

Narrator: Roland Weigt
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8647 Fernald, Morton Grove
Interviewer: Yvonne Ryden
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INTRODUCTION

Roland Weigt is a photographer and has lived in Morton Grove all his life. His father, Richard, was a well-known carpenter in town.

In this interview, dated February 26, 1986, Roland recalls many memories of early Morton Grove. He remembers the volunteer fire department being rallied to a frantic blast of the Poehlmann Brothers greenhouse whistle -- the same whistle that was used for starting and quitting time. Summertime picnics stand out to him as the big Sunday occurrence in this community and Morton Grove Days as *the* event of the whole year.

In the 1920s, Roland's father was the projectionist at the first and only movie house in Morton Grove on Capulina and Ferris Avenues. They converted to sound movies in the '30s, but the business was not profitable due to the Depression. The Weights then opened the first outdoor movie in Morton Grove supported through local merchant advertising.

RW: Roland Weigt

Q: Question asked by interviewer, Yvonne Ryden

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

Q: We are recording some memories of early Morton Grove. Would you begin, Mr. Weigt?

RW: Sure. Okay, early memories. One thing I can remember from the real young years was a wood-burning stove in the kitchen, not for heating but for cooking. It might not sound very important today, but back 50 years ago or 60 years ago, 70 years ago (laughs) that was important.

My father had an automobile, one of the early ones in town. He was a carpenter by trade and he needed transportation. It was probably a Ford. One thing I remember most clearly was we had our own little gasoline supply in a shed adjacent to the garage. I don't know if that was common in that time, but we had no such thing that I can remember of filling stations or gas stations. Where you bought the automobile, that's where you'd buy your gasoline. Like Herbert Dilg and Baumhardt Brothers. In Skokie, it was Harry Heinz and his Ford agency.

Public sidewalk snow removal was done by a horse-drawn, v-shaped -- I don't know, we wouldn't call it a plow, but it was very effective.

Another thing from the early days was when there would be a fire, our local volunteer firemen would be called to duty by frantic blasts of the Poehlmann whistle. That was the same whistle that they would start in the morning and quit in the evening by.

Q: Where was the whistle?

RW: It operated out of the Poehlmann's greenhouses. The men would start in the morning and quit in the evening by the blasts of the whistle. But when there was a fire, the whistle would toot -- what's the word I'm groping for? Well, rapidly or . . . then they would pour out from the saloons, form wherever the firemen were. Being volunteer, they came out from Loutsch's Meat Market, the saloon on the corner, and so on and so on and so on.

But now, let's talk about the early, early years in public school. That was at School and Capulina where our village hall is today. At that time, as I remember, it was a three-room school. There were two in the main building and then we had a little tin building in the back. That's where the younger students were.

Q: I think in Chicago those are called portables.

RW: Except this wasn't portable. It was built and left right there. I don't know why they just didn't put an addition on the two rooms they had.

Q: Did they eventually?

RW: Oh, eventually they did, sure. But they still continued on with the little tin building in the back.

Q: Was that for the primary grades perhaps?

RW: Yes, yes.

Q: Was there kindergarten?

RW: I don't remember anything such as kindergarten. You would start from one to eight. Maybe there was a kindergarten. I don't remember that. Oh, we also had a German school. We called it at that time a German school. I don't know if they actually taught the pupils in German or not, but that was in the basement of the church building here at Fernald and Capulina. One person in the neighborhood who could tell you about that is our ex-fire chief, Christ Hildebrandt. Boy, he's getting along in years, too. (pauses)

About that time, we were getting indoctrinated to commercial hair cuts, such as Tony's Barber Shop. Imagine spending a whole quarter for a haircut!

Q: Where was the barbershop?

RW: Well, the building at the corner of Lincoln and Fernald was a National Tea store. And just to the north of that is a small . . . office? They had living quarters in the back and Tony would cut the hair in the front and he and his family would live in the adjacent rooms in the back.

Q: That would be on the Fernald Avenue side?

RW: It's facing Fernald Avenue, yes. I don't know what's in there right now.

Q: It seems to be more businesses than shops or stores.

RW: And adjacent, just to the north of that was Milke's Market, butcher shop.
They were competing with Loutsch from Lincoln Avenue.

Q: Where on Lincoln Avenue was Loutsch's?

RW: It's now occupied by Hazard Engineering. It's right across from Villa Toscana.
We had one doctor in town, Dr. Drostenfels. I think I'm saying that correctly. I
don't remember the man; I just remember the name.

Q: Do you remember where his office was?

RW: No, I think that building is gone now. It was later converted to Feigel's Beer
Parlor when Prohibition came back at the early '30s. I don't know what happened
to that building. It's gone. Like I say, just from old age. I don't know.

