always got those mixed up...the hotel where the bar was, across from...right in town by the bowling alley. It's not the Wagon

Wheel, it's not the Wishing Well, it's not....across from where the barber shop was...Bloom's Agency is.

CE: Oh, John the Greek's Bar?

Int: Where they have the hotel and all the rooms.

CE: Yeah.

Int: Mrs. McLaughlin's here...

.....

Int: Her son and our son went to school together.

CE: How about that!

Int: So I know about the computer up in the back room up there.

CE: Oh yeah.

Int: OK. The Winner's Circle. That's where Perrins is. So probably, it's not the same family. P-E-R-R-I-N. It's the same spelling.

CE: Well, Perrins built that building. Ed Perrin.

Int: Built the Winner's Circle?

CE: Bradshaw ran the pool room. And John the Greek had a restaurant on the other side. And then they...Ypsilanti...and the slot machine there went haywire. He found out about it first. You put in a quarter and out would come five bucks. That went on....fifty-seven dollars! Every time you put in a quarter, out would come money.

Int: So you had gambling in Northville just like other places did?

UV: Slot machines?

Int: Slot machines?

CE: There wasn't a slot machine, I don't think. A pinball machine of some kind. There was never any gambling in Northville. I shouldn't think of such a thing. Did you belong to the 1-2-3 Club?

UV: No.

CE: You never got into that?

UV: No.

CE: You were gone then, I think, anyway.

UV: Was I?

CE: I took Joe Denton up there one day. The guy pretty much had a heart attack.

UV: Well, I never was a card player or anything like that.

CE: I didn't play any cards. I remember the time my dad and Cullen Langfield were playing gin rummy for ten dollars a point. Harold told me about that. That was a pretty expensive game.

Int: So you knew Joe Denton?

CE: Everybody in the world knew Joe Denton.

Int: Our daughter married Carl Stevens, the young Carl. We did get to know Joe before he passed away.

CE: Very good friend of mine, he was sales manager for Motorola. Got to know Joe Denton and he'd stop in there. Go to the driveway and his car started backing down there and he'd try to get into it, and that's when he was killed.

Int: And that was who?

CE: I'm trying to think.

Int: I can't think of it either but that was horrible.

CE: Oh, yes.

Int: But that was a steep driveway.

CE: Yes it was.

Int: Joe used to go around Friday night or Saturday and pick up all the people who might get in trouble, put them in the clink...So that's...it's...

CE: Oh, sure, I had a Springer Spaniel. He went on the assumption, "Bite first, negotiate afterwards." That's when Clancy and Ulinda were just little, hell, we had to knock the dog before we could touch them up. We couldn't get any mail delivered, garbage picked up, no milk delivered, that damn Springer. The kids weren't there? Guarded the house away! When the kids were home--and I never realized that those dogs could get ugly like that—but anyway...Some folks right of here, on Beck, she was walking with her dog, down the street with a baby buggy, with a baby in it, and my dog saw her dog. Whoomp! I grabbed a board and started getting over there, and flailing dogs and I don't know if you've ever seen a dog fight or not—but they fight. She's trying to grab her dog and I said, "Don't get near the dogs," and she said, "Don't hit my dog." I was just hitting and finally got the dogs separated. She went home and called up and said, "Your dog bit me." And I said, "Are you sure it's my dog?" Yeah, because her dog wouldn't bite her. Well, I said, "I got to look at it." But she says, "No, you can't. Where I'm bit you can't see." So I sent Doc Edson? to her and, "If you're bit, I'll pay for it." Well, they wouldn't allow him to do anything, so I figured I was free and clear. They got a peace bond on me. Do you know what a peace bond is? They're an awful thing. If you—my dog—ever did anything, they'd serve this peace bond on me. Out comes old Denton one night, we're having supper, he says, "Well, I got to take you to jail." I said, "Can't you wait till I eat?" And he said, "You better have your lawyer there, because you're going to have to go to jail." So I called Cliff Hill up and he was there before I was, so I never did get in jail and I never knew just how that turned out.

