

Donald Clarence Vergin

Narrator

Marianne June (Zaske) Vergin

Narrator

Rebecca A. Mavencamp

Greenfield Historical Society

Interviewer

September 23, 2013

At the home of Donald and Mary Vergin

Motley, Minnesota

Donald Vergin--DV

Marianne Vergin--MV

Rebecca A. Mavencamp--RM

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[unrelated conversation]

RM: This is Rebecca Mavencamp on September 23, 2013, and we're visiting with Don and Mary Vergin. Could you please spell your names?

DV: D-O-N-A-L-D V-E-R-G-I-N.

MV: M-A-R-I-A-N-N-E V-E-R-G-I-N, but I go by Mary.

RM: How about middle names?

DV: Clarence.

RM: Clarence? [laughs] You said you'd been called worse...

MV: [laughs]

DV: No! I said I was proud of that.

RM: Were you named after someone?

DV: Uncle.

RM: Mary?

MV: Mine is June. I was born in June, so that made it simple.

RM: How about your maiden name?

MV: Zaske. Z-A-S-K-E. German. Not Polish. [all laugh]

RM: There's been a few Germans and Polish marriages that we've found here, too [laughs] so where were you both born?

DV: I was born two and a half miles west of Rockford, on a farm.

RM: So you remember where exactly the farm was?

DV: How would I describe it though?

MV: It's on the--

DV: Just on the Highway 55--

MV: On the west side of the highway?

DV: South side. West side, yes. That's where we lived until 1945. Then Dad sold it. He drove livestock truck for his cousin and farmed, then he bought out the Vergin Trucking.

RM: Is that business is still going?

DV: No, I quit. With livestock in that area, there wasn't enough farmers to make a living. In fact, I put it this way: when we got married, for example, there was roughly four hundred people in Rockford, and now it's what? Better than four thousand?

RM: So the people have taken over the cows?

MV: Yes.

DV: The whole economy of things changed. The way a farmer farmed forty years ago and what they do today...

RM: A lot of things have changed.

DV: Then we moved to the farm and we ended up buying a house up on---

MV: Basswood Street.

DV: Basswood Circle, you know where that's at?

RM: In Rockford?

DV: Yes. It was called Snob Hill [all laugh]

RM: Not because you lived there...

MV: No! Well, they let us move in, though [laughs].

RM: What year were you married?

DV: Ooof.

MV: 1956. April 15th.

DV: April was not income tax deadline [laughs] because at that time you had to file by the 13th of March, and a lot of people do not know that. Or forgot about it.

MV: Fifteenth of March.

DV: Fifteenth, yes. Then we went up here.

RM: Here is Motley.

DV: The address is Motley, yes.

RM: How about your story?

MV: I was born in Brown County, Eden Township, which would be close to Morgan Minnesota? Then when I was just about 4 years old we moved up to Round Prairie, Minnesota and my Grandpa and Grandma, my mom and dad, and my sister...we all lived together in this one big house. Then eventually my Grandpa and Grandma got a house and we had a 365 acre farm of sand and rock.

RM: Didn't grow much?

MV: No! Had to work real hard at it. I graduated from Long Prairie High School in 1954 and I went to college for lab and x-ray. My first job was out in Clark, South Dakota. I was there for a year. We were engaged at that time, met on a blind date.

DV: Been blind ever since [all laugh]

MV: Couldn't seem to save any money because we were travelling too much. I quit out there, came home, and we got married. We lived out on Highway 55, we called it our little honeymoon cottage. Was about a mile and a half from east of Rockford.

DV: Yes.

MV: Then we started building our own home on Ash and Elm. We lived there for twenty three years. We had four children. Then we had an opportunity to buy a little hobby farm on the west edge of town, they called it the Faust Place. We lived there for fifteen years?

DV: Something like that.

MV: Then we moved. We sold that to our son-in-law and youngest daughter and we bought a house up on Basswood Circle. We lived there for nine years and had this opportunity, so we ended up in Motley. North of Motley.

RM: It's a beautiful location out here.

MV: It is, it's so quiet and peaceful.

DV: Interrupting you, but coming in here, people don't know this place is back here.

RM: No! not at all.

DV: Of course, that road ain't the best.

RM: It's a good thing I had four wheel drive [laughs]

DV: You know what's odd, is that soil when you come in there, just keeps...we've hauled gravel in there and it...

RM: It's very soft.

DV: Well that's what washed in there. We make it through.

RM: Of course. So you said you met on a blind date?

MV: Yes.

RM: I think I should hear the story.

MV: [laughs]

DV: This kid from school...I knew him, but not as a close friend. One time, he was dating this girl from Delano that went to college where she did [indicates to Mary], and he talked me into going---“ahhhh! I ain’t going on no blind date!” Well, I did. And then what she did [Mary laughs] she left her purse in my car!