Q: So many parts of Morton Grove have changed. It must be hard to recognize some of
it.

RW: That's right. If you've been away for a while during that change period and you
return, hey, you would say, "Where is it? Where's Poehlmann's? Where's the
doctor's office?"

Q: Where's the candy store?

RW: The candy store is still there. It's now the Pequod. That was run by the
Filipes. Candy, ice cream, cigarettes, fireworks when the season was right.

Q: Did they have school supplies there? Paper and pencils?

RW: No, we would have to go over to Luke Meiers stationary supply on Lincoln Avenue. That was just west of where the library is now. That building is demolished. It had the concrete steps, very steep grade. That's where we would buy our books and pencils and papers and what other garbage we would need. Very, very nice man. He was our local printer.

Q: His brother, Clem, taught print shop at the high school in Niles East.

RW: I'll be darned. I didn't know that. See, I was sort of on the other end of town, and we knew of them but we weren't that closely affiliated.

Oh, yes, about that time -- this is the early '30s -- we had a bowling alley in town put up by the Lutheran Church, right adjacent to the alley at Georgiana and Capulina. A two-lane bowling alley. I was probably ten years old, something like that. The idea seemed to be how fast you could whiz that ball down the alley -- not how many pins you could knock down but how fast you could throw the ball.
(laughs)

Q: Is that where the parking lot for the church is now?

RW: The parking lot is there now. That's right. This was demolished -- oh, my goodness. I don't know, probably 20 years back. Leveled and they blacktopped it and today it is where they park.

The summertime picnics were a real big Sunday occurrence in this community. There was that Mueller's Hall at Lincoln Avenue, the St. Paul's Park, Lincoln and

Lehigh, and the Wayside Inn at Ferris and Dempster. They all had covered dance floors. The two really big ones, though, were at St. Paul's Park. Montgomery Ward would treat their employees and bring them out on a train. It was usually a two-day affair, a Saturday and a Sunday. Free -- everything was free, and boy! That was great for the local citizens. We were all Montgomery Ward employees.
(laughter)

Then the next big one was the Swedish outing. That was usually in the fall of the year with their fried fish breakfasts and same thing. It usually ended up a couple of the people from the Swedish picnic by being carted off to jail. They would just drink too much and, hey -- drunken Swedes are hard to stop.
(laughter)

Q: Was the jail nearby?

RW: Oh, sure. We had one in the village hall. In the front was the place where they kept the two fire engines, and the back of it was two cells. Two cells! (laughs)

Q: So there could be two drunken Swedes, huh?

RW: There could be considerably more if they jammed them in there. (laughs) Boy, that's really primitive. But the big deal of the whole year was Morton Grove Day. I'm sure August Sonne will tell you something about that, because he did the announcing. He just had the natural gift of gab. Nobody else around here could handle it the way he did. He did a marvelous job. It was always on the last Thursday of the month, and we had a parade that would go through Niles and Niles

Center and Glenview and end up at Wayside Inn, which is Dempster and Ferris. Usually they would raffle an automobile off, and, boy, hey, that was big stuff!

Another interesting thing they had over there was a water fight. It was conducted between the volunteer fire departments of the neighboring villages. They would have a small barrel suspended on a wire at the top of two telephone poles, and the idea was to, with a stream of water coming out of the hose, push the barrel into the opponent's pole. We had some very big men on our volunteer firemen like "Boots" [Rudolph] Woltersdorf and Werner Finke, Joe Gabel, who later became our police chief. Because of the sheer size of these people, hey, we were usually the winners.

Getting back to school . . . The big deal there was to prepare a play for the local citizens to watch in conjunction with the graduation. Paper costumes, paper settings -- boy we were lucky there was no fire. (laughter) Graduation pictures were usually taken by August Sonne's father. Very ingenious gentleman. He was an inventor, he fixed watches, he took photographs. I'm sure Augie will tell you something about that.

Upon graduation we could go to either Schurz High School in Chicago or Evanston Township in Evanston. My parents felt I would get a little better education by going to Evanston, and so I did. There were four of the graduating class from Morton Grove that started to go to Evanston, and the idea was we were going to take turns driving. It's the only way you could get there; they had no buses. But like most good, well-laid plans we just couldn't agree. I ended up driving myself at age fourteen. The family car, 1928 Pontiac. At that time, Dempster Street was just a two-lane highway with deep ditches on either side. You had to watch what you were doing.

