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I: This is Jennifer Despres interviewing Harold Bretschneider July 28, 1989 for the Tri-Cities Historical Museum. Okay, would you like to, oh.

R: I'm Harold Bretschneider, born in 1920, January 7, graduated from Grand Haven High School in 1937. It was a long time ago.

I: Okay. Do you want to start with where you grew up?

R: Yeah, I was born in Grand Haven, and lived here all my life except for the time I spent in the service.

I: Did you live with your mother and father?

R: I lived with my mother and dad. Got married in 1946 after I got back from the service. You ask the questions.

I: What did your father do for a living?

R: He worked out of at Eagle Ottawa Leather Company.

I: And how long did he work there?

R: As far as I remember, all through my childhood years until he retired.

I: What did he do?

R: He was an embosser, [inaudible], he originally worked with patent leather which was a very touchy leather, and you have to have have sunshine to cure it, and in wintertime the tannery would have orders, but they wouldn't have any sunshine, so there was a lack of work, and in the summertime, they had the sunshine but no orders, and so it was sparse. Later on, he became an embosser, and he was real busy then.

I: What did an embosser do?

R: An embosser puts grain on the leather. The first top grain, of course, has the grain in it, but when they split the leather, the next split has to have a grain put on it if they want a grain on it.

I: Alright, and what did your mother do?

R: She was a housewife. She never worked outside the house.

I: Who had the authority over the children in your house?

R: I guess my mother did. I was the only one.

I: Oh, you were an only child?

R: Only child, yup, spoiled brat.

I: [Laughter] And were you really?

R: I don't know. I don't think so. Maybe.

I: Oh well. What was your house like? Where was your house located?

R: Well, in my childhood, it was on Griffin and Columbus, and that house is still there and it's been restored. It looks really nice now. Some of the other houses in that area have been torn down, and that looks nice. We moved from there in 1938 and for a few years from Griffin to Madison Street, and we were there several years, and then we bought a house on Washington Street. My grandparents were kind of needed some help, and their house wasn't big enough for us to move with them, and ours wasn't big enough for them to move with us, so they sold theirs and we sold ours and bought the house on Washington which incidentally had been Dr. Long's house when he was a doctor in Grand Haven many, many years ago.

I: Who was Dr. Long?

R: Well, he's gone. Actually its Bill Long's uncle, so

I: What type of doctor was he?

R: Well, I guess a general physician, practitioner, yeah. I know he drove a horse and buggy.

I: Oh really?

R: Yeah, that was way back.

I: And did he do house calls then?

R: I presume so. I don't know. That was before my time.

I: How long were your parents there before you or did you have any?

R: Well, my dad was born in Chicago and he came over when he was a young boy. I think he was around 10 or 12, something like that, and they built a home out on Lincoln which is still there, too. His father, my grandfather won this farm or the money, we don't know for sure in Chicago, and bought this farm out there, and they built a home on it, and it's still there, still standing, right off 144th.

I: Oh, really? Huh. Do you know the people who own it now?

R: No, I don't. I've never been in the house.

I: And how long did your father stay and farm then that?

R: Well, he was a young man. He went back to Chicago. I think they all moved, well, I know they all moved back to Chicago, and I guess they probably sold the farm, and I don't know too much about that side of the family because he was the youngest child, and his dad died in front, I never knew my grandfather. I never met my grandfather. He died when my dad was just a young fellow.

I: Alright, and how about your mother's parents?

R: They lived, they came from Germany, too, and they met on the boat coming over.

I: Oh, really?

R: Yeah.

I: Wow!

R: They lived in the city of Grand Haven. He worked for the railroad, Grand Trunk, I believe, and that was, I think he did that mostly and then they moved on a farm on Mercury Drive in about the '20s or early '20s, and later on, he got a job with one of the local factories and was a night watchman there for many years when they moved back into Grand Haven.

I: Okay. Where did you go to school?

R: Grand Haven. Graduated from Grand Haven High School. Class of '37.

I: And elementary school?

R: Yeah, started school in Grand Haven, went to Ferry School, went to Ferry School through 6th grade and then Junior High in the old Central School Building which was burned down, and High School was right there in that same square block, the Old Grand Haven High.

I: And you walked to school?

R: Yes.

I: Are there any experiences that you remember; was there a teacher you liked?

R: Oh, there were a lot of teachers I liked. Some I didn't like, but I shouldn't say I didn't like 'em, but they weren't the popular ones. I had a lot of nice teachers. Jack Toma was a Chemistry teacher and he was a very nice guy, and he even passed me, and I didn't ever think I'd ever do anything in Chemistry, but then I became a photographer and used chemistry quite a bit.

I: Is there any stories that you have about elementary school?

R: Elementary school? Well, one I remember, especially in 6th grade, we had a fellow name of Steve Carol, and he had infantile paralysis, I guess when he was a young fellow, real young, and he had a brace on his leg, and he was a little older than the rest of the class, and Miss Bolt, who just recently passed away now, I guess it was just last winter, she was a new teacher, and this was her first year in Grand Haven after college and he was in the front of the room, in his desk because he had long legs, and they could stick out without bothering anyone in front of him, and he did something she didn't like, and she come over with a ruler, wanted to slap his hand, and he just looked up at her, and shook his finger, "Now, now," he says, and he reached up and took the ruler away from her and she just cracked up. She laughed. [Laughter]

I: Uh.