MV: Not on purpose, I tell you!

DV: I had to take her--

MV: Can’t make him believe it though.

DV: --purse back the next night....oh, these women will do anything [both laugh].

MV: From then on....it’s all history [laughter].

DV: We’ve been married for 57 years now.

RM: That’s wonderful, it’s nice to hear those stories. What did you do on your first date?

MV: We went to a movie called “A Man Called Peter.”

DV: We did? I don’t remember that.

MV: Yes.

RM: You were so enamored by your date...

DV: Yes...

MV: [laughs] No! That was our second date, I’m sorry! I’m very sorry. We went to something in the Rockford City Hall with...what was it?

DV: A lot of people thought you were the Mayor’s daughter from Delano.

MV: Yes! [laughs] Not! Not!

DV: I have no idea, but people did...

MV: Yes, we went to Rockford City Hall.

DV: For a ball game or what? Whatever it was.

MV: Must have been some kind of concert or high school...

DV: I don’t remember.

RM: It was held in the City Hall?

DV: Yes

MV: It was in the City Hall [Don continues to talk] that was before the flood came.

RM: So holding lectures and events at the Rockford City Hall was part of the entertainment?

DV: Oh yea! There were weddings and receptions. There was a basement with kitchen equipment.

MV: In fact, our shower--

DV: Yes!

MV: --on the Vergin side, was in the City Hall [Don muttering].

RM: Could you describe the building for me?

MV: It was made of brick. Did it have a second story?

DV: A balcony and the back.

MV: Just storage and stuff.

DV: No, there was seats up there.

MV: Well, it had a stage--

DV: Yes.

MV: -- too where they played basket ball.

DV: Oh yea! That was--

MV: There wasn't very much room to for anybody to--

DV: There were bars going across the ceiling and when the kids shot, you had to shoot around them [laughter].

MV: Well, it was to hold the building together! [laughter]

RM: It was a big metal beam?

DV: No, no! It was a cable. Then came the flood.

RM: In '65?

MV: Then the floor went like this [makes wave motion with hands] and the walls went out and it was no longer safe, they had to demolish it.

RM: So many people in town played basketball?

DV: No this was just the kids.

MV: High School.

DV: We always had the luncheons...we had to run down for your noon dinner, because it wasn't in the same building. It was three blocks from the high school, four blocks to the hall? And that's where you had to eat your dinner, and back to school.

RM: The school you're talking about would be the current middle school?

DV: Been torn down now.

MV and DV: where the middle school is now.

DV: But see, all eight grades were in one building.

MV: Eight? I thought it was twelve.

DV: Yes, I'm sorry. Twelve, yes.

MV: Our oldest daughter went to kindergarten, it wasn't really even kindergarten, she went to first grade in the old school, which is where the present middle school is. Our second daughter went to spring primary in the Presbyterian Church basement. Our youngest daughter, our third daughter, went to kindergarten...was the new school then built? The new elementary?

DV: I can't remember all that stuff.

MV: She went to the new elementary school out on the county road there.

DV: Yes, she was one of the first ones.

MV: Her class was the first one to graduate from the sixth grade in that elementary school

RM: And that isn't there anymore.

DV: No! That's where I got into [Mary laughs] the Principal...our intentions when they built that, was so that [unclear] it could be built up and I got into it with--

MV: Don't mention any names [laughs].

DV: I lost out. At that time, they needed it all, no city hall or anything anymore. Course, now they have the fire department and library and stuff.

RM: Originally the City Hall was where a lot of the town gatherings happened?

DV and MV: Oh yes.

MV: That was it.

DV: That was the only place there was.

RM: Was it a very large building?

MV: Well, it was...

DV: The size of a small basketball court.

MV: It was a legal basketball court.

DV: No....

MV: But it just didn't have any area on the sides to have bleachers. You had to stand against a wall [laughs].

DV: Now what? [chuckles]

RM: We heard about the fun you had on your first date, so there must have been some crazy single years before that.

DV: Well, two years of service.

MV: I didn't know him then [both laugh].

RM: You say that as a disclaimer [laughter] where did you serve?

DV: Fort Knox, Kentucky. With the hillbillies.

MV: He didn't even bring any samples home [chuckles].

RM: Samples of hillbillies?

MV: No! No! From Fort Knox! [laughter]

DV: They had good booze down there, whatdya call it? Moonshine.

MV: Moonshine, yes.

RM: I heard Rockford had its fair share of liquor as well, as did Greenfield. Any good stories you could tell there? Without incriminating anyone? [laughter]

DV: The only...these little 3.2 joints or whatever, I was just a little bit too young when they were...I didn't have any money...Lake Sarah, that was the only one that we ever...like Whoopee John on Sunday nights, and Easter. Easter Sunday.

