

Narrator: Ray Schultz
Date of Interview: November 6, 1987
Place of Interview: Interviewer's home
Interviewer: Yvonne Ryden
Recorded For: Morton Grove Historical Society
Transcribed For: Morton Grove Public Library
Tape Running Time: 40 minutes

INTRODUCTION

Ray Schultz grew up in a part of Morton Grove called "Ducktown". It was one street of homes near the woods and on the west side of the railroad tracks and thus west of the major part of Morton Grove. In this interview, Ray recalls life there as pleasant and an ideal place for children.

RS: Ray Schultz

Q: Question asked by interviewer, Yvonne Ryden

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

Q: I'm Yvonne Ryden and I'm sitting here with Ray Schultz. We're getting ready to talk about Ducktown. Would you like to start?

RS: Yes. Ducktown. I believe this name came about because we had a pond in the back of the house on Elm Street or there was some standing waste water across the street. Some ducks did come there, but these were probably just local ducks. This name Ducktown always was sort of degrading to us, we who lived there, and we resented hearing it. As kids we took a lot of teasing. Yet the children envied us in a way because we had the woods around us, we had a big ball field across the street, and we had this pong in back we spent many hours at.

Ducktown to my knowledge consisted only of Elm Street. I guess there were ten or eleven houses on the street. Ducktown or Elm Street was just a dead-end street to the west of Lehigh and this was south of the building that was the Morton House.

Q: Who were some of the people that lived on your street?

RS: Well, there were the Weights, who were my grandparents. They were the ones that lived at the west end of the street. They later sold to the Lindemanns. Next to Lindemanns, why, Schultzes lived. We had two homes there, and next to us was the Rihans, and going east was the Kaspers, Brechts, Gabels, Stejskals, and the

Finkes. Max Finke was later our mayor of Morton Grove. There were also some houses south on Lehigh, probably two or three. But I don't believe these were considered part of Ducktown.

Q: I was interested in the big house that's on Lehigh right at the corner. It actually faces east on Lehigh.

RS: Yes, that was owned by Max Finke, and that's a two-flat. He lived in the lower flat, and then his son and daughter-in-law lived up in the second flat.

Q: I see. Most of those homes are still standing as they were when you were a boy?

RS: Yes, I remember the location of them, and they're still pretty much the same. They remodeled some of them and put new siding on and such, but in most cases, these are all just the original homes.

Q: Other areas around there have become commercial. Chestnut Street was not there. There are some buildings that are more like businesses or the Moose Hall is over in that area.

RS: Yes, the Moose Hall and that are to the north of Elm Street. Chestnut Street is the street right in back of Elm Street. At that time it was just a little winding road that went through there. Cars -- it was hardly passable for a car to get through there. I don't know just when the industry that is there now began -- it probably came in about 1940, I would guess.

Q: Have you something else there you'd like to talk about?

RS: Well, the employment of the people who lived in that area. I believe many of them worked at the Poehlmann Greenhouses. Some worked at the Vegetable Growers Supply. Some were trades people, carpenters and such. The women who worked at that time probably worked on farms nearby or at the onion factory.

Q: The building at the north end where Lehigh meets Lincoln Avenue is now the Morton House. Was it called the Morton House when you were young?

RS: Yes. The corner where the Morton House is now, as long as I remember, was called the Morton House. Then there were a few houses just west going into the forest preserve. Some of them are still there. There was a small home just south of the Morton House that belonged to the Rossi family. Now it's part of the home of Fred Huscher. He and that moved over.¹

I remember stopping at the Morton House with my father for a beer on our way home from work or from the store. I can recall when the train would come in the station, the bartender would ring a bell and wave a lantern. The engineer would blow the train whistle. This always delighted the Morton House customers. I remember watching the fire at the Morton House. I watched it from my home on Elm Street. I was just recuperating from pneumonia, so I didn't go over there to see it.

Q: When would that have been?

¹ This house is now located at 7102 Church Street. It has been remodeled

RS: I think that was 1950. The area to the north of Lincoln Avenue, as I recall, had some industry. There was a onion factory there and Huscher Supply Company and also the Vegetable Growers Supply.

Q: We've been talking about Ducktown because it's an interesting area and no one else has been talking about it, but I think we'll go back a little bit and establish your credentials. You were born at home?

