

Ruth (Mielke) Dixon

Narrator

With comments by John Dixon

Rebecca A. Mavencamp

Greenfield Historical Society

Interviewer

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At the home of Ruth and John Dixon

Plymouth, Minnesota

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[unrelated conversation]

RM: Let's start out by introducing you. It's July 25, 2013, I'm Rebecca Mavencamp interviewing Ruth Dixon. Could you spell your name?

RD: R-U-T-H D-I-X-O-N.

RM: And your maiden name?

RD: Is Mielke. M-I-E-L-K-E.

RM: And you said you were born in 1929?

RD: Yes, January 30, 1929.

RM: You got married in what year?

RD: August 25, 1949.

RM: You said you're coming up on a pretty important anniversary?

RD: Yes, this next year is going to be sixty-five years.

RM: It's very impressive.

RD: We traveled around a lot and enjoyed ourselves and was blessed with many things. Good health is one of them. Our healthiest living was up in North Dakota.

RM: How many years did you live up there?

RD: Thirty-six years. Five years down in Missouri, but I didn't like all the bugs [laughter].

RM: Yes, it's nice how they freeze off around here.

RD: The cockroaches and the chiggers! The chiggers were so itchy I couldn't stand them. Now I found out their also Minnesota. This suburb.

RM: They're moving in?

RD: Mmm hmm.

RM: Where did you raise your children?

RD: Two were born in Missouri and two were born in North Dakota. And, let's see...yes. They all went to school up in North Dakota. In Missouri they were too small [for school].

RM: What brought you back to Minnesota?

RD: When my husband retired, he said, "We're going back to Minnesota." Our four children are now in Minnesota and we wanted to go where there was more dancing. Many of the dance halls had closed up, so we still have to find some [laughs].

RM: South Dakota wasn't known for its polkas?

RD: I should get my little United States map out. I think we've gone and danced in twenty-three states. We traveled with a lot of bands and enjoyed traveling even while we were working. We had time off in the summer time. Still, to go all the different states. We have been in every state except Alaska and Maine. We ran short of time [laughter].

RM: You've managed to put a lot into your life.

RD: Yes, yes.

RM: Did any of the bands that you traveled with play down at Lake Sarah?

RD: Ah, yes, at one time.

RM: Which ones?

RD: Whoopee John did. There was another one that ...we didn't travel with Whoopee John. Lake Sarah closed I believe in 1965, so there wouldn't have been any traveling bands like they do now. The Wendinger brothers maybe had somebody at one time and we travelled with them. There were three busloads that went to Frankenmuth, Michigan but I don't remember...I was trying to think of some of the earlier bands, but I don't remember the names of them anymore. I'd have to look back in some old magazines [laughs].

RM: So the important reason that we're here especially, is the fact that you're the daughter of Herman Mielke, a resort owner on Lake Sarah.

RD: Yes, for forty years.

RM: Forty years?

RD: Yes.

RM: Did the resort have a name, other than "Mielke's Resort"?

RD: Yes, I had a map once, like Joanne did, but I don't remember...I...it got lost somewhere in this last move that we did. I haven't found it [laughs].

RM: She found hers so we can get a copy.

RD: Ok. I thought it was ...was it Breezy? Breeze Point or Breeze Hill? Yes, something like that.

RM: Everybody knew it as Mielke's?

RD: Yes, that and it was right off the highway. We could always use that.

RM: If we wanted to find the property, we just turned off of Highway 55 onto Lake Sarah Drive?

RD: I'm not sure if it's Lake Sarah or not. Lake Sarah may be on the south side because there is a road that follows close along the south shore. There is a landing back there. I think that's the only landing that's left on the Lake.

RM: Yes, we talked to Kohnen's about that.

RD: Ok...there used to be one... if you're going from here toward Rockford and you're passed Medina...passed that pumpkin patch? Just a little ways past the pumpkin patch, you're getting pretty close to the railroad track and to the lake. There is about cars length space on the other side of railroad tracks. That was the very first train stop years back.

RM: Passenger train?

RD: Yes. Now they've got a gate there. That would be the very one. And then where my folks were, their house actually was a summer stop from the train. There was an addition on the house that we later made into a garage. That was a cooking kitchen and the house itself was two rooms, which were about fifteen feet wide each and then thirty feet long. Those were for eating and the rooms where the people getting off the train would stop and eat. Later on we just made it into...put some partitions in and made smaller rooms down the house. It was on the historical register for a while, but now they've done too much to it, so. Then there was a depot in Rockford that the train would stop at too, but it was always passenger trains that would go through there.

RM: Do you remember the trains?

RD: There was a Soo Line, that's what they called it, although passenger trains went through pretty fast and the ground would vibrate [laughs].

RM: I bet you would lose a few tea cups off the wall.

RD: Nope, we never did because when we hung a shelf or fastened a picture, we anchored it the wall. On the shelves, and even in our cupboards in the kitchen where we kept the good China, we put a little ridge board on the edge of the shelf so when they got to that, it was time to push them back again [both laugh].

RM: They would actually walk across the shelf?

RD: Yes! They would vibrate and I got to the point where I DON'T want to hear it. I want to sleep!

RM: Never want to hear another train again?

RD: You know? To this day yet I don't want to hear a storm. I won't! I just don't want to

hear it [laughs] if it lightning, yes and then the thunder is really bad, then I know just how far away that lightning is, too. I was in a house fire once was before we went to Lake Sarah.

RM: You started out in Lyndale?