R: It was funny. Oh, I'm sorry. There're a lot of stories, but I don't think of any in particular.

I: Did you have a fairly happy school?

R: Oh, yes.

I: What would you do to play in the wintertime?

R: Well, we had sleds and made forts and stuff like that, snowball fights.

I: Was there a lot of ice skating?

R: I never did ice skate. Well, see we had no rinks around, and we only lived a few blocks from Grand River, South Channel, but my mother would not allow me to go skating on that, so I never had ice skates.

I: And what did you do in the summer?

R: Oh, we played games, and baseball.

I: What kind of games did you play?

R: Well, cops and robbers and cowboys and soldier and stuff like that. What should we do today we'd ask, and well, let's do this, okay.

I: Well. We can move on to later on after your childhood, but is there anything about your childhood that you remember especially that you want to relate?

R: I don't know if you met him a couple weeks ago, he was here, but my friend from Washington, and we started first grade together, and kept in touch through the years, and we got to see them once in a while, and they got to see us, and we went through high school together. His name is Bob Hammerman.

I: He's in Washington?

R: He's in Washington, State of Washington. He was in the service, and retired, well, he was a college professor after he was in the service, and then, he was a geology professor.

I: When you were in high school, it was probably, towards the end of Depression?

R: Yes, right. It was 19, well it was '34 to '37, I graduated in 1937 so the '30s was the end of the Depression, the late '30s were, it was tough going back in those days. Actually, we lost our home on Griffin Street in I guess it was '37 or shortly after that because of the Tannery strike. The Tannery went on strike, and of course, income was cut off, and we did lose the home, and a lot of people lost homes back in those days, but it was mostly due to the Depression more than the strike, I think, so that's about that.

I: How did your family make it through the Depression?

R: Well, through a good hearted grocers who would charge, and you would pay him off you know, I mean, we weren't destitute, we weren't to the point, there was some work, and actually my dad went to work for another factory for a short time, and then finally got back to the tannery after a few years. He worked at Dake Corporation.

I: And you were just graduated from high school, probably when the war began?

R: Well, yeah, I graduated in '37, the war began

I: In Europe.

R: Yeah, Europe, we weren't into it until '41.

I: And you were in the service?

R: Yes, in 194, well I was 21 in January, '41, but the first draft was in the summer in '40, and anyone 21 years of age had to register. Well, I wasn't 21 until January so I didn't have to register, and then until the following August, I think, and then went into, and then registered, and I was classified 1B.

I: What is 1B?

R: Well, I had bad arches, so they said, “You can’t get in the service with those,” so I just figured I wouldn’t go in the service, and the Pearl Harbor happened, and we tried to enlist. Another buddy and I went to Grand Rapids, and tried to enlist, and they wouldn’t take him because he had asthma history, and they wouldn’t take me because, we were both 1B, asthma, and I had bad arches, so we didn’t get in. The guy said, “Oh, you’ll never get through basic training with those feet,” and to him they said something about his asthma, and “You’ll never know when you’re gonna have an attack, and blah, blah, blah,” so he didn’t get in either, and then after Pearl Harbor we tried to enlist. Well, that’s when we tried to enlist, and then after we couldn’t get in, why I took the civil service for State Police and passed that and I was waiting for, said, “You’ll be notified to go to State Police School,” and every day I’d come home from work, and I was working in Eagle Ottawa in the shipping department then, everyday I’d come home and we’d look for a letter, and it wasn’t there. Finally, I got a letter from Uncle Sam for reclassification. I was reclassified and went into the service for 30 days, and about a month after that the State Police Sargeant was able to make arrangements for me to go to State Police School.

I: Mm. So you missed?

R: I missed it by a few weeks, yeah, and he said, “Well, you can have, can get in after the service if you still want to,” and they moved around quite a bit in those days, so I decided not to go into then.

I: After the war?

R: After the war, yeah.

I: Okay. How did you feel when you were notified that you were in the Army?

R: Oh, it was alright. That was okay. I figured it would be. Arches didn’t bother me that much, and the funny part of it was they never bothered me either. I took a 25 mile hike and no problem, but the problem was one of the local shoe stores that was fitting me with too small a shoe.

I: Oh really?

R: Yes. When they gave me shoes in the Army, they said, “Well, these are size 11,” and I said, “Well, I been wearing a 10.” “Well, they measure 11. If they don’t work, bring ‘em back.”

I: What shoe store was this?

R: I wouldn’t mention the shoe store. It’s not in business any more. It’s long gone, but in fact, I think somebody else has bought it over since. [Inaudible]

I: So you learned one thing from the Army about your true shoe size?

R: Yeah, I got the right shoe size, right.

I: Did you go overseas?

R: Yes. I was, after basic training, I was at Fort Grant, Camp Grant in Illinois for basic which is medical, and then we went to Fitzsimmons. Well, I was still bugging them about getting in photography. I wanted to get in photography, and he said, "Well, see me after basic training, and we'll see what we can do. Remind me." I said, "Okay," and I reminded him and he said, "Well, the best I could do is get you into X-ray. How would that be?" I said, "That would be fine." So they sent me out to Denver, Fitzsimmons Hospital; General Hospital for X-ray training, but the X-ray school was all filled, so they put me into a medical training.

I: Wow.

R: I became a medical technician, and I was in there two months, so one month in the book learning and the other month, on the wards. Incidentally I got stuck on the psycho ward, and

I: The what ward?

