



Eric M. Poders



Photo Credit: Tom Robb

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Interviewer: Chad Comello
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Transcriber: Amy Chow

INTRODUCTION

Eric M. Poders has lived in the Morton Grove area for over 30 years. Born in the Rogers Park neighborhood on the Northeast side of Chicago, his parents met at the Glen Grove Equestrian Center in Morton Grove in the 1950s and in 1975 moved their family to unincorporated Glenview, which bordered Morton Grove. Eric fondly remembers visits to the Buffalo's Restaurant as a kid, spending Summers at Oriole Pool and St. Paul Woods, and biking around Morton Grove's West side with his friends. As a kid he began working at his father's pharmacy and restaurant in Downtown Chicago, which led him to study communications, advertising, and public relations in college. In addition to starting an electronics firm, he also began training racehorses and writing about them in a self-made publication called the *The Horseman's Voice*, which later evolved into *The Morton Grove Voice* and then *The North Shore Voice*.

In this interview, Eric talks about his favorite Morton Grove memories and places, the lessons he's gained from his world travels, and his appreciation for the work done by local organizations.

This transcript has been edited for content and clarity.

EP: Eric M. Poders

Q: Question asked by interviewer Chad Comello

Q: Tell me about where you were born and where you grew up.

EP: Born in Rogers Park in Chicago—on Touhy and Hamilton, which is 7200—in 1971. Basically grew up on the North side of Chicago. Moved to the area in January of 1975. But the area that I moved into—they call it the West side—it's basically called the unincorporated Glenview/Morton Grove area. And it's a little area in between, let's say, Shermer Avenue to the East, Washington Road to the West. My backyard fence, which was Fontana Drive, borders like Glenbrook South High School and Maine Township, and then Golf Road and maybe a little bit to the South of Golf. So it's real small little area. Ladendorf Park was our main park.

We moved to the area in 1975. My parents had met in the early '50s in Morton Grove. There's a little equestrian center there that everybody knows when you come down Harms Road to turn onto Golf, the Glen Grove Equestrian Center. That would be on the Southeast corner of Golf and Harms, or Central Avenue as we call it in Morton Grove. So my family has history here. Not like most people, but they met here in the '50s. They loved the area like everybody else. It was called 'Mortgage Grove.' They found an opportunity to come to the

area and like everybody else, the taxes were real high, so the area we were in, the taxes were super low. I don't know what they were offhand, but when we left in 2005 they were like \$3,500 or \$4,000 a year. And unincorporated Glenview was in an area of unincorporated Maine Township, which could be anything from Glenview, Morton Grove, Niles, Des Plaines, a little bit of Park Ridge, and it's an area where I grew up. And we'll delve into it. There's more history I guess with Skokie, Niles, some in Morton Grove. But a lot of the stuff that we did originated in Morton Grove because my parents met here 60-plus years ago.

Q: Tell me about early memories you have of this area.

EP: Buffalo's Restaurant. I remember Buffalo's, where El Sol is today. Every kid looks forward to sugar or candy or anything. Kitty-corner from Doctor Hoehne, which everybody knew where they got their braces. I got my braces I think when I was eleven in 1982. Buffalo's is the first memory, and that would be on the Northwest corner of Dempster and Austin. Just going in there in the whole hoopla and the booths and the popcorn all over the place. They would give away free popcorn back then as incentive of the kids to come in. The shakes were too big for me. The glass cups or whatever you call them, they were just as big as my hand, big as my foot. You would get such a sugar high coming out of there. You'd just be in a daze walking out of Buffalo's. That was probably my first memory.

Other than that would probably be Oriole Pool, because my uncle grew up two houses down from Oriole. So all I remember is basically Summertimes with my uncle and my aunt. And then her great Aunt Babe, who lived on the corner of Beckwith and Washington; basically two blocks from where I live now. Just getting hugs and kisses from her, Summertime, shakes at Buffalo's. It all congregates from there, but it originates basically the fact that my parents met in Morton Grove, grew up in Rogers Park, and then finally made the move to the big MG, but unincorporated.