RD: That's where I was born and then lived down south of Watertown. In the fall of 1938 we moved to Lake Sarah. It was a lot of run down area because we found messy stuff around. The grass was so high and the weeds were so high that my sister and I, we said it was like running through a forest [laughs]. I really didn't want to move there because I didn't like all those weeds! No, it was fun. I learned a lot of lessons in visiting with strangers coming. You knew when to keep still and when not to be and watch for cars coming in. But one time, I didn't like it very well because my pet dog was missing and I thought...oh... where is he? So we looked over the railroad tracks thinking maybe he got hit. Nope. Nobody else knew what happened either, but it was a friendly little thing. A little rat Terrier. We never found it, it never came back, so we were sure that somebody put it in their car while their car was on the yard.

RM: Oh, that's so sad.

RD: Yes, because when I would come home on weekends then it stayed by my side all the time [laughs].

RM: You had him for quite awhile?

RD: Yes. It was so handy after the highway was built that I could just stand up there by the mailbox and wave to him [the bus driver] and he'd pick me up. He said, "You don't have to go back to the depot, I know where you live." Then they'd drop me off at the depot in Minneapolis and I would walk down to Marquette Avenue where I worked.

RM: Where did you work?

RD: It was with Nagel Hardware at that time, but now it's a parking ramp.

RM: You said there was a bus that came?

RD: Yes. Liederbach bus line. It went on from Minneapolis all the way up to the North Dakota line. It stopped at all the little towns. I think I was out of state when the line stopped. So, it was handy. I didn't need a car. And then I went to the dance one Wednesday night and then somebody had to go back and forth to all-time.

RM: Who would that "somebody" be?

RD: I've still got him! [laughs]

RM: Why don't you tell me about the night that you met?

RD: ah—

[JD] How are you people getting along?

RM: We were just talking about the night that you met.

RD: Yes! I needed a ride back to the city and he was going back, so it came in handy [laughs].

RM: You were just a taxi service?

RD: Well, yes...he said if I didn't marry him, he was going to charge me for bus fare! [laughs]

[JD] I'll leave the room and you two talk more about that...

RD: That's the end of that! It went on for about three years! [all laugh]

RM: That would have been a pretty big gas bill!
[unrelated conversation]

RM: What was it about her that you liked? What caught your eye about Ruth?

[JD] Most didn't know how to dance. We've been dancing ever since.

RM: I hear you do quite a bit of it.

[JD] I never had met her before. I bet you told her where we met?

RD: Yes, at the dance hall. For some reason we agreed on most stuff, so I guess that's what got...[laughs]

[JD] You know what was ironic about it? We both went to the same church, we were confirmed by the same pastor, but in different years. I had never met her yet, until later on.

RM: Isn't that funny!

RD: Most of the time, if my folks went anywhere...somebody always had to stay home at the resort. I had heard of his name but I didn't know, but yes, he was a good dancer! [laughs]

RM: That's the important part.

RD: I was going to dances with my folks from little on because I had an uncle who was a drummer and my folks used to drive him home. He always got so tired and almost fell in the ditch. He would fall asleep.

RM: Which band did he play in?

RD: He played with Stahlke band out of New Germany.

RM: They would come up to the Pavilion and play, too?

RD: When they lived down south by Watertown for a while when I was younger, then we were only living a mile away from where he lived. And years ago the dances used to go from nine until, what was it? One o'clock at night and that was just too...people were working during the day, they could go later.

Another thing I was going to mention, too...there was a lot of restaurant owners in Minneapolis that used to trap turtles. One time, I just could not get over it, I had to go talk to this guy. My Mom said, "Well, ok, but that's all. Be careful and don't get hurt now." He had his own boat and he came to the lake. When he was off, he had a turtle in that boat that was wider than his boat.

RM: How wide were the boats?

RD: I suppose...usually in the middle of the boat maybe two people could sit on a seat. This turtle was in the middle of the boat on one of those seats and was partially over the edge! That was a big turtle. And then I said, "Well how can you trap a turtle, you know, it's so big?" I was thinking about a bit trap. He showed me. It was just like a little box, a wire box. About six inches by four and he put food in there. When the turtle reaches its head in there, it shut up and he couldn't pull his head back under his cover and so then he drowns. They used to serve turtle meat in the restaurants in the city. Now my brother had one once when I came home to visit. He was going to have turtle supper and I should stay. I said, "I can't! John's got to get back for work." And so I never did get a taste of that turtle! [laughs] They were so big.

They were another thing the kids wanted to see. They wanted to chase the turtle away so they could swim. I said, "No! Just let them alone, they won't do anything, they want to build a nest." Oh, turtles can't make a nest, how can they make a nest? I said, "You just watch em. They're going to go to wiggle their tail and make a hole down in the sand and they're going to and lay their eggs in there." Well, this I got to see. So then they would leave them alone because our beach line was sandy and I'm not sure just when they actually hatch. I suppose it was early in the spring. Oh, could they have one of those little turtles? I said, "Well, you can if you put a little food in and you put it in water and then may be as it gets bigger and you don't want to take care of it anymore, then go put it by a lake and let it keep living." So there's a lot of them, when they were in a cabin, they would sometimes keep it until they left and then put back it back in the lake again

because they didn't know what to do with it once they got home! [laughs]

RM: These were the "city kids" you were talking about?

RD: Yes, yes, yes, yes. We had a serving bowl of the type where it had a big ridge with a little mound like in the middle where you could set a plant or decorate a centerpiece? We had one on the porch for a while. The turtle would go down in the water, around the outer edge, and when it wanted to get the sun, it would go up on that little hill. We had that out by the opening where people could come and check out the boat or pay for it and leave. It was one way of showing the kids that they don't hurt you and you can let them go. Now, the way the lakes are getting, the shores are so full of weeds and the turtles can get up there to the sand. We have a cabin right now and the weeds were gone until two, three years ago. Now I don't know where the seeds came from or how it spread because there were clamshells that were there. We've got some wood ducks and they could always come off and sit on the sand. Now they won't do that because the weeds are in their way and they get tangled up in them. The kids don't like to go swimming because it's mushy and weedy. I've gotten letters from the Conservation Department asking, "what would you like to preserve?" I said, naturally the lakes of Minnesota because of that. I know some people around Lake Sarah and some other places that have done fine because they've cut the weeds off.

