

DB 13965  
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I: This is Jennifer Despres interviewing Douglas Baker, July 25, 1989. Russel Baltz a longtime friend of Mr. Douglas Baker will also be participating in this interview.

R: I'm Douglas Baker, age 71, born in 1918 in Newark, New Jersey, 'cause that's where my dad was stationed during World War I and when I happened to come along and soon as the war was over moved back to Grand Haven, Michigan where I went through all the schools until college life started.

I: So you had early settlers then in your family in this area?

R: Yeah, lumberyard has been in the family for four generations, D. Baker and Sons started in 1871 and my grandfather, W. D. Baker, Dirk Baker they called him was the first owner and proprietor of D. Baker and Son. Then came my dad, John D. Baker, incidentally, that's why I get the name Douglas Baker, because my name is really John Douglas Baker, but his name was John D. Baker and so I have to be called by second name which is Douglas. That's how I get that, even though my name is John Douglas Baker. And he died early in life shortly after World War I. And they enlisted the help of Martin Boon to run the yard for the second generation, you might say. 'Cause my dad was gone and I was two years old, three years old. I was just a kid, baby. So, Martin Boon who, incidentally was the mayor of Grand Haven for six or eight years and is the uncle of the present mayor, Marge Boon, he ran the lumberyard for the entire second generation until I got out of the U.S. Navy after World War II. And that's when I came into the lumberyard about 1944, '45 in there. And I was the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation in there and ran it until 1972 or '73 in there, 30 years stretch. And my two boys, Dick Baker and Bruce Baker are now the proprietors of D. Baker and Son and they are on their 4<sup>th</sup> generation. I suppose a small lumberyard like that in a good area like Grand Haven can keep going forever 'cause people always need help with houses and lumber and Grand Haven is a real good area, 'cause you got your tourist business in there and you got a lot of commercial business, a lot of factory stuff and you got a lot of housing going on. Everything takes lumber and building materials. So, that's still going right along. Let's see on my mother's side, my grandfather Adams –

I: Okay.

R: Okay, Grandfather Adams was what they call a drummer in the old days. A typical salesman, gets on the train, goes to Georgia, St. Louis, wherever they are selling Dake engines. He worked for Archie Campbell when Campbells had owned the Dake Engine Company, before Jeff Jacobson and Paul Johnson got it for Dake Corporation. Lived on Lafayette Street, he had four daughters and my mother was the one of the twins, he had one set of twins and my mother was an identical twin. Went to Alma College and they were so identical that they could exchange places in class and the professor wouldn't know which girl was there. They could go to dances and the dates they had would seldom know which girl they were dancing with, they were really identical twins.

I: They dressed the same then other people were in trouble.

R: Right and I don't know where she met my dad, John Baker, but it had to be in Grand Haven someplace in the old days.

I: So your mother and her sister they all grew up here?

R: Yeah, they grew up here, uh-huh, Isabelle Adams and Charlotte Adams and they had their dances at the Cutler Hotel which was on the site of the James Oaks office right now, beautiful thing. I wish I had been around in those days, but that's a generation before me. And, her mother was Ann Adams and her sister was married to Andrew Thompson. Andrew Thompson was one of the mainstays of the American Brass Company which turned into Michigan Brass and he and Fred Cooley ran that and it was in the site where the Sandpiper Condominiums are right now. The important thing about Andrew Thompson was that he led the, what they called the Jackie Band and that was the official band of Grand Haven for many years and it was sort of like the Scottville Crown Band is now, only it was a little better, bigger and better and they were the official band that would go out from Grand Haven and make the rounds and play for all the fairs and so on. And he was the conductor and I was one of the little kids that would go down to rehearsal with them on the river. They rehearsed right where the, what do they call, north of the Dance Kro where all those little shops are now.

I: On Washington Street?

R: On Lake Drive going out to Harbor Avenue. Right on Harbor Avenue north of where the barn burned down was a building that Nells Fisher and Louie Bridles owned and they sold coal out of it and in the evening they had a space there that that's where the Jackie Band rehearsed. And I used to go down and listen to them as a little kid. I thought it was a real good band and it was probably pretty good. Like I say, about like Scottville Crown Band is now probably and they made the rounds and represented Grand Haven. And we've always been in the Presbyterian Church on the corner of Franklin and 5<sup>th</sup>, joined there in 1928, I think it was when Reverend DeCrocker was the minister.

I: Can I ask you if your mother ever told you any stories about Grand Haven or anything that you can remember?

R: Just that it was possible that she, when Grand Haven was across the river they had the Grand Trunk station on the Dewey Hill side of the river and they used to go across, I don't know really too much about it. I don't remember too much about it, except that they did have the tracks over there at one time before the Dewey Hill kind of shoved them out. The sand shifted and shoved them into the river more or less, so they had to move over to this side of the river. But oh get back to my uncle again. This is a funny one, 'cause his sister, Isabelle Thompson was my aunt and she was the librarian for the city and the schools in her day and she was the organist for our church. She played the organ and it was a pipe, air organ that my uncle had to pump the air so she could play the organ for

them. And the story is that he fell asleep one Sunday morning and forgot to pump the air and there was no music left because he was derelict in his duty there. But that's how it went in the old days when they had the old church on the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Franklin.

I: Is that the first church?

R: First Presbyterian, uh-huh.

I: Okay. Could I ask you, what is your heritage? Where did your

R: They came from Friesland the Bakers came from Friesland which is a little section of Holland, the Netherlands, which is just northeast of Holland, towards Denmark. And my mother's sides all came from Edinburgh, Scotland, so, half Scotch and half Dutch.