RS: Yes, I was born at home at 6419 Elm Street, August the 30th, 1920. I was married in 1948 to Kathleen Kleven, who is from Wisconsin. I have two sons, David and Steven.

Q: Fine, thank you. Now let's go back and start way at the beginning. Tell us about your grandparents.

RS: Well, on my mother's side, they were Marie and Gustav Weigt. My father's side, it was Daniel and Caroline Schultz. My father was born in 1877 in Europe -- Poland. He came to this country about 1900, and he was married in Morton Grove in 1910. As I recall, he had three brothers and one sister. She died at the age of seventeen. In Europe, his family had a farm and they also took in some boarders for a livelihood.

My father came to this country because one of his army friends had come to America and then wrote to my dad telling him how good the country was. This influenced my father. When he came here, he traveled from New York to Colorado where he worked making coke for heating. Also in Colorado he worked on a farm and in a lumber yard. He eventually worked his way to the Chicago area and then

to Morton Grove. Here he built greenhouses and then went to work for Poehlmann Brothers for many years as a fireman or steamfitter. My father had other jobs when Poehlmann's closed, and at 62 years old, he went to work for Chicago Aerial Survey as a maintenance man. Then he retired at age 82.

Q: Oh, how wonderful! Was Chicago Aerial Survey the company that came out of the airport that was on Dempster Street?

RS: Well, perhaps because Mr. Sonne owned that company. Augie Sonne worked there for many years, and as a matter of fact, I believe he's the one that got my father into that work.

Q: That was interesting. What about your mother?

RS: Mother was born in Niles Center, which is now Skokie, in 1889. Her family moved to Elm Street in the early 1900s. In her family there were five girls and one boy. That was the Weigt family, and she was a twin with her brother, Richard. Mother loved to cook and to bake and we had our share of good food. Now in our family, the Schultz family, there were four boys and one girl. There was Edwin, Earl, Gene, Margaret and myself, Ray. At the time of this tape, Margaret and myself are the only living children. Margaret's 73 and I'm 67 years of age.

All my mother's children were born at home with the kind old Dr. Drostenfels, who had his office on Lincoln Avenue. This was right near the Loutsch Meat Market. My mother worked at the onion factory, as I recall, for some time and also at a farm nearby. She was a very kind, understanding person and faithful to her family and to church.

Q: This has all been so interesting. Let's go on and talk about both your birthplace and your childhood.

RS: I was born in a small frame house on Elm Street. It was built for single-family living, but later on my father made the attic into a small rental flat for additional income. We didn't have all of today's conveniences, but probably more than our parents had in their younger days. I remember we had an icebox that had a pan under it that had to be emptied periodically. We had ice delivery. A man would bring either 25 or 50 pounds of ice when needed. I also recall we had a rain cistern outside. This water was used mostly for washing clothes and the women used it for shampooing their hair. My father and uncle, Richard Weigt, later on -- this would be about 1928 -- they built a two-story frame house on a lot we had to the west where we presently lived. This we moved into, renting one flat and living in the other.

We had a memorable childhood. Although my father was very strict with us and we had many chores to do such as feeding the chickens, digging over the garden, keeping the basement clean, we still had a lot of time to play and enjoy the area around us. As I mentioned earlier, as part of Ducktown we had this pong in back of our house where we could catch tadpoles or what we called polliwogs. Later they turned to frogs. Of course, when it froze, we had a great skating pond. We also had a lot of woods around us, and we liked to explore these. Or go down to the river to catch turtles.

I did a lot of hunting, not so much with a gun until I was older, but we would get a deep snow and then we traveled, we would track the rabbits and pheasants and jump on them. One day we caught a raccoon. As I recall we followed it for a long time and as it was going into the hole of a tree, we

grabbed it by the tail. (laughter) While I hung on to it, my friend went home for a bag to put it in. Then my father built a cage for it, but we couldn't tame it, so after a while we just set it free. Caging an animal today would probably be frowned upon, but those were different times.

I also remember a smokehouse my father had. He would smoke hams and sausages for the family when they bought a hog, or smoke meat for other neighbors. You know, sometimes now when a barbecue is smoking or a campfire is smoking, I can still smell those hams and time goes back to the old smokehouse.

