Narrator: Raymond Harrer
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Interviewer: Denise Rossmann Christopoulos
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INTRODUCTION

Raymond Harrer's father was George Harrer, a prominent citizen and the first mayor of Morton Grove in 1895. Raymond was born in Morton Grove and has lived here all his life. His father had a wholesale florist business off of Theobald Road for thirty-one years. Raymond recalls his father first growing vegetables and then around 1908 he grew flowers. After graduating from grammar school, he worked in the family business also.

Raymond Harrer's mother was from the Yehl family on Lincoln Avenue. He tells about his Yehl grandparents selling eighteen acres of their property to the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. The railroad used the gravel they extracted from here as the foundation for the tracks, thus a gravel pit resulted. This was a source of swimming recreation for many young boys in town.

Raymond's interview is a colorful account of boyhood remembrances in the town he grew up in. this includes hanging out at the local pickle factories, schooling and teachers, playing basketball at St. Paul Woods Pavilion and been a fourteen-year-old member of the Morton Grove Colts baseball team.

Of particular interest is Raymond's explanation of hobo Island at the river and fishing. He tells of the times when hobos would work for his father in the greenhouses in order to get just enough money to buy canned heat and a bottle of alcohol.

RH: Raymond Harrer

Q: Question asked by interviewer, Denise Rossmann Christopoulos

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

Q: We'll start with the biographical data, which has to do with your family history. If you could tell me what your grandparents' names were on your father's side first of all?

RH: On my father's side, there's Henry Harrer. And you want his wife's name?

Q: Yes.

RH: That was Katherine Neeb Harrer.

Q: And your mother's side?

RH: George Yehl and Dorothea Schmidt Yehl.

Q: Okay, now your parents' names?

RH: My parents was George Harrer and Mary Yehl.

Q: The Yehls are intermingled there way back, aren't they?

RH: Yes.

Q: Where were your grandparents born?

RH: They were all born in Bavaria, Germany.

Q: And who were the first to come to the United States.

RH: The two Harrers were here first. Henry and Michael, his brother, came over together with a cousin. They stopped off at Rochester, New York, but didn't stay there, and the two brothers then came on to Chicago, and the cousin went to Canada. I think they came in -- must have been '44 -- spent one year in Chicago doing the teaming business, but they didn't like it and they couldn't collect money. Times were hard. They said in German, "*Was soll es wir mitt dem* _____ (phonetic:Zuflokt) *tun*." Means: "What shall we do with this swamp land." Chicago was very low land. And the County Building is now on this land.

Q: Oh, that's interesting.

RH: Yes. Anyway, they came out here and bought land from the government in the town of Niles, township of Niles, on what is known as the East Prairie. There was a road going through there called the East Prairie Road. There weren't any east and west streets there other than Lincoln Avenue coming out.

Q: Had they heard that maybe the land was better in this area?

RH: I really don't know. As far as I know, they had no relatives in the area, but I guess generally Illinois had the prairie land and I guess a pretty good reputation for farm land. So, they did that. They bought adjoining pieces of property.

Q: Were there any stories in your family as to the reason why they left?

RH: No. I have never heard of any. I don't know. But anyway, I believe they built a log cabin. Because I remember seeing the remnants of a log cabin standing on the property. They arrived in the Township of Niles in 1845. They built a home on the southern end of the property, that is, my grandfather did. And it would be today the corner of Howard Street and Crawford Avenue.

Q: What did they do once the two brothers settled there? Did they become farmers?

RH: They farmed. Yes. Much of their land was clear. That was known as the East Prairie. There was a strip of forest land about seven or eight miles wide on either side of the north branch of the river. That seemed to stop just on the west portion of their property. The forest stopped and then there was a prairie all the way down toward the lake. There'd be an occasional tree, but there was no more forest.

Q: So when your grandfather settled there, he ended up forming his family and they all lived there? Or did he move once again from there?

RH: No, they stayed there until later years. He rented out the farm and moved into what is Niles Center. He went into this general store and saloon business in the Blaumeuser Building on the corner of Oakton and Lincoln. Actually, I don't think that was called Lincoln Avenue in those days. I remember the old name of this road was Miller's Mill Run.

Q: Right. What was the name of the general store? Did he have the family name attached to it?

RH: Oh, I don't know. I just suppose he used their family name. That was in the 1880s. Well, there were, I think, six or seven children. Now, let's see, there were three boys -- no, six -- and three girls. Several of the children died. There was a severe scarlet fever epidemic, and two of them had it before they even went to school. And it sort of affected their brain. Run the high fever; they didn't have the doctors and things available in those days. And, of course, they both died later on.

Q: Your father was one of these children?

RH: Father was the third child, I believe. I think there's Margaret and Adam, and I think then he came. Then Barbara and the other two children, that boy and a girl who died later. So they were the only four adults.

Q: So your father and his sister and brothers, they lived there for years until he became a man and moved out?

RH: Yes. Well, he took over the store and ran that after his marriage. Two of his children were born over there in the Blaumeuser Building. They were born in Niles Center. Then his brother, Adam married one of Henry Harms' daughters. He was a well-known man. Harms had a few greenhouses, and Adam went in the greenhouse business. My dad got the bug, too, and he came to Morton Grove.

Q: About how old was your father when he came to Morton Grove?

RH: Oh, let's see. He was born in 1865, and he bought the property in 1889. He was only 24. And he bought almost three acres off of his mother-in-law, Grandma Yehl.

Q: Where was that?

RH: That was on Lincoln Avenue. That house I was telling you about . . .

Q: Right. Next to Linmar Motors.

RH: They lived there in a log cabin. That's where my mother was born on December 28th, 1865. But she was still very small when her father, who owned some acreage on Dempster Street, across from where the Evanston Golf Course is now, and he moved to that farm there. And so she was actually raised up there although born in Morton Grove. But, then, of course, they were married in 1886, I think.

Q: So he went right from the general store business over to Morton Grove to form the florist?

RH: He started the florist business, yes. So he didn't come from the farm. I don't know, I really never did know just how old he was when they left the farm and came in town.

Q: How many years was he in the florist business here? Was he still in it when you were a child?

RH: Oh, yes. In fact, I worked for him after I graduated from grade school in 1911.

Q: Did you? Did he sell wholesale or retail?

RH: Wholesale. Until he sold the business in the summer of 1921. So he was in the business thirty-one years.

Q: Where was the greenhouse located?

RH: On Theobald Road -- the beginning of the property's about a full block off of Lincoln Avenue. In fact, right behind that property is where this home was. See, that was a part of that property. He bought it from my grandmother.

Q: What did he grow?

RH: When I was a little boy, he grew vegetables. Now I don't know whether he started out in vegetables, but then a couple of years after from my recollection, it was probably maybe about 1907 or '08 or something like that, he went into growing flowers.

Q: Who did he sell those to?

RH: Wholesale florists, wholesale dealers in Chicago.

Q: How did he ship them out? By train?

RH: Well, by train. Hauled them down here. I even had to do that later on. Haul all the boxes down to the depot. Yes, pack them. I did that, too, later.

Q: Did your family speak German when you were a child?

RH: Well, I guess they did, although when I was born, they spoke English. Except, you know, they made some comment to each other (laughter) in German.

Q: So the kids wouldn't know. (laughter) Right. What's your wife's maiden name?

RH: Her name is Seelhammer. And she was born in North Washington, Iowa. Her parents also were born in Germany. My parents were born here, but grandparents were born in Germany. They were all young when they came over to this country.

Q: For a little personal data now, what's your birthdate?

RH: I was born August 11th, 1898.

Q: And your birthplace?

RH: In Morton Grove on Theobald Road. My oldest sister, who is 88, was the first child born on Theobald Road. They had eight children -- and two of them were born in Niles Center, and then Eleanor, who's still living over here, she was the first one born on Theobald Road.

Q: Did your mother use a doctor?

RH: No, a midwife. That was the rule back in those days.

Q: Did you see a family doctor when you children were growing up?

RH: Yes. We had a family doctor. In fact, at first, Dr. Sintzel, who was a doctor in Niles Center was also a family friend. And then his son later was also the family doctor. I can remember as a small boy I had some of these small children illnesses. Then we had a doctor in Morton Grove. He came here. Then they called on him. Dr. Drostenfels.