I: Quite a mix.

R: Quite a mix. My brother was born in 1920, two years later and that's a story in itself. I came out on July 1<sup>st</sup> which was my Grandfather Adam's birthday. So he was all set to have me named, Adams after him, but my mother chose to name me after my dad, John Douglas Baker. My grandfather was really

I: What's the story on your brother's birth?

R: So two years later, July 1<sup>st</sup>, the same day 1920, out comes my brother with our birthdays are the same and that gave her the chance to name him Charles Adams after my grandfather.

I: Oh I see. I thought your brother was born before you.

R: No, two years later and all the same dates, so when we were all teenagers, he used to put on the biggest birthday party. He lived in Chicago and we had birthday parties that just wouldn't quit. He thought that was really something.

I: That you were both born

R: Yeah, on his birthday, yeah. So we had some big ones there and my brother, of course, he went on to Harvard University and he was in the same class Lennie Bernstein and those guys and went to, after the Navy went to William Morris and ran that where the Abe Lastfogel in New York City and he still lives there. And they handled everybody from Elvis Presley to Loretta Young and you'd go in the office there and here they are all sitting and waiting for parts and he was the one that was getting the jobs for them. So he is pretty well known in New York. He retired from William Morris and then went with McMillan and Company, the book company for about five or six years.

I: What does William

R: William Morris is the biggest entertainment, well they book all of the big Broadway names, who is the one that is in Murder She Wrote right now?

I: Angela Lansbury.

R: He is very close to Angela. She is over in, just got a letter right here somewhere, she's over in Spain right now and she is making a new movie and he is in with all those people, lives in a penthouse on the corner of 165<sup>th</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup> in New York City, so a lot of fun to visit him all the time. We are going out next month to see what's going on in the big city of New York.

I: Okay.

R: Let's see, I did the Jackie Band thing. I think one of my recollections as a kid is of having fun was going across to Chicago on the Alabama that used to come in here every night from Muskegon. And then we'd book passage and you'd sail across and come in to Chicago the next day where my grandfather and my aunt lived and go see the ballgames, just the old ballgames around then just like they are now.

I: Do you know about how much it cost you?

R: No.

I: No.

R: You'd have to check the Chamber of Commerce or somebody. I was just a 12 year old then or something, you know.

I: I see and you would

R: Go out and see Chicago clubs or the White Sox play. Yeah, and then come back to Grand Haven and I remember seeing that Chicago skyline disappearing when you'd come back across the lake. A beautiful sight you know, the Wrigley building and the Chicago Tribune, they'd just disappear from sight finally.

I: About how long would that take you?

R: The ride from Chicago to Grand Haven, oh man, I don't know, six, seven hours maybe. You get on at 10:00 at night and maybe get here and 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning, about like as I remember, yeah.

I: Okay.

R: Then let's see, what's next.

I: Well let's start your earliest, earliest memories of Grand Haven.

R: I suppose going to school at Central School. Like I told you my dad died when he was real young and so my mother had to go and teach school and we lived with my aunt on 5<sup>th</sup> Street and she was the librarian in the school. And my mother was the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Central School. And a lot of people in town remember her, because they all had her.

I: Was the aunt the identical sister?

R: No, no this is an aunt who was Uncle Andrew's sister.

I: Okay, alright.

R: Not the identical twin, no.

I: What happened to the identical twin?

R: She married an engineer from Muskegon named Lamar Dunlevy and they lived on Spring Lake at Level Park all the time. So, we were pretty close to them.

I: Okay, alright, so anyway back to school.

R: Back to school, Central School, same place it is now. Best grade school in the world I would say and still is. Those kids get about the best education you can get and it is close, you walk to school, you walk home and where can you get a better deal. And then you are in the Grand Haven school system on the way up you go to Griffin now. We used to go to the high school which was on 7<sup>th</sup> Street, you know, the one they tore down. And then that was from '31 to '35 is when I was in high school.

I: What do you remember about the elementary school?

R: Oh, I guess starting in junior high band in 7<sup>th</sup> grade is where we started to learn how to play. Music has always been a big part of my thing, you know, for a hobby. And it still is. We started in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and Marshall Richards was our music director. He was a biology teacher, but he had to do the band. Everybody had to do something on the side in those days, so he took the music end of it. He was our band director. Didn't know much more about it than anyone else, but we had a pretty good band. And then over into high school we went to the state contest just like they do now. I don't remember every-- and the Tulip Festival down in Holland and never made any big showing, but it was typical high school band.

I: What would you do for recreation in the wintertime?

R: Wintertime was skiing in Duncan Woods. Basketball was the big thing. I was on the last championship basketball team that Grand Haven produced. Lee Rising and I were the forwards on the team. And we won the Class B Championship in 1935 and we'll never forget it.

I: That's the last one, huh.

R: That's the last one they ever won. And we were behind Detroit St. Theresa was our opponent, we were behind the whole game until the very last 10 seconds and Les Wonk was the captain and Coach Coors was our coach and Les had a shot from the middle of the floor and he had already missed six of them, so the story is that Coach Coors figured his percentages were pretty good, let him shoot and he made it. The first time we were ever ahead was at the end of the game.

I: I bet that was really

R: Oh what a thrill. And those guys walk off the floor crying, of course, and we are just happy. That's the last time Grand Haven ever won the state championship.

I: Well now they are A class though.

R: Yeah, that's why it is tougher.

I: So that makes it a lot harder.