A lot of my childhood memories stem from the mid '70s. I remember like Summer of '78, if I'm not mistaken—which when I was 7 until I was 13—I hung out in St. Paul Woods. Because the JCC camp on Church Street in Skokie, which is between those little train tracks and Skokie Boulevard—they had an Olympic-sized pool back then, so we became members there because we all liked to swim. But every Summer, Summer camp was out in St. Paul Woods. So if you could imagine kids frolicking around—we were little “pioneers” in the beginning and then did “Sports Camp” as we got older. Then it became maybe 20 or 30 guys, down to like maybe 10 of us. Most of those guys went to Niles North High School; I went to Maine East High School, so I was the oddball.

So Buffalo's, St. Paul Woods, popcorn on the floor. Another popcorn on the floor I can remember when I was 16. This is kind of funny. Where Planet Fitness is, in Village Plaza on the Northwest corner on Dempster and Harlem, used to be the Morton Grove Theater. So you would go in there—and again this

is more when I drove so when I was 16, so this was like late '80s—you would go in there and it would be the same old man collecting your \$1. And he had this big *Back to the Future* bouffant hair like the old man in the movie, and he was kind of scary and intimidating. But you would pay your dollar and then you would get your popcorn for \$2 and your pop for \$3, and you would just try and walk in and find a spot. Everybody would be there. Everybody from the area. You would try to walk to your spot and the floor would go [makes squishing sound] from all the pop and all popcorn [makes squishing sound], so you would get this mixture of pop and popcorn on the floor with that same old man collecting your \$1. They nail you on the popcorn and the pop.

And the Golf Mill Theater too, where Xport Fitness is in the Golf Mill Shopping Center—this is on Milwaukee and Maryland, which would basically be the Southeast end of Golf Mill—that back in the day, they built it as a theater for live performances if I wasn't mistaken? But again, we went there and it was like fireplaces and chairs, and it was just a big hoopla back then. But a lot of memories were, like I was saying, swimming at the pool, Buffalo's for the malt shakes, and then the movie theaters, because that's what we did back in the day. Everybody wanted to go see the latest movie.

Q: Tell me about your family.

EP: I got two sisters, one that's a year younger, so we were both '80s kids. And then another sister that's six years younger, so she was like a mid '90s graduate. More of a '90s kid, let's say—almost a Generation X. Me and my sister growing up were models. We were found at a department store. We looked like twins. This guy liked us. I think it was like JCPenny or Sears in Golf Mill. Next thing I know we were like touring around and going to all of these fashion shows and were on the front cover of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. I remember holding an apple and wearing a suit or something. My childhood, I guess, was a lot of flashes. I don't know how many years we did it, but it paid the bills.

Other family members, I guess you could say, would be puppies. We had a mama puppy at our old house in unincorporated Glenview/Morton Grove. And we had three litters, so I remember clearly having those three litters because it would be to six weeks of incubation. We had 21 puppies. We had one puppy that passed. We had a runt, which was a white dog, and when you have a runt there's a chance that one of the other puppies would pass because the white puppy hogs all the milk. So we did have one that passed; kind of freaked me out. But we raised dogs in that house, we had a swimming pool at that house, so everybody and their mother came there. But yeah, I would consider the puppies to be family. [Laughter] They're kids.

Q: What did your parents do?

EP: My mom stayed home and raised us. That was the thing that we did back then. She was like our personal security/sergeant-at-arms, do-everything mom. Raising one kid in Rogers Park was one thing, but then having the second kid was kind of a burden. And then my second sister they called a mistake. I remember her coming home in the driveway and being like, 'Oh no, not another one!' It's like competition when you have little sisters, especially with your mom being home. But my father was a pharmacist, a registered pharmacist for 49 years. I remember when I was about 6 or 7, he entered a contest with Schick razors and won a new car. So that was kind of new and exciting. There was a Chrysler Dodge dealership by Bredeman Lexus, up on Waukegan Road, closer to Wilmette Avenue—that whole, I guess, car dealership row. He ended up taking the money and running. We did a photo shoot and stuff on cars, and I remember my sisters and I were on the cars and stuff. But he took the money and run, started a drugstore downtown, and the rest is history.