High school was sort of a disappointment for me really. For one thing, I didn't get the type of education from our local school that would have done me really good, so the first couple of years I really worked hard trying to catch up. Reading, learning -- as a result I had no spare time to do all these extracurricular things. They had all kinds of things going on, which I couldn't do. Didn't have the time. There again, took a college preparatory course. Big deal. When I graduated in 1933 like many of the other kids, no money to go on further. Couldn't go forward, couldn't go backward. (laughs) I tried to go back, but the tuition my parents would have to pay and it was pretty strong at that time. Oh, my. (pauses)

Q: So what did you do?

RW: Well, like the rest of the kids, you sat home and just went from place to place trying to compete with people that had families for a job. And naturally, what chance did we have? The wages at that time were roughly about seven dollars a week. And I would lose to a married man who had a family to support. Boy, oh boy. Now the kids get out of school -- seven bucks an hour? I can't even get somebody to cut my grass for seven bucks an hour.

Q: Times are different.

RW: Oh, boy. Well, in the early '30s, Poehlmann Brothers closed down. Well, closed down -- they probably went bankrupt. Nobody had money to buy roses or any of their greenhouse products. That was quite a shock to this small community who

depended on them for the majority of the population being supported from them.

(pauses)

Q: Did most of the local people work there?

RW: I would say about 80 percent of the people worked at Poehlmann's. About ten percent commuted downtown -- well, at least they took the train. I assume they went downtown. About ten percent were like my father -- carpenters, painters, plumbers, building trade. Farmers, we had, oh, on Dempster Street that was loaded with farm land. Strange community.

We had, and this is strange, a pickle factory. We also had an onion factory. We know they didn't manufacture onions. (laughs)

Q: But the pickle factory probably turned cucumbers into pickles.

RW: I can't tell you.

Q: Where was it?

RW: If you would continue on Capulina just west of Ferris Avenue -- between Ferris Avenue and the railroad tracks -- there are two large buildings there side by side. Which was which, I can't tell you. But one building was a pickle factory and the other was the onion factory. That's crazy, but that's the way we used to call them. Now, somebody who can really tell you about that would be Christ Hildebrandt. All his life he's lived over there on Ferris Avenue. The same damn house. He would surely know which is which and what they did there.

Q: Okay, I'll ask him if I interview him.

RW: Some of the people here were really happy that Poehlmann closed down, because they burned soft coal and it was blowing out of the huge smokestacks, and it was a soot. You could wipe the window sill clean, and hey, three, four hours later you could wipe it clean again. You couldn't open the windows in the summertime, because if you had a south wind, for example, it would just infiltrate everywhere. What local ordinance could they pass or what could they do to them? He was the one employer of 80 percent of the population. What the hell, hey?

Q: Right. People suffered that because that was a job.

RW: I wonder now that we're talking about Poehlmann's if anybody's going to mention the fact that their property went from the tracks to Austin Avenue.

Q: All that way?

RW: Yes. That whole area. Along Austin Avenue was a heavily wooded area there where Bell and Gossett is now. Some of their migrant workers would come -- during the summer months -- and actually live in the forest there.

At that time, Prohibition was on. We had the local hardware store, department store -- Otto Frank's [?] -- had something known as canned heat. I can't tell you what canned heat is or was, but I can tell you they found many of these people dead over there. They would somehow make whiskey or alcohol from this canned heat. I've heard various stories of how you put it in a sock and you soak it.

like a tea bag. I can't verify if this is true or not. But, hey, some would go blind, and, oh, my God, they had all kinds of problems there.

Also we had a boarding house in town. The building is still standing. The building right to the west of Bringer Inn -- it's a big, old-fashioned type building. It was run by Kaufmanns, and many of the employees roomed and boarded at Kaufmanns. I went to school with Tom Kaufmann. There were three brothers. I don't remember the names of the other two fellows. I wonder what they charged. Rates must have been very reasonable.

Q: Would it have been for men working at Poehlmann's?

RW: Yes. There still is a building right adjacent to Loutsch Meat Market that was run my Mailanders. They also had roomers and boarders that worked -- well, where else could you work in town? That was it -- Poehlmann's. So when they closed down, you had a lot of empty spaces in town.

Q: Was there a big house on that property? I saw a picture of Poehlmann's family home. Now was that on the same grounds as the greenhouse?

RW: That's correct. That big house that you're talking about was on Lincoln Avenue. (pauses) As I remember it, it would be on the south side of Lincoln Avenue right across from where our local hardware store is now -- the True Value.

Q: Fairly near the tracks then. Not near the Austin Avenue end.

RW: Oh, no. No, no. That building was later moved out. It was converted to a funeral parlor, and that's the building that's over here at Simkins Funeral Home now.

Q: Without the porches.

RW: That's right. If you have a photograph of the building as it was on Lincoln Avenue, and you take it over here, you could still identify the rounded windows up there, the ornate roof structure. That's the building. We're talking about a lot of years. (pauses) Anything else you'd like to know about the Poehlmann's?