R: Yeah, we were class B. And then in the spring we won the, our team got to the Les Ronk and we won the state doubles championship in tennis. Didn't know much about playing, but nobody else did either. We were taught by a chemistry teacher named, Jack Toma. He had to take the tennis chores because, like I say the teachers all had to do something extra. He was the tennis coach, so we were good enough to win that thing. So we had quite a high school life.

I: Oh I guess so, that's pretty neat. All the teachers had to do their little extra

R: Yeah, one of them is still living, if you can get a hold of Kenny King, he lives in Grand Haven somewhere. And he was the teacher that did the, mechanical drawing teacher, but his sideline was the golf coach. Oh, he's got some funny stories, he figured if the golf team came over the 9<sup>th</sup> hole at the Spring Lake Country Club which is now the 18<sup>th</sup>, if they came up that hill and nobody was throwing any clubs around that they probably won the match, you see. Oh he is still living, still in good shape. I see him in church quite a bit. And his wife is still living, Laurie, she knows a lot about it too, in the old days.

I: What would you do in the summertime then?

R: Camp. Oh that was fun in those days. We went to Camp Manitou-Lin on Barlow Lake. That was the YMCA camp out of Grand Rapids.

I: How long?

R: All summer, six to eight weeks. Bob Augustein was the leader. And Doug Blocksman was the tennis coach and you learned a lot of tennis down there too. And then we went to Camp Hayo-Went-Ha on Torch Lake, that was another Y camp and that was heavy for tennis in those days too.

I: Who did you go with? A lot of other

R: Miller Sherwood was one of the big ones that we went with up there. Miller and I were real buddies in the old days. He'll never forget when I came in to high school, he had first chair in the clarinet section and I beat him out of first chair and he was about two years ahead of me. Oh he was mad then. Yeah, that was really great fun and then afterwards, later I went to Interlochen up near Traverse City, the national music camp and I had third chair in that clarinet section. In 1933 they bought us all new uniforms and we went down to Chicago, boy if this wasn't a big deal, 'cause let's see. I graduated '35, so '33 I was about a sophomore in high school and we went to the Chicago World's Fair. And we marched and we got to see Sally Rand do her fan dance and I'm telling you, this was big stuff for high school sophomores. And then back up to Interlochen to finish the summer. And, of course, that's where you really learn how to play. You have the horn in your mouth for eight hours a day, you know, and that's how you learn, that's when you are really playing. I'll never forget Joe Mattie came up to me. Mattie was one of the owners and T.P. Gettings was the other one. Joe Mattie got me on the dance band rehearsal and he sat down and he played my same horn, sax, saxophone. He said, I think your reeds are too soft he says, why don't you try a harder reed. I said no, these reeds are just right for me, Mr. Mattie. [laughs] I'm going to stick with my number 3's or whatever I had on there. But that was a real kick that summer and that was just before we went to University of Michigan because Joe Revelli, is it Joe Revelli, hi Russ, come on in. That was our big deal. Then, oh and then what was Revelli's first name? W. D., William Revelli, Bill Revelli. He was the high school band director from Hobart High School. He was coming to the University of Michigan. He knew nothing about what his players were for the University of Michigan band. So he recruited oh maybe a dozen of us at Interlochen and gave us scholarships to go to Ann Arbor. And so that's how I got there for one year on a musical scholarship to play on the University of Michigan band. While I was there my mother and one of her bridge parties or somewhere learned about this beautiful college called, Antioch where you could work your way through. Okay, that's a lot better than paying money to Ann Arbor, so I get the transfer down to Antioch College where I put in five long years and got my degree from there. And you know all about that, if you are going there, it is the darnedest college you ever went to in your life. I met my wife there, don't forget that, she transferred from Mt. Holyoke. Okay, now what are we on? She is going to Antioch.

Russ: No kidding.

R: Yeah. If that isn't a coincidence.

Russ: That is.

I: Okay, we have social events here and you have written down Highland Gardens and Fruitport Pavilion.

R: You are just at the right time.

I: Was this in high school?

R: Highland Gardens was after the war for me. We all came back after World War II. He went to work for Addison Baltz which is now Steketees, he had to try to do the carpet business and sell and all that stuff, do the windows. I had to go to the lumberyard and see if I could make ends meet down at D. Baker and Son. But then on the side, social life, Highland Gardens, that was the greatest place that Grand Haven ever had. It was a huge two-story structure where the condominiums are now and on the main floor was roller skating and on the second floor was this dance hall and they had these big bands coming in and we were the house band there.

I: Was this after you were married, then?

R: After we were married, we already had the first kid. If you didn't think we didn't work, eight hours, at least eight hours a day in the lumberyard, come home, wash up, they picked you up about 8:00 at night, you got out to Highland Gardens, you play from 9:00 to 12:00, three hours playing, \$10 you got for that. Next morning, 8:00 lumberyard, 5:00 out, wash up, out to Highland Gardens. Six nights a week we did this.

I: So you were playing in the band. You had a

R: Charlie Byrd's band and it was a big 17 piecer that when we got going real good, they'd have to stop on several, I remember St. Louis Blues March we'd have to stop playing because the building was shaking so bad, they might have a thousand people up there, you know. And we'd have to stop playing for fear the building would fall down.

Russ: Well we had ...the fact is it was condemned. And that's how I happened to get it.

R: That's how you got it, yeah.

Russ: That's how I got it. The person that had it wasn't able or in a position to build a new building, so I was able to get it. I went down to the bank and they gave me \$10,000, if you can believe that, that's what I paid for the whole thing, \$10,000 and my dad had to sign the note, but any rate I got it and then the bank went along with me to build a new Highland Gardens. And that, you see the building, ....Highland Gardens was between where the condos are now and Meyer's

R: And the restaurant.