Q: So he left your family?

EP: He didn't leave the family. He started a drugstore downtown, and at the time the lottery was basically starting out. So he took—I don't know what you would call it back then—an agent? He was one of the first agents to have an Illinois State Lottery agent, and he became the largest Illinois State Lottery Agent in the State of Illinois from 1977 or '78 when it started until 1990. So he was doing pretty well

from that and the drugstore. We had a restaurant around the corner for about four years. So I grew up a lot downtown. I don't know if you're getting more out of my sisters, but I spent most of my childhood downtown working, where my sisters were here dancing and getting into other things.

Dancing—that's another thing I remember. Tabby Dance Studio—where Palace Restaurant is on Waukegan—that would be just North of Beckwith on the West side of the street. Not like Arthur Murray Dance Studio or these other dance studios but something called Tabby Dance Studio. Everybody went there. From 1975 my little sister went there, and then '79/'80, the other sister was old enough; she was 3 or 4. They went there for 10-some years, maybe 15 for the older sister. So I wasn't limited to the things that I just did at St. Paul Woods growing up and going to the pool all the time in the Summers and eating at Buffalo's, but my sisters danced. They ended up doing Orchestras in high school too.

Q: What sort of student were you?

EP: I was a B student. I got A's once in a while, but I made honor roll couple of times, student of the month. I had close to a 3.0 graduating high school. I was a Merit Semi-finalist, they'd call it, for the Industrial Education department. It was like not a Merit Semi-finalist but like a Merit Award. I remember the printing teacher I took for 3 years at Maine East said to me on the stage, 'You would have won this if you had taken printing for 4 years!' So that was kind of neat. And then education,

I went to Bradley University in Peoria. Had a little scare my first semester and then ended up graduating in 3 years. Got out quick.

But education-wise, if you wanted to talk about that, I went to the pre-school at the synagogue, Northwest Suburban Jewish Congregation, which is now St. Knanaya Church, which is again on the West side—kind of on the power lines off of Lyons and Washington, where I live now. I went to pre-school from when I first got to town in '75, started up in '76 at Washington School for my elementary school, and was going simultaneously to Hebrew school. We would go to a half-day of kindergarten then would have Hebrew school at night for a couple of hours. Did Washington School to 6th grade, and then went to Gemini Jr. High School, which is in Niles on Greenwood and Ballard, for 7th and 8th grade, then simultaneously graduated from Hebrew school, got Bar Mitzvah-ed, and then went to Maine East.

Like I said, my backyard fence was like the border between Glenbrook South and Maine East, so a lot of my friends were from Glenbrook South. A lot of my friends from Hebrew school, synagogue, and the youth group were from Glenbrook South. So it's this myriad of 'guys'. I grew up with 'these guys' from Niles North and Skokie with St. Paul Woods and day camp to my backyard fence being Glenbrook South and playing Summer camp basketball with those guys at Glenview Park District. But then in Morton Grove I've got my friends from synagogue and from that little part of town, and then also Maine Northfield Little League. So I played baseball over at Apollo School by the old Maine North High

School. So I was all over the place. It was mostly baseball but then it became basketball, a little bit of volleyball, and then in school I ran cross-country, played basketball, and ran track. So I was a three-sport athlete as well.

Q: Did you have any aspirations for pursuing athletics or was it just for fun?

EP: No. Back then it was all about the sugar high. It was all about trying to get playing time. Track it wasn't so much, because I was on the relay teams and stuff—for the mile and then doing the two-mile freshman year cross-country. It was more about going in the game and you want to shoot those two points and you want everybody in the crowd to scream, but it didn't end like that. I ended up being a three-sport athlete my freshman year, saw what the grind was like, and was more interested in working at my dad's drugstore. So then I started getting out early my sophomore year at 1:53 PM and then going straight downtown. Jump on trains and stuff and work a good four or five hours. So I would go to school all day and then jump on a train and go downtown. I would do that two or three times in a week and then Saturdays all day long.