Q: Did you ever use Dr. Klehm from Niles Center?

RH: No.

Q: Did your mother use any home remedies on you children? Was there anything in particular?

RH: Oh, I'm sure she did. I think, what do you call, mustard plaster probably,

plasters, and (laughter) onion compresses when we had colds in the chest. Hot, you know, heat up the onions and then put them in the cloth and put it on.

Q: And it worked?

RH: Yes.

Q: What do you remember about your early home over on Theobald?

RH: Well, it was a nice home. It was a large place. It had to be for there were eight kids. (laughter) Well, there was the greenhouse and a barn. We had one horse. And then on the northeast corner along Theobald Road, we had quite a few apple trees in there, small orchard. The biggest cherry tree. I think by the time I grew up, that was the biggest cherry tree I ever saw. (laughs)

Q: When your father sold the greenhouse there, did they move out of that home or was that the family homestead?

RH: Yes, they built a home on the corner of Lincoln and Austin. It's just been recently torn down and replaced by those condominiums over there.

Q: Are you talking about the brown brick home that was on the very corner?

RH: Yes. Well, you see, to go back to Grandfather Yehl, they owned ten or twelve acres on this side of the road. Two acres of that piece was north of Lincoln and eighteen acres all along there . . . now this ought to be interesting. You

probably never heard of this. They sold that to the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul Railroad -- that eighteen acres -- because it was a gravel hill. In 1871, with the train, they built the railroad tracks through Morton Grove. A lot of the railroad track foundation is on the gravel that they hauled. They built a spur in from the railroad and they tore -- what was left were holes. There were a lot of water holes, and I don't know who owned the property, whether it was Franzens owned that on the other side of their line, but there is the old gravel pit there. That was the big swimming hole. They dug that deeper and made a nice swimming hole for us kids.

Q: So all that gravel was used to build up the sides . . .

RH: That was for the foundation of the railroad track. Finally my dad made a bid to the St. Paul Railroad for that eighteen acres and he got it at a very reasonable figure. Somewhere about 1915, '16, somewhere in there. And, so, another little sidelight to that is the land along the deed for that eighteen acres was being used by Poehlmann Brothers greenhouses.

Q: Oh, really?

RH: They were using the track. So my dad could have been pretty rough on them. But, "Oh," he says, "what's the use." He says, "They've been using it all these years." He just deeded it over to them, so that they were secure.

Q: You've mentioned your brothers' and sisters' names in the conversation. Could you tell me their names in order? Who was the oldest?

RH: Well, George was the oldest. He was born in ’87. Olive was next. She was born in (pauses) ’88, I think. Unger (?) was born in ’90. Mae was born in ’92. Ernestine was born in, let’s see, 84, yes, 1894. I was born in 1898, but there was one child born who died after a couple of days in between Ernestine and I. I was born in ’98, Lambert was born in 1901. Caroline, the youngest, who just celebrated her fiftieth wedding anniversary Sunday, was born in 1904. She was 74. She was born in April.

Q: When you all lived together at home, it must have been a very close family being so many children.

RH: Oh, yes.

Q: You must have a lot of memories of family life over there.

RH: Well, George went to school. He was the oldest. He’s eleven years older than I, by the way, so there’s quite a difference. He went over to Northwestern Academy. He stayed with Grandmother Harrer who lived in Evanston with her daughter. She moved around quite a bit. After the academy he went to business college in Chicago.

Q: What did he end up doing for an occupation?

RH: Oh, he was still a young man about 1908. He was working for a packing company in Chicago. They sent him south. I think about 1908 that was. He was down there about three-and-a-half years. He married down there. He lost his wife when

their first child was born. Their daughter came up north to his wife's sister and married a doctor. They were in Polk City, which is outside of Des Moines. So they took the daughter with them and raised her there. Then he came back here.

Q: Do you remember any of your household chores?

RH: Oh, heck, I did everything! (laughter) Took care of the chickens. We had about twenty-five to thirty-five chickens. Once in a while, they'd buy a couple of geese and raise them. I remember I think they raised one pig.

Q: And you had one horse?

RH: And one horse, yes. Different horses -- you don't have the same one all those years.

Q: So you really didn't have a garden outside. That was taken care of in the greenhouse?

RH: No, we had a large garden. Oh, yes. In fact, we would raise some corn. After he bought the eighteen acres, there was some that was not woods and holes -- maybe about six acres of that was tillable.

Q: And was that for your own use or did your father sell it?

RH: That's for our own use. It was not for sale. We raised corn so we had something.

That would feed the horse and chickens. Raised potatoes to use for the family. And during the war years, we raised I don't know how many bags of navy beans.

Q: Where did your parents do most of their shopping? Did they stay in Morton Grove in the main section of town?

RH: Oh, the general shopping was done in Morton Grove. I used to walk down to the stores as a young kid. There was only one at the time. That was Dilg's store, which was a frame building right along the tracks. That was there before the large building was.

Q: Right.

RH: And Duffy (?) Christ, who had the saloon across the tracks. A little ice cream parlor, and he put in a few groceries, too. And the post office was also in Dilg's there. So, we did most of our trading there.

Q: How about the market day in Niles Center?

RH: Market. Well, as I was going to say, peter Haupt had a little butcher shop in that Bringer Inn building, the west end of that. Then Henry Loutsch came from Niles Center and put up a meat market. We did practically all our trading there in meat. The market in Niles Center? Well, I knew of it and never spent much time there. I didn't see any of the activities. I know, of course, that farmers or truck gardeners, as we called them, they raised most of the vegetables. Any thing else, like corn and things, they raised just for their own use more or

less. Except sweet corn. They raised sweet corn for sale. And they used to buy their pigs. They'd go to that market, and most of them around there had two, three pigs that they raised for killing.

Q: Really?

RH: Oh, yes. Killed them in the fall for meat.

Q: Last time I was here, didn't you say you had a relative that had moved on to Glenview? Or was it Evanston?

RH: Well, I had one in Evanston. The oldest of Michael's sons, that's my father's cousin. Michael was Henry's brother that came over. He had about six boys. Charles, I know, went to Evanston. As long as I can remember, he lived in Evanston. And another one of his sons, Benjamin, farmed on Dempster Street on the south side of the street, just east of the Evanston Golf Course. And he had a number of sons. Art, one of Ben's sons, lived in Glenview.

Q: I wondered if you ever did any shopping by Rugens?

RH: Very Seldom.

Q: But basically everyone stayed close to home?

RH: Well, you stay here and once in a while, in Niles Center. But if they wanted to clothes shop or something like that, we drove over to Evanston in the old horse

and buggy. (laughter) You know, speaking of Evanston, there's an interesting angle. When I was four years old, we drove over to Evanston. Left the horse and buggy over there, and took the old electric trolley, the interurban, up to Waukegan. See, my Grandmother Yehl was born in Waukegan, and her father -- my great-grandfather -- was still living. I'll never forget that ride up that interurban. And my uncle, my mother's sister Kate's husband, was the motorman on there for a while, so I was up by the motorman. (laughter)

Q: Sounds like fun.

RH: Yes, it was. I'll never forget it.

Q: How long did it take to get there?

RH: Oh, I don't know. About an hour, I guess. Well, anyway, I'll never forget seeing my great-grandfather. We got in the house -- they had a second story on it with a wide staircase going up. And I stood at the bottom of that stairway looking up. Probably deciding whether I wanted to go up. (laughter)

Q: How old were you?

RH: Four years old. And I can remember this. Oh, yes, because that made a big impression. There's a man comes and stands at the top -- white hair, white beard. Santa Claus! (laughter) He looked like Santa Claus! Just a big, bushy white beard. And I'll never forget seeing him up there.

Q: That is really incredible.

RH: That was Great-Grandfather Schmidt.

Q: How about the pickle factories over by the train here. Did you ever play over there as a boy?

RH: Well, yes, we used to hang around there. Principally at Henning's. They were across from Hobo Island. It was George Baumhardt who was born there [near Henning's Pickle Factory]. He was a neighbor. And his father worked there, so we kids used to hang over there at that pickle factory quite a bit.

Q: Did you eat a lot of pickles?