Int: Where was jail?

CE: Probably about where it is now. Oh, the old fire hall. And the courthouse was in the big building there, wasn't it?

Int: Lapham's?

CE: Yeah.

Int: That's right.

CE: You remember that?

Int: Fred was telling me.

CE: And we could prove that, hell, our dog was...Harry Rackham had a dog just exactly like it, only his wasn't ugly. And they swore it down that it was that dog they saw instead of ours. Do you know Joe Denton?

Int: Those kids of his could make anything up.

CE: Those two girls, Harry Rackham's. God bless her soul—one of them wasn't too bad. But Harry Rackham we're talking about. He was kinfolks of that Rackham Golf Links. Hell, he never made a dime. He just kept one step ahead of...the only reason I'm saying that is that they're all dead and gone so.... And he married Hattie Pagel. You know Hattie?

Int: No.

CE: No, probably not. And so Harry came in with about hundred and fifty to a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars—more money than he ever dreamed of. And I know they're making a book all over town about how long it's going to take Harry to go through it. Hell, we wound up a millionaire, he sure did.

Int: How?

CE: Very shrewd investment, mortgages, I don't know that he ever got over six percent interest, but I knew he did very well. You know that old guy, oh, through to the War when we had stamps, oil stamps, he come in, open up that door, my dad had all those stamps laid down on the counter and the wind was blowing and, geez, they went psssst. My dad wasn't too enthused about the whole deal.

Int: Those were C Stamps probably?

CE: Oil stamps, or whatever the hell they called them.

Int: Ration stamps?

CE: Yeah, Mr. Rackham says, "Carl, would you like to have me take care of that?" My dad says, "Hell, yes." Nothing was said how much he'd pay him. And he worked all through the War, they would be four years. Boy, we didn't have any problem at all, everything went just like clockwork. The War's over and we don't know just what to do. Harry called my dad from down in Detroit someplace and said, "Carl, get rid of everything. Get them burnt just as fast as you can." My dad said, "Are you sure?" "Yeah! Get those out in the furnace. Burn them." My dad

said, "Here's all the records for four years." Out they went. I said, "Dad, how much are you going to pay Mr. Rackham?" Well, he said, "I don't know. Nothing was ever said about pay." Oh, he was going to Detroit at least once a week, doing something for the stamp businesses. Drivers would turn in stamps, they had to be pasted in books. Oh, it was a mess. We were all done and my dad says, "Harry, what do I owe you?" "Well," he said, "It's been most interesting. You know, I've acquired a taste for Seven Crown. How about a quart of Seven Crown?" My dad said, "Get up to Charlie's and get a case of Seven Crown." Which was what...seventy-five, eighty dollars?

Int: That wasn't bad. That was pretty cheap pay.

CE: Yeah.

Int: I bet those stamps were a pain. You know, just having to cash them in for food and all that was bad.

CE: I don't need this thing anymore.

Int: You calmed down a little bit?

CE: Uh-huh. I use it half the night.

Int: Do you?

CE: Medicare pays for that.

Int: Fine, fine. That's why you have the insurance.

CE: Yep. You know, I say Medicare and Social Security are the biggest cause of inflation there is. I've drawn so much more money than I ever paid in. Shameful.

Int: So has Mr. Amerman always lived across the way from you?

CE: I think he has, hasn't he? Sure, I think he rented that place for fifty years. He was principal. You should go talk with Liza Wagonshoes.

Int: Somebody is going to...yeah...somebody. Do you remember May Babbitt when you were in high school?

CE: Sure, we lived right across the road from her. Doc Holcomb's sister.

Int: Do you remember any of the other school teachers?

CE: Ha! Mrs Cooke, Mrs. Larkens. I'll never forget the time Mrs. Larkens...I sit underneath the clock, she said, "Everybody right underneath the clock there, I want to see you after school." So Ray and I got up and walked out. The next day she said, "Charlie, I distinctly remember saying everyone underneath the clock I wanted to see after school." "Mrs. Larkens, I thought you meant everybody but me."