RM: Sure. Taken care of it.

RD: Yes.

RM: Did your Dad ever do anything to the beach?

RD: No, we didn't have to. But now our farmyard, when we would bring the cattle home, they would all run down and get into the water. You can't do that either anymore. Yet they never dropped any of their droppings in the water. They would run down there, cool off and drink a little bit, and then come out. They never stayed in the water. Now, I don't know if only farmed cattle would do that, I didn't experience any other kind. But you know, we had that farm as long as we had that resort.

RM: Can you describe the farm and where the cattle would go?

RD: Well, as they came into [begins to draw]...here's your railroad track, driveway, and this was a cabin right here. This was the house and these were those other barns and those other sheds. I'll just put "sheds" here. That would be the garage, ice house, chicken house... then back here would be the barnyard. There was a barn and here's the lawn. You go down to the lake... the barn the cows would come in from... the road cross the railroad tracks came in here, ran over here, and right here was a gate to go down to the lake. Back here was the door coming [altar?] in the barn and there was a fence here and they would come out and they'd go up into here. Dad would fence them off in this

backyard. They'd stay there for the night with a pile of hay. They would eat out there because this was high ground here, but when they first came in, they ran down here to the water, then they'd go up out here so there were no weeds in there. We could walk out. There was no drop off either. You could walk out, oh gosh, way above your chin to...I would say at least to eight, ten feet of water. There wouldn't be any weeds or anything. It was all sand. My sister, we would play with a little inner tube, she'd hang onto those. My folks did not know how to swim so we were taught, and we told anybody with kids when they came to the lake and wanted to go swimming, walk out as far as you're comfortable and swim in. Don't ever swim out. I was out farther than she thought that, she didn't think it was that deep, and she let go of that old inner tube. She went down over her head. I threw the inner tube to her right away because it had popped away. But see, the smaller kids, I had to watch that all the time. Even Art, the little rascal...oh god... if you couldn't find him he was down by the lake.

RM: He was several years younger than you, right?

RD: Yes, he was...let's see. He was at least nine years younger. I was almost ten years old when we moved there and Art was born just before we moved. His birthday is in January too [laughs]

RM: You had a pretty responsible childhood.

RD: Yes, well, yes. I was either but my mother's side or my Dad's side all the time, helping to watch for this or watching for people driving in or, "Watch something on the stove, I gotta go out!" or, "Watch those two little ones." Then I'd lose track of Art, and he go down and crawl in one of the boats and he'd lay over there and watch those fish swim until he was dizzy and he fell into the lake. The water was only ten inches deep where he was probably and he'd just stop.

He [Art] probably didn't tell you this, but oh, god...we always had to cut the grass. It was a slope and there was one of these rotary lawn mowers. He would come crawling behind. I was pulling it, going up the hill so I could cut going down and he was crawling behind and he got his finger cut off. So he always says, "You're mean to me, you cut my finger off!" My mother right away she took him into the doctor. It was hanging just by the skin on the side. That finger didn't take hold, so that's always been a short finger. "Remember this?!" [Art says] So I said, "Yes! You were grown up enough to walk, you didn't have to crawl!" But right at the joint, so it really didn't damage his hand all that much [laughs] anyway...oh shoot...yes. Little accidents can happen.

Another thing that was attractive to the resort was the winter fishing. There was a lot of people that brought their fish houses down because they could drive all the way down to the lake and unload because it was level. It was a nice level area. I even speared some fish...caught them. Yes, I had to hurry up and do my work so I could go down there. So there was stuff year round. There always had to be somebody at home. A lot of times somebody wanted to come out from the city and the said, "I cant be out long, but I'd like to come extra early. Would you care if I drove in at four in the morning, or real early?"

Well, no because we'd be awake probably anyhow to go do chores and other things. He said, "I'd like to have a can of some bait ready." Okay, we'll assign you to the oars, we'll put the oars in a place where you can find them, and a certain number. You can take that boat. So they would come early in the morning and pick up the bait, which would be with the boat overnight. They could go down and start fishing. We wouldn't be alarmed when we heard a car or something come in because that time of the year it was daylight early. They were people that came back year after year, month after month. Some of them even came to our wedding.

RM: You got to be very friendly with people?

RD: Yes. There was a lot of people that I still remember. Some of them...in fact, one of them years later when they saw some company that he had investments in, that you put in before when you're starting to use them, his name came up. I talked to his wife, because he wasn't living anymore, and she was able to go claim that stuff. It was just amazing to talk to them again because it was... oh gosh, had to be at least twenty years that we hadn't seen them. I stayed with at least three different families [in Minneapolis]. When the Marine came home, I had to move [laughs].

RM: You boarded with them?

RD: Yes. I had room and board. I didn't know a city block from anything. I hadn't been down because I always at home with my Dad, unless my folks had to go in for something and they stayed out with us. One gal, she said, "Can I drive the horses?" I said when we were picking up hay, well, sure. And she always stood alongside of me and she was watching all the time. I stayed with that family I think the longest, must have been at least two years or more. We used to go horseback riding whenever I stayed with them because they had a horse. We even kept their horse in our barn for awhile. And by gosh, she ended up marrying a barhop farmer--she just loved it. Oh she loved it out there! She wanted to come out all the time [laughs].

RM: It sounds like you did a lot of education?