Russ: The Belmont Restaurant. That was in the lot between. That's where the parking lot is right now. So, at any rate we put up the new building which was called, Highland Gardens, the same thing, and then we had the big name bands coming in at that point.

R: And every Sunday afternoon they'd have a concert on the porch. They'd have Petro Brechio was one with his Heartbeats of Rhythm and D Peterson from Iowa was another one and all these bands would come through. They got really good bands and here everybody would sit out on the sand right about where the parking lot is now for the restaurant and hear this big band would be playing on the porch. And that was your Sunday afternoon entertainment.

Russ: We've got about 200 yards of beach out there in those days.

R: Yeah, yeah, it was a big beach. Yeah.

Russ: So then dancing went to pot really. The big band era came to a close. That's when I converted the Highland Gardens into a hotel which is called the Bil-Mar Hotel, which is taken from my two kids, Bill and Margo. It was always Highland Gardens, but then I converted it to the Bil-Mar Hotel and did a lot of the work myself. And then as Meyer's got it, he lifted the roof out of that structure and made it into condominiums. And that's how that building got there.

I: Okay.

R: You've been to the Bil-Mar, haven't you? You know what we are talking about?

I: Oh yeah, I certainly know the area, I grew up here.

R: That's going like crazy now.

I: Oh yeah, it sure is.

R: Yeah, it's beautiful, yeah.

I: Okay and I filmed the Fruitport Pavilion you had a part in playing there too.

R: Oh boy, that's another story, that's with old Frank Lockage, the old humpbacked violinist and that we were the house band and

I: Where was he from?

R: Frank Lockage was from Muskegon and he was a little humpback violinist and he couldn't play much, but he had a pretty good band and that's where Bob Warnaar came into the picture. The guy that plays down on the waterfront now on Wednesday night is Bob Warnaar. And he was really the musician that wrote all of the music for Frank Lockage, who got all the credit for it and made all the money. And poor old Bob, he was

the trumpeter and he wrote the arrangements and every Saturday night out that at the Fruitport Pavilion we were the house band and the big name bands, Duke Ellington, Louie Armstrong, Guy Lombardo, they all came through there, everyone of them. Stan Kenton, Woody Herman, you name em, of course, you don't even know em. But, they were big in those days. And that place was just terrific, they'd have boats lined up 10 deep, the boats would all go down to the lake and they'd lash the boats together and you'd raft them together and then you'd walk into this Fruitport to hear the name band play.

I: This is around the same time that you were playing at the

R: Ah a little later, wasn't it? I think it was a little bit later. Oh about the same time, yeah, not much, not much. And then finally Fruitport burned down. A big fire and fortunately nobody was, it was on a night when nobody was there.

Russ: That's where the park is in Fruitport.

R: Fruitport Park, you know. You can still see the piles that the pavilion was built on. They are still standing out there. And there is a lot of pictures of the pavilion, I'm sure you got some

Russ: Oh my gosh yes.

R: Down at the museum there. That was the place to go.

I: What was it like? What was the pavilion like in the

R: Oh god, it was fun.

Russ: Beautiful old building.

R: Beautiful acoustics.

I: Was it open to the outside?

R: Oh yeah.

I: It was really a pavilion or was it a building?

R: It was a, oh it was a real building.

Russ: Huge building.

R: Huge building. Yeah.

I: Okay.

Russ: But they had big windows that would open up so forth.

R: In fact, we played for so many people sometimes that when you went to work, you'd look for one of those windows and think in case the building catches on fire tonight, which one do I jump out of to get into the lake, see. It was right on the water.

I: How much did it cost to get in?

R: Oh probably a dollar.

Russ: Back in those days it was

R: Fifty cents.

Russ: Forty cents tax, \$1.20.

R: A dollar twenty, he knows for sure. Okay.

Russ: And the name bands would come through and the deal was that you would give them a guarantee whether it rained or shined, you gave them a guarantee and then it was 60/40, they'd take 60 percent and they'd give you 40 percent. Out of your 40 percent, you had to pay for all the advertising and publicity, etc., etc. And they would walk in for a one-nighter and the band man would bring all the stuff and set up, then off they'd go on the bus to the next job. Then if it happened to rain, you were out of luck, because you gave them the \$1200 or \$1500 or \$2000 that you had to give them and you guaranteed them whether you made it or not. It was a very dangerous game.

R: However, sometimes when you had a big crowd you'd make out pretty good. It was a real gamble.

Russ: Yeah, sometimes you won.

R: And the music, absolutely sensational, these were the best players in the world you know, that were in these bands going around.

Russ: See, I was in competition with Frank Lockage, because I had the Highland Gardens out here and he had the Fruitport Pavilion. So I had the same thing coming through. I might have Tommy Dorsey one night

R: Gene Krupa.

Russ: Or Gene Krupa for a week and so forth and then Frank would have somebody. We never knew which one had which one. So sometimes we were competing with each other pretty good.

I: Okay.

Russ: Great old days.

R: Great old days is right. I even played at some of them. Frank used to try to make money on one called, Park Plan and that's where you paid 10 cents a dance and if the floor was packed we'd play one tune and you'd dance and then you'd quit and then everybody would, another dime, another ticket, 10 cents for every dance and if you had a big crowd you made some pretty good money that way.

I: Oh my gosh, yeah.

R: They called that Park Plan.

Russ: Used to call it Park Plan or we used to call it a dime a dance.

R: Yeah.

Russ: You dime a dance you can get a role of tickets. And each dance cost you ...