RH: Yes, we would raid the pickle barrels. (laughs)

Q: Ever in any trouble?

RH: No, well, not real trouble, but one of the guys yelled at us one time, "Hey, there! What are you going to do? Eat up all our profit?" or something like that.

Q: Oh, really. (laughs) Who were some of your other neighbors where you grew up?

TAPE ONE, SIDE A ENDS

TAPE ONE, SIDE B

RH: . . . Jake Baumhardt. He later worked for us for quite a few years over in the greenhouse. And then the Schuetz's. And Mrs. Schuetz, the elderly Schuetz's, she was a Theobald. And the Theobalds were down on a farm. They were old settlers here. The road was named after them.

Q: Did they all have farms?

RH: Yes. And right along next to us, there was a family by the name of Marquardt -- John Marquardt. They had quite a large farm -- was on both sides of Theobald Road and ran all the way to Dempster Street on the north. And then they had the 20 acres of woods on Lincoln Avenue which ran from Austin to Georgiana Avenue. That was Marquardt's woods. Marquardt's pasture, we called it, because there he had cows and we used to go through it to go to school. I went to the first five grades over here at the public school. Two rooms . . . Grove School.

Q: Two rooms?

RH: Two-room building. I made the first five grades there, and then I went to St. Pete, parochial school, St. Peter's Catholic, for sixth, seventh and eighth.

Q: Do you remember your teacher at the public school?

RH: Well, there was a Miss Merck [?], I think it was. And then Miss Herschberger, whom I had most of the year. I think Miss Merck [?] was my teacher for the first

and second, and then she was very kind to me. I was always listening to what the grade ahead of me was doing, and I used to do some of their work. She happened to notice that, and she picked it up. Finally she says, "I think you would be able to do the third grade work from what I've seen." So I went from the second to third in a year.

Q: You were lucky she noticed that.

RH: Yes. Then I got into the second room and Miss Herschberger was in there. The teacher who taught for so many, many years here, Ordway. She taught all my older brothers and sisters. She was still there when I started, but Miss Herschberger took over. She was no longer in the second room when I got there.

Q: What did the outside of the school building look like when you went to school there?

RH: Oh, sort of a stone and brick.

Q: Was it surrounded by just farms?

RH: Capulina Avenue was there. And there was just a little spur of School Street that went down to Marquardt's woods.

Q: Was it paved?

RH: Oh, no (laughs), it wasn't paved. There wasn't any paved roads when I was a kid. No, it was all mud and dirt, and I can remember when Ferris Avenue was cut through to Dempster Street. Through the woods. And all of the others, every one of those streets, they all went as far as Capulina Avenue originally. From Ferris down to Georgiana there were four streets. First Ferris Avenue was cut through to Dempster to get away from going all the way around and crossing the tacks twice. And then Fernald Avenue. Poehlmann Brothers did that themselves because they wanted a direct route to their plants. Plant B over here -- they cut through the woods. Then the other streets, people started building homes north of Capulina, and then they finally cut the streets through. The church was built in there. What was it -- 1903 or something? I think I'm in the right period. Then Julius Geweke, an attorney, built his house there.

Q: Did you walk to St. Peter's then?

RH: We walked and ran -- if we were late we ran (laughter) -- to St. Peter's.

Q: What do you remember as your major interest when you were in grade school? Was there anything in particular you liked?

RH: Oh, well, we played games, pom-pom-pull-away, cherry across the water, hide and seek, and such. But I was always interested in baseball.

Q: Were you on the team here in town?

RH: Yes, we formed a team -- Herb Scharenberg that's the cashier of the bank, he had been a semi-pro player. I remember going watching him play. Well, they had a semi-pro team in Morton Grove. My older brother, George, and Herb Dilg and Henry Theobald -- he was the catcher. Most of the players were from outside. But they had a good semi-pro team. And then that kind of petered out and Glenview started up, so I used to go up to Glenview and take the train and watch. Herb Scharenberg was playing on that Glenview team. Then after the bank had started, they hired him as the cashier in Morton Grove Trust and Savings Bank. He started up a team called the Morton Grove Colts. We were all, well, I was the youngest and the tallest on he team. I was only fourteen years old. They were all fourteen, fifteen, sixteen.

Q: Who did you play?

RH: Oh, we played neighboring teams and we also booked teams from what you call the Chicago Amateurs Association. I think we won most of them.

Q: Did you?

RH: Yes. Herb Scharenberg had some good friends from Chicago. He hired a battery -- pitcher and catcher -- from Chicago, and they were pretty good. Otherwise I don't think we'd have won as many games. (laughter)

Q: Well, that's being honest. (laughs) How many acres under glass did your father have?

RH: Well, I notice that Niles Township history gave him credit for twenty thousand square feet at that greenhouse. Actually, when I was a young teenager, he built three more houses. We had about thirty acres. We tore down a couple of the old ones and built three new, more modern -- they were wider. We had about thirty-five, thirty-six thousand square feet. That's not counting everything.

Q: Did your father employ anyone else to help out at the greenhouse or was it just you kids?

RH: Oh, yes, when I was a kid, we had my Uncle Tom Yehl and Henry Fielder (?) used to work there at least until I can remember. To go back to who he'd hire, during the summer months, for a lot of the heavy work, he always hired hobos that would come around looking for work. They'd work a day and a day and a half, and they'd get enough to (laughs) buy a bottle of booze (laughs) and the canned heat. Poehlmann Brothers attracted many, and they hired a lot of them, too, for the labor. They had a lot of hobos. In fact, they had a camp for the, back by the greenhouse where they built a barracks for them. Where that new Plant C was.

Q: Closer to the tracks are you talking?

RH: No, it was away form the tracks. The newest plant that they had built. Well, part of it, they had to really tear down, but there was some dry pieces that was all leveled by the railroad. Not only my grandma's, but they leased or bought the gravel from that gravel hill that spans the northeast and the southwest. And there were a lot of water holes and that forest that grew up. Trees grew up in it. And back in there is where they had built sort of a barracks in there.

Q: Did they supply their food?

RH: Well, no. They just had a place for them to stay. And they cooked their own food and made campfires.

Q: Was there ever any problem in town with them?

RH: Very little.

Q: How did people feel about them?

RH: Well, I don't know that there'd been any complaint. A lot of the hobos would come begging for food.

Q: Really?

RH: Oh, yes. We had a lot of them come and stop in at Theobald Road. They'd wander through or -- I don't know whether they begged much in Morton Grove, but they would go to the outskirts. We always gave a handout. And we hired any -- you'd be surprised. We had a man come look for a job. He had on a black broadcloth suit and a white stiff shirt he was wearing. Hobo. And he worked for us two or three days, about three days, and I worked with him and talked to him a lot. Do you know that he was a professor in Cornell University in New York? But heavy drinker and he went to the dogs.

Q: What were the wages that your father would pay for them?

RH: Well, the going wage was just fifteen cents an hour. A dollar and a half a day for ten hours work. Then it was raised to sixteen and a half cents an hour, a dollar sixty-five cents a day. I remember. And I think it went up a little bit more than that -- twenty-five cents an hour. Then we quit them, and so he didn't hire much any more because -- in fact, I did a man's work when I was thirteen. (laughs) Night and day. Then, of course, Lambert came around. He got a little bigger. After he was through grade school, why, he worked there. And Ernestine worked in the greenhouse doing just cuttings and potting and stuff like that for a few years.

Q: In your opinion, do you know why so many people who had settled in this area built greenhouses? There were so many, just in Niles Township.

RH: Well, it was near Chicago, a good market. And, I don't know why, but it was not only north. Evanston was full of them. Niles Center, Morton Grove, Des Plaines and all the way around Chicago. Out west, Amlings which was the only one, the big -- Peter Reinberg in Lincolnwood had a huge greenhouse. And he at one time had the largest greenhouse in America. Well, Poehlmann's passed him. They were on Western Avenue north of Lawrence. That was called Bowmanville at the time. That was actually a separate -- before it belonged to Chicago, that was Bowmanville.

Q: Yes, right. I've heard of it.

RH: And then Amlings were out west of Chicago. After Reinberg, his property became too valuable and he tore down the greenhouses, and sold it for real estate and

business, and so forth along Western. Then Amling was the main competitor of Poehlmann Brothers.