RD: They never were out of the city. They just wanted to be out. We would go out the woods and those gardner snakes were all over. There was a nice big rock pile where they always hatched. I said, "Well, you don't have to be afraid of these." It might tug your ankle once in awhile, but I said, "Don't panic." Just carefully take hold of its tail, but don't touch it's head [laughs].

RM: They were pretty squeamish?

RD: Yes, well...not knowing what it would do...

RM: You said you kept worms as well?

RD: Mm hmm

RM: Can you tell me about that?

RD: It was always hard to find any good sized worms when the weather got dry. About the middle of July we would always see to it that we had a good supply, because there was still a lot of time for fishing. If I tried and couldn't find them, then I went over to my uncle's and dug them. I'd put them in our washtub in the basement and would feed them. To this day... we have a cabin and I have a smaller box and I put less worms in, but I put them in the dirt. First put a big plastic bag in there so that keeps the moisture, keeps everything in there. Then you can keep them in a smaller container. Then I turn that bag around every once in a while just to loosen it up. We always had the angle worms, but I didn't get very much money for them...ten cents for fifty of them? Those were hard times [laughs].

RM: I'll believe it. That's a lot of apple peels you need!

RD: Yes, we had a lot of excess stuff there, what with all of us home. We were raised on our own things, so it was always something that we...especially potato peelings. Then one fall, we had Apple trees, and there was a hailstorm. So we had a lot of apples that we were going to eat that we ended up feeding to the pigs and some to the worms. We educated a lot of kids. They wanted to know where the chickens lay their eggs and how. We said, "Don't ever go in there by yourself. If you want to see the chickens, come and ask us and we'll let you go in and see." If you scare the chickens that's not good...and I don't know if they really did or not, but it was one way of keeping them out [laughs].

RM: You'd be chasing them across the yard otherwise.

RD: Yes, yes! [laughs] The kids really enjoyed it because it was something that you never saw, never knew anything about. If they didn't know what to do in the city, they would end up coming out to the lake... When we would go out into the pasture to bring the cows in, we always had to beware of the train.

RM: Yes, the track was very close.

RD: Yes, and the cows...when they got to the gate they're going to go through and they won't stop if you hear that train whistle blow after you open the gate. I found that out. I tried holding back about twenty of them once.

RM: Little you didn't win against the cow, huh?

RD: No. One cow had got smarter. That young cow ran around me and got hit in the back end by the front of the engine and it couldn't walk anymore ... it wasn't killed, but it

couldn't walk anymore. So my Dad went to town and got the butcher and they came out. They had to kill the cow because it wouldn't...it was a younger one. All the rest of them, by that time the train engine had gone past the road, the rest of the cows ran along side of the train. There was a ledge where there was once part of a rail track, so it was a wide path. They didn't run very far and slowed up, but they went at such a speed going down there. None of the others got hurt. After that we had to listen very close and the whole problem was the wind from the wrong way. The engineers always would blow their horn...they knew there were roads going across railroad tracks in that area way before ours and so they would blow the whistle already at Loretto. They would blow it loud and long, but we did not hear that train. My cousin was with me and she said, "Well Ruthie! What are we gonna do?!" I said, "Well, we'll do as much as we can." She still to this day remembers it. The wind was from the west and sound went in the different directions. We never lost any other animals because of the train. We would take them over in the morning and then bring them home at night. The pasture was across the railroad tracks. One winter we had a lot of wild geese that stayed...it was too late for them to leave, so we put them in our hay barn. It was the funniest thing. It was like they didn't... I don't know if it was because the weather was so much more warmer or something, but we ended up keeping them in the hay barn. Then we'd let them go out. Open it up and they wanted to go out in the snow. They'd play around and eat the snow a little bit, but then they'd stay back in the barn because we had an area when you could drive in all the time. We had the cows on one side and the horses on the other end of the barn and they stayed in there. They liked it, I guess [laughs].

RM: What did you feed them?

RD: They ate on some of the hay, the leaves, the alfalfa, and Dad would put some wheat in there. We did have to water...we didn't have electricity out there until 1946, so he had a generator on top of the barn. That's how he got water to the barn. There again, he was going with his ingenuities.

RM: You said he had much ingenuity.

RD: Yes...the cabins all had kerosene lamps. We had moved gasoline...one of those with the little mantle, I think it was...a different type of gas that we used in those gas lamps.

RM: Just the regular oil light with the wick?

RD: There was a wick that lit up, but I know we had to use some special stuff for that. We'd hang them in the kitchen. Otherwise we had lamp gas that was two different kinds. Then Northern States had a power line up to the neighbor on the one side and REA to the neighbor on the other side. Then one year my mother said, "That's enough! We deserve electricity just as well as everybody else." She wrote a letter to the electrical company in the city and said, "How long do we have to be out here before we can get anything?" It didn't take too long and there was a power company there.

RM: As soon as you make a little noise.

RD: Yes... they decided to come in, but that was in '46. I don't know how long they really waited because it was quite a while. They really couldn't afford to get the house and all that stuff wired right away because they were in debt when they moved there to begin with. My uncle was an Electrical Engineer and he wired houses, so he came over and put electricity in the house, the barn and all the cabins. See the cabins back in those years were very rustic. There was only one wall, and that was the outside board! My mother and I, we painted them so that they would be a little bit nicer. On the 2X4 beam, the ones that hold across on the roof? On one side we wrote "good morning" and on the other side, "good night!" "have a great day" and paint a few flowers in between on the boards on the inside [laughs]. They all had a porch, so we put a few things out there. That's usually where they left their boots and all the other equipment, because it was a screen porch. There was the one cabin up behind the house that was just a one bedroom the size--I should say for a one bedroom because otherwise there were no rooms except that one. That was close to the house where the parents had their parents living for a while, otherwise everything was wide open. Had a lot of jokes with kids that were up there--they had to put a curtain up [laughs].