R: The psychopathic ward, and one fellow was always griping, "How come we're on this ward? How come we're on this ward?" I said, "I don't know. Ask the Major." He did, and the major said, "You were the ten highest in your class so that's why we got." He said, "Well, why didn't we get into the surgical ward or the medical ward?" "You're the ten highest in your class," the Major said. Well, then after having that medical training, or that psycho training, I proceeded to Texas, Abilene, Texas to an evacuation hospital, and while I was there I went on detached service to the station hospital and I was in the psycho ward section, it wasn't psycho. It was epileptic, but they had 40 of them to take care of during the day, and they all helped along with you. They had epilepsy periodically, and when we went on maneuvers, I got into the psycho ward there when it was necessary and also overseas, we came back to Texas after Louisiana maneuvers, and we went overseas in September of '43, to New Guinea, and our first campaign was on New Britain which was December of '43.

I: Were you with your?

R: Evacuation Hospital.

I: Were you with your buddy the whole time through this?

R: You mean the one I tried to enlist with?

I: Yeah.

R: No, no, no. Actually, I did see him when I was in Denver. He wanted to get into mechanics of some sort, and he was in the Air Corp in Denver, Army Air Corp. It was Army Air Corp then. See, now it's Air Corp, Army and Navy, but it was Army Air Corp and Army Infantry, different classifications, but he was at one of the camps out there, and we got together, double dated a couple times and saw Denver, beautiful place, yeah.

I: Your first campaign, what was that?

R: New Britain. That was New Britain.

I: What is a campaign?

R: Well, that's your first engagement, the first encounter with the enemy, yeah.

I: I see, and how did you feel about that?

R: Well, I had studied to become a surgical technician. While we were in New Guinea, we were getting climitized to the temperature there, and drawing our supplies, and I became a surgical technician, and we were setting up surgery on New Britain. We weren't receiving patients then yet, and we had a air raid that morning, a jet, oh, not a jet, they didn't have any jets then, Army Zero came streaking in and dropped a bomb on the airport, and it never got up again. It got shot down there, and then while we were working in surgery, I got a call, and I said, "After we were receiving patients," and said, "What do you want?" And they said, "Get over to Ward 22. We got a bunch of psychos in," so my psycho training pulled me out of surgery. I was back in the psycho ward again.

I: Uh.

R: And I stayed in there until things quieted down in that campaign, and then I went to a medical contagious ward. It was only about five or six beds, I had that alone, and they had a cubicle between each bed then, all childhood stuff, mumps, scarlet fever, and one of each one and mumps, scarlet fever and I think maybe chicken pox, I don't remember all the ones they had in there, but that was, and then after that we moved to a different location.

I: Okay. Did you get a chance to experience New Guinea at all?

R: Well, yes, we were in New Guinea to start, and then we went back to New Guinea at Atape, New Guinea. That was another campaign. That was the next one, I think, yeah, it had to be, Atape before, I should have brought my records along. Atape, New Guinea was, see, we went to Layte first, then we went to Atape, New Guinea, but the, General McArthur had cut off the supply lines to Atape. They expected he would hit, the Japanese expected he would hit Atape area, and he bypassed that and hit Layte. Well, then, of course, there was a lot of mopping up to do on Atape because their supply lines were cut off, but there were a lot of people there, a lot of Japanese there, so that was kind of a rough campaign. We had a lot of casualties, and even had two surgical teams in our unit,

and they even brought another portable surgical team in that attached to us, and it was a lot of, it was ground fighting mostly because they didn't have any Air Corp any more there, but they were fighting, I know I actually heard some of the Japanese prisoners that were captured, and they were in our hospital being questioned, an interpreter and I was right there when they were talking with 'em, and they were told by their officers if they fight real hard, the ships that they could see, the shoreline was kind of curved, and from their point of view, they could see ships down at the other point of the island, part of the island, and they said they would, if they fight real hard, they could get through there, and those were their ships, take 'em home, and they were really fighting mad, they were fighting to get through there. These were Japanese soldiers that were interrogated, but that campaign finished up. I met a couple guys from Grand Haven there, at Atape, Fred Peck who I was in the boy scouts with, and Ed Lowmen who I knew as a child.
[Inaudible Interviewer comment] Yeah it was.

I: It made you feel pretty

R: Then we went to Layte, and I worked there. Of course, there was no campaign there any more, but there was still a lot of casualties and people coming in. I met Wally VanStratt there. I was working out of the attached service.

I: And when did you get out of the service?

R: December 4, 1945.

I: Did you come right back to Grand Haven?

R: Yes I did.

I: How did you feel then? Were you relieved kind of?

R: Well, kind of, yes, sure. We were over there for, I was in the service 48 months, and you know, being away that long. I had gotten home for furlough and a couple passes, but it was a long time, and we were over seas 27 months I think it was.

I: That is a long time.

R: Yes it is.

I: Did you grow a lot? Do you feel that you grew up a lot when?

R: I lost a lot of weight. [Interviewer Laughed] When I got off the train, my mother could hardly believe that I went from 190 down to 160.

I: Oh wow, that is a lot. And when you got back home

R: She put it back on me though pretty good.

I: Did she?

R: Yep.

I: Your mother was a good cook?

R: Oh, yeah, a very good cook.

I: What did you eat? Like what kind of foods were?