R: Oh yeah.

Russ: In the '30's and '40's.

R: Yeah that was big.

Russ: ... '50's.

R: Oh it died out before the '50's. The end of the '40's was about the end of it. Yeah.

Russ: And your rock-n-roll

R: Boy we used to have some, you ask anybody about the boats going down to Fruitport at night and coming back in the fog at 1:00 in the morning, you wonder how you ever got back, you know. You didn't even know where you were going on Spring Lake. And half of them were smashed, yeah.

Russ: We all seemed to get home, nobody ever got killed.

R: No, I don't think they

Russ: But they took it awful easy.

R: Yeah, right.

I: Well it sounds like you were really busy then. You were working or playing or dancing or one or the other.

R: Oh man. Poor old wives trying to bring up the families, oh boy, [laughter] that was something else.

Russ: Oh then Doug lives right across from what we used to call the barn, which you'll probably know all about the barn sooner or later.

I: Oh yeah.

Russ: And Joe Davis, the Davis' had the barn and it burned down and that is now the park down on

R: North of the Dance Kro where all those little buildings are.

Russ: That whole thing, from Dance Kro all the way over to the other buildings.

R: That was the barn.

Russ: The barn, plus the

R: Mel's Fisher, I told her about that.

Russ: It was something like 1,500 feet and so I bought that from Joe Davis for \$40,000. He couldn't do anything with it, he had no money and he couldn't do anything. So we put an outside roller rink, probably the largest in the world down there. So, I would run out to Highland Gardens, open up the dance, no I'd go down at the barn and I'd open that up at 6:30 or 7:00, then I'd run out to Highland Gardens and open that up at 9:00, then I'd come back and run the skating rink until 11:00, then I'd go out to the Highland Gardens and close that at 1:00. And then from 1:00 we'd have a jam session all night and the next morning I was up fixing up, fixing skates. And then we'd have every afternoon we'd have matinees for the little tots.

R: But you didn't have to work in the dry good store on Washington Street anymore. You got out of that, didn't you?

Russ: Got out of that. I did that for a year or two years.

R: Your dad didn't make you do that in the morning.

Russ: No then my dad came to me and said, do you want the store, because he had taught me that since I was a kid. And I said, no, absolutely where I couldn't stand being enclosed in that store. And he said, well I have a good man, Paul Oltman from Hurpolshimer's in Grand Rapids that would like to buy it. And he said, I want to give you

first chance to buy it. And I said, forget my first chance, you sell it, you worked for it, you sell it to whomever you wish. So that's what happened there.

R: How did Steketees get in there then?

Russ: Well then Paul Oltman had cancer, a young man, and he died. He was doing an excellent job and he died. And then Steketees in Grand Rapids took it over and that's why it is Steketees today.

R: But you still own it?

Russ: Oh yeah, but I'm just signing another couple years contract with them, because that's all taken care of now. But that's those things.

I: You'd get the high school crowd at the roller rink and you'd get their parents at the Highland Garden.

R: That's about, that's how it works.

I: But you were the big name entertainment man around.

R: Remember when Gene Krupa came and he lived up in Silly's Castle, you know Silly's Castle, on the top of High Mile Hill. Well, Gene Krupa was quartered up there and he had the cutest gal singer you ever saw, Dolores Hawkins. High school gal out of New Jersey, somewhere and now that we moved down to St. Pete, here is old Dolores Hawkins, she just died last year. And we saw her at the end of her life and it just brings back tears to your eyes almost when you think of how that used to be.

I: In Florida do you mean?

R: Yeah. Yeah, she was singing with some bands down there, but she couldn't handle it, she was getting too old and too far gone, couldn't make it. But boy when they were here, was that fun, oh man.

Russ: And then I had a band, well he was a Grand Rapids boy but he led the band at Duke, Duke University and I went down to interview Sam and audition and boy this was just the band I want, that was a great band.

R: Sam Fletcher and the Duke University Ambassadors. They played a whole summer out there in Highland Gardens, two summers. Good band.

Russ: And that was something. We used to jam them in there, 2,000 a night and there was no room for 2,000.

I: Where did you get all these people?

Russ: Local.

I: Really.

R: Sure, same place you get them for now. They come from Grand Rapids and Holland.

Russ: Two thousand of them and they would stand there and stand right next to the bandstand and watch the band. There wasn't a heck of a lot of dancing going on. They'd just crowd that thing.

R: Oh yeah, this band, did you ever hear of Les Brown, the guy that backs up Bob Hope? Well, Les Brown's band was from Duke University and Duke Blue Devils and Sam Fletcher was supposed to follow Les Brown

Russ: No, Johnny Long came in the middle.

R: Okay, but the next band down was Sam Fletcher and they could have made it big, you know, all over the world, but they weren't willing to do the one-night traveling. You had it all set up for him and he wouldn't take it down at the Chase Hotel in St. Louis.

Russ: .... all down in Chicago and I had the whole band all set and these fellows, one by one, would back out because they didn't want to have that tough life, that's a tough life. Some of them wanted to go on and be doctors, they were all university boys, they wanted to be doctors or lawyers or whatever and so the band disintegrated.

R: But they were good. They were as good as any one of the big bands. Yeah.

Russ: [inaudible]

R: Yeah, we've had our share of it. And it has been lots of fun.

I: Some of the people that I've talked to, older than you guys, they tell me

Russ: There isn't anybody left over

R: Yes there is, I told her to go see ah, Lucille Gasko and get the lowdown on Akeley Hall there.