The other thing I wanted to say, which I think is kind of cute, is they always say 'the other side of the tracks' when they say Morton Grove. Well, I like to say 'the other side of Washington Street', because where I grew up that area was unincorporated, but we had a division with Washington Street. That was that border of unincorporated Glenview with unincorporated Niles. Actually, with the

restricting it's probably still Glenview or it might have changed because it's always changing over there. But they say the other side of the tracks is like the border between the East side and the West side of Morton Grove. Technically it's Harlem Avenue where Kappy's Restaurant is. We'd like to say, on that West side of Morton Grove or unincorporated Glenview, that Washington was the border because, like I said, at first we went to Ladendorf Park which was behind Talisman Village Shopping Center, which you can see off Golf Road. But then that other side of unincorporated Niles went to Rugen Park. There used to be a school there that got shut down and it became a Korean church or school or something.

But anytime you crossed Washington, you were in other people's territory. Because back then in the '80s, there were no cellphones. There was more like [mimicking screaming voice] 'Eric!' But it wouldn't be me; it would be my best friend [mimicking screaming voice] 'John, John!' When you heard your name, it was like fire. [Laughter] If you didn't get home in five minutes, your food was cold. If you didn't do your homework, you were in trouble. So you're on your mountain bike on the other side of Washington, and you just hear this sound and you were like, 'Whose name was that?' [Laughter] You were playing like Kick the Can with your friends or you're playing Vietnam up in the trees. Neighbors didn't care back then. We'd go into backyard fences and run through people's yards, jumping over fences. People wouldn't even bother us.

But I remember the other side of town. [whispers] 'He's from the other side of Washington' — 'He's a Glenview guy.' It was fun back then because everyone was on their mountain bikes. If you were looking for a friend, you'd go to your other friend's houses and look for their bike in front of their house. That's how you would find somebody. You have a key fob or a phone, that's how you would find somebody these days—you could ping it. Back then it was like, you would see a bicycle and be like, 'Oh, he's over at Bob's house.' That was kind of the neat thing. It wasn't like turf, but everyone had their area where they hung out.

Talisman Village I like to talk about too because I remember everything about all the stores. The famous McGreevy's bar/nightclub everybody would know. It was like a little dance club. There was The Name Is Games, a little coin place where you would play your video games. The Works, where everybody knows were the famous gyros. Shasta Pet Center—everybody used to go there to get their pets. Everybody would go there to just look at the pets, like the hamsters and the gerbils and the fish.

And then there was Eagle, the big supermarket there. I remember Adam's School of Driving, which is prominent in Morton Grove. They had an office all the way in the back with fronts like printing agencies, real estate, and travel agencies. So I actually went to Adam's School of Driving there, not the one here on the East side of town. But that shopping center back then was so prevalent. Hot Dog Island was actually built on the corner. That was actually a neighbor from down the street where I lived on Harrison Street.

And actually my neighbor from across the street—which we didn't get into—was the owner of Esposito's Restaurant. So there was the Esposito family and then the Brigante family. If anybody knew Brigante's, that was the banquet hall of the family. They were on the Northeast corner of Potter and Dempster, where the CVS has been built right now in Park Ridge. But Esposito's, everybody knew Esposito's. My whole family worked for them. My sister worked for them first. I worked for them one Summer, and then my little sister ended up working for them. They were neighbors for 30 years. And Esposito's is where that little Korean restaurant is, kind of in the area of Just Tires on that East side of Waukegan, South of Beckwith. I think it's called Kozy's now, but I mean everybody and their mother used to go to Esposito's. I mean, they had pasta specials—their pizza, their sauce; the crust was thin but that sauce... There was something that Nick was doing—Mr. E's son—he was doing something with the sauce. Everybody would go there.

They all lived in the area too, so don't think just that one neighbor was across the street, because her sister was next door; she moved back in with her sister. 'Mrs. E' lived there too. But then Tony Jr. lived around the corner, and then the one daughter's son lived up above Esposito's Restaurant—Tony, who is the grandson of Mr. E. Yeah... Memories...