R: Well, basic, meat and potatoes and my dad loved pork roasts. We had fresh pork roast quite often and pot roast and chicken and all the stuff that goes with it.

I: Your mom probably learned how to cook from her mother?

R: I imagine she did, and my wife learned to cook from my mother, too.

I: Oh, really?

R: Yeah. She was from Illinois, and she got out of high school, and she got an office job at Ralston Purina Company and then later she got married, so she never had much of a chance to learn to cook there, and at school she didn't take much in Home Ec. She did mostly commercial, and, so she learned a lot from my mother, and my wife is a very good cook.

I: When did you get married?

R: 1946, October 5.

I: Where did you meet her?

R: In Grand Haven incidentally. She came to Grand Haven in 1941, and stayed at her cousin's who was the wife of our minister, and we were real good friends with the minister because when he came to Grand Haven, he was single, and he used to come to our house a lot. He and I would go fishing, and hunting together and he'd come over to the house for meals and so forth, and so he continued to do that after he got married, which was in, I don't remember what year they got married, and then, so they came over and so that is how I met her. I met her actually in front of church that was the E & R Church which was on the corner of Fulton and Seventh Street, and that's the area where we have our museum of storage now in the basement there.

I: E & R Church?

R: Yeah, Evangelical and Reform.

I: Oh, okay.

R: In the museum here, we have the fount and the altar from the podium at our church.

I: When was that church first built?

R: Oh, my grandfather was instrumental in that. It must have been early 1900s, something like that.

I: Mm.

R: It is now, they have moved right across from the Junior High School on Griffin Street.

I: Okay.

R: St. Paul's Evangelical and Reformed Church.

I: What was your wedding like? What was the traditional wedding?

R: Oh, it was a traditional wedding.

I: Well, what was one? What was a traditional wedding to you, to your generation?

R: Oh, well, it was, well, you go to church and get married and go to the photographers for pictures and go to your reception. The reception was held at, her mother and dad had the reception in her house, and it wasn't that big a wedding. We had a nice wedding.

I: Was it common to have the reception at the bride's house?

R: More so than it is now. Depends on the size of the wedding, yeah, quite often they did that, so I don't think it's, now people have a wedding, you know, there's half the town there at the wedding.

I: Yeah.

R: Well, not quite that bad, but

I: Pretty close.

R: Yeah, quite a few, so, and then we went to Niagra Falls for our honeymoon on the train.

I: Oh. What train?

R: I really don't remember. It was out of St. Louis. It was right across the river from St. Louis.

I: And what type of job did you secure after you came back from?

R: Well, I went into photography when I got back.

I: You finally got your photography?

R: I finally got into phtotography. I had a, under the GI Bill, I got some training, and I went to apprenticeship training, I went to Mosher's Camera Shop, and worked there, and then when my program was

I: Where was Mosher's Camera Shop?

R: It's now Kirk's.

I: Okay!

R: Yeah, in fact, they got Mosher's picture hanging in there. I gave it to 'em. It's one that I took of Bill after I got in my own business, and he was not doing portraits any more. He wondered how he was gonna get me portrait training which is what I really wanted, and so I transferred my program to Robbin's Studio, which was on Seventh Street near Washington, and I worked there and finished up the program, then I went to school for, the Winona School of Photography in Indiana for the portrait course, and I came back and I worked there a little while, and I worked there a little while and I got another job up at Alma, Michigan. I didn't like that too well up there, so I just stayed there two weeks and tried it out, and I didn't like it. I mean I liked the photography, but this lady was, she wanted someone who would take over the studio when she was, every time I wanted to do something, she was, "I'll do it. I'll do it," so she was, wouldn't give me a chance. All I was doing was printing so I came back home, and I said to my wife, "Well, shall we take the plunge?" And she said, "Sure, why not?" And we started our own studio in Grand Haven.

I: What studio was that?

R: It's called Bretschneider Studio incidentally. Well, it was originally was up above the, where Oaks, Dornbos and Crimmins is now located. It was the dollar store then. That was McLellan's Dollar Store.

I: Okay.

R: Up above there, on the second floor, the VanDenBosch Building it was known as then 'cause he was the owner, and we had four rooms, big rooms up there, and fixed one for finishing, and another one for, well, two of 'em for finishing, and one for reception room and one for a camera room, and incidentally, there was a little hallway between the front two and the back two, which made it kind of nice and it separated them. He put water up

there for us, so we were able to have our, we built a dark room, and had the washer in there, and it was all black and white photography then.

I: Did you do like a lot of senior pictures or?

R: Well, yes. I did senior pictures. I got my negative file still, and I'd like to get rid of 'em and give 'em away to anyone that wants them. I mean, anyone that wants their own pictures, and we got a lot of 'em there. I started in '49 with a, let's see, it'd be the class of '50, so I started, we opened up in June of '49 so the first seniors I took would be the class of '50 under our name. Now, I did take some when I was working at Robbins Studio, too, took seniors there, too.

I: How has the equipment changed?

R: Incidentally, it's gotten smaller. [Laughter] The group pictures we used to take, wedding groups and big groups, usually on 8 x 10 film, and individual portraits were on half or full 5 x 7, [clears throat], excuse me, and the candids were taken on a 4 x 5 film speed graphic, and it was quite difficult to do a wedding because you had all these slides. There's two shots on each slide, one, you pull the film packs I mean, and sometimes I did use a film pack which carried 12, and that helped, but you had to use flashbulbs and pop the flashbulb out, and put a new bulb in, and reverse the holder and pull the slide and cock the shutter before the next bridesmaid got down there. It was a little tricky sometimes.