Q: Were they?

RH: Yes. Oh, yes. They had several big plants.

Q: After your father closed down his greenhouse . . .

RH: He didn't. He sold it and it was sold several times since 1921, and many of those houses there are still the same houses that I helped build. (laughs) Yes, all but -- the three old houses that were left (pauses). I don't know which of the following owners, they finally tore those down and built two new ones in their place. The newer ones were all wider. And that's the only two new greenhouses that have been built there. All others we had built. So some of those are quite old.

Q: Yes, really.

RH: Yes, because the two first houses running, from the south, running east and west, they must be sixty-five years old. Because I was a fairly young teenager when we built those. Well, actually, I say we built them, but Mr. Mailander built them. As the contractor, but I worked with him. As a carpenter, I was not much. Couldn't saw a straight board. (laughter) I could hit a nail on the head, but I couldn't saw very well.

Q: Did anyone in the family ever go over to Poehlmann's and work after your father sold it?

RH: No.

Q: Do you remember going in Poehlmann's?

RH: Oh, yes. I remember carrying a well casing, a four-inch well casing, when I was only about fourteen years old. I and Jake Baumhardt. They were supposed to be pre-cut to size, and the one was too big. I had about three or four inches cut off of it on Poehlmann's big machinery. We couldn't handle a four-inch. We could probably only up to two inches, but we had to carry that on our shoulders all the way to Poehlmann Brothers and carry it back. Oh, brother! This was casing! Not an ordinary steel pipe -- it was well casing this thick. [gestures]

Q: Did you go to a lot of dances here?

RH: Oh, I never was a great dancer. I was too bashful and nervous. I went to dances and I danced. Of course, I danced a lot with my older sisters, because they were trying to get me to dance more. They would get me out on the floor.

Q: Where were a lot of them held?

RH: Oh, Dilg's Hall was quite a place, and then across where the library is now, Joe Hoss started a Manila Park, he called it. They had picnics there every Sunday and had a bandstand and a dance floor, an open dance floor there. There were

always places. When we talked about the railroad, Klehm owned a lot of property along the river. Klehm. St. Paul Park was started by Klehm before the turn of the century and was an amusement park. And the Milwaukee Railroad ran special excursion trains out from Chicago, parked them on the siding here in Morton Grove. And I can remember my older sisters dragging me along and seeing all these trains stand there.

Q: And people would come out from Chicago?

RH: People would come out. This was before Riverview. This was the Riverview of Chicago.

Q: No kidding.

RH: It never was big. They didn't have the different kind of rides they did, but they had all kinds of amusements there and a big pavilion. And that went on. . . I don't know. I must have been eight, nine years old when -- I guess the railroad wanted more money, and Klehm wouldn't give it to him. They just closed down. That's when it stopped. But that pavilion stood there for many, many years, and people would rent it and run fairs in there and have dances there on Saturday nights or Sundays. Local organizations of any kind from all around would actually hold their picnics in St. Paul Park.

Q: So at the time Klehm was making it and so was the train.

RH: They had built a dam down near where the Weldons live. In fact, George Weldon's father was the first white child born in the Township of Niles.

Q: That's right.

RH: They damned the river, and they had boating. You could take rowboats and go down to the dam or go north all the way to the Church Street bridge. It backed up that far. So that was all part of the amusement. I'll never forget being a little kid getting in the boat. And there were pickerel in the river. And several times while I was in it -- and I imagine it happened to other people -- the pickerel would jump up and they'd land in the boat. (laughter)

Q: You can really remember a lot.

RH: Yes. But we kids always went down to the river at the swimming hole. We used to fish with poles and catch bullheads and sunfish. And at the river, we would catch the same kind of things except once in a while, we'd get a, not a carp -- oh, what the heck is the name of that fish -- sucker! They're white, silvery sort of fish and got about that big, but they were like a carp except they were scavengers. Yes, we never ate them, but it was fun to catch them. (laughs)

Q: In the wintertime, did you ice skate on the river?

RH: We skated on the river quite a bit, but the gravel pit was so close to us. And that was a pretty large area. I was nine years old, and I got my first pair of

skates. And I remember skating and falling, skating and falling (laughs), up and down. Always getting in the way of the bigger people. (laughter)

Q: That's great.

RH: They even came down here from Niles Center to skate on the gravel pit.

Q: Where was Hobo Island then?

RH: Hobo Island was where it still is today.

Q: Where is that?

RH: Right across the street from -- over across the tracks, down from the tracks there was a channel. When they dug, put the railroad through there, they dug a channel and used some of that for fill, so that the river went around and through this channel and well, the main bed was here. So it formed an island, because of this channel that was built around here. People threw things in it and ground water. It kind of got blocked off on the upper end and the water no longer flowed. It just came around the corner and didn't go any farther. But that was the hobo's, that was one of their main hang-outs. Got the name of Hobo Island.

Q: Did any of the kids ever go to the island or were you told to stay away?

RH: Oh, yes. We used to go down there. The hobos never bothered us. My kids always ran down there. I'll never forget they used to toboggan down that steep bank, go

across, when that little bay that was in there would freeze over. I went down there with them one day, and, "Hey," they said, "come on. Try it! Try it!" Gee, that bank looked awful steep, so I got on that little sled they had, bunched up and sitting up like this. [gestures] And about four feet from the ice it dropped out. It went out and then (drops fist on table).

Q: Oh, no!

RH: Well, I landed on the ice. I stuck my foot in my mouth. (laughs) I said, "Well, I did it."

Q: Do you remember going over to the swimming hole in the gravel pit?

RH: Oh, yes. A lot.

Q: I've heard some stories about that.

RH: Oh, yes.

Q: Was that the one where the guys went swimming with no clothes on?

RH: Yes, that's right. We didn't wear -- we skinny dipped. No, we never wore anything.

Q: Did you ever go to the little movie theater that was on Ferris Avenue?

RH: Oh, sure. Sure. That was the only movie theater around. They used to come from Glenview and Niles Center.

Q: Really?

RH: Oh, yes.

Q: Who owned that?

RH: Morton Grove had the first one. I was thinking about that. I really don't know who owned that.

Q: Do you remember what admission was?

RH: I think Richard Weigt operated that first. I think he started it. And Eifer (?) Hoffman and Fred Sonne operated the machines, and Art played the piano.

Q: (laughs) He did?

RH: Oh, yes. He was a good piano player.

Q: The piano was in the front of the movie theater?

RH: Yes, up front. That's the way the movie theaters were. They always just had a player piano or somebody playing the piano. Art played the piano and Fred Sonne operated the projector.

Q: What was admission, do you remember?

RH: Oh, I don't know. It seems to me that it started at a dime and went up to a quarter.

Q: Incredible, isn't it?

RH: Yes, oh, yes. A dollar bought something in those days. (laughs)

Q: Yes. Do you remember anything special about your holidays as a family? Your Christmas?

RH: Christmas always was a big thing as we were kids before we really knew anything about it. Why, it was always a big deal. We had to go to bed and Santa Claus would come during the night. He would make a noise. We would probably hear him stamping on the porch, and my father would come in and -- we weren't allowed to get up until the next morning. And this tree was always -- they never put that up until the night before, after we went to bed, you know, and decorated it with hand decorations.

Q: Did you have the candles on the tree?

RH: Candles, yes. Oh, yes.

Q: How about Halloween? Did you ever pull any pranks with your friends? (laughs)

RH: A little bit. We were, of course, a half a mile out into the country, and we never came into town that much. You know, once I remember there was a fellow by the name of Levett. And my grandmother, when I was in second grade, built that house that still stands there that belongs to Harper. My grandmother built that when I was in second grade, and then she and the children lived there. She rented out the place over here to Nelleson's farm. Anyway, this Levett was a crotchety old cuss, and the boys loved to play tricks on him. So I joined a gang and we were heading for his place, and all of a sudden -- BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! You know, he used to shoot -- I don't suppose he shot at us, but he scared us with his revolver. Oh, boy! Did we chase tail and run! Oh, boy, we had fleeting feet, I'll tell you.

Q: What church were you involved in here? St. Martha's?