We also had a garden as long as I could remember, and we always had fresh vegetables. We raised chickens so we had fresh eggs and also a rooster that woke us up every morning. There were some farms nearby, and I remember getting caught stealing a pumpkin because I couldn't run as fast as the other kids could.

My uncle had a farm on Howard Street. That was in back of where the Leaning Tower "Y" is on Touhy Avenue. As kids we enjoyed going there and working in the fields. I recall my uncle had a pair of mules that, although they were very strong, would often run back to the farm when he left them alone when plowing. This made him very angry, because he'd have to go back and get them. Of course, usually there was a whipping involved for them which did little or no good. He also had a goat that my brother and I would tease and then be chased around the barn. As I recall, the farmers at that time grew cabbages, carrots, beans, radishes and a few other vegetables.

Q: They probably also raised onions because somewhere there had to be onions.

RS: Yes, they did.

Q: You mentioned that your father was born in a part of Europe you called Poland, but he spoke German. Was German spoken in your home?

RS: Yes, especially if Mother and Dad didn't want us to hear something. Then they spoke German. When my grandmother would come over and visit -- and she stayed with us for a while -- more German was spoken.

Q: Now this would be your mother's mother.

RS: That's right.

Q: She would just come from Niles Center.

RS: Well, at that time I believe she was staying with my aunt who lived in Chicago. But she would spend a week or two at our house, then go to one of her other children and spend some time. What little German I do know or learned, I guess I learned from both my grandmother and my dad and mother. But most of the time German was not spoken in the house -- just English.

Q: Now, let's see, on your side of Lehigh there were no stores, so you would go right into the stores on Lincoln Avenue in the eastern part -- well, not far east, but just across the tracks, right?

RS: Yes. There was a little business section there. We had a few stores on Lincoln Avenue that I remember. Especially Loutsch Brothers. That's where we got all

our meat from and I believe some other groceries. I also remember the Loutsch stores because we'd always be treated to a piece of sausage by Mr. Loutsch.

There was a little candy and ice cream shop on Fernald Avenue that was just off of Lincoln Avenue. This would be around 1934 that I'm speaking. I was fortunate enough to get a job there my last year in grade school. Of course, I was the envy of all the kids. Then the following year . . .

Q: Wait a minute. Before you go on, what did you do in this job?

RS: Well, I sold candy and . . .

Q: You waited on people?

RS: Waited on people and dished out the sodas and sundaes or whatever, malted milks and so forth.

Q: It had a fountain, like a soda fountain?

RS: Yes, they had a little fountain. That is still there. That's the little pizza place.

Q: Oh, is that Pequod or whatever?

RS: That's right, yes.

Q: I see. So it was in that building?

RS: It was in the store, yes. He had a few little tables in there and also the counter, the soda-fountain counter.

Q: So you worked there when you were in eighth grade. You were about fourteen.

RS: Then later on, probably because I had worked at this candy store, the man at the Morton Grove Pharmacy asked me to come and work for him, so the following year then I worked at the local drugstore. This is where all the young people gathered in the evening for ice cream and Coke.

Q: Where was that store?

RS: Well, this would be about where the Ace Hardware store is now right on Lincoln Avenue. There weren't many jobs available at that time, so I considered myself fortunate. Some of the other kids had to caddy or maybe set up pins in a bowling alley.

Q: I would be interested in hearing about schooling and what you did along those lines.

RS: Getting back to the grade school, that was the Morton Grove Public School. Now, of course, that's the village hall. It was a nice school with classes on each of the two floors. I remember we filed out each morning for a Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. You know, it still impresses me as something worthwhile. I recall a few of the teachers. Gretchen Stoutt, who is Mrs. Art Loutsch, Esther Fowler, and Pop Etherton. These were all very dedicated and capable teachers. As I

recall, there was a large playground in the back of the school with swings and a baseball field. The baseball field they would flood in the wintertime for skating.

We usually went home for lunch. My mom loved to bake, and I could smell that homemade bread and pies when I was halfway home. Sometimes when coming across the tracks, a freight train would be standing in the way, and because of our limited time for lunch, we would crawl under the train at the section where the cars were coupled together. Can you imagine? (laughter) Our parents, I'm sure, never knew about that practice.