I: It's gotten a little bit simpler, huh?

R: Yes. Then it went to roll film, and my first roll film camera, which I still have one, I mean I still have that model, made it a lot easier for, I still use bigger film for group pictures, but for the candids; coming down the aisle, and cutting the cake and so forth, we used the roll film, and that was all black and white and then eventually, we started doing color, and I started doing color, and the first wedding I did in color, it was ordered in black and white. I didn't even have color prices. I doubleshot the wedding, once with two cameras. I shot black and white and color, duplicated everything just for the experience of color, and to have a color bride's sample, or color book sample, wedding sample, so it

I: Were you very excited?

R: Well, yeah, it was, now the first color I got back was horrible, I mean, not because my fault, but it was the finishing was spotty, the spotting wasn't spotted, and it was very, very rough processing, but eventually now, it's gotten to all be beautiful, and you could, I could, and later on when I still used the larger film, you could go from a large film to a small film, and go through a book, and you couldn't tell which was which. Through the years the color has improved so much, and not just in the looks of it, originally, but in the stability of it. When we first started doing high school seniors in color, we did a few, and then, but the others were black and white, and the ones that were hanging in the window would turn color very quickly within a few weeks, and then we sold that studio in the

building in '82, and I had pictures in the window for weeks and months sometimes, and that was the sunny side of the street, and they showed no sign of fading. In fact, the lab we send 'em to now, they're guaranteed for 100 years.

I: Oh, wow.

R: So that's pretty good.

I: Has business gotten better or?

R: Yes, it's turned around, sure. It's improved all the time. When we first built that building in 1955, we got into it about October, I think it was, September, October, and, but the following year, '56, our gross income doubled over the 1955 income, just, I don't know why except that it might have been the building and that was showing people where we were, and the pictures that were in there looked better on that wall than they did in other locations.

I: Oh, yeah. You know, sometimes, maybe more people just saw.

R: That's another thing, too. We were on Washington right by Seventh there, people watching the railroad track, and the signals and the stoplights and making turns, and it wasn't as obvious as when we were at Eighth Street.

I: Yeah, and also, the population got bigger.

R: Well, yeah, this was just a matter of difference, but it increased through the years. We tried to sell the business as a, the building and business as a package, but we didn't have lookers with enough money to buy both business and the building, so I told the realtor to sell the building, and we'll move the business out, so he did. I moved to another location in a short time in a year and a half and dissolved it, and got rid of a lot of the equipment, and finally, we just got out of it entirely.

I: What do you do now?

R: Oh, I do a little photography, but, well, we did take our passport camera home, and we were shooting passports at home, and since then, I sold that passport camera, and we still do a little group photography and things like that. We don't do any advertising at all, and people call us, and if I can do it, I do it.

I: Yeah.

R: If I can't, I don't.

I: People in the area.

R: It's like the one I did today. It was black and white, and I couldn't process it, but by taking it with this other film, we were able to run it through the Kodak processor.

I: Okay.

R: Anything else you want on the business?

I: Well we can go into other, when you were in Eagle Ottawa Leather.

R: Well, that was before the war, and I was at work in the shipping department there, packing leather for shipment, and we rolled up the hides and put 'em in boxes or packages depending on the size of the, only they did a lot of upholstery, I understand now, they're doing a lot more upholstery than they, car upholstery for cars.

I: Oh.

R: All the newer luxury cars are coming out with leather, and a lot of it is Eagle Ottawa leather.

I: Oh really?

R: Yeah.

I: Where do they get the leather from? From cow hides?

R: Yes, cow hides, and they split the hides. See, a hide is quite thick, and then they have a splitting machine, and these hides, of course, after the hair is off, and they're processed, then they're soft, and the leather is split.

I: Is that why it has like the brushy underside?

R: Yeah. That's right. Like you see Hush Puppies, those are a split without any finish over the top of it.

I: Okay.

R: That's the rough side of the leather, but when they split the hide, then they, of course, the top grain is top grain, and that is the higher priced leather, and then the next split is what they call a second split, and then they do put finish on that, so paint type finish, and finish 'em, and emboss 'em, and then they have, I don't know how many splits they make. I don't really remember, maybe three or four.

I: From one hide?

R: Yeah, and then the last split is used for insoles, not insoles, but for interior parts of boots or shoes or something like that, the rougher shoes like work shoes. They're cheaper quality.

I: All the cow hides they got, where did they come from, all over the United States?

R: I can't resist this, but I gotta say cows. [Laughter]

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: Yeah, they import a lot of 'em from, in fact my wife worked for the guy that used to be a hide buyer years ago. He's passed away many years ago, and he, they used to import 'em from South America.

I: Oh.

R: A lot of hides are imported from South America and local too. I mean the United States, but again from the various packing houses I suppose, that's

I: Gonna take you way back to where you rode the Interurban.

R: Way back there?

I: Yeah.

R: That's a long time ago, a couple years ago. [Laughter] Well, I didn't ride it very much. I remember riding it out to the lake, we used to catch it right up here on Water Street and we'd go out to the lake, and it'd go on beyond Highland Park and out about Stickney Ridge area, maybe a little further in. There was a turnaround there, and my Aunt worked, she was a young girl and worked for one of the families out there as a maid. On her day off once in a while my mother and I would go out there on the Interurban and go swimming and visit with her.