RM: Were there bunk beds?

RD: No there were regular beds. They were metal beds. Some had cots that they brought along. Then in the summertime they would maybe put a cot out on the porch and the kids would sleep in there. But there was a lot a lot of laundry and a lot of ironing pillowcases and sheets and whatever.

RM: You did all of the housekeeping yourself?

RD: Yes, yes I often thought, "here's where we need those..." Remember when the ironing was a bit, like a big...waffle iron almost? To do some of the sheets... we didn't get one though, but it was a desire.

RM: Did you use an iron from the stove?

RD: We had one, but no, we had a gasoline iron. I was very, very careful because I was so darn afraid of fire. See, the house... that was why we moved. That lightning had struck the house where we were living, south of Watertown. Just random. Before that, my sister had been three weeks in the hospital and so they just couldn't afford to buy the place. We moved and went up another relative who was helping with finances, so it was like starting all over again. Then two years after that there was this huge hailstorm...ruined all the crops. We picked up nine heavy gunny sacks full of apples off the trees that were going to rot because they were all from the hail. Well? That was pig feed at least... so you know...that was some tough times, those years.

RM: Did you want to move? Are you in the sun? Is it getting painful?

RD: Yes, now it's getting to bright.

RM: Do you just want to move down one chair? We can shift [movement]

RD: There we go. I think that I covered the things that I have thought about. I was going to write more.

RM: You had some pictures here that you were going to talk to be about as well?

RD: Lets see...well, these two are the same, so I suppose I should write my name down on here, or who they are. [pause] Let's see, we were married May 3...I forget what year...wait a minute. I was born in '29...they were married in...May 3, 1929...Mom said they were accusing her [of being pregnant] and she had to get married "They didn't count it right!" [laughter] Just because it was close to the...I think that I got the date figured out right [laughing]

RM: They sound like very fun people

RD: Oh, gosh, yes...they enjoyed stuff. Well see, he had two sisters and four brothers and I stood up for her youngest brother when he got married so they were kind of scattered.

RM: Can you tell me more about them as people?

RD: We were all Germans [laughter].

RM: That says it all right there .

RD: Right there! [laughs] Yes, mother graduated in eighth grade at... in German, going to German school, and so did Dad. Dad lived in the Montrose area...Lyndale. See, Lyndale was a creamery, that's now a shop of historical things, and a feed mill, I think that was all that was there. That creamery is still standing because we go by it every so often. Now I think they call it Highway 20? They changed all the numbers of the roads when we moved back to Minnesota. I wanted to go down to Watertown from Plymouth and I thought, "Am I on the right road? I've traveled this road I don't know how many umpteen times." So there was a guy that was real close to the road, in his driveway, working in the shop. I thought I'd better ask and find out where I was. So I stopped and ask him and he said, "No, you're on the right road, just keep on going." They just changed the numbers. It was strange.

RM: Who did you prefer being with when you were young, mom or dad?

RD: I was with both of them so much. Dad was easy to talk to and get along with. So was my mother; my mother I would say, "Well, I'm only going to say it once, that's it." Then she said, "I don't care how bad, or what you did, I want to know about it. Don't ever lie to me. You don't ever, don't ever lie about it. If you want to talk to me about it, fine." We all make mistakes you know, and so she was easy going that way, but when she said something she wanted it done [looking through pictures]...Lake Sarah driveway...yes I think this probably explains things well. That's the road coming in and ...now this is actually the farm off the highway. That was the highway, I don't know if you want this one or not.

RM: Well, of course.

RD: Ok ...this is the highway near Lyndale , yes it's on here, yes...

RM: That was where you grew up?

RD: Yes, let's see, I was probably [pause] probably was about four or five years old when we moved from here because the great-grandparents had passed away south of Watertown. The two families each had a farm and that house had burnt down all the way, the brick house on there, and grandpa built a new house. They wanted somebody on it and that's when my folks moved closer to... I don't know if you've ever heard of the Hollywood store? It's south and a little west of Watertown.

RM: What was the name?

RD: The Hollywood Store. It's in Hollywood Township. My uncle had a farm there and then the two great-grandparents had their farm side-by-side. They wanted somebody in the house...Ma and I would scrape those floors and varnished and cleaned it up after that first fire...and then that was the fire...when Art was born he was born in that house, that new one, and lightning struck the house again. We sat in that house for about an hour and my mother with going to put Art to bed. When she went to the bedroom, those pink curtains looked doggone pink. She looked up behind them, and here she could see flames coming out the side of the house--it was burning between the walls. So they had prepared, my folks had just bought my sister home shortly before that from the hospital. She had a ruptured appendix. So they say, "No, we're going to have to move." So from August until...well, we weren't around because my uncle took my sister and I up to Rockford. He dropped us off at the country school up there just out of town a little ways. Then we would walk over to his in-laws until he came to pick us up towards evening so my folks could get all that other stuff arranged.

RM: What was their name?

RD: Herbert Becker. They're both gone now. Both...but they lived on the south side of

Lake Sarah ...yes, it's written on here ...1930... 1931 I guess it is. That could be. That would make it about ...from '29 to '31 ... two years and they were there in a little while after that. My other grandpa, he wanted to...keep on farming so that he can tell if something... that grandpa started the corn factory in Watertown. A corn canning factory. Him and three other farmers around there.

RM: So ingenuity runs in the family?

RD: Yes, mm hmm yes. They got together with a lot of people... they would borrow from each other and you know, one fella was doing so good...a lot of times someone couldn't quite make it. You lost some of their own and he had helped him as much as he could, but yes, it used to be that you could borrow it from another person-- maybe a brother, or your neighbor or somebody whose doing ok...well, let's see. I don't know...[looking at pictures] "Dad Mielke" it says back here. He's the Santa Claus. I don't know if you want any of these, if you know anything about that.