RH: No, St. Martha's didn't exist. Went to St. Pete's on Sunday. We drove a horse and buggy.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B ENDS

TAPE TWO, SIDE A

Q: Were you involved with St. Martha's when that started?

RH: Oh, yes, yes. St. Martha's started in 1919, I think it was.

Q: Yes, it was.

RH: We were always very active in that. In fact, we started -- I suppose you know that -- started a saloon on Lincoln Avenue.

Q: Storefront.

RH: Yes. Then when the church was built here, Father Schmidt wasn't here any longer. Yes, I think he was. Sure, he was. Father Schmidt was still here because Father Schmidt, my brother Lambert and I and Peter Schuetz and Peter Lazar, who farmed Charlie Fisher's property over here, where that little red brick now it's painted white. That's an old building.

Q: Where is that?

RH: On Carol Avenue. There's a brick building painted white that's got two big walnut trees . . .

Q: I think I know which one you're talking about.

RH: Well, Pete Lazar farmed that and the Fisher property across the street. And he had a truck. Peter Schuetz and Peter lazar used their trucks. We went to St. Mary's church basement in Evanston, and Father Schmidt had negotiated for the old pews that they had in the basement.

Q: He mentioned that.

RH: Well, we hauled those pews . . .

Q: So you were one of those that went with to get them?

RH: Oh, yes. I and Lazar and Peter Schuetz and Father Schmidt went.

Q: I heard they were beautiful pews. Didn't he say they were made out of oak?

RH: Oak. They were in the basement there, hadn't been used. They needed cleaning up.

Q: Father Schmidt mentioned your family a lot when I was interviewing him.

RH: Well, the Harrers and the Lochners and Haupts and a few more were his helpers. Well, actually there were only twenty-six families and only about sixteen of those were active.

Q: He mentioned your family was very active.

RH: Oh, yes.

Q: He said something about the kids playing the organ or singing in the choir. Did he mean the Harrer children?

RH: Oh, probably my sisters. I never did. I always liked to sing, but I never could. (laughs) I still make noises, but you can't call it singing.

Q: When St. Martha's was formed, was there a young people's club or organization formed yet, or did that come later?

RH: Well, I don't think any young people at the time (?) -- the whole thing was a club, you might say. Everybody pitched in and were active. Later it had become different. But getting to clubs, you mentioned in here about clubs and social, this baseball group after about three years of playing, we formed what we called the Marquette Club, named after Father Marquette who came through down the Des Plaines River in the 1600s and something, 1708 or something.

Q: And you formed the Marquette Club?

RH: We called it the Marquette Club. And we had about thirty-five, forty, yes. Forty members. We had members from Niles Center and Glenview.

Q: What did you do? What was the purpose?

RH: Well, just social. We had meetings and played cards and had initiations and played some tricks. (laughter) And held a couple of doings every year. Ordinarily, we always had a summer picnic and outing in St. Paul Park and a dance in the pavilion and at least one excursion. We'd drive up to one of the lakes up north. Fox Lake or Round Lake or one of those, and the baseball team -- the Marquette Club, backed the baseball team.

Q: Who formed it?

RH: Well, I would say that George Loutsch was probably the master mind of it. He was elected as president. I was elected to treasurer, and I was the treasurer until it disbanded. (laughs)

Q: When did it disband?

RH: Oh, golly, I don't know. Finally, you know, other things came up and there was a lack of interest; it began to deteriorate. So somebody says, "Oh, what's the use? We're not enjoying it the way we used to." So somebody made a motion to disband, and we disbanded. But we had a charter and everything from the state. We had to file papers, which I had to take care of.

Q: It sounds like it was fun anyway.

RH: Oh, it was. It was a nice group. We really never had an organized team -- but we used to go and take a basketball and throw it around in St. Paul's pavilion. Put up a basket on each end, and, boy, that was a big basketball court. (laughs) You'd get tired out running back and forth on that. We used to choose up sides and throw the ball around.

Q: Sounds like you had a great boyhood and teen-age years.

RH: To have fun, we used to, well, run around the perimeter and do a few exercises. Sort of fitness, it wasn't really well organized, but we enjoyed it.

Q: Sounds like fun. You've already talked about the different streets that were all paved.

RH: Well, streets were all mud and dirt, and we had nothing but the railroad until -- I don't know who started that bus line to Chicago. They ran to the el station. Wilson Avenue el station -- Wilson and Western. And that goes way back, even before the World War One. In fact, right after World War One, we did have a jitney. Peter Heinz of Niles Center, he actually was at Sharp Corner up at Church Street there. Heinz's family came from there. He had an old autocar, they called them. Now you call them vans. It was built like a modern-day van, but it was an old autocar. Had a dual differential, if you know what that is. That was very noisy. See, that was, the nice thing it drove on both wheels, but the dual differential driving all the gears in there made a loud humming sound on it. So it was noisy going down the street, and it broke down (laughs) every once in a while, and you could be sitting there. But it was a great thing, because you could hire that. He operated all though -- not as many runs as the bus -- but certain times of the day, he would also run down to the el station. Or in between, you could hire that bus. So we had no swimming pool or anything here, a bunch of us young people, we got him to drive us every Thursday night to Lake Michigan for a quarter. And that bus was loaded. (laughs)

Q: I'll bet.

RH: So, every Thursday night during the summer, he ran us down to Lake Michigan.

Q: Your family only had the horse and buggy, though, in that time?

RH: Yes, we just had horse and buggy and another single wagon, as we called it, which we did some work around.

Q: When did you get your first car then? Do you remember that?

RH: We didn't get a car until the 1920s, after we sold the greenhouses. I don't remember what the first year was. In fact, I didn't live in that house. When they moved, I lived in with the family in the garage. We had just kitchen and beds in the garage before the house was done. We had to get out of the other one. And then my brother, who was with Swift & Company, had gone to Mason City, Iowa, in 1915. The Decker brothers wrote to Swift & Company and asked if they had a young man. They were looking for a man to -- they had an officer, and take charge of their branches -- that they could recommend. And they recommended my brother, so he went there and he was there until Decker's were taken over by Armour about twenty-some years later.

Q: Which brother is this?

RH: George, the oldest one. And anyway, he kept writing when he knew we sold. He says, "Come on out here. Come on out here." To me. So I went out there and I worked in the Decker plant at different jobs.

Q: Was that your first job in the greenhouse?

RH: That was my first job after the greenhouse. Well, I was going out with my wife,

and we, of course, then married. And finally, after about a year and a half, I quit and came back here in 1923.

Q: What year did you get married?

RH: '25, and then I went and looked for a job. I tried different employment agencies, and they sent me up on 844 North Rush Street, which was a new building. And I applied there and they hired me. June 23, 1923, and I was with them until I retired August, 1963.

Q: That's great!

RH: And there was a little coincidence there. We mentioned Weldons. Well, the granddaughter of the original Weldon, her great-granddaughter anyways, Daisy Weldon, who we knew about. She had all the dances and whatnot. I had put down on the application in answer to the question, "Do you know anybody working here?" And I said no. So, I got over, and I said, "Hey, you're Daisy Weldon." She was the secretary of the man that I had to see for a job, and I said to him, "Mr. Alexander, I made a mistake on your application. I said I didn't know anybody, but in I know your secretary there." He looked at me in surprise and turned around, and in the meantime, Daisy had looked up and she saw me. He says, "You know this young man?" "I sure do," she said. So maybe that got me the job. Anyway he hired me.

Q: What early newspaper did your family read?

RH: I have early recollections of the *Journal* -- the outside sheet was green. (laughs) The *Journal*, which went out of business some years ago.

Q: It was just called the *Journal*?

RH: The *Journal.* The *Daily Journal*. And, oh, that was probably only for a few years, after which we got the *Daily News* delivered every day.

Q: Do you think that the *Daily News* put out the *Daily Journal*?

RH: No, I don't think so. The *Journal* was bought up, probably by the *News* or the *Tribune*. I don't know. Or the *Herald Examiner*. The *Herald* was also a newspaper. It became the *Herald Examiner*. They ended buying there, and finally it wound down until there was *Daily News* and *Tribune*. And then the *Sun-Times* actually was a new newspaper backed by Marshall Field. They started a competitor and now they're the only competitor of the *Tribune*.