I: How much did it cost?

R: Oh, Heavens! I don't have any idea. I was just like four or five years old.

I: Oh. Do you remember what the Interurban was like on the inside?

R: Well, like streetcars in Chicago, I guess, similar to this trolley that runs around now, except it was on tracks and electric.

I: Did it have like covering on the seats or?

R: Yeah, they were probably leather 'cause they didn't have vinyl back in those days. They were probably, or maybe corduroy, I really don't remember that much about the

Interurban itself, and once a year we would go over to Mona Lake in Muskegon and Eagle Ottawa used to have their picnics over there. In fact a lot of the factories had, there was a recreational area there, and they had pony rides and merry go rounds, and I don't remember if there was a ferris wheel or not.

I: And that was when your dad worked for Eagle Ottawa?

R: Yes. He was; get a picnic; tickets for different rides and they had free ice cream and all this stuff and we used to go over on the Interurban, come back on the Interurban.

I: Was that like a once a year thing?

R: Yeah, that was a once a year thing, but of course, the Interurban went every day. That was a daily routine for them, but it went to Grand Rapids, and it went to Muskegon, Fruitport.

I: Okay. How about the Depression? Is there anything?

R: Well, we touched on that briefly. I know my uncle lost his shirt in the Depression. He was a bachelor living in Chicago, and he made his living by clipping coupons, and that was like Jebediahs (?) from stock that he was selling. They called it clipping coupons. It was money that he got every month, and he had a lot of his money in real estate bonds, and real estate projects, and well of course, real estate went flop just like a lot of other things, so those were practically worthless after a while.

I: Okay.

R: I remember going to Chicago when I was 7 years old. That was before the Depression, of course, and seeing the big city for the first time. It was quite a treat. I mean, we went over on the boat from here actually. We, I was scared to death, afraid that boat didn't have a bottom in it, and I can remember getting on that boat, I was just shaking. You got on board at about 11:00 o'clock at night and had a state room, went to bed. In the morning, we were in Chicago, got on the streetcars, and went to my grandmother's house. My uncle and grandmother lived together. He lived with her. He was a bachelor, so, then I saw the big city, the stock yards, that was quite something, too, going to the stockyards and seeing 'em butcher pigs. They did three hundred and some in an hours time. They had 'em butchered and practically cut up.

I: Isn't that what they wrote that book about; was it "The Jungle" or something?

R: I don't remember.

I: Some guy wrote about all the bad practices in meat packing.

R: Oh.

I: A long time ago and that kind, that's when people started realizing what they were eating, and it was more at the turn of, the very turn of the century.

R: Well, of course, this was all inspected meat at the stock yards. It was; I think it was Armor or Swift or one of those meat packers.

I: Okay. You said you lived on a farm as a child?

R: Well, my Grandmother and Grandfather Brown had a farm, of course, it was a 20 acre one on Mercury Drive, and that's my first recollection of my grandmother and grandfather was on that farm living there, and they moved back to the town in I think '28 or something, I'm pretty sure it was 1928, and I was just heartsick that they were moving away from that farm, moving back into the city.

I: You liked the farm?

R: Oh, I loved the farm, horses, I mean; I used to ride that old horse just by the hour. Around and around and around she would go, and drive me, we had a circle drive there, and she'd just plod and go around, and once in a while she'd get tired, and she'd head for the barn. Oh, she did that one day and there was a neighbor girl who was riding behind me, she was an older girl, I assume she must have been maybe 12 or so, and she said, "Duck your head," and the horse went in the barn and she grabbed hold of the door as the horse went into the barn, she grabbed hold of the door and swung, and fell, the horse was passed, and then dropped down. She was a little too tall. She thought she was too tall and would bump her head, so after that whenever I rode the horse, I closed the gate so she couldn't get into the barn.

I: Yeah, good idea.

R: Yeah, I wanted a horse from the time I was kneehigh to a duck, and I'd still like to have one.

I: You never got a horse, huh?

R: Never got a horse. Closest thing I got to it was my uncle was a car salesman for one of the local; well I bet if I mention the name of it. It was Beers (?) Motors and it was over on Second Street, and somebody wanted a car out in the Nunica area, and they didn't have a trade in, but they had a five gated saddle horse, and they said, "Can we trade the saddle horse in?" His boss said, "I don't want a saddle horse. I don't want a horse. What am I gonna do with it?" My uncle says, "Well, maybe I could take that instead of my commission." So he says, "Fine with me." So my uncle got the horse, and they lived about a half a block from us, and they fixed it, see, years ago, a lot of people had garages with chicken coops attached. Well, they had one of those, no chickens in it, but the chicken coop was there, and they fixed that up for a stall for her or him, it was him, his name was King, and he had it for most of the summer, and I got to ride it quite a bit.

I: Oh.

R: That was the year I graduated, 1937.

I: And what happened to the horse?

R: Oh, that's the funny thing. I bought a new pair of boots. Wore 'em, got 'em in the mail, the day I got 'em, I was working at Oldberg's at the time at night, and the parcel post man came, tried 'em on, they fit, and I had to go to work, so the next day it was a Saturday, and I went over there with my new boots on, was gonna ride, and my aunt said, "Oh, Uncle Bert doesn't want you to ride today 'cause King has been sold, and he's going to Chicago on a truck."