RM: Do you remember this day?

RD: Yes, he loved the kids ...what year would that have been? 1954. We were up in North Dakota then already. We went up there in '53? I think so, yes. Regan was born in '51, and Ron in '53.

RM: That picture was taken [phone rings]

RD: At lake Sarah, yes. John, you going to get it?

RM: You can get it, that's fine.

RD: He can hear better out of one ear than he can out of the other [unrelated conversation]

RM: You remember your Dad dressing up as Santa?

RD: Oh yes, yes.

RM: Did he hand out gifts or just make a visit?

RD: He would come in there and he would hand out a little, sometimes we'd pass them out, depended on the ages of the kids.

RM: In the background is one of the cabins?

RD: Yes, that one was never rented out because we raised little chicks in there in the spring. There was no room in the regular chicken house. Then we would get a lot of

roosters and raise those because we never took them to town. We sold them all to the people that came there. People would come out on Sunday afternoon, "Oh, do you suppose I could buy a chicken from you?" or some eggs. "We need some eggs!" I never took eggs to town and we had over one hundred chickens.

RM: That's a lot of eggs.

RD: Yes. My uncle on the south side of the lake used to take chickens eggs to town and try to sell them in the city by going up and down the street. They had a certain section in Minneapolis that they could go to. They had the regulations that they could go up those streets and sell eggs. They used to take all thirty dozen eggs--several cases of those. There were two families that were together and they would take them to town on a certain day every week and they would sell eggs. And then we just got rid of ours right at the lake shore. Sometimes we'd get some from him, if we didn't have enough ...yes, that was the thing. They knew you, knew it was all fresh. They all knew us enough for years and years to just keep coming out there. So yes, it was...

RM: They would take a live chicken back to the cities?

RD: Most of the time you would have to either kill it first. Then later on we ended up...my folks got a deep freeze and so then we could start putting them in there. Cleaning them and putting them in there and they'd be on hand [laughs] they'd come out, "You think we can have a chicken?" You hear the children running around, roosting... you think you're going to catch that chicken? [laughs] I said, "Maybe not!" And what I used--this is also something really different--it's a little wooden handle on a wire. A real thick wire, that doesn't bend. At the end of it was a hook. It was about six, seven feet long. Then I would take that and go hook it's leg and then I had caught my chicken. You don't get any closer than that to catch it [laughs].

RM: You would just trip it enough that you could grab it?

RD: Yes, that way...it was bent just so [demonstrates] then it was bigger at the very end and smaller towards the end where the hook was so it couldn't back out. Then you catch that chicken and you can kill it. Now I had kept telling them -- the butcher shop-- I said, "I have a pet peeve." I said, "I killed many a chicken then I cleaned many a chicken and I *never* had to eat the blood." I said, "Now I'm going to fix some chicken and the darned stuff is all black inside." Unappetizing as anything. I'm ready to call the food and drug department. Oh! and I can tell if it's an old chicken or if it's a younger chicken just by the meat ...Rainbow's chickens are good, but I don't know...they're all bloody. "Oh, that's because they catch them on the legs when they clean them." I said, "There's no feathers on their ankles!" [laughter] They could still turn them upside down so the blood runs out [laughter].

RM: You should go in there and teach them how it's done.

RD: The guy just kind of laughed. I said, “Well? I know you guys can’t anything about it, I’ll have to think of something else.” Oh jeepers! [laughs]

RM: Did you butcher your own hogs as well?

RD: Yes, most of the time we did. We maybe took them into town to get them cut up, because I don’t think they did. We had a smokehouse that we used to put stuff in. Sausage with the sausage machines and the hams...us kids, we had to salt them down before they went in the smokehouse. But I don’t remember ...unless Dad did some cutting while we were at school, but I really don't remember doing that part of it. I know the butcher shop in Rockford used to help. But chickens... oh, and then the ice. We used to sell that ice, too. There were people year round who would come for chunks of ice.

RM: Did you ever help your Dad do the harvest?

RD: No. Partly because I was gone most of the time, either working or got married and moved away [laughs].

RM: Can you tell me about it?

RD: You mean, moving away?

RM: No...the ice...[laughter]

RD: The ice was in hundred pound chunks and you would... we had a special saw that you could take and saw a crease in it, at the top, and then the chisel...you could crack it and break them off. We would break them into twenty-five pounders, or even smaller. A lot of fishermen wanted to take ice along to keep the fish fresh in the hot summer when they would take them back to town. Sometimes Dad would break up chunks that were smaller if there was a time when he knew there would be a lot of warm. He took that ice to people from oh, Monticello, Rogers, Delano, Loretto...all those. They would come and get ice so the ice houses... if we threw away one chunk of ice that would be something. They just use it all up by the time it was, I would say...end of August, beginning of September.

RM: How big was the ice house?

RD: Let’s see, that shed, the garage, and then the next one was the ice house. They were all the same size, so I would say the ice house was the size of about a garage that would put one car in and still have a lot of room on the sides.

RM: So not that big.

RD: No. But it was full from ground to ceiling. I want to say he used to put in, gosh I don't know how many hundreds of chunks? Art would probably know more about that because they did more ice cutting and stuff when he was growing up. Maybe he would have something like that in the literature. I don't know.

RM: You packed it in sawdust?

RD: Yes. Sawdust would be maybe so far apart [indicates with hands] put saw dust in between that way you can separate the chunks. It stayed frozen so we had some...there were big forks that you had to haul it around and we had a cart. Actually the carts were used to put milk cans on and wheel them from the barn to the shed or whatever. We'd put these chunks of ice on that cart and then we could wash the sawdust off before they left. If they wanted a smaller piece, you just chiseled it and it would break, so it would be easier to handle instead of carrying in a big fifty pound...they came in hundred pound chunks, so when you got a fourth of a one, it was a smaller chunk. They were at least so big [indicates with hands].