Q: Did they move out then when they went bankrupt? Did the family move away?

RW: I don't know what happened to the family. (pauses) Some of the boys moved to Skokie, to Niles Center. The older folks, I have no idea what transpired. And apparently they had a plant also here north of Dempster Street. Now that's strange. I would be so close to them and I don't remember that. I don't remember the building or the greenhouses. The only thing I remember is they had a huge water hole.

Q: Like a swimming hole?

RW: A swimming hole, and my father would go fishing there. Now I can't tell you if he ever caught anything.

Q: North of Dempster? Near the railroad?

RW: (pauses) As long as I can ever remember, and that's going back, oh, 60 years at least, that forest preserve property, that I called Wayside Inn -- it's something else now-- has always been forest preserve.

Q: Is it near what they call Linne Woods now?

RW: So, their greenhouses and the building of the home must have been east of that. It's strange that I don't remember that.

I can remember, for example, across from Sonne's house over here at School and Dempster Street, there was an airplane field, where they actually built and airplanes would land and take off there. (pauses) Oh, boy, there was what? A half a dozen of those kids. Augie Sonne can tell you that. His brother was the prime mover in that venture and he later invented something. A special type of camera that you could fly over the area.

Q: Oh, to make aerial surveys.

RW: That's correct. That's the name that he later operated under -- Chicago Aerial Survey. They made these cameras. During the war, for example, the last one, I mean, I hope it's the last one. My father worked for him making special shipping crates to ship these cameras all over the world. I don't know if Augie worked there. He must have worked there during the war.

Q: I think he did.

RW: Since then, that organization has moved. They're located on Wolf Road in Des Plaines. His brothers died several years ago, and this has gone on. I don't know ... did he sell the business or what happened. I can't tell you.

Q: Maybe Augie will tell me. I would like to go back a little bit. You talked about going fishing with your father. You told me once about a theater that you had. Tell me that again.

RW: The local movie house at Capulina and Ferris. It's still there. It's a red brick building right at the alley line.

Q: Did it front on Ferris?

RW: No, it fronts on Capulina. It's right at the alley line.

Q: It's a tall red -- is it a two story building?

RW: No. The ceiling was rather high, but, as a matter of fact, now that you mention it, we had no gymnasium. We had no big place where the school could put on plays or graduation. They had several graduations over there.

Q: It was like an auditorium then?

RW: Well, (pauses) oh, I don't know. What did I say? About a hundred, a hundred and fifty seats. Can't be any more than that. Hard seats! They had no air conditioning, so the place was intolerable in the summertime. Hotter than hell!

(laughs) And in the wintertime, steam heat. Your feet were cold. As a matter of fact, some of the patrons, and I don't remember how they did this, but they would bring hot bricks along and put their feet on the hot bricks. The length of the show was roughly, I would say, 90 minutes, an hour and a half.

Q: Did you show regular movies?

RW: It's a movie. Oh, naturally, the period I'm thinking of is the mid-'20's. My father was projectionist. I don't know how he got involved in that. These were silent pictures. Cowboys, oh, boy. They were open two days -- Saturday and Sunday. The building at the very corner of Ferris and Capulina was the candy store. Now we had two candy stores, but this was primarily open Saturday and Sunday for the theater trade. Popcorn and stuff like that.

Sound started to come in and naturally the theater had to be converted. So the original owner wasn't interested any more. There was no money to convert. My father said, "Hey. This is a natural. I'll pick up some money here." So he bought some sound equipment and we had sound movies. Well, (pauses) most of the time we had sound movies. The equipment wasn't fail-proof, it wasn't perfected. It was in the early stages, and it was a heck of time trying to get anybody out here to this little town to repair it.

Now we're talking about the middle '30s. I had already graduated from high school and I couldn't get a job. Nobody else could either. So he said, "Hey, I'm having this problem. I'm going to send you to radio school and you can learn about sound equipment and you can keep up my equipment in repair." What choice did I have? Great!

So I went to RCA Institute -- they were in the Merchandise Mart. I can remember the number now -- 1154. We were on the eleventh floor. Boy, that was great. You'd have school in the morning and lab in the afternoon. Occasionally the instructor would get a bug or get sick or something, and no lab. So we went upstairs to the NBC studios and we were in the studio audience. We would watch all these performers. Of course, you had to be quiet.

Upon graduation from there, I was smart enough to keep his equipment in repair, but along the way I said, "Hey, why don't I open a little radio service department here in town and service the local radios?" Well, that was great except for one thing. Nobody had any money. In other words, they would call you or they'd come over and say, "Please come over and fix my radio." You'd come over and most of the time all it needed was a tube. But you couldn't charge them list price for the tube. You'd have to charge them your price. Hey, this is great -- everybody's happy except nobody's making any money.