I: They all tell me, well we didn't dance in those days because in those days dancing wasn't proper. I think that was more in the '30's

R: They did the Charleston and

Russ: Oh no the 30's we were all dancing.

R: The Charleston and the Shag and the Snuggle music, boy

I: Did any of your parents ever make any comments about

R: Not us.

Russ: Oh no.

R: We could do anything we wanted to on the dance floor.

Russ: Oh there was no such thing as that.

R: No.

I: Mostly it comes from a lot of the Dutch.

Russ: They would send us to dance classes.

R: Yeah, oh that's another one. Marg Watson and her dance class at the old women's club right where the post office is now.

I: Is that what they really called it, the Old Women's Club?

R: No, just, it was just called the Women's Club. And that was located right where the post office is now. And every Tuesday night or whatever it was, we'd go down there and the girls would dress up, everybody dressed up and we'd take ballroom dancing from Marg Watson, who just passed away, her name was Marg Jurline and she lived up at Arbutus Banks, should of got her before she died, 'cause she knows just as much and more than we do. And she was the dance instructor for everybody in town.

Russ: I took tap dancing from her.

I: And this is in elementary and high school?

R: Yeah.

Russ: Junior high

R: Junior high and high school. We'd go down and learn how to dance properly and we'd have to dress up and it was oh on the high plain, you know.

Russ: ... and we had to

R: Ties and everything for this, you bet.

I: So your parents never said, never made any comments about ...

R: No, we were supposed to do it. Go down there and learn how to dance.

I: That's a different

Russ: It's called social grace.

R: They had to pay money for us to take dancing lessons from Marg Watson.

I: Oh I hear different stories from different people then.

R: Oh yeah.

I: I think some of the people were like more the Christian Reformed or something.

R: Oh yeah, they held them down in that

Russ: They couldn't do anything, including reading the Sunday funny papers. They couldn't read a paper on Sunday.

R: They went to church twice.

Russ: In morning and then they went ...or whatever in the afternoon and then they went to church again at night. And so they went to church really from about 10:00 in the morning, pretty much, til 9:00 at night.

I: Well what did they do for school? Did they have their own school?

R: Well they had the Christian school. A lot of them didn't even go to Grand Haven High School, they went to the Christian school.

I: Oh they went out to Holland.

R: Yeah. Just like Holland had a, Holland Christian and Muskegon Christian. Sure.

I: Oh okay.

Russ: Sure, the Dutch had their own schools all the way through.

I: I see.

Russ: A lot of them went to Grand Haven

R: How did they get to high school? Because we had Louie and Chuck Rycenga, you know, in our

Russ: They didn't have the high school.

R: They had to go to Grand Haven High School, yeah. Yeah, that's right.

Russ: They just went through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

I: Were they good at mingling after that or did they always kind of keep to their own?

Russ: Oh sure.

R: Sure. Sure.

Russ: Sure, I went to Cornell and I took a sociology class and come to find out, Zeeland, Michigan had the highest Dutch community in the United States and also the highest illegitimate birth rate. I'll never forget that one. That was a time when getting married out of wedlock or having babies out of wedlock was a no-no, really a no-no. But you notice you see they didn't have anything else to do. There was no television, no television and they wouldn't let them hear the radio and they'd go, didn't read the funny papers, couldn't read any paper on Sunday.

I: I guess that kind of sealed the lesson there.

Russ: That's what happened, you know, they ....

R: Remember when you went to Cornell, I was going to ask you about this guy that's running, HUD, Sam Pierce, is that out of your class?

Russ: My buddy.

R: That's what I thought.

Russ: That's the guy I played football and basketball with.

R: Yeah, he's the one that's

Russ: He was all-American football player, that's the guy I told you had a 97 average in chemical engineering. Then he went as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant into the Service, because he at ROTC, came out a chicken Colonel, came back to Cornell, went to law school, was president of the law school and then he became assistant states attorney of New York state and then from there on, then he was appointed by Reagan

R: Now he is stuck with this HUD thing.

Russ: HUD and now all this stuff comes out, so he really did a job on that HUD.

R: I guess so.

Russ: Yeah, and that's my friend, Sam Pierson.

I: Who is HUD?

Russ: He is a colored fellow and he

R: He was in Cornell with Russ.

Russ: He was at Cornell with me. And he is the fellow that I took, I took him to my fraternity house, so that was a no-no back in those days.

R: 'Cause he's black.

Russ: 'Cause he's black and I got tubbed like you can't believe. I mean I almost lost my life. See, 'cause that's what they do, fraternities, they tub you, take this great big thing, it was about eight feet long and three feet wide and the freshmen would have to put the ice in the thing, you know, water and ice and then you'd run up these stairs naked, of course, take the cloths off and every time you got to a landing they'd smack you with a paddle and then you went through these doors where they had this big bathroom upstairs on the third floor and these big guys would grab you and boom down you'd go and they'd hit you in your gut just before you went down. You'd .... ice cubes dropped up there, and then they'd ... one, two, three. So the first time you are tubbed it would be, it was six seconds, four seconds, four seconds. Then it went up to oh something like eight seconds, six seconds, six seconds. And each time they'd pull you out, smack you in the gut and down you'd go. They'd knock the air out of you. So, that's what I got, but this was about my 4<sup>th</sup> time of getting tubbed because I was kind of a maverick myself and the 4<sup>th</sup> time of getting tubbed, boy this time it went up to 20 seconds, 10, 10 I was out cold. And they were worried about that. They revived me and put me in the hot shower and they got out of that one, but that was ....

I: You are kidding?

Russ: No.

R: That's what college and Cornell University was like in those days.