The other funny thing talking about Talisman Village on Golf was—I didn't think of this until now—there's about two other prominent places I remember going to. Because everybody would go to, let's say, Omega Restaurant, which is

over bordering Des Plaines and Niles down Golf. Everybody went to Omega. But if you can remember, heading to where I am at Golf and Washington, you're headed Eastbound on Golf, heading towards the expressway: the Jack in the Box, where the Popeye's Restaurant is. That thing was so high up in the air. That thing was like hundreds and hundreds of feet up in the air. You're just this little kid. And I remember driving in the Plymouth. We had a '77 Plymouth I think it was, and just chugging along and this huge Jack in the Box was just sitting up there on the corner. You're just this little kid and are like, 'Let's get Jack in the Box!' It wasn't like the McDonald's over on Milwaukee and Greenwood, over by the prairie reserve, but that was the one thing that always stood out.

The other thing was Bob's Big Boy Restaurant, where Kappy's is. Before Kappy's came, I think in the '70s if I'm not mistaken, it was Bob's Big Boy. That was another place you remember—this 'big boy'. You're hitting that corner and you're this little kid in this itty-bitty car and you just remember this huge Bob's Big Boy, this huge guy with this smile. You know, you get the crown and the coloring books and they give you popcorn. The thing back then was popcorn. It really was. [Laughter] Wow, going off on tangents here.

Q: That's all right. You said you enjoyed working at your father's pharmacy, or you preferred doing that. Is that something that you wanted to pursue as a career?

EP: Not as a pharmacist, no. My memory was more as the OCD manager. I was young and I had to monitor inventory, I had to watch customers, do sales. But it was mostly inventory. It got me to be very OCD—facing merchandise, making sure what's on the floor. But our main thing was the lottery, obviously the drugs, then pantyhose, soda pop. I remember doing a lot of deliveries to a lot of businesses in the Sears Tower. I would have a hand truck and take fifteen cases of pop and go down Jackson over the bridge and go right to Sears Tower with fifteen cases of pop, going up some back elevator and delivering pop to these guys. This was like '78, let's say, and then I was probably doing deliveries '82, '83 when I was like 11 or 12.

Then we got the restaurant in '84 and it transcended from cases of pop to delivering food. You kind of learn the geography downtown and the buildings. You could literally blindfold me and I could just wake up and be like, 'Oh, that's this and that's this.' And I would just know the buildings; I wouldn't know the addresses. I could find my way—Madison, Monroe, Adams, Jackson. I could go down the line: East, West, North, South; State is in the middle, Madison is zero. Yeah. [laughter]

Q: What was the restaurant?

EP: The restaurant was Chicago Fish & Rib. I guess the adage was basically my dad saw the sales with the lottery with the drugstore going down and he was trying to

figure out, you know, 'Why are my sales going down? I kind of have a stronghold on the market.' He found out that the restaurant around the corner... The drugstore was on Jackson and Canal, across the street from Union Station, and the restaurant was kitty-corner from the old main post office, and that was at Van Buren and Canal. He started seeing his numbers going down, so he basically just bought the guy out. So he had that from I think '84 to '88.

Then the Chicago Board of Education owned all the property and they were strong-arming him, so he got out of the restaurant and then two years later he got out of the drugstore, which was basically my freshman year at Bradley University. And my sister was going to Illinois State University the next year. So he had a lot of pressure to get out, and he got out and just did his own thing and basically just became a retail pharmacist for the rest of his career. He just retired a couple of years ago.

And then my mom—I'm sure you'll ask about her—she was basically raising the family and then she got into market research. She became the largest independent market research recruiter in the City of Chicago. So people would go to her with projects and then she would basically fill it with all the people that she knew. You could do a car survey or a doctor's survey or just a survey. You go somewhere for an hour to talk and get paid and stuff. But she's retired from that. He's retired from pharmacy. They're both living on the West side and enjoying life, grandkids, the whole bit.

Q: Did your mother start that work after you all were grown?

EP: Yeah. Like I said, she was the sergeant-at-arms of the family. She ran the show, driving us around growing up. From my sister's dance lessons, to my sports, to anything and everything. Then we got two cars and made things easier for her, but then, you know, carpooling, you got to go to Hebrew School... That's a lot of carpooling for three kids. That's *a lot* of carpooling. I remember there were about six or seven of us that would pack into cars just to go down the street. But yeah, she's retired and he's retired. Grandkids, my one sister's got two boys, the other one she just had her third girl, so that keeps them busy.