Q: By this time had you gotten out of the movie business?

RW: Yes. Now we're talking about the middle '30s. the movie business did not work too well for the primary reason, nobody had any money. We tried keeping the theater open on a Wednesday, for example, and give away baskets of groceries or bags of groceries. Some of the local comedians tried to put on vaudeville skits, and nothing worked because people just didn't have the admission price, which was -- I don't remember now. If I said a quarter, I think it would be high.

So the next thing in vogue was an outdoor movie. The surrounding communities were starting to have these, so Morton Grove's going to have one, too. It was held in the empty vacant lot right next to Herbert Dilg's house over there on

Callie Avenue, across the street from the village hall and the police station. It was the bank at Callie and Lincoln. You'd go north, you would have the alleyway and between that spot and Mr. Dilg's house was a huge vacant lot. Probably four, five, probably five homes in there by now. Everything was portable. You'd put the screen up and you'd hang the speaker on there and wait for the darkness to come. The people would come and sit and bring their blankets or some of them would stand. Boys and girls arm in arm. This was marvelous.

It was fostered by the local merchants. They would pay, and I mean pay, a dollar a week for the privilege of having their slide advertising of their business being put on the screen for a short period of time. The slides were usually shown right in the middle. For example, if you had a four-reel feature, you'd run two reels, stop, project the slides, which took about probably ten minutes. No, it wouldn't be ten minutes. Probably closer to five. You didn't keep them on too long. If you kept them on too long, the intense light from the projector would crack the slide. Now you're in trouble. You got to send away for another slide. Fiegel was on there, Tamminga, the local painter. Max Finke, all these people. Fifteen local merchants and this program ran for roughly fifteen weeks.

Q: The same slides each week?

RW: Same slide. The slide was something you sent away. In our case, we sent to Kansas City for it. I think the slide was something like two or three dollars. So you'd buy one slide for each merchant and they would keep the slide for the entire year. Next year, you'd go back again and say. "Hey, you want the same slide or you want something else?" They'd say, "Let me see the catalog."

Q: Now this was just in the summertime.

RW: Oh, yes.

Q: Were there insects?

RW: You know, that's strange you mention that. I don't remember ever being subjected to the mosquitos or bugs as we area. No, I don't remember that. Maybe they were there, but we were so interested in the program that they just didn't register.

Q: Now you and your father were running this outdoor movie program?

RW: Yes. So we were still effectively in the movie business. During the winter months, he still got the movie itch, so he said, "Hey, let's try it again." There was a theater in Bensenville that had closed and the projectionist there worked for the railroad. I don't remember his name. So Dad approached him and said, "Hey, let's open the place. I'll furnish the film." At that time, it was very difficult to book films. The current, new films would be run downtown or in the city of Chicago, and when they were finished with them, then us free-lancers would get them. You had to book them something like six months in advance.

So we opened that theater. All I did there was like sweep the floor, take the gum off the seats, take the tickets, you know. And at the same time, he was interested in the one in Skokie. That had been closed for a while. There was a fellow there by the name of Ben Mohrbacher. Later he was a teller in the bank over here in Morton Grove. He took over the business end of that and my father was the projectionist. We had a projectionist at Bensenville. The problem with

that Skokie theater was that damn steep stairs -- concrete stairs -- in the wintertime. Slippery, hazardous.

Q: Yes, because they were outside.

RW: Outside. Oh, I don't know, that ran about -- I would say we did that for about four years. Probably from '36 to '40, something like that. In the meantime, big competition. At the corner of Waukegan and Golf, I think it was the first open outdoor movie -- drive-in movie in this particular area. As a matter of fact, in this part of the country. Huge -- Sunset Drive-In Movies. Maybe I've got it wrong.

Q: I think there was another one by that name over on McCormick.

RW: Oh, okay. That's perhaps where I got the name. I don't think they ran around the entire year. It was just during the -- well, who the hell wants to sit on the cold car. (laughter)

Well, I should -- let me clarify that. They probably would have people willing to do that, because once they had two things -- they would hang the speaker inside the car, and if you'd want to pay extra, they would hang a heater inside the car. So, it's conceivable that they did run during the cooler months.

Q: But not all winter.

RW: I can't tell you. I don't know. All right, now we're up to about 1940. The theater business kind of pooped out. At least we got out of it. I got a job

with the Rauland Corporation, because things were starting to pick up. Lend-lease. It's a plan whereby our government would furnish military equipment to the friendly foreign powers, like Russia, France. We made a lot of equipment for Great Britain -- tank transmitters. I don't know where the hell they sent them. Walkie-talks. This was the start of things. Gradually things started moving. Oops -- comes Pearl Harbor. Now things really started moving.