Q: You know, you're lucky that you weren't injured or hurt when you crawled under the freight train that way.

RS: Yes, when I look at it now, we were so very foolish, and I do recall some train accidents that were very tragic.

Q: Right there on that track near your home?

RS: Yes, right across from Lincoln and Lehigh. One in particular -- Tony Rossi, who was a boy, I guess, a year or two younger than I, was taking his dad and another friend of theirs to work. He wanted to use the car, I guess, for that day. As he was crossing the tracks -- I don't think at that time they had the crossing gates; I don't believe they had a warning -- and for whatever reason, they didn't pay attention to a train coming, and the train hit this car. One person was thrown clear of the train, and all he got was a few scratches. But Tony was killed. He was a young person, and his dad was also severely injured. I believe

he had to have a plate put in his head and so forth. But it was such an awful thing to witness.

Q: About when would this have happened?

RS: Early in the morning, do you mean, or what year?

Q: In what year?

RS: This would be about 1936, 1937. It was our high-school age.

Q: Did you actually see this accident or did you just see the aftermath?

RS: No, after an accident on the railroad, they generally would blow the whistle for a long time. Of course, we heard the sirens and the ambulance and so forth.

Q: The whistle from Poehlmann's probably.

RS: No, I think a train whistle. They would just keep blowing the train whistle. There were other accidents on the train, so, like I say, we were very foolish in crossing under those cars, because if the train did decide to move at the time, we would have had another tragedy.

Q: Living as you did close to the station there, the commuter trains must have had more service than they have now. There were more trains on the track at that time, weren't there?

RS: Well, I would believe so. Living at the west part of town now, I really don't know how often these trains stop, but I think they had a schedule in the morning where they were more frequent.

Q: Like they do now.

RS: Yes.

Q: Was there more freight traffic perhaps?

RS: Perhaps. Another thing that I recall that was kind of interesting. They would pick up a mail bag. They had a pole outside of the station, and they had this mail bag stretched in between these two brackets. And as the train came by, the freightman had a long pole with a hook. He would just snag the bag.

Q: Let's talk now about some of the games that you played as a child.

RS: Well, unlike children of today, it was unnecessary to have planned recreation. We were very fortunate to be living in a neighborhood that had a lot of kids. In the evening when we had our chores done, especially in the summer, it was time to go over to the old baseball field across the street. We played ball or we hit golf balls.

Q: Now, when you say across the street, was this across . . .

RS: that would be north of our house. There was a big ball field.

Q: There were no homes?

RS: Not at that time, no. there was nothing there, just this big ball field. They did play baseball there on Sundays. I think it was just amateur baseball. I think Art Loutsch played on the team and Warner Finke. I think Stan Browder played on that team. I cant recall some of the others.

Q: But they would have played maybe other teams from all over.

RS: That's right, from different towns, and this was hard ball. This was hard ball with the gloves and everything. We also had other games. We played marbles, and I remember right at the corner of our street, we had a big street light, so we would play marbles way into the evening hours.

We had other games -- touch football and we had one game we called "Baby in the Hole." As I recall the way that was played is each team would dig some holes in the ground, and then we rolled a softball into the area trying to get into one of the opponent's spaces. If this happened, then the opponents would start to run because we would try to hit them by throwing the baseball.

Q: Do you think you made up the game or do you think someone taught that to you? I never heard of it.

RS: Yes, it probably was made up. Some foolish thing. Another game we played was "Run, Sheepie, Run," but I don't recall how that was played. I think it was something similar to a hide-and-seek game that they have now. It was on that order.

Q: I've heard of it, too, but I can't tell you how it was played.

RS: We flew kites a lot having that big ball field across the way. We would send the kite up a long distance, and then we would put a piece of paper, wrap a piece of paper around the string and see if it would get to the top. This we would call be sending messages.

I just remembered something funny. One of the neighbors would always whistle for his kids in the evening when it was curfew time. My brother, who was pretty good at whistling, could imitate this call. So periodically when he was home, he would give the whistle an hour or so earlier than the children would have to come home, and they would come home much to their father's surprise because he didn't call them. It was kind of a nasty trick, but I don't think that they ever really found out who took credit for this. (laughter) We also had the woods and the river where we spend endless hours.