Q: What did you study at Bradley?

EP: PR, advertising, and basically business. I went in and it was like the first year they had computers in dormitories. Bradley University was like the pilot for that. This was like 1988/1989 when I started. So I went into the Academic Exploration Program and was deciding between business and communications. I saw that with communications you could get out a little earlier if you work your butt off, and you don't have to take stats. I was good at math, but I just didn't feel like taking business law and I didn't feel like taking statistics. I did take management and marketing, all high-level courses. Those were my underwater basket-weaving

courses. But I graduated with communications, advertising, and public relations in three years.

Q: And where did that inspire you to go?

EP: I don't know. It was the Summer of '92. It was my third year of school. I was working with the American Red Cross Central Illinois Chapter in Peoria. Created a volunteer internship program that became a national structure. I got to meet Elizabeth Dole, who was the President at the time, and they took what I was doing in a six-month volunteer internship—basically from February to July of 1992—and they made that nationwide in their public relations department. So she came to Peoria in September and they asked me to come down.

I had a nice Summer that Summer. I worked like three or four different jobs. I worked a Summer camp with my youth group, and then got involved in electronics and that transcended into two and a half years. We had started our own electronics firm and then I traveled the world for five and a half years. Came back in August of 2000 and then started pursuing a dream with racehorses. Started training racehorses and then started writing about them, and that leads me to today. I started *The Horseman's Voice* and then some things started changing in the industry in '06 and then I came back to Morton Grove. Because we moved from unincorporated Glenview to Morton Grove proper in 2005, and then 2006 I jumpstarted this paper, called *The Morton Grove Voice* from *The*

Horsemen's Voice and then *The North Shore Voice*, and it kind of imploded from there. I've been doing that now for about 10 years. I stopped going to meetings in October of 2016, and I've kind of slowed things down from then.

But yeah, it's been a good run, I do have to say. Because you know, we've talked, candidly, I'm usually the one asking the questions, so it's kind of fun talking about what I've done. I could tell you, man, some of the stories that I've been involved with... Some of the things that I've seen and experienced...

Q: Well, for example?

EP: I'm not going to get into some of the things. But some of the things that you just see locally, as compared to nationally, really makes you think. Because they say that everything does start locally. It does. It *really* does. Because what you see in the national landscape—not talking about current events let's say—but a lot of the stuff transcends from these local meetings that people don't go to. Going to 25 to 30 meetings a month in seven school districts, the park districts, the library, here in the village, and all the commissions in the village, you really get to see what really goes on, what the people really do. We were joking about the snow before we started talking. I mean, Morton Grove Public Works, if you're up at 5:00 AM, if you're out there during the day, you see what these guys do just in the Winter, let alone the Summer. These guys are dedicated. Even the library staff, the things that go on behind the scenes—park district too—people don't

see what you guys do during the day. People don't see the dedication a lot of the staff has.

Especially with the village. Like I was saying with Public Works, some of these guys have been working there for 20 or 30 years, starting out in their 20s and they're still there in their 50s. They're dedicated. I won't get into some of the things that I've experienced, but I will give a shout-out to the Mayor and all of the Executive Directors, all the school Superintendents. When I first came around, people didn't know who I was and what I was doing, and now they see it. I'm just promoting Morton Grove. I'm promoting the area that my parents met and grew up in, where I grew up in. I'm 47 in a couple of weeks. I've spent 90 percent of my life in this area, besides being in Rogers Park growing up as a toddler and traveling the world. I could probably say of my 46 years, a good 30 of it was in this area. The memories, you can't escape from them, especially with the mountain bikes and the bicycles growing up, and the neighborhoods and the train tracks I guess you would say. I never heard that growing up. We would always say Washington was the borderline, I guess the West side. You know, everybody had their turf. It's been a good run until now. I'm still young, and I guess we'll see what happens.