Q: Did you ever get the German paper, the *Abendpost*?

RH: Oh, gosh. No, I never got the *Abendpost*, but my mother got the *Jungen Freund*, the young people's friend. Jungen means youth, young people. *Jungen Freund*, and Freund is friend.

Q: And your mother received that paper?

RH: Well, when she went to school they had only German. My father and my mother they only talked German, and, in fact, they had nothing but German in the church. This was such a German community. However, they started to teach some English before they got through, so they knew English also. And they spoke English when we were kids, except, as I say, if they didn't want us to know what they were talking about.

Q: Then they'd speak German. (laughs)

RH: But my grandmother fell and broke her hip. She went back to the farm from Evanston. She wanted to go back to the farm. Well, her daughter and her husband were farming, so there was somebody there. She really wanted to die on the farm, I think. Well, she went out, she was very strong willed. A carpet or something had fallen from the line out in the yard and it was January and it was icy. Instead of asking or telling her daughter to go out and get, pick it up, she went out and picked it up and fell and broke her hip. So she lived with us on Theobald Road for almost a year. Now I learned quite a bit of German from her talking German. And actually didn't learn much German in school because by the time I went to St. Peter's -- in fact, I was there about two months in the fifth, sixth grade when they dropped German entirely. So, I really didn't know -- I could read German, though. I learned enough so that I could read this *Jungen Freund*. And I would always make it a business of reading things in there. And reading in that *Jungen Freund*, the name Harrer come up in one of the stories in there. Fellow, by the name of Ignatz Harrer. (laughs)

Q: Gee, could it have been a relative?

RH: I suppose it might have been.

Q: How about the police force in Morton Grove? I've heard a lot of people say there was only one policeman.

RH: There was one policeman for quite a few years. But there wasn't -- listen, there were less than five hundred people in Morton Grove when I was a kid. That was this settlement here and the settlement up on Waukegan Road. You know, that actually was older than Morton Grove.

Q: You mean where Lochner's is?

RH: No, beyond Waukegan Road where the Dilgs, Fielwebers and Gabels lived. The Gabels were very early settlers. Where they lived, there was a settlement there that was, well, not as big, but quite sizeable.

Q: Perhaps older?

RH: Yes, and it was older than Morton Grove itself.

Q: So there was only one policeman?

RH: Yes, there was one policeman. Oh, I don't even know, I can't tell you the names there.

Q: But there wasn't much trouble in town.

RH: No. Well, on picnics, on picnic Sundays or something doing, they always hired an extra one. Some local man would be sworn in as a policeman -- be a constable or whatever you want to call him (laughs), a deputy on and help out on those days.

Q: Your father was mayor in 1895, is that correct?

RH: Yes. He was very instrumental and he was the one who pushed incorporating the town into a village. And, of course, he had help. There were others who worked with him. I think he was the pusher.

Q: That's really something to be proud of.

RH: And he was, of course, the first mayor for fourteen years, and then got tired of some of the things that were happening and he resigned.

Q: Wasn't he the president of the volunteer fire department?

RH: He was the first president of that, and he organized most of the -- he was the, not the only one, but I mean he was the pusher.

Q: Yes, it sounds like it.

RH: Took the lead in getting it. The same with the school.

Q: He was on the school board?

RH: Oh, sure, he was the first one, head of the school board, too, for. . .

Q: So he was a fairly young man, then, wasn't he, when he became mayor? You were only about three. You were born in what? 1898?

RH: I was born in 1898. I think the school was started in . . .

Q: It was 1897.

RH: Yes, that's the year I was going to mention. I think it was about 1897. There weren't many pupils in it, of course. I don't know whether that school was built with the two rooms at one time or not.

Q: Or whether there was an addition or not -- is that what you mean?

RH: Whether they built on a half of it and then added to it. I really don't know. It looked the same as I can remember it. It didn't look like there was any addition. So I think the building was built at one time. The first graduation class there was my brother George, Herb Dilg, Irene Hoffman -- who was the other? -- Fred Huscher. Yes, Fred. Those were the four, the first graduating class.

Q: (laughs) That's pretty big.

RH: Three boys and one girl, yes.

Q: Was being a mayor a part-time job?

RH: Oh, yes. He continued out there at the greenhouse. It took a lot of his time, though. I think that was one reason why he got out. Because it was taking too much of his time, and he was away from the greenhouse.

Q: What did you say he did after the greenhouse? They bought that other house over there.

RH: Yes, they built that other house, and he was the -- at that time he was a Republican. He had been a Democrat; he became a Republican. He was the Republican precinct committeeman. He got a political job down in the county recorder's office. He worked there for years until he finally quit.

Q: He had quite a life. When World War I came, were any family members involved in that?

RH: No. I wanted to enlist because a couple of my cousins from down in Chicago came out in uniform, and, boy, I was all gung-ho. But I wasn't actually old enough. They'd have had to sign papers and they said, "No. I need you here." My dad did, because he couldn't hire anybody, see.

Q: You were younger than the age, too.

RH: So I had to register, of course, in time. I was in Class 1-A and was called for physical examination in October,1918, but I was down in bed with the flu that raged around here at that time. You probably heard about that.

Q: Yes.

RH: And so my dad was the registrar. He was the registrar for the young people. And, of course, he notified them that I couldn't be there, and he had to get a doctor's certificate. We never had a doctor and I was out of my mind, I guess. I had such a high fever for a while, weakened. So I was down in bed from Saturday, and on Thursday he got the doctor in order to get me, for him to make out a statement that I was unable to report.

Q: Were any of the women involved in the Women's War Working Circle?

RH: I don't think so. No, I don't think any of them were actually a member of it. That was quite an organization.

Q: Were you at the dedication of the monument over by the library?

RH: Yes, I think I was there. (laughs) I had no part in it.

Q: How about when Prohibition came along? Do you remember anything in particular about the roadhouses on Dempster?

RH: Well, I wasn't quite a tavern visitor. It didn't make any difference to me really, although here I made some home brew during -- tried it. It was successful once. I had a good batch, but it must have . . .

Q: Was it beer?

RH: Beer, yes. I made some wine one year, too. It turned out quite good after a time. After it aged.

Q: Do you remember any of the roadhouses? Anything in particular about them?

Q: Dells? Lincoln Tavern? The Bridge?

RH: Oh, before that. Before the Lincoln Tavern. The old Hoch, Dr. Hotz's place -- what was the name of that? (long pause)

Q: Wayside?

RH: Wayside Inn? Yes, I think that was it. That was the first one. That was set back, way back. There was a pavilion there, too. (laughs) Anyway that was the first one. I remember that. And they had a dance pavilion that they built up there, which was used quite a bit afterwards, you know, when that became forest preserve. But anyway that finally burned down. That was about a block back from Dempster Street, and the tree-lined driveway. It was a beautiful place. He was a well-known doctor in Chicago. This was his country estate out there. He had quite a lot of acreage. For the same way where the original Lincoln Tavern was in. The Gutman property is now the Gutman and Kretschmer Candy Company. He operated a candy company in Chicago, and that was his home out here. He bought five acres, I guess, from the Huschers, directly across where the Lincoln Tavern was. After that burned down, then the Lincoln Tavern moved into the old Huscher

building. The place was vacant, so they just moved in there. That was right across the alley from us here. That was a big grove of trees, and there was a house in there in the center of it. Except for in the corner. The corner was occupied by the frame building that the Sonnes lived in. And Mrs. Sonne was a Huscher, and I guess he just bought the corner lot there and he built it. Otherwise, that property was still all the woods and grounds for the old Huscher home and with the Wayside Inn.

Q: Do you remember the airport off of Dempster over there?

RH: I remember that, yes. Sure, I used to go and watch there.

Q: Did you ever have a ride?

RH: No, I never did. I never had a ride, but Fred Sonne, who lived up there across the street from it . . . Of course, he was very interested in it and worked for -- some World War aviator started it. I forget, I don't know what . . .

Q: I don't remember his name off hand.

RH: Maybe one of the Sonne boys would remember it. And Fred and Art Hoffman worked around there a lot, but Fred really got interested in it, and he learned to fly. And that's how he started the Aerial Survey Company.