RM: How did they keep it frozen between the resort and Monticello?

RD: They would put an old rug or a covering on it. If they had a container they were going to keep it in, they'd put it right into that then into whatever truck or car they came with...they would usually come with a trailer. Fourth of July always was the biggest demand. They would want it smaller then. They would put it into their fishing equipment and sometimes some of them had a canvas bag or some other fishing equipment that was just for carrying that stuff. For a while they got so smart they could get ice and get something to put it in, so it doesn't run all over the trunk [laughs].

RM: I can imagine the first couple of tries.

RD: Yes, but no.

RM: Was there an ice man who would deliver ice around town?

RD: Not that I know of, I'm not sure what the people did in town. They must've because we had a just a regular icebox. When we went to Missouri and lived there, I told John, "We gotta get a refrigerator." We did that when Rita was first born. That slimy stuff, weeds and everything else, was in that ice. They'd get it from the little creek [laughs].

RM: So the Lake Sarah ice wasn't weedy?

RD: Oh no...no, no. Dad used to cut where it was deep water and there was no weeds in it. All the years Dad cut ice, there was never a leaf or dirt in this [laughs].

RM: You wouldn't be able to use it for drinks or anything?

RD: No, no. It was clean enough that if you did get a little bit of it wouldn't hurt, you know, because there's no chemicals in it, as far as I know. The weeds were ...nah...just kind of this slimy... when it starts to melt. I got teased more down there, "Well, how come you don't go fishing, you like to fish, you got a lake up there." I said, "I'm not fishing in that dirty stream!" Fish is even going to smell dirty [laughs].

RM: So the Lake Sarah fish were tasty, then?

RD: Yes, yes...and then when one hole was used where he'd cut, you'd let that freeze up again and it would freeze thick. Then we would go ice skating and fool around on that. It was a big area. And for some reason or another, the weather has a lot to do with whether the ice cracks across the lake. That sounds just like thunder. Sometimes it's these big cracks and sometimes they're little and when it's windy, oh! It was fun for us six girls. These lake people coming out there. We'd hold up our coats and we sailed across the lake! If it got too windy, lower your wings! [laughs] Oh goll... there were a couple of sisters in that group and the one that ended up being a farmer's wife? One other time... you have to be really careful. If you see a crack, you yell, to that the rest of them, because if your skate gets caught in that crack you trip. Well, I went down. I hit my chin right there and I...well, I thought for sure I broke my teeth, but they didn't. One of them went back home and got the sled and hauled me home. I saw purple and red stars ... I can still see those stars [laughs]

RM: Just like the cartoons!

RD: Oh! I thought, what is ma going to say? Oh gosh... I hope I didn't break something in my mouth, oh...but it wasn't too bad. I just got knocked out...so...but what you don't try sometimes you don't know what's going to happen [laughs].

RM: People came and rented the cabins even in the winter?

RD: Yes, late. We did have heat in some of them. The one up by the house had a stove in it, a heater that you could put some wood in and burn and make it warmer. See, that was because the parents lived in there when my grandma and grandpa would come up and visit for a while. I had said once, "You guys go on a trip." John was working with the General Mills in Minneapolis as a visiting professor and so grandma and grandpa came up in the cabin in case I needed some help with the little kids or something while I was doing other things. I was taking care of the resort by myself. Rita and Ron were small because Ron was just learning to talk. He had so much fun with grandma. They [the parents] went out to the state of Washington because there was an aunt who had been living out there all the time and they, the aunt, her sister, and her husband, the four of them, were in Seattle. Then I was asking grandma about some plums or something I was going to can. I said, "Am I doing this right?" She said, "Yes! You still need us old people!" So I got kidded about that, but I hadn't done that much canning myself...I

wasn't positive, and I didn't want to make any mistakes either [laughs].

RM: No, you can't in canning, can you?

RD: No. Let's see, here, yes, yes these are the two Leffler boys. [looks though photos] One is gone, I don't know if the other one is still living or not. Oh, we used to have fun with those kids [laughs].

RM: Are they locals?

RD: No, they were Minneapolis kids. They had an older brother that was--
[John enters room, laughter, exits]

He had a hearing problem yes. So which ones now? Of the pictures that you really wanted to do anything with ...

RM: I would enjoy having of all of them, actually, if that's ok with you?

RD: Mmm. Let's see...

RM: Can you tell me a couple more stories about the trouble that you got up to with the Leffler boys?

RD: They would come out and ride the hay wagon with us, or walk behind it and pick up whatever dropped. We'd go fishing. We'd spend some time on the railroad. They were related to my uncle's family...his wife's family.

RM: Speaking of hay...Joanne told me about one time she was helping you get some hay in from the field, and you were driving the horses. You took the corner a little too sharp and she had to go behind you and pick up all the bits that you missed.

RD: [laughs] yes...ah...well, yes, see because the hay loader was fastened to the back of the wagon and if you took a corner too short, they could catch each other, then some of the hay would fall off. What she would pick up was a forkful, maybe like this, and then I'd either have to stop or she'd have to walk a little faster to get it back up on the wagon. I can't remember what Dad was...was he pulling? I didn't drive that alone. Dad must have been ahead walking with the horse, because if I was using the horses and sometimes it is on the hillside, he was watching the hay loader more I think. He would be walking. On the side there was a bank on the end of that one field. You always wanted to lean a little bit over this way.

RM: You also said that you built boats for the resort?