So for the duration, I was employed by the Rauland Corporation making military gear or equipment. My father was working for the Chicago Aerial Survey custom building boxes for their -- I wish I could remember the name of that damn camera. I can't. Apparently it was a very amazing invention, because no one else had come up with anything like that.

Q: It must have been important during the war, though, to have an aerial survey.

RW: Oh, definitely. Absolutely. Highest priority -- well, almost the highest priority. Why can't I think of that fellow's name?

Q: Maybe Augie Sonne has it?

RW: It's his brother. He would know right away.

Q: So you were working for the Rauland Corporation?

RW: At the end of the war, they sold part of the business, the cathode-ray business to Zenith. They were building picture tubes for Zenith. As a matter of fact, during the war, we had government -- I'm trying to think of the name of that

hotel on Sheridan Road -- Edgewater Beach. Mr. Rauland was sort of a strange character really.

TAPE ONE, SIDE A ENDS

(SIDE B, TAPE ONE IS BLANK)

TAPE TWO, SIDE A

RW: When he [Mr. Rauland] started clowning around, his voice would sound exactly like Andrew Brown of Amos 'n' Andy. A real nice boy.

Q: Now was he your boss or he owned the company?

RW: He owned the company. One-man organization.

Q: Where was that company?

RW: Well, we were at 4242 North Knox. That's right off of Montrose and Cicero in that province there. Later when they broke the company up and he sold the picture tube manufacturing business to Zenith, they moved that out to Melrose Park. And the electronics moved to roughly Addison and Kimball there. They're still there to this very day. They make sound equipment for railroad switching yards or stadiums, some telephone systems for big buildings like schools, etc. No more government work.

Q: How long did you work there?

RW: From about '39 to '46. When the war was over, he decided he didn't want any more military business. He wanted to get out as quickly as possible. Oh, the place was overrun with inspectors. And they would be picky. The screw head was burred a little or you had a little blemish in the paint finishing. For anything they could possibly do to reject the material. It was terrible. They were probably doing their job the way they were told to do it, but -- well, that's over. Forget it. (laughs)

Q: Then where did you go to work?

RW: One of the engineers I worked under at Rauland, he had formerly worked for Zenith, and he wanted to get out in business for himself. So he started up a little company known as Radio Industries. We were at 24 -- oh, I don't know, 35, something like that -- Irving Park Boulevard in Chicago. We made components like coils for the radio industries. Tuners. He took a partner in with him. Since I had served under him at Rauland, he said, "Hey, I need help. Come on over and give me a hand." Dummy that I was, I said, "oh, sure. No problem." His name is John Antalek. No problem. So I went to work for him.

If I had stayed with Rauland when they sold, the company was broken up, I would have probably gone with Zenith and I'd be rolling in money now. Some of the people that did, they worked for Zenith, for example. For five years or so, and then they came out with profit sharing and bonuses. After five years, they would get a \$50,000 bonus.

Q: Wow!

RW: Hey, but, dummy, I went with Mr. Antalek. So I worked for him for, oh, my goodness sakes . . . probably until about 1960, which was for me a long time. Then our company was bought out by TRW, Thompson-Ramo-Woldrich. We moved to Des Plaines. The building is still there. Beautiful place on Ballard Road -- Rand and Ballard. Right along the riverbank. As a matter of fact, in the spring, the river would overflow its banks and you were wondering, "Is it going to stop or is it going to come inside?"

Q: Did it ever come inside?

RW: No, it always stopped just short. That was not too good of a place out there. They expected a lot of help from the local housewives that were bored with housework. They would come and work cheaply at the place, but they were too smart. So it ended up that they would bus out some Chicago Puerto Ricans. We would call them Porticans. Good workers, but they would be jabbering away in Spanish and you never knew what the hell they were talking about.

So, I was with them for ten years, from 1960 in Des Plaines, until roughly 1970. In 1970 they closed the Des Plaines plant completely. One of our objects in Des Plaines was to provide information to Taiwan -- how to fabricate tools and equipment, test equipment, and how to make the products that we were making in Des Plaines. Taiwan's help was a quarter a day, something like that. They thought it was a marvelous idea. Well, the people in Taiwan are no dummies. They caught on pretty fast, and they did such an excellent job, TRW decided, "We don't need Des Plaines any more. Let's close it." Damn it, I'm out of work.

(laughs)

I was out of work for about -- oh, I would say, six or eight months. Something like that. A lot of jobs, but nobody required the skills that I had acquired working for Rauland and Radio Industries and TRW. So finally I got located with a small organization known as Radio Condenser. I know, this is not much of a history of Morton Grove, but it's a little history of me.

Q: Interesting.