Q: Did a lot of people go out there to watch the planes?

RH: Well, there was I think more strangers than local.

Q: Really?

RH: Passers-by would stop in and . . .

Q: It was pretty big.

RH: Yes. Nobody was farming it at the time. It was pasture land. And they used the whole thing back there.

Q: How about when the Depression years came in the '30s? Did that affect your family life? By that time you were married.

RH: Well, I was thinking -- there was a little Depression after World War One, but nothing like the '30s. No, I would say it didn't affect us except that things were hard to get. And as I said, we raised many bags of navy beans and the prime ingredient of our meals during a couple of years there was navy beans and cornmeal. (laughter) Corn and navy beans was the basic food. Oh, we had vegetables in the summertime and even in the winter. We would grow our own vegetables and then heel them in, as we called it -- cover them over.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A ENDS

TAPE TWO, SIDE B

Q: How did the Depression affect Morton Grove? I know the bank closed and then Poehlmann's went down.

RH: Oh, yes, it hit Morton Grove very hard because Morton Grove was very dependent on Poehlmann Brothers.

Q: A lot of people worked there.

RH: Yes. I would say the bulk of people who were gainfully employed outside of their own activities at home, why, the bulk of them, I think, were working for the greenhouse, and it hit the town very hard. Then when the bank closed, that made it doubly hard.

Q: Right. In your opinion, do you think there was nay other reason why Poehlmann's collapsed other than just the Depression coming along?

RH: Well, yes. I think they . . . (pauses) . . . I would not say over-expanded, but expanded into activities that didn't particularly pay out. See, they had that huge orchid -- well, the orchids, I think, paid for itself, but then they built huge, high greenhouses, conservatory I'd call them. And they had, oh, a tremendous display of palms of various kinds. Some of them were huge. That never paid for itself. Then they put in new boilers in Plant C -- modern type of boilers -- and installed them themselves. The manufacturer wanted to install

them, but they said, “We’ve got our own engineers.” And they never installed them right, I guess. And that was what led to the black snow. (laughs)

Q: Oh, the soot.

RH: The soot. It wasn’t really soot. They pulverized the coal. See they ran the coal up on winches and dumped into high hoppers and then down chutes. And they ground the coal up as it went down into the chutes and blew it in, which was supposed to be very economical, but it never operated right. And they were blowing unburned or just charred -- what it really was like was little fine black cinders, because the combustion was not correct. They blew a lot of it out of the chimney. Instead of burning up in the furnace, a lot of it blew out of the chimney and that’s what blew out over when the wind was right.

Q: It didn’t make some people too happy.

RH: The snow would turn black.

Q: (laughs) Oh, gee. How about the W.P.A. or any of those government projects? Was anyone in your family involved in those?

RH: No, all except only to observe them. (laughter) I was all over. In Chicago I used to get off at Western Avenue and take Chicago Avenue over to 844 Rush Street. And they would have what looked to me like a hundred guys in a block, working, supposedly repairing some of the Chicago streets. And they would take

turns on leaning on the shovels. One was working, five guys were watching. (laughter) And that was no joke. I saw it.

Q: I believe you.

RH: I don't think they were as bad as that here in Morton Grove. (laughs)

Q: Then during the Depression, as far as you were concerned, you were still working and it really didn't hurt you financially.

RH: Oh, yes. I took a cut in wages. Other than that I had a job and we were getting by, raising the kids.

Q: Would you like to tell me how many children you have and what their names and ages are?

RH: Four. Two boys -- John and James. We call them Jack and Jim. Two girls -- Marjorie and Joan. Marjorie is Midge and Joan is Joan. But she had a nickname as a kid, but she's glad she never kept it. (laughter)

Q: I won't ask what it was then. So when the '40s came around and the Second World War broke out, was anyone in the family involved in that?

RH: Oh, yes. The boys enlisted while they were still in high school, and after their graduation, they went into Service.

Q: And everybody came back safely.

RH: Everybody -- well, actually none of them was in combat. Jim, the second one, went in and never finished his basic training when he was sent over to Japan in the army of occupation. He was stationed at Bepu (?) on the Island of Kyushu.

Q: Was the when we occupied the Japanese for four years?

RH: Occupied Japan, yes. Well, they went over there right after the war ended in August and he went over in November. And the Camp Chickamauga wasn't completed yet when they got there. They had really nothing to do. Some of the soldiers used to wander off and go to Bepu. A lot of them never came back, because some of those Japanese people there -- it was down on one of the lesser islands, you know, and they didn't know the war was over. And so, after that, they were never allowed to go into town unless they went in a group.

Q: How did your sons or yourself react when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

RH: Well, we used to hike in the forest preserve an awful lot on Sundays -- the family. And we were out walking, and we came home, and I turned on the radio. First thing I heard was Pearl Harbor was bombed. That's all that was on the radio, of course, but that's the first thing I heard. I said, "Oh, my God!" And I yelled. I says, "Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." Everybody gathered around and . . .

Q: That was a shocker for all the people.

RH: Yes.

Q: Was there any particular reaction in this community since it was mainly a German settlement toward the war?

RH: I would say no. There were some German people who had some feelings, but not aggressively or not actively -- expressed some thoughts, but that's about the extent of it. And they were few. Oh, we had no difficulty, but that's about the extent of it. And they were few. Oh, we had no difficulty. There was one, not from Morton Grove, who had a reputation of being quite outspoken.

Q: Did he get in trouble for it?

RH: Sort of, yes. He was hauled in and sort of detained for a while.

Q: How about your life here at home? Different things were rationed like sugar or flour.

RH: Oh, yes.

Q: Was that particularly hard?

RH: Well, I don't know. We really didn't suffer. Of course, we couldn't operate as usual, but we got by.

Q: Do you remember when you got your fist telephone?

RH: Oh, I was going to St. Pete's I think. Or was I? No, I think we got that telephone before I went to St. Pete's. Very early in the 1900s. I was pretty small. It was the old wall phone that you rang.

Q: And the exchange was at Dilg's?

RH: The exchange was at Dilg's originally, yes. Then I guess it went to Sickengers from there. And then Mrs. Ernestine Paroubek. She got tired of working in the greenhouse. She was, oh, a teenager. She worked for Mrs. Paroubek on the exchange before she went to the railroad to work.

Q: How about electricity? Do you remember that coming to your home?

RH: That I think came while I was over at St. Pete's. That must have probably been around 1909 or '10. I think that's when electricity came in. Before that everything, of course, was kerosene. No, gas light. I can remember some kerosene lights, but we had gas lights in the house, but not in the greenhouse. We still used kerosene lamps in the greenhouse until we got some electricity. But we still used kerosene lanterns to go up and down the aisles to read the thermometers at night in the houses. But in the packing house and the boilers, we had electricity.

Q: Dorothy Yehl had mentioned the ice cream wagon that used to come around. Do you remember that?

RH: Oh, yes. I can remember that. That goes way back, because I was a little kid. I can't remember whether I had the mumps or whether I had the measles, but I was . . . (pauses) . . . oh, I was very small. I was lying in the crib. They had these cribs. All the kids slept in there for a while. And I was lying in this crib, and I heard this guy ring his bell. Dad went out and bought some ice cream. The best thing I ever had in my life! (laughter)

Q: Do you remember any political races in town?

RH: Oh, yes. Some of them were quite active and there were pretty strong races. I was part of them. I first served over here on the school board in 1928, I think it was. No, before that on the school board. In fact, we put the first addition on the back end of that school -- the first addition to the original two rooms. And then they talked, in fact, they didn't talk me into it -- they put my name up in a meeting, and I didn't have the guts to decline. I ran for trustee, and I was trustee for seven years. 1935, and then I quit because my dad had been dying of cancer, my wife was in the hospital for seven weeks and they didn't expect her to live. And when it come time to make up the ticket for spring, they kept arguing. My dad finally died the week after my wife came home from the hospital. They always said he, seemed like he hung on until she came home.

Q: I didn't know your father died of cancer.

RH: Yes, cancer of the throat. And he had to be fed through a tube.

Q: Is that so?