RD: Yes, we built them. I want to say... ask Joanne what she remembers. I know in the

wintertime we would stack them up towards the stone wall so the snow wouldn't blow there as much. Also, if it was going to be high water, the water wouldn't get to them. We used to stack them upside down, it could be two or three on top of each other. I know he made at least ten to twelve boats, because he didn't buy any. Each cabin had a boat, if they rented a cabin, they got a boat with it. We never tipped a boat to dump the water out of it, we siphoned it out.

RM: How come?

RD: You could crack the sides. The boat is heavy enough that if the whole weight is on one side it would crack the boats and they would leak. It all always rained on Saturday night [laughs] We would siphon the water out and then wipe it out because there were times when people would just dump the can of worms with dirt and all in the boat. Then it's dirty and muddy so we would ask them if they wouldn't do it, or if they clean it up themselves, but if it wasn't real clean, or if it rained and there was dirt in there that blew in, then we'd tilt the boat to a point where you'd get it all the one side and clean it off so they were all ready for Sunday. We never went to church on Sunday because Pastor would come out and see us. He said, "I know you can't get here!" [laughs]

RM: So you had a private service?

RD: Sure [laughs] not real formal but anyway, he would come out and visit with us. Later on as we got older, when I was sixteen and I started driving a car, then I had to take my sister and brother to school. I had to bring home the feed from the feed mill. There was only one car [laughs]. I learned to drive in January, which was when my birthday was, so boy you know where your tires are going or you're stuck.

RM: What kind of a car was it?

RD: I don't know if it was a Ford or a Chevrolet...just a regular size car, but that's how I learned to keep my position, because if I got stopped I had to shovel the car! One time, the car stopped on me and I was on the side of the road halfway to Rockford and I got out. Dad showed me how to change a tire because he said, "You're going to have to know this." There was something with the carburetor. I had the hood up and this trucker stopped and said, "You need any help?" I said, "No, I think I've got it fixed." Well, he said, "Start her up once and we'll see." So I started it up and away we went. It was something...the air got into something under the hood, into the car. Anyhow, I knew what to do because he [Dad] had showed me to do that, too, before I had left home [laughs].

RM: There you go!

RD: I was always afraid somebody was going to make me have a flat tire, but I didn't.

RM: You're pretty lucky.

RD: When I'd go over to Mitchell's, to the ballroom, if I drove over there, I'd park it up by their house. I didn't park it in the parking lot.

RM: The parking lot was a pasture, wasn't it?

RD: Yes, it was part of it, but it was wide open from the house. You go right down over the hill and then up towards the ballroom. That was on the hill, on the edge of the lake, right off the one side of the ballroom. It slanted down to the lake right away. There was a lot of room for parking. But I used to go to some of the picnics that they had around there and I thought...uh huh...put this car off so it's not so conspicuous [laughs].

RM: What were your reasons?

RD: I was afraid of a flat tire [laughs].

RM: Because of the glass?

RD: Well, because I was too independent [laughs].

RM: I heard it was kind of a rough place?

RD: There's always these guys who want to play tricks on you and do something but I...it wasn't until my...the latter part of my junior year, because I was 16 in January. School was out pretty soon after that. They had a few picnics that I drove to and then I picked up a couple of the other girls along the way. Then my senior year... I had graduated before I was eighteen, but you had to be eighteen to get a job in the city. I said, "Well, heck, two awards, two places I can go, pick any college I want to, but I can't afford the first semester." We had to pay that before you could go. So she said, maybe this one might consider you. She sent me down to Naegles Hardware store. And I showed them my stuff and why I wanted to earn some money, so I can make use of these awards. He said, "Well, you can work here. We show you how we do it, schooling isn't going to affect that in any way." Then he said, "With your handwriting and your school record, we'll give you a job." That's how it went. I always did like math, I did a lot of that. He said, "With your handwriting, you've got a job." My numbers were *always* in a straight row and then I had perfect handwriting...it just...but we used to have handwriting practice all the time. And the hardware store had at least...twenty to twenty-five registers. Each department had their own register. It was a big store and there was three off-line stores that belonged to the three sons and those records would all come in at the end of each day and you had to record all that. So at the end of the day you had a record from every register--- the paint department, the tool department, the fishing department... I don't even remember what they all were anymore. Then when the gal with the telephone, I don't know if you've ever seen one, one of those telephone things [laughs] I didn't... here was this big...all these plugs. When the gal wanted to go for lunch,

sometimes I took over the telephones and I had to plug it into the right one for the person calling [laughs] and have all the figures ready for the bookkeeper to put it into another log. There was five of us that worked up there in that office. That was quite an experience.

RM: That was a better paying job than you could find down in Rockford?

RD: Yes, well, I worked in Rockford during the summer when I was going to school in the restaurant. We knew the couple there and you needed to have a waitress in there.

RM: Which restaurant?

RD: You know where the meat market, the meat department was, don't you? That brick one right on the corner? As...let's see...[drawing] here's the main street coming, here's the bridge. You're coming off the bridge and the meat market is on this corner and there was a restaurant that was right in this corner. Now, there's a bar here and I think, I forget what company is here...is it painting, or? There's something in there. [daughter enters] I'm sorry we don't allow, um...are you recording?

RD: There was a restaurant in here—

[daughter] she's diabetic and needs to eat [kitchen noises]

RD: Just ah...for the summer months, the people, they needed extra help, people would come in after harvesting or something and eat there instead of cooking. I used to help in that restaurant for a short time, anyhow. I got that other job, so that, I was there three years. But I never did go off to college [laughs]

RM: Never made it!

RD: No [laughs]

RM: It sounds like you need to get some lunch, so would it work ...could I come back another time? I feel like we have more things to talk about. Would that be ok?

RD: Yes

RM: That would be wonderful

[daughter] can I ask what this is for?

RM: Oh sure, it's the Greenfield Historical Society. We're [tape ends]