Q: What did you learn in your travels in those few years?

EP: Patience, listening, understanding culture more. Going to Maine East was a lot different back then, compared to Niles West and Niles North, because we already had that influx of immigrants. A lot of the immigrants were like myself: Eastern European, a lot of Greeks, Assyrians, Indians were coming around—from the Indian subcontinent. Some Pakistanis. Lots of different Muslims from all over the world. But it was just influxing back then.

Culture, food, meeting people, traveling, just being out there and having those weird experiences that you've always dreamt about, just being in them. Being in life-or-death situations.

Q: Did you have a structure to your travels or was it pretty aimless?

EP: Nope. Just left. I told everybody it would be three months, booked it for three months. Told my best friend, 'Hey, this is our only shot. I want to travel. This is our only shot.' He quit his job, changed his life, changed my life. Next thing I know it's three months later. I've totally gutted my plan. I'm sitting there in Greece on a beach. I've been working there for two and a half months, and just kept going. Made promises to people that I would come see them. They thought I was crazy. I came home and started a little import/export company. I was getting into hand-blown glass and leather and machine parts. Then the internet came, so that kind of messed that plan up because everything was online and you can't really do your thing.

Going back traveling the second time around opened my eyes. I was able to see people on my travels and spend time with them in their country. So I was able to not only experience the culture firsthand by being in the country, but you're sitting there living with these people. Especially 'Down Under' in Australia and New Zealand. You'd be surprised how they live down there and you'd be surprised how behind they are. At least back then; maybe technology sped things up. But just the way they washed dishes, do their laundry, how they eat their food, and what they eat. Little things like that.

You don't realize growing up on the North Shore doing the things that I did, and then being exposed to the elements in New Zealand and being out there and hitchhiking, being stranded on roads for hours on end, waiting for a ride, and then a guy would pull up and give you a ride. It would be hours on end. So traveling wasn't more like self-development but it was more about experiencing what I've always wanted to see, which was culture, international cuisine, clothing even. Just stemming from relationships that you have, meeting people, and just going back and seeing them.

Q: Did you have any favorite spots?

EP: For the land or for the people? If I can ask you a question [laughter].

Q: Either way. Whatever sticks out to you.

EP: Land I would say New Zealand. It's as beautiful as people see in the movies, if not even more beautiful. I'd recommend South Island. It's literally untouched. It's not spoiled. And Northern Ireland is the same, if you look at the Earth and how it rotates, really green and what have you. I would really like to go to Iceland.

But then for the people, which is why I asked that question: India, because you see so many different types of cultures and religions and food in one country. From North to South to West—not so much too East for me—there's just such an array of things living in that same area. When I left they said, 'You're going to feel India.' I did. Not only in my stomach, but spiritually. You feel like you've left a part of yourself there, because you're exposed to so much and you see so much.

I didn't go to the city of Varanasi, where they have the Ghats and bring the people and what have you. But I was up in the mountains, in the Himalayas. I got to meet the Dalai Lama, and I was not as far South as I wanted, but South in the beaches and West of the state of Rajasthan, which is where all the tourists were. So you get to experience all of that, and that was a three-month trip. And you're talking overland. That's a lot of land to be covered. You're taking buses at 30 or 40 hours at a time to get from point A to point B because you don't want to spend the time to go to the airport to spend your time on the flight, because by the time you've gotten to the airport and gotten on the flight, you're halfway there. So you're taking these buses with these people, just three oranges for five rupees. Little kids walking up and they have like cholera or they have leprosy and they're

trying to make a buck and they're selling you three oranges for about 15 or 16 cents, and that's big money for them.