Russ: Yeah.

R: It isn't like that anymore.

I: And you still like those people, huh?

R: Well, Antioch they didn't have too much control, because you were off campus for 10 weeks. They can't put them rules on you when you are in New York City.

Russ: Well, I don't think they had ....

R: No. No, they didn't have that, uh-huh.

Russ: No, no.

R: And I had a job off there in

Russ: It is a socialistic school.

R: Yeah, well it wasn't that bad.

Russ: Now we call them socialistic, but it was communist back in those days.

I: Oh really.

Russ: Well it really wasn't, but it got that reputation.

I: How did you guys meet each other? Did you go to the same

Russ: We lived one block apart.

I: So you were always friends?

Russ: And his brother was

R: Sure.

Russ: my real buddy. Well,

R: I'll give you the article on that one before you leave.

Russ: Him and I were great

R: Tooly(?) just wrote it up in the paper, you might probably missed it.

Russ: He was just one class ahead of me. Doug was four years older, Charlie was two years older.

R: And his brother, Stan, was in our class.

Russ: And my brother, Stan, was in Doug's class.

R: I'll show you a good picture of him. I just, Cap got all the old annuals out in case they want them down there and his picture for declamation .....he was in one of them there.

Russ: Well, so was I.

R: Yeah.

Russ: I wasn't in declamation there, but I was present.

R: And he is in hot water on that now. He is the head of HUD, don't you read that, in the paper, all the scandal that's going on with this

I: I've been gone for quite a few months in Australia, I didn't get much

R: Oh well boy they are having a heck of a time. Gee.

I: Okay.

R: Where were you in Australia?

I: Oh I was in

R: Sidney, Melbourne?

I: No, Queensland, near Cairns.

R: C-a-i-r-n-s.

I: Yes, it is pronounced Cairns.

R: Our ship stop there. I was all through there in the Navy, starting in Perth, Australia.

I: Oh you went to Perth.

R: That's where I joined the ship. And then I went to Melbourne, Sidney, Brisbane first, then Cairns and Darwin and then up into New Guinea.

I: Oh my gosh.

R: That was my Navy service with a submarine tender, AS 20, U.S.S. Otis.

I: How long were you

R: Four years, '42 to '46.

I: Okay.

R: I never saw my oldest daughter til she was 2 ½ years old.

I: Wow.

R: Yeah. Boy I'll never forget coming in California, they were out at Fort Ord and come walking in there and my wife, of course, gives me a big kiss and she looks at me like who is this guy, you know. [laughs]

Russ: Well, I had the same thing. I came home, I was in '42 – '46, and I came home and I got this kid that he runs up and jumps in my arms and he says, hi daddy. He was just one-year old.

R: You were in the

Russ: I was in the Army.

R: Over in Germany, he was over in Germany in the Army.

Russ: Over in Europe and Doug was out in

R: I was with the Navy in the Pacific.

I: What was that like coming home to your wife?

R: Oh god it was something. It was wonderful.

Russ: ... back down ...

R: But we were kind of heroes, 'cause we won the war, you know. It wasn't like Vietnam. This was a war that we were the winners.

Russ: Oh yeah, we were the winners.

R: Boy you came home and you were practically a hero.

I: And none of that controversy either. What was it like, I mean did you feel like you didn't know your wife that much or did you write a lot or how did that

R: Oh they wrote and she sent a telegram that you have a beautiful daughter and all that stuff.

Russ: Gees, Doug, I didn't even know I had one for a month. I was so far out there that the Red Cross never even found me for a month or month and a half. I never even knew I had one.

R: Oh my gosh.

I: Oh really, you didn't even know she was pregnant.

Russ: Well I knew she was pregnant and was going to have one.

I: Oh okay.

R: But you didn't know if it was twins or what you got.

Russ: Well, I didn't know anything. I was supposed to be there, but nobody ... and usually they'll find you wherever you are and let you know. But it took them about six weeks to let me know.

I: Did you worry a lot or did you too busy to worry or

Russ: ..you know when the nine months is up. I mean, you really know that and hell nine months is up and there goes another month, and I don't hear anything.

R: You had a few other, he's out in the trenches in Germany, he was really doing some fighting. He wasn't on a nice little Navy ship like I was.

Russ: It's just a different story.

R: Yeah.

I: It is all war.

R: Two different routes there that we took. And you'll read in this article after the war where poor Russ, he's looking for investors in Grand Haven that go down to Florida, nice new hotel going up in Treasure Island off of St. Petersburg. I was the only guy that was dumb enough to get \$10,000 together and put it in to this hotel, see.

Russ: Yeah, he was the only one that I had all these buddies up here and I mean some of them was real good bucks, all Dougie had to go down to the bank and borrow the money to give to me. So the banker down here was .... Well, I ...Doug not to do something like that, that's a loser, that probably won't even open. Well it is a big place now.

I: Oh really.

R: Oh you come down there, you'll see a dandy.

Russ: ... and two swimming pools, 550 feet of beach.

R: Best hotel on Treasure Island.

Russ: Yeah.

I: Well I'll remember that.

R: Oh sure if you get.

I: 11:30.

Russ: Well if we are going to pick up Doug by 11:00, but it is only 10:15.

R: Yeah, we can go some more. What's next or what do you want next out of

I: Well, what happened directly after the war then you got these jobs and then you started in your band era, what happened when the band kind of died out. Then what did you do? Your kids were probably getting on to about high school age then?