RH: Open up here and put a tube to the stomach and fed liquids. That lasted about three, four months, and then he finally went into a coma and died. And my wife was still unable to work. She had to be in bed after she came home. It made me mad. At my dad's wake, which in those days was still held in the home, these guys corner me. I was greeting people at the door. Pulled me aside, and, "You've got to run. You got to run. You got to run." And I cussed. I says, "Here. Look here. All the trouble I've been having, and here's my father just died and my wife almost died and she's still bedridden, and you come around here." I said, "Get the hell out of here!" (laughs)

Q: I don't blame you.

RH: Certain ones of those never forgave me. And then so a couple of years later, part of that group who were on the board came around. They talked me into running for mayor against Herb Dilg. I was foolish enough then. Well, I couldn't, I sympathized with them, and I ran. They told me, "You don't have to do anything. We'll work." Because I was taking a school course. I had taken a four-year course in insurance while I was working, and that'd take a lot of my time. So, anyway, they got mad at me, too, because the night before election, I had to take my final examination. The end of the four years. And they got mad at me because I was late in coming to the meeting.

Q: That was more important -- four years.

RH: Well, darn right it was. Because I was so darn tied from electioneering that that night I sat there and my mind went blank. So I just sat there and closed my

eyes for about fifteen minutes and finally came back. I finished my examination. I was scared, but, you know, I had my best marks. It was darn near perfect.

Q: Did you? (laughter) Well, good. Fifteen minutes paid off.

RH: Well, in fact, I graduated for the four years magna cum laude. The first one. I was the first one who graduated from that. Of course, they had a lot of them later, because it was something new and the classes were small.

Q: What year was this that you ran against Herb Dilg?

RH: 1937, I think it was. It was the spring of 1938. And then I got out of it and I was happy. The vote was 491 to 479. Quite close. I was really relieved. I felt sorry there was only one fellow on the ticket, Walter Poehlmann, that was reelected. Boy, he was sad. He says, "Oh, I got to be on the board all by myself now." But then I got back on the planning commission in about 1948 or something like that, and I was on until 1955. Then I had quite a prolonged illness. My doctors couldn't figure out what it was. I was in the hospital for four days for testing. They couldn't make up their mind. They finally decided it was a respiratory virus, but in those days respiratory diseases or viruses were a little something new yet. It took me a month to get over it. Anyway, I resigned from the planning commission and quit bowling. I never went back to it either. I haven't bowled since '55.

Q: Or politics?

RH: Or politics. I've been happier staying out of it. I'll tell you, small time politics is, can be worse than the big time politics, because you've got so many personalities in there.

Q: It gets to be more of a personal thing.

RH: Yes, that's it. And some people would come to you with their grievances against another guy, and because you wouldn't do it, it was none of your business to enter into their private affairs. You wouldn't do anything about it, they were mad at you for life.

Q: Yes. I can see the problem there.

RH: I really think small time politics itself is neighbor against neighbor and so forth. It's really worse than big-time politics.

Q: How about the American Legion? Were you ever involved in it?

RH: Well, actually, as I say, the war ended. I never got into the Service. I would have gotten into the Service if it were able to go for the first examination, because those people were called and they went into Service and were in camp about ten days and they sent them home because armistice was declared. And I went just a couple of days before the armistice -- had to go to Wilmette for the physical. That was something in itself. (laughter) Anyway, they said, "Don't worry. You're 1-A, but you'll never be called. It's going to end." Two days

later in did end. So I never got in, so I was never eligible for the Legion, but I went to doings and things like that, but I never was involved.

Q: Were there any other fraternal organizations or civic organizations in town that you joined?

RH: Now the boys never joined the Legion either, although they were in the Army. Oh, I belonged to the Foresters, the Catholic Order of Foresters. I belonged to the Knights of Columbus. And during the Depression I dropped those to curtail expenses (laughs), and I never went back in local church affairs. Outside of the bowling club over at church and the golf club -- we had a little golf tournament every year. I was in charge of that. I had to keep all the scores and whatnot.

Q: You're somebody that's lived in Morton Grove all your life. How do you think it's changed? Do you remember the building booms that we had here in town?

RH: Oh, yes. Well, as I say, I remember it was probably less than five hundred people, and I could, even to this day, take you up and down the streets and point to the houses that I remember when I was a kid. But I can't remember all the people that lived there. I remember the town began to grow and expand gradually. It didn't really boom until after World War II like so many other places. But it kept growing, and got into the three thousands by the time World War II ended.

Q: During the Depression, did you know of anyone that lost their land in this area due to the Depression?

RH: Well, other than the greenhouses, yes, I would say there were some people. I don't think I could name them. But there were some people that lost their houses. There were an awful lot of unemployed in this town.

Q: What did a lot of people do? Just get by or did a lot of them go to the W.P.A.?

RH: Well, they did odd jobs. For instance, we had no storm windows when we bought this place in the spring of '26. We're here ever since, but I hired a carpenter. I bought some storm windows. Thought I'd give a guy a job. Hired him to put them on, and the rest I put on myself because he put them on inside out. (laughter) Well, they worked except that what was outside was on the inside. He cut the bevel on the wrong side, see, so he had to put them up the other way.

Q: Well, you've seen Morton Grove change from a community of farms to what it is today.

RH: Oh, yes, other than right here in town, the greenhouse and the few stores were in town and the pickle factory and when Huscher started the coal year. And, of course, Dilg's operated a coal yard, too, but it never was a big deal, and they gave it up when Haupt and Huscher started across the tracks. Then the vegetable growers bought the Henning Pickle Factory building over there, and that was quite an operation. Still is quite an operation.

Q: Do the changes in Morton Grove, the way you see them today, agree with you?

RH: Not now, no. I liked it as a smaller town myself. Yes, it's more personal

Q: It's really grown.

RH: Oh, yes. Boy! You know so few people now. Of course, so many have died off or at least moved away. New people coming in, even in church there are a lot of people. We have sort of gotten away from -- well, ever since I retired, we spend the winters away. See, three of our children -- I didn't tell you that -- only one lives here. One in Colorado and two in California, so we go west, have been going west every winter since I retired.

Q: What year was it that Harrer Park was named after your father?

RH: I really don't know.

Q: I think it was in the '50s. I'm not sure either.

RH: It's quite a long time ago.

Q: That must have been quite an honor.

RH: Yes, and I had to give a talk, and I went away form the platform thinking, "Boy, you made a fool of yourself." I was never good at that anyway. I was too nervous.

Q: It's really an honor to go down Dempster, I imagine, and know that the park was named after your father?

RH: Yes, it's a feeling of pride to have someone, or you meet somebody on the golf course -- you meet people in Morton Grove who don't even know, and they say, "What's your name?" "Ray Harrer." "Harrer? The park named after you?" I said, "No, that was not me because I never did anything to merit that. That was named after my father."

Q: He was quite active, wasn't he?

RH: Oh, yes. He sort of liked those things. If there were some event, like when they had the first World War W rally, he was called on to do the speaking and he was a pretty good speaker. I never was. I'd get nervous. And if I started to speak, I'd hear only my voice and nobody else's. I'd panic.

Q: Did your mother work or was she mainly taking care of the children? There were quite a few.

RH: Oh, yes. I don't know for sure. I think as a young girl she worked out in Evanston for somebody for a year or two, or something like that. That's all. Otherwise, she was at home.

Q: What yer did your mother pass away? What year were they both born?

RH: 1959. They were both born in 1865. My father in April and my mother in December. And my father died in 1935. He didn't quite reach February 28th. He didn't quite reach his 71st. And my mother died -- she was 93. My wife's mother was 94 when she died.

Q: Is the greenhouse business really profitable? Was it for you?

RH: It is for some. My dad never made much money. That was one reason why I worked for him all those years from 1911 until 1921. Oh, he paid me a little money, but very little. A little spending money. Finally at the very end, I got a small weekly salary, and when I became twenty-one, he gave me a ten percent interest in the thing. But I don't think he was really cut out for the florist business. I think he would have been better at meeting the public and, like in the business he had been in. I think he'd have been better off staying in it, because he was very good at meeting people. And I don't think it did me any good, working by myself so much, you know, all the teenage years. All I did was dream, you know. (laughter)

Q: Well, I think that about ties it up. This has been an excellent interview.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B ENDS