Int: Did you play on the baseball team or football team when you were in high school?

CE: No, because I was playing the saxophone and it was easier to play the saxophone than get knocked out playing football. I was the only one who could read music when they started the band.

Int: How many were in the band?

CE: That first year?

Int: Uh-huh.

CE: Fifteen to twenty, I guess. And I was taking lessons at the same time, I'm about eighteen years old. And I noticed A&P opened stores that summer and they gave the Northville school system two hundred dollars to play out in the street in front of their stores. And I got—of course, I was working—I would lay off and I wouldn't get paid. I wanted to...it was fun playing in the band. I was getting five dollars a day then, so I didn't think much of losing five bucks just to play in the goddammed band. So they'd give me ten bucks to deliver the drum and I could take my car (and my girlfriend in the car) and I didn't get ten dollars for playing in the band, but ten dollars for delivering the drum. And then we played at the fair five days, from nine o'clock in the morning to midnight. And of course I quit playing, so did the rest of the band. They were listening to me. I didn't realize that for a long time. So I'd see him off and thought that was the cause of trouble. It wasn't long before I couldn't play over an hour and the wind wouldn't go where it's supposed to. It'd go up my nose. I'd rest a little while then play another hour. And it got to where it was fifteen or twenty minutes. And it happened when I was taking a lesson one time and he said, "It's no use coming back here."

Int: Well, he led the band. Did he write any music that you know of?

CE: Hill Head? Not that I know of. He was in a old brass band. A goddammed saxophone and the oboe. But he had to put up with me because I could read music. And it wasn't six weeks'

time before as a band we were playing music without any sharps or flats. By that next summer, hell, we were the Philadelphia Philharmonic.

Int: Really?

CE: Put you right down wolf trap right now!

Int: Then you have some pretty good memories of growing up in town here?

CE: Oh sure, sure. Where were yours from?

Int: Detroit, born and raised. My dad had a printing company at Fort Street and the Boulevard. Wolf Incorporated. One of my uncles owned Detroit Creamery, which, with the ice business, you might have been familiar with.

CE: Detroit Creamery? Ice cream?

Int: No, all I remember is the milk part. Well, all I know is they owned it, they lived on Grosse Ile. But those were the days when you started out and business and...Like you say, you did because you worked hard and made...

CE: Hard work...No, I never, Northville's been home to me.

Int: You never left like Fred. You stayed here and kept the home fires burning.

CE: Uh-huh. That's no fun either.

.....

Int: Very good. So you're here just visiting for the summer, Dale?

D: No, no, I live out here.

CE: He owns all that property out in Highland Lakes. And that was the only lake in Wayne County.

D: It still is the only natural lake in Wayne County.

CE: Do they know which one it is?

D: I don't know whether they do or not.

CE: Do you know that?

Int: No.

CE: It's the only natural lake in Wayne County, Highland Lake.

D: It's been Curtis Lake, Silver Spring Lake, they tried to call it Yerkes Lake once too.

Int: Did you know the Yerkes boy who lived down the street, the collector?

CE: Yeah, everybody knew him.

D: He was my buddy. I had to drive him all over in the wintertime because he wouldn't drive his car in the winter.

CE: He'd come over to see Chappy and Betty. And the only reason he walked because he knew he was going to get a drink. He only had one drink—I never saw him have two. He didn't want to be driving and have a drink. He was an attorney.

Int: Did he go to U of M?

D: Yeah, but he didn't finish up there. He finished up in Asheville, North Carolina.

CE: Well, I never heard that before.

Int: OK, did either of the Yerkes boys go to U of M?

CE: Well, Bob Yerkes went to U of M.

Int: Because our son was going through the Delta Epsilon records (a fraternity there), he found one of the Yerkes boys was a member of his fraternity.