Q: Now how far was the river actually from your house?

RS: Oh, I would guess it would probably be a mile maybe. That would be a mile west. Of course, all that time it was farmers' fields and forest preserve and so forth.

Q: But if you went north wasn't the river closer?

RS: Yes, yes, in back of Huschers, that part of the river. But again this was probably wilder being out this way. More woodsy and farther away from home, I guess. When you're kids . . .

Q: Made it more attractive.

RS: Made it more attractive.

Q: Well, now let's see, Ray. You were maturing during the Depression. You were growing up just right at the height of the Depression.

RS: Yes, because I was born in 1920. I don't really recall the Depression as such. I'm sure that it was hard on my parents -- my dad with working conditions at Poehlmann's, maybe the people were getting laid off. But, as children, we had our fun and our games and so forth and probably didn't pay too much attention to it.

Q: You didn't go hungry or you . . . ?

RS: No, we always seemed to have food enough and clothing and so forth. My mother made a lot of the clothing, and I'm sure that this helped, too. Then with our own chickens and vegetables in the garden and so forth, we managed all right.

Q: And you had fun besides.

RS: We had fun besides.

Q: What were some of the things you did?

RS: Well, we had a lot of picnics in those days. We had a lot of relatives, and we would get together at some forest preserve. This, of course, was holidays or Sundays. Men would play cars and we children would play ball or other games. I guess the women would just talk and visit and probably prepare the food. There were also a lot of big picnics at the forest preserves -- St. Paul's Park and at Linne Woods -- such as the Swedish Picnic and there was a big Philippine picnic.

Q: Did you go to these?

RS: Yes, we went to these. There were just thousands of people that came to that. Half of Morton Grove was shut off because of so many cars and so forth that were, you know, parking along the streets. We children would go there and sometimes we'd enter the races. Most always we would get free ice cream, candy and so forth. There were some big pavilions at these parks, and in the evenings there would be dancing. I remember one of the men by the name of Fred Emery. He ran all the concession stands. My brother and sister both worked for him.

Q: Was he a Morton Grove man?

RS: No, I don't believe so. I just don't recall where he came from. I think it was Chicago, but we got to know him quite well because of my brother and sister working there. We had the usual holiday parades, but perhaps at that time they were looked forward to more than they are now.

Q: Well, they were bigger entertainment then.

RS: Yes, I'm sure that it meant more to us then. There was a little movie house that was located at Ferris and Capulina. This building is still there.

Q: I think that building is just now being remodeled. Are we talking about right at the corner?

RS: Of Capulina and Ferris, yes.

Q: I think it looked like it was a store, a two-story building?

RS: I believe so. They turned it into a little factory, then I think there was an automotive place for a while. I haven't seen it lately.

Q: I think now they have just put in windows that make it look like it's going to be a home.

RS: Oh, is that right?

Q: Yes.

RS: When it was a movie house . . .

Q: Were the movies shown on the first floor?

RS: Yes. This was operated by my uncle, Richard Weigt, and his son at one time. We would help out over there as ushers and ticket takers. They had some great

Westerns. Also in town, I think it was on Wednesday nights, one night a week, they had outdoor movies. This also was operated by my uncle, Mr. Weigt. The merchants sponsored this by paying a dollar each week, and then their ad would appear on the screen. I had a job of collecting this dollar each week, and some of the merchants were not too happy to see me come around. (laughter)

There wasn't much in the way of swimming holes, but I know that when we went down to the river we probably fell in the river more than was necessary. We fished for bullheads in the river and also looked for turtles. The river, when it froze in the wintertime, was a great place to skate because we could go for such long distances. We would build a big fire and then spend a good portion of the day there. There was also some good sledding. I remember we called it the double hill, which was located in back of the Huscher Supply Company.

Q: Now this would be what's forest preserve now?

RS: That's forest preserve, and I believe it was forest preserve then, too. They don't give much up on the forest preserve, so what was there years ago is probably still forest preserves.

Q: But I didn't know if it became forest preserve after the Huschers had it. So we're talking about the, we're talking about the west side of Lincoln -- what we call Lincoln Avenue.

RS: Yes, and that would be in back of Huschers, west of Huscher's place at the river, going down into the river.