RW: Not necessarily. (laughs) The place I worked next was Radio Materials. They were at 4245 Bryn Mawr. Sort of depressing in a way, because they were facing the cemetery. There's an awfully big cemetery there at Pulaski and Bryn Mawr, and each day you'd go to work, you'd say, "Hey, this is the way it's going to end up, like it or not." (laughter) So I worked with them. They later became affiliated with P.R. Mallory, the people who make the Duracell batteries. I worked for them until about 1983. In the meantime, P.R. Mallory decided they weren't interesting in the electronic component business. The profit margin was too small. It's always been a cut-throat business. If you could make it for a quarter of a cent cheaper, hey, they would pull their business and take it someplace where they could get it for a quarter of a cent cheaper. So, Radio Materials moved. They moved down to Georgia -- no head tax, help is supposedly cheaper, on and on and on. The hell with it.

Q: Have you stayed retired since then?

RW: Yes. I was given the option of going down there, but they wouldn't pay moving costs, they wouldn't pay selling costs. I had dealt with the people from southern

Illinois for a period of time, and . . . no. You can't show those people anything. Right or wrong, they know it. There's no other way of doing it. Besides, now I'm 65, looking around trying to get employment locally. Rough, rough. The heck with it. I get my few dollars social security. (sighs) This is not telling much about Morton Grove, however.

We had two famous nightclubs in town -- the Dells and Lincoln Tavern. The Dells was roughly at Dempster and Austin, and the Lincoln Tavern was over here at School and Dempster. In the summertime, because air conditioning was not in vogue then yet, they opened the windows for ventilation. By tip-toeing around the place on the public sidewalks, you could watch the entertainment and hear the music. Big bands. When they would have a colored band, the colored folks from Evanston would come out, and they would crowd us off the sidewalk. We didn't push either.

Q: (laughs) They would listen, too.

RW: Oh, yes, hey -- this was marvelous.

Q: Was this when you were a child or when you were more adult?

RW: (pauses) Both of these places went out of business, I would say, about . . . 1934, 1935.

Q: After Prohibition?

RW: Yes. Well, they couldn't make it any more with the entertainment and as gambling houses they were very competitive. The story is that the gamblers had set the Dells on fire. I don't know why. Two different organizations trying to control one another or something. I don't know what happened to Lincoln Tavern. I think they just went out of business. But it was interesting -- top-notch entertainment for kids like us who knew or never saw anything like that. Marvelous.

This goes back a little bit. Going back to the early '30s when the local village officials would be re-elected. They would throw a victory party, and we only had two places that would accept a party like that. That would be at the Dilg's Dance Hall upstairs. That was on the second floor. Boy, very steep stairs, or at the Mueller's Hall, depending on which of the two factions won the election.

Q: Would these be local elections?

RW: Yes, for mayor and trustees and so forth. Still got the same problem today -- can't get the old rascals out. (laughter)

We didn't have mail carriers those days. That started in 1933. Before that, if you wanted your mail you had a box at the post office which was in the Dilg building at Lincoln and Ferris. Ours happened to be box number twelve. As a strange coincidence, there's the same post box I have now in our post office -- Box 12 on Waukegan Road. Art Juern was our first local carrier. Golly, he's gone, too. That's a lousy job. Hot as hell in summer and winter, slopping through the snow and in the rain. Mail's got to go out -- the heck with that.

Q: Tell me about the village hall when you were a child.

RW: The village hall was the large room upstairs in the building where they kept the two fire engines. That was on Callie Avenue just about two hundred feet north of Lincoln Avenue. Village hall. You'd go there to pay your water bill. That's where they held their traffic court. That's where they did their village board meetings.

In the middle '30s, like maybe '32 or '33 or something like that, WPA Project came along, and they built just to the south of that building -- you can see in our Local History Room here at the library photographs of this building that was put up by the WPA. Beautiful brick building. Today it's since been demolished. It's the parking lot just north of our fire station, which is now at the corner of Lincoln and Callie. It's blacktopped over. In the back of that building that was put up by the WPA, there was a water tank with a pumping station right beneath it. I have no recollection whatsoever of when that was taken down.

Before the village hall had been put on that location, there was a little red building there occupied by a local shoe merchant. He repaired shoes and he sold shoes. As a matter of fact, one time my father took me there to buy shoes, and he still operated a kerosene lamp. Later the rumor was that the man had gone out of his mind, to be polite -- crazy, I could have said -- and they took him away to Dunning [Naragansett and Irving Park, Chicago], and the building was demolished. That is where they put the building up with the local help of tradesmen paid by the WPA.