R: Yeah, that's when Spring Lake, my daughter, she went to Grand Haven High School. They were still transferring them and that's when the big to-do came whether Spring Lake was going to go on their own or whether they were going to mesh with Grand Haven and they made the big mistake of going on their own. So, all the rest of my kids graduated from Spring Lake.

I: I see.

R: But Rachel went to Grand Haven.

I: You had moved by then, then.

R: Out to the, yeah, from Grand Haven out to Arbutus Banks is where I moved to. Well, when did you go down to Florida?

Russ: Well, I had my two kids went to school here in Grand Haven for a while. Bill was two years older than Margo, my daughter.

R: But he graduated from Admiral Ferogat, so you had to go down there before?

Russ: Bill was just in junior high and Margo was just in grade school.

R: So where did she graduate from?

Russ: She ... in 1950,

R: She went to one of the high schools in Florida.

Russ: Yeah, we went down there in 1957. And so I've been gone for a long time.

R: Uh-huh. But he comes back every summer.

Russ: Then my dad died in '59 and that's when we started the hotel down there.

I: Oh okay.

Russ: And the last time I was running the hotel out here. And then my wife would come and run this hotel the first couple of years and then, summers, and then I stayed down there operating that one. And the kids would come up, I was down there alone, kids would come up and run this for two, for about two years until I sold it to Meyer's. And then, of course, we all went down here.

R: That's Howard Meyer's. The guy that is the alderman for the city. He is on the city council. That's his son, but he owns it now.

Russ: He owns it now.

I: Okay. And what was, how did Grand Haven change or didn't it change that much or

R: Oh yeah it really did. Yeah, it has changed a lot. It has got a lot more

Russ: In those 30 years it has changed remarkably and I would say the biggest factor in the change would be the Loutit Foundation which Paul Johnson was the head and, for instance, all that old riverfront is all because of the Loutit Foundation, which ...

R: You got to know about that.

I: Oh yeah, I know about that.

Russ: Well that caused a lot of it, for instance, all your buildings, a lot of your buildings up here, for instance, community center and so forth, that was caused pretty much by

R: Money from the Loutit Foundation. Boy that was a big thing.

Russ: So it did change a lot.

R: Yeah.

Russ: My god, in that old piano factory down there, look what's happened to that. Well the waterfront, the riverfront really shows the most remarkable change.

R: Yeah.

Russ: And Spring Lake has changed a lot. That marina over there and

R: Oh yeah. And the duck farm going commercial, going all the residential over there, gees, Prospect Point.

Russ: I mean there is a lot of changes.

I: There used to be a duck farm over there?

R: John Prowsic and his duck farm, I will never forget it.

Russ: Ducks all over his place.

R: I think the guy still owes me \$500 for lumber, I never could collect it. Oh boy he was a character. Ducks all over Spring Lake.

I: Why would he have a duck farm.

Russ: To sell them.

R: To sell ducks, he was really into the business, big business.

I: When was this, what

R: You know where all the nice homes, what do they call that section.

Russ: ...Landing, just north

R: Veit's Landing, then comes, you know, where the yacht club is, Spring Lake Yacht Club? Just east of that is a great big bunch of beautiful homes, that was Prowsics' duck farm when we were growing up.

I: When did he do this?

R: Well I was in business, so it had to be after '46, probably around 1950 in there.

I: And he raised ducks and sold them to people for

R: Oh businesses, wholesale, yeah.

I: For eating?

R: Yup. Big duck farm.

I: Oh my gosh. Okay.

R: I don't know who would know the dope on that, but there was a bowling alley there and everything. It used to be a resort before he got it for the duck farm and I don't know how old you got to get people to remember that thing, but

Russ: Well, I don't know, but

R: I remember that bowling alley, 'cause we used to go out and try to collect from them and in the middle of winter he'd come out with out even a shirt on and his body would just be steaming, you know. He says, come on in, have some Schnapps, oh we'd have to go some Schnapps and then we'd put it to him. Could you spare, let's say he owes you \$1,000, could you spare \$100 or you know. Oh man oh man. He was some character, that guy.

I: And so they are changing it now or when

R: It is all built up. All those beautiful homes.

I: About when, 20 years ago, 10

R: Oh within the last 20, 30 years, yeah.

Russ: It was 19, somewhere around 1950, about 38, 35 years ago.

R: Yeah.

I: That's why we have all these ducks around here, huh.

R: Well, that's possible. There are still a bunch of ducks rolling around. Yeah, that's when, when was that that you opened up the high rise of the Bil-Mar?

Russ: Gees, I don't remember.

R: Cath was asking me what year that was. Oh we've had so darn much fun together in this Bil-Mar thing, gees. That's a story in itself. That is really a hair raiser. Yeah and then the

I: Well, it looks like you both enjoyed living in this area.

R: Oh yeah, we've had a heck of a time, we really have. And now that we are both retired, we both got something to do and that's the secret to live, you don't just retire and get a watch and lie down, you still keep playing golf and trying to play tennis and you keep interested. That's what keeps you going. We got to go over there and play 18 holes at Muskegon Country Club today. We are going to do it.

I: Oh it sounds awful to me. I don't like golf at all. No, because my mom always made me be her caddie when I was little. Yeah.

Russ: What's Vaughn's number, Doug?

R: 842-4832.

Russ: Alright.

I: Is there any other stories or anything that you remember?

R: Oh there's a million, but I haven't got time to tell you. I have to come back for another one or interview Russ some day before he goes back.

I: Okay. Would you like to have another interview sometime?

R: Sure. If I'm still here.

I: Okay.

R: I got to give you that story that tells you about the two of us.

Russ: How you asked is how we grew up together.

I: Okay.