Q: And there was a double hill there?

RS: We called it the double hill. As we would go down one hill, you'd cross the river, and then you'd start going up the other hill. Many years later when my children came along, I used to take them there, and we had some great times. Then, of course, I would tell them about our childhood, how we went sledding there. I suppose it's still there.

Q: Weren't there trees there? If I'm picturing it, I'm picturing . . .

RS: Well, there's trees, but the river is down below those trees.

Q: You didn't hit a tree?

RS: Well, I'm sure you could have, so you had to pick a spot where it was fairly clear. Maybe we cleared out some of the brush, too, I don't know, that was in the way. But it was a dandy hill.

We had a lot of hobos in town, especially at the train station. I can remember in the evening coming home after dark, we would get to a certain area on Lehigh, about where the Morton House was and is, and from there we would run full speed until we got home. This was always very frightening to us, especially when alone. The heart was really pounding. (laughs)

Q: Were they really a threat or did you kids just fear that they were a threat?

RS: Probably fear that they were a threat, but there were some instances where they would come to the homes, I guess, and maybe disturb the people or disturb the families. I just don't remember what things they did -- if there were some crimes at that time that they committed. But it was a fearsome time. I did hear that sometimes they would follow the different people home, especially the gals, you know. It would be frightening.

There were some taverns and roadhouses in town at this time. Some of them like the Dells and the Lincoln Tavern, they offered some big entertainment and bands. Some of these became famous -- Guy Lombardo and Wayne King. I remember some of us kids would climb the trees at the Lincoln Tavern and from certain vantage points, we could see the floor shows. This was always something to do in the evenings.

Q: Let's see now. I've heard that the roadhouses were on the south side of Dempster, but the airport -- there was an airport on the north side. Is that right?

RS: There may have been two airports, and I'm not sure of this, but the airport that I was familiar with was the one that was west of the railroad tracks between Lehigh and Waukegan Road.

Q: That would be further west than the one that I've heard about.

RS: Yes, like I say, I just don't recall this other one. But I remember it used to be a big part of our Sunday entertainment, because in addition to watching the flyers there and the flying, there was a parachute jump on Sundays. This man

would fold his own parachutes, always warning the people who were smoking to back off so that he wouldn't get some sparks on the parachute and burn a hole in it.

I don't recall just how long that airport functioned, but I think one of the reasons it closed was one of the main pilots and I still recall his name was Walter Meyer, was killed in an airplane crash.

Q: Not there though.

RS: No, he was flying to some other big city and this happened. But it was shortly after that that it was closed.

Q: Well, we've been talking about your childhood and your young manhood. Let's talk now about how World War II affected you and your family.

RS: Yes, of course, to all of us, the coming of Pearl Harbor was shocking news, especially to my parents who had great concern because they had three sons of age if the war broke out. As it turned out, my two brothers and myself did get into the Service. We were all in the Army. Of course, this was a very difficult time for my mother and father as it was for most parents. Fortunately, we all did come through it well. In later years, there was the Korean War. Then my younger brother went, was called into that.

Q: You say that your parents weathered through your experience in the Army. How about you? Did you have a tough time in the Army?

RS: Not really. I never went overseas like my other two brothers did, so my time of duty was certainly not as hazardous or any problem like the others.

Q: And you had no life-threatening experiences?

RS: Not really, no.

Q: Before we conclude this tape, Ray, I think we'd like to clarify something about the names of the streets in your area where you grew up.

RS: Yes. The street south of Elm Street was called Main Street. I think we mentioned that it was Chestnut Street. Chestnut Street, in fact, is north of Elm Street where the Moose Lodge and some of the other buildings are now, but at that time, there wasn't a Chestnut Street. It was just part of the ball field and park.

Q: What about Main Street then? Did it exist at all?

RS: I believe Main Street existed, but it was just a little winding road that went through there, hardly passable by a car although some of us did go through there. It was a lot of brush and woods and so forth.

Q: Was there any industry or anything there?

RS: Nothing at the time.

Q: I see. I want to thank you very much for giving us this interview. I've enjoyed it and I've learned a lot, and I hope that sometime in the future, somebody else will find it interesting.

RS: Well, thank you. I enjoyed doing it.

TAPE ONE, SIDE A ENDS