I: Oh no!

R: And you don't want to tire him out, so I got on the horse, saddled up and got on the horse and she took a couple pictures of me with my new boots on, so I never got to ride King with those boots.

I: Oh, were you sad when he left?

R: Oh, yeah, sure, I hated to see him go. He was a nice horse.

I: What did you do with your boots?

R: Well, I kept 'em, I wore 'em, I wore 'em out actually eventually. I think it was after the war before I wore 'em out, but I wore 'em out eventually.

I: Riding?

R: No, I used 'em for walking. I used 'em for hunting or whatever, towards the end there. They weren't cowboy boots. They were high leather boots; well actually, they called 'em engineer boots. They're black and they're up kind of high. That wasn't the English type, it was sort of that style.

I: What did your grandparents farm?

R: What did they?

I: Yeah, what did they have on the farm?

R: Oh, well, they just had, it was a one horse farm, and they had one horse and a cow and raised pigs every year and chickens and

I: They didn't make their living off of it then?

R: Well, they did sort of, I guess. He used to raise onions, I'm sure they didn't make a heck of a big living off of it, but they did do some. Of course, they raised their own food, and maybe, I really don't know how much stuff they actually sold or how much of a living they made off of it. I was too young at that time to know that. I know they used to come into town peddling onions, sweet onions that are packaged in lunches. Well, he'd take 'em to the store. I know he did sell some to stores. He didn't go house to house or anything like that, but he

I: Did they have a Farmer's Market?

R: No. The grocery stores, now the grocery stores buy this stuff when it comes, where it's transported every day, and there produce from all over the world actually, where back then they didn't do that. They did eventually have refrigerator cars, and that helped, but transportation was by railroad then.

I: Ah.

R: And they had no trucks on the road.

I: So when they got fresh produce offered to 'em.

R: Yeah, sure. And that was, you didn't buy fresh produce in the winter time back then. It there just wasn't any available, like now.

I: What did you do? Did you have it frozen or canned?

R: Well, frozen, canned, sure. Didn't have too much frozen, I mean, mostly canned because refrigeration wasn't that big a deal back then either. When I was a kid, we didn't have a refrigerator. We had an icebox, and we used in summertime, put a chunk of ice in there every few days, and keep the milk fresh and the butter and whatever had to be kept in the refrigerator, or icebox.

I: What did you do in the winter; stick it out in the pantry?

R: Yeah, set it outside or have a window box, have a window up?

I: What's window box?

R: Well, you raised the window, put a box in the window, have it attached inside there, and you could set it in the urn, and it keeps it cold, and then you close the window to keep the warmth in the house.

I: Yeah, okay. Were they made out of wood?

R: Some of 'em, yeah, most of 'em.

I: Oh. How about fishing? Did we talk about fishing?

R: Yeah, not too much I don't think. I started fishing, of course, when I was a kid, and my dad would take me out to the pier or we'd go out to a cottage and go bluegill fishing or something like that, but pier fishing was mostly what we did, and occasionally we'd get out in the boat, and the perch used to come in really good here years ago. We'd get buckets of 'em, and

I: Off the pier?

R: Mm eh. And there were lots of minnows, you could have 'em thrown at you, you'd just toss the net out in the river and pull it in, it was a hoop type of net, and get a whole bunch of minnows and you'd have enough, one scoop, you'd usually have enough for all the fishing you wanted to do. Later on, I got to the point where I wanted to do fly time, I'd read some articles about fly fishing, are you familiar with fly fishing?

I: It's where you make a little?

R: Use a fly.

I: Yeah.

R: Fly rod and fish, anyway, I made my first fly from some goose feathers and big hook, it had to be red because that's the way you see that stuff advertised, red, so I dipped it in some red paint which, of course, when it dried, got real hard, and stiff, and then I had to try it out, I went down in the south channel, which I mentioned before, my mother wouldn't let me skate on the south channel, I know she didn't like me playing on the south channel, but I went down there, I was older then, of course, and fished off, and I couldn't hardly throw it out far enough 'cause I didn't have a fly rod, it was an old telescopic metal rod, and I was darned if I didn't get a bite on that. The fly was, the wings were so hard from that paint that he never got a hold of the hook, he or she, never got a hold of the hook, but at least I had a fish on it for a few minutes. So I continued to try to try flies through the years.

I: Did you make better ones?

R: Oh, yeah, sure I tied the first one, holding it in my fingers. Now I have a vice, and tackle pliers and all the stuff that you have to have, and a lot of different types of material.

I: How much do you fish, just recreationally or?

R: Yeah, sure.

I: Summertime, on the weekends.

R: Sure, that's right.

I: Good way to relax.

R: Yeah. This year I got my boat in the water 29th of April 'cause that was opening day of Walleye Season, and I have not fished in it more than an hour since that time, and this is the 29th now of June, so I just spend so much time on the garden, working in the yard and doing other things that I just don't take the time. I've fished out there. I've fished off the shore, and caught a few fish, but haven't been fishing in the river in the boat.

I: Well, I wouldn't want to eat anything that you caught.

R: I wouldn't want to eat anything out of the river now either. It's a shame, but we squawk about, and it is terrible, about the Grand Rapids pollution, but this has been going on now for years and years and years. It hasn't changed. We just never knew it.

I: Ih!