D: That would be Bob. Robert. I don't know if Don went there...

Int: Probably Bob?

CE: Yeah, oh sure. Bob graduated as an attorney from there. What did they call them in the old days? Lit..Lit...

Int: Literature, Science and the Arts.

CE: I don't remember the Science and Arts end of it, just Lit.

Int: Uh-huh. And then when he finished that he went to Law School.

CE: Oh, is that it?

Int: I think you had to get four years in and then three years of Law School, similar to Medical School.

CE: Did Bob ever work as an attorney, did he?

D: Yeah, his dad was an attorney with Yerkes, Sells, and Putnam down in Detroit.

CE: Yerkes, McClintock, Goddard, and Shreve.

D: The last one Bob was in was Yerkes, Sells, and Putnam. And Bob started to work in there and he was...his morals were a little bit higher than the rest of them. He couldn't stand the skullduggery that was going on. He got out of there.

CE: How many times did he marry?

D: Five that I know of.

CE: Yeah, that's about right.

D: I was at three of them, I think. I married him to the last one, Dorothy.

CE: You know, out there on Haggerty Road, he married their daughter. He had something to do with Meadowbrook Country Club, on the board. He died very suddenly. If I don't remember that guy's name, it's going to keep me awake half the night. Bill? William? Margaret and I were invited to their fiftieth wedding anniversary. The old folks came to the door and the lady didn't know me for four dollars a week, and I said, "You ask Mrs. if she needs any ice. Just ask her." She said, "OK." I heard somebody say, "That's got to be Charlie Ely." What the hell is her name? They were nice old folks. They'd come out every summer. That's right.

D: I think he was a college professor.

Int: How long has Meadowbrook been there? I should know, but I don't.

CE: Back in the twenties that started—very early twenties.

Int: Mother and Dad belonged to Plum Hollow, which was very old.

CE: We were living out on across from Newburgh, Eight Mile, Halsted...Halsted...when they were building that, the guy who was supposed to be the superintendent over there stayed at our place while they were building that place. 1920 around there, 1921. His name was Scotty Southern.

Int: Are you sorry to see the farms going? I mean, just driving Eight Mile must make you sick.

CE: Yeah yeah yeah. What amazes me, where do those people live, moving into those houses?

Int: I don't know.

D: That's what...they're getting crowded out our way, building like crazy.

Int: You're on Tower Road, which is farmland, isn't it?

D: Yep, yep.

Int: Are there any oil leases, gas, around your way, or is that only along Napier Road?

D: Gas to buy or leases? They don't come out that far to us, south of Six Mile Road.

Int: Oh, OK.

D: I'm a mile north of Territorial and a mile east of Pontiac Trail, corner of Brookville and Tower.

Int: But you didn't always live there. You lived down on Halsted there for a while, when you were growing up. How did you get into school?

D: I came into school in the seventh grade, eighth grade. We went to the Country School through the seventh.

Int: That was Farmington, wasn't it?

D: Oh yeah, yeah.

CE: Nine Mile and Halsted Road? Thayer School?

D: The first school I went to, we lived down Six Mile Road between Beck and Ridge and went to the Thayer school and Napier and Six Mile Road. Then from there, went down to over here and there's another Thayer School. The Thayer School is still there, is a house now. People are living in it near Mount Trashmore.

Int: Is that really what they're doing?

D: Yeah, it's huge! You should go out and see it. They're going to make a lot of money off of that when it's done. They're negotiating with gas companies for the methane gas that comes out of it. They're going to make a bundle off of that.

CE: Van Born was there for years and years.

Int: Well, I live on Taft and Eight.

CE: Taft and Eight?

D: Where the gravel pit's there.

CE: Oh sure.

Int: There was a McDonald farm across the way, I believe. Down from there a bit

D: McDonald was just up Eight Mile Road. Hey, you know that guy? Was an eccentric...attorney, Whipple...used to live right across the road. He asked me, "You remember those guys that got drunk and got a fire?" I said, "Sure, sure." He said, "Who were they?"