Now, that building served for village hall upstairs, water department on the first floor and some offices, and downstairs was the police department. They had a two-cell jail down there. The heating plant was down there. I toured that just

before it was demolished. The initial reason for touring the establishment is they were going to give it to the Morton Grove Historical Society, but it would have been so expensive to maintain. The building had deteriorated to the point where it would have been really expensive.

Q: Is that where the fire station is now?

RW: No, that's where the blacktopped parking lot is. It would have been very nice if we were able to swing that deal. It would have been ours -- not like it is today. We broke our back to move a building and then give it away to the park district. We have no control over it today. I didn't see that deal at all.

Q: Well, it's done.

RW: Yes. I wish it hadn't been done that way. They begged the local people for money and help and so forth, and now it belongs to the park district. Already the park district is unhappy with the way it's being operated. They floated a \$50,000 loan to renovate the premises, which by all normal standards don't need any renovation. We can't say anything; we can't do anything, but provide manpower to help.

Q: Could I ask you about the building at the corner that was originally a bank building?

RW: Oh, yes. That was a bank. We're talking now about the northwest corner of Callie and Lincoln. That was the original bank building. It was always there as

far as I can remember. But the bank in 1929 went out of business like many other banks did. Shortly thereafter it was opened and operated by Roland Dilg as an insurance agency. Later on -- I don't know how he got some money together -- and it once again became a bank.

Then when they outgrew their premises there and moved here on Dempster and Fernald, the Morton Grove village was running short of space allocated in their building that was put up by the WPA, so they rented for a while, and then they bought the building. Nice for their purposes. It had a huge safe, a lot of storage room in the basement. They operated probably, ten, fifteen years as village hall offices. When they moved to Capulina and School, the building was vacant and there again was another building offered to the Morton Grove Historical Society which they couldn't do anything with. Huge safe in there. (laughs) But empty. Today, it's occupied by Kropp. Insurance agency. It's marvelous. They have a safe for their records, adequate floor space. It's really a nice building.

Q: They've changed the outside of it. They've added stone and they've modernized the building.

RW: Oh, yes. The village did that when they were occupants there. There again, to note the difference between today and yesteryear, refer to photographs at the Local History Room at the Morton Grove Library.

Q: Yes, I've seen pictures of the bank there. You and I have discussed that the Poehlmann home was moved up to Dempster Street and became our present funeral home. Tell me about the funeral homes when you were little?

RW: There was no such thing as a funeral home then -- at least in this community. The people would be laid out in their front parlor room. Most of the time they didn't even have church services that I can remember. They would just put the box in the front room for display and then moved out.

For example, the local baker, whose name was Fred Fleteau, died, and it was the first time I had ever seen that. The Masons were carrying him out from his premises there and they all had these cute little aprons on, and I never really understood why they had the little apron on. They were dressed like Mom, you know. Years later, somebody said, "Hey, that's part of the rites. That's the way it's supposed to be." I didn't know that.

My grandparents were immigrants from Europe and they also died in their homes. In both cases they took the front window out, because the casket was too large to go through the door or some reason, but they took the front windows out and they carried them out to the cemetery that way. I don't even remember if they had any services in the home at all.

Oh, the way you'd recognize that there was someone had died in the home is they would have a wreath on the front door. Very similar to the wreaths people have on their front doors now at Christmas time. That's strange, isn't it.

Q: Yes, it is. How about hospitals?

RW: One -- St. Francis in Evanston on Ridge Avenue. I know because I was there to have my tonsils removed. At that time it was run by the Catholic sisters. They didn't have any -- well, I suppose they were the nurses there. They served as the personnel. Tonsils -- you got to take them out.

Q: Did you actually stay in the hospital?

RW: Overnight. My mother stayed with me, and next day on the way home we stopped at the Dilg's ice cream parlor. Originally it had been a saloon, a tavern, but when Prohibition came they converted to an ice cream parlor. So we stopped there -- oh, my, ice cream! For such a little thing like tonsils removed?

Q: Yes, but I bet it made your throat feel good.

RW: I don't remember. Awfully long time ago.

Q: Were you born at St. Francis Hospital?

RW: No. At that period in time, the local doctor would be called and the children would be born at home. In my case, it was Dr. Drostenfels. The name I can remember, but the man I can't. His offices were on Lincoln Avenue between Joe Hoss' saloon, which later became a National Tea store, and Henry Loutsch's butcher shop.

Q: So his office was right close to your home then.

RW: Yes, yes. He could have just grabbed his bag and run down the alley. (laughter)
I don't know if the gentleman was elderly or not. I have no recollection of that at all.

Q: So you were born at home and that was in the next block down on . . .

RW: That's right. Roughly 8523 Fernald Avenue. The home is still there. It's a two-flat affair. We lived downstairs and the upstairs was rented. They even thought of that in those days.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A ENDS