R: Yeah, every time they had a heavy rain here, that was probably going just like it is now, maybe not as much because Grand Rapids wasn't as big back in those years, so there wasn't as much runoff as there would be today, but.

I: It is a sewage problem, it seems like by now, they would have done something.

R: Yes, yes. I don't know why it's gonna take 'til 1992 to do it either. They can build a

I: The lake's going to be a big sewage.

R: Cesspool.

I: Yeah, by that time.

R: Well, it's deterioration and it is in the river and it is bad when it gets out on the lake, which area is, there's a lot of area there.

I: When did you grandparents come to live here?

R: The year exactly I don't know, but they were about, in their late teens, 17, 18 years-old. I mentioned they met on the boat.

I: Oh yeah.

R: These were my mother's parents that met on the boat, and they came to Grand Haven, they both settled here. My grandfather was sponsored by the Fritz family, which Mrs. Fritz was his sister, and my grandmother was sponsored by Ferdinand Behm and also her sister, and mother was sponsored by him, so he married Mrs. Behm, Amelia

Cramekeeper (?) was her maiden name, and my grandfather and grandmother met on the boat, and found out they were both coming to the same area, and I guess that's how it happened. I never got a lot of details on that. As I say, my dad's parents lived in Chicago. They were married in Germany, and it was her second marriage. Her first husband was killed, and she remarried, and she married Bretschneider. Her first husband was Noble, and I mentioned my uncle before who lived in Chicago. His name was Fred Noble, her son by her first marriage, and he came to the United States with them, of course. My dad and his other, he had one sister that was born over in Germany. The rest were, and he were born here. He was the youngest of the Bretschneiders. And they lived in Chicago until they moved to Michigan.

I: Have you ever moved out of this area?

R: No. Been living here all my life, except for when I went in the service. I was in Denver for a while, for two months, and I liked that pretty well, I thought, "Maybe after the war, I'll come back to Denver," and after years went by, I thought maybe I would like Arizona. I don't think I'd care for that heat. We've been out there. It's pretty warm and dry.

I: So you pretty much feel that Grand Haven's the place for you or?

R: I think so, I know so. I don't anticipate moving.

I: How do you feel about all this construction and all this tourism and stuff that's?

R: Well, tourism is fine. As I mentioned before, I worked with the Chamber of Commerce area from Washington for many years, and we were instrumental in, when we had the water thrill show, and I was on the committee back when we got the musical fountain, and Mr. Creason; Dr. Creason said I've got something to show you tonight after the meeting and he took us over to Spring Lake and showed a working model of the musical fountain. "What do you think of it?" And we all said, "Go for it. It sounds great." And that's how the musical fountain was born, and it's been, 25 years last year, this is the 26th year, so that was interesting. Tourism is great, and although I never got a lot of money directly in photography from tourism because we were a portrait photography, we didn't have a big camera shop or anything like that. We did sell some roll film, and we'd sell some to tourists, but basically, I was in it because I felt that if the home town people had a good year, they were already getting their money from tourists so maybe I'll do their kids' pictures.

I: Yeah.

R: Or their wedding pictures or graduation pictures or something like this, so I think tourism is fine, and it's a great thing. I would kind of like to see the highway moved over to the other side a ways, but, cut down some of the congestion.

I: Traffic.

R: Because there is a lot, I mean, there'd be a lot of people still coming to Grand Haven, but the congestion and the people that are going through, would give them a clear route for one thing, and less congestion for the people that are here.

I: Something that we need.

R: Yeah.

I: Can you think of anything that happened in your life or anything that you still want to talk about?

R: Did we talk about the service? I guess we did.

I: A little bit about how you were trained.

R: In basic training, yeah, psycho ward. I guess that pretty well covers it.

I: Is there anything about this area, the Tri-Cities area that you like the best?

R: Well, there's several things. Well, of course, I like the water, and I like, one thing we don't have that I'm so thankful for, you notice this year there were tornadoes here and tornadoes there and tornadoes all over, and floods. We had very little bad weather, real bad storm. We have a tornado once in a while, but we've been very fortunate, and earthquakes other places, and it's been, I like the location, and I like the four seasons. I'm not too nuts about spending a lot of time out in the snow, but I don't mind it that much either.

I: It's nice to have a White Christmas?

R: Yeah, if I don't have to drive too far.

I: Uh eh. Is there any family traditions?

R: No, I don't. My Grandfather Bretschneider was a cabinet maker. I have some beautiful work that he did of desks and a clock, all inlaid wood, with small pieces inlaid wood, they're really beautiful. I gave my son the desk, and we still have the clock.

I: They must be worth something right now?

R: Yeah, some years ago, some guy looked at that desk and I said, "That was start at \$1,000 if you went to an auction to sell it." I had no intention of ever selling it.

I: No.

R: And neither does my son.

I: And did your grandfather make it here?

R: I really don't know. I kind of doubt it. I think it was probably made in Chicago 'cause they lived in Chicago most of the time, and I think he was getting, he died of Cancer, I believe, or they think it was Cancer, now they think it was Cancer, but that was many years ago, of course, and he was in Chicago quite a few years before that, and I think it was made there either he came back from or maybe it transferred over and moved back to Chicago and came back here again, I don't know. Well, we have it now.

I: Well, I think we pretty much covered everything.

R: Okay. Thank you.

I: Thank you. Yeah, thank you.

R: Okay.

I: I enjoyed it.