Int: Fred remembers that fire.

CE: Oh yeah, because I stirred things up when I got home. This all happened...hell...sixty years ago. And I knew two of them...two of the fellows' names. You think I could find the third one? No. Sure, they all remembered the fire. It happened right in the middle of the day. They got drunk and did something. Bert Moserman? Wet tried to get Bolive? and Sickle? as one of them. No, he wasn't one. P.J. Thomas, Barney Roach, and Art McLaughlinberg? Outside of you and I and Bert Moserman, I bet there aren't many people who know that. Whipple had a hell of a good looking daughter, I forget what her name was.

Well, I'm going to have to skedaddle.

.....

Int: Do you know Mike Allen?

D: Yeah.

Int: He's still working and you're still working.

D: But I don't think Mike's as old as I am.

Int: I don't know how old.

D: Betty, his wife, she was born in 1926, because her dad bought that 1926 Pontiac so her nurse could take her out for a ride. I told her about it one day and she said, "I didn't know about that."

Int: Because I knew somebody was kidding Mike the other day...oh, someone who is retired, who is quite young, in their sixties, and Mike said, "I'm never going to retire. I'm still working." He goes in everyday. What do you do?

D: Well, I'm still working. My son-in-law runs Northville Refrigeration, Heating and Cooling. I got him started in it.

Int: Have you done any repair work at the Presbyterian Church?

D: I haven't. Maybe...he's got several other fellows...I don't know whether he's been there or not.

Int: Where's the office?

D: At 18485 Ridge Road.

Int: Oh, OK.

CE: The only reason he works is Cliff. He says, "Hey, Dad, could you possibly come in? I got a job just for you." He can't get anybody else, let's put it that way.

Int: You don't work very hard, though?

D: Well, some days I do. I worked the day before, Tuesday and Wednesday and it's pretty hot. I got on top of buildings...

Int: You're still doing that?

D: Sure.

Int: You know Mr. Rutledge from Plymouth?

D: No.

Int: He's in the refrigeration...

D: Is he?

Int: Yeah.

D: Put a new air conditioning in at the Wishing Well here. (C: I don't think they have any air conditioning in there.) Last time I was up there, I don't remember, I was over to see Thelma and Liza, I don't remember.

Int: I feel sorry for Nelly, too. But she's got a phone now, that helps a little bit. I always try to go see her on her birthday. She was always good...

CE: I called Liza and asked her, "What the hell do you want to know now?" Is Marky still there, I wonder? He was up there last time I went up to see...Marky and I, way back, before I was married, we were dating. We were going together on dates, so I've known Marky for along time.

D: That was the largest settlement the Ford Motor Company ever made.

C: Must have been a dandy, because he really got busted up. Forty years ago?

Int: What happened?

CE: An employee of Ford Motor Company rear-ended him and the executive...I can just visualize...going down the road, absolutely impervious of everything in front of him, comes to the stop light at Grand River and Novi Road and he's clear out on cloud nine and wham.

D: Marky stopped and he's...

Int: Did you know Alf Parmenter?

CE: Sure.

Int: Of course, he's out there now.

CE: Yeah, yeah.

Int: Pearl goes over every day.

CE: Last time I was there, I got to Leona but she's gone now. Is Rubitsky..Florence Rubitsky...still there?

D: I don't know.

Int: Rose Carrington always had the front room...Now she's gone.

CE: Margaret, do you remember those old folks out on Haggerty Road? We'd take their furniture from Detroit out to Northville...we went to their fiftieth wedding anniversary...It'll come to me later.

Int: Well, someday, we send you this letter, try to get together...

D: Yeah, do you work Saturdays? It's surer for me to get off on a Saturday.

Int: We can always make some kind of arrangement. No problem.

D: I'm usually after six o'clock.

Int: It's amazing, you're still up on the roof.

CE: Can't drive a car...he twitches.

Int: Well...OK...I'll...