I won't get so much into my travels again, but I remember my first memory of the first trip was getting off at the airport in the city of Mumbai, in Bombay. I was with a couple of Israelis and we were in a Commodore cab—which was big then and I think still is big there because they are so easy to maintain—and you hear this skateboard. You know the sound growing up as a kid, and you just here this [makes sound of skateboard rolling] and you're looking to the sides and you don't see anybody standing on a skateboard. Well, you look down and there's this little kid—I don't even know if he was a kid—but he had no legs, he had basically the bone from the shoulder to the elbow, and that was it. And he's using that bone from the shoulder to the elbow to push himself on the skateboard. So my first memory of India kind of scared me, because you're in this Commodore cab, you're with some guys and everything is cool—the smells, the sights, the sounds—and here comes this guy rolling with no legs, so it's a torso with a bone from his right arm. And I couldn't take a picture—you can't even grab your camera fast enough—but that right away shocked me and put things into perspective. Like wait, I grew up on the North Shore, now I'm going to experience what life is about. And taking those buses and seeing those people day to day, having tea (or chai) sitting with these people for five or seven rupees and just talking with these people in broken English. You can't compare that to anything. And there are more stories. 29 countries, five and a half years.

Q: Gosh, that must have been amazing.

EP: That last place I've been was Japan. I was teaching business English. That was fun. That was really fun. Because I went to Bradley and I was a specialist with inter- and intra-personal communication—like I could look at you right now and study your body language and tell you psychologically what you're thinking and doing—they would farm me out all over Japan in the center region, believe it or not called the 'Kinki' region. I was based in Osaka City and they were sending me to Osaka to Kobe to Nara to Kyoto, North of Osaka. Ten or 12-hour train rides. Sometimes they would put me on a plane. Takashimaya City I think was the one place. International training facilities for like Panasonic Matsushita and Sanyo and all the things I learned when I was younger from printing and printed circuit boards, electronics; all transcended when I went to Japan.

It was fun because they would farm me out. I'll give you one story. I worked for... ALC is what they would call it. I think it was Advanced Learning Centers. And I remember the guy that ran it. He was from Toronto—Michael Paul. He started me out with a one-day gig. That was cool. Then he gave me a three-day gig. That was nice. But then he gave me five-day gig. And that five-day gig was a one-on-one with this guy that was supposedly a low-level student. He was Japanese going to Germany and he was going to be working with Japanese people obviously from his office to anyone from Brits and Aussies and Kiwis to

Americans and the Germans and any other Eastern or Western Europeans that would be in that office. And that last day he basically told me he was a high-level English student and he appreciated what I did for him in a week. And he wasn't supposed to do it. And he tried doing it in Japanese, which was a rule: no Japanese in the classroom. But I remember this guy sitting there flipping his Rolex. It was on the last day, on a Friday. I'd worked my ass off that week, taught him everything that I knew. And he just flipped his Rolex, looked at me and said, 'I'm a high-level student. Thank you.'

So you can imagine some of the experiences that you had teaching people, but that was probably the pinnacle. I was working my butt to get the one-day, having them believe in me, doing the three-day, and I remember him clear as day too. But then that five-day with Michio. I will never forget that guy flipping his Rolex, looking at me and saying, 'By the way, I'm a high-level student, thanks.' [laughter]

Q: Wow, that's great. Any other stories or life lessons you would like to share?

EP: You know, it's interesting how Morton Grove is trying to get back to the way that it was in the '50s and '60s. Morton Grove was known as a great place to come and go out to St. Paul Woods when Morton Grove Days was there. I didn't do that so much. But just everything that I had said, from the shops to the people, just how America was back then, how we grew up back then. And it wasn't so much

Morton Grove; it was the area. You could just go around and not worry about anything; leave your doors unlocked to your house, not only your car. Leave your bicycle out on somebody's front yard. Getting yelled at to come home. That was your security system. If you don't make it back you're not going to eat.

Just playing board games with your friends. We had a television. We didn't do so much Atari, but we didn't really play video games and stuff. We spent time with our friends, we saw our friends, we talked with our friends, we laughed and joked with our friends, we'd stay out as late as possible with our friends. Is that going to come back? I don't know, but that's how it was. I think that's what the people miss. People miss that connectivity, not this 'not connectivity', if you want to call it that, with the phones you look at and play with and social media. People don't talk on their phones and they don't text. There aren't pagers anymore. Just the communication aspect of growing up is not there. Am I old school?

Absolutely. Handshake, look you in the eye—that's how it's done. But other than that, I love Morton Grove. You see the bumper stickers everywhere.