DV: That was a yearly. He was booked for years probably, way ahead.

RM: I've heard he had a pretty nice sized band, too.

DV: Oh! Yes...it was ooom! Pa pa! ooom! Pa pa! [all laugh].

MV: My dad knew him when he was young. The band was from New Ulm and my Dad used to go to dances down there. He would be playing, so he knew Whoopee John.

RM: Did he keep the same band members every time or were there new people?

DV: No, I think there was more that rotated, I think, I'm not positive. I was sixteen, seventeen... somewhere in there. Eighteen.

RM: So you were out there dancing?

DV: Oh, yes.

MV: I don't know about dancing...[laughter] maybe.

RM: Who taught you?

DV: Self-taught [laughs]

RM: Is that why you said, "maybe dancing?"

MV: [laughs loudly] maybe one of his five sisters did.

DV: No! Not to my knowledge [Mary continues to chuckle] oh, yes, oh, probably so.

RM: So your whole family would go to the dances?

DV: At that time the dances were a lot of probably house parties, where eight, ten couples and their families would all--

MV: Barn dances.

DV: Barn dances.

MV: Boy you had fun at those [laughs].

RM: So the farmers would host people in their barn?

DV: With their family or friends.

MV: It would be a family affair.

RM: Who would play the music then?

DV: There were a couple guys that played accordion.

MV: His dad would call for square dancing.

RM: What was your dad's name again?

DV: August.

RM: How long did he play accordion and call?

MV: He didn't play accordion.

DV: He just did the calling, I don't know.

MV: We started going right after we got married because we went to Schmitz and all those.

DV: Yes.

MV: I suppose there was five, six years that I can remember that he would have been calling.

RM: Would the barns be all decorated?

DV: Not necessarily.

MV: Just clean out the hay mow, you know.

DV: Some had bigger houses, you know, years ago they had bigger families.

MV: Everybody brought food. It was a pot luck thing, yes.

DV: And of course you had a keg of beer.

MV: Or two.

RM: What kind of food?

DV: All good food.

MV: Hotdishes and sandwiches.

DV: Yes.

MV: Bars and cakes and cookies and you name it.

DV: That was served just before quitting time you know that way...

RM: So you had to work up the appetite.

DV and MV: Yes!

RM: They'd happen after chores?

MV: Yes. Usually it was on a Sunday night, wasn't it? Saturday?

DV: Saturday night I think.

MV: Sometimes it was on Sunday night. They would have celebrations for anniversaries and they'd have shiveries...they shivered us, when we were married. That was up at Round Prairie. You know what a shivery is? That was at my home. We stopped, we went up there to get my things about the second weekend after we were married, to move my things out of the house, to take to our house.

DV: We went up to Thief River Falls, or Thief River, Minnesota for our honeymoon.

MV: Really exciting [rolls eyes].

DV: I didn't even buy her supper.

MV: He was so excited to see his Army buddy up there that he forgot to buy me supper before we got there.

DV: Which is fine [grins] I mean, we had spent the two years together. We were about ready to ship out and the Korean War was settled.

RM: So you were married before the Korean War?

DV: No, '56.

RM: So whose places in Rockford and Greenfield held barn dances, then?

DV: Well, my Dad's ...our Mother and Dad's place. Really none of them were close to Rockford. There's one at Winsted, a couple of them west...Liebels.

MV: Watertown.

DV: Watertown, and the other Schmidt out there, on Bell Street...Art.

MV: Harvey? Harvey Schmidt? I think they had some.

DV: Yes.

MV: I think that was on the old--

DV: The old Johnny Meyer place.

MV: Yes. I can't think of any that we went to in Greenfield.

DV: No, I can't either.

MV: we went to some in Rogers

DV: [chuckle] Yes.

MV: And Buffalo township.

DV: Yes.

MV: June Becker.

DV: Becker.

MV: Becker's, yes. They called that the shed dance, because they had sheep and that was in the sheep shed [laughter].

RM: Have to be clear on your location!

MV: Yes! Definitely.

DV: Well, I'll put this: we had a good life.

RM: Why do you say that?

DV: Well, you know, and I know people that... well, you said you were divorced. I mean, we made fifty seven years. There's been some ups and downs, but minor compared to... what upsets me is that there's so many... now there's another deal where a family got to feuding and then someone gets killed.

MV: That's just so sad.

RM: Do you think that events like barn dances and going out to the dance hall together played a role in keeping families together?

MV: Oh, definitely.

DV: I think so.

RM: Why do you say that?

MV: The kids didn't have so many things going on that--

DV: That's a big thing.

MV: They're pulled this way and that way.

DV: Like these little great-grandkids—one is in dance, one plays basketball--

MV: They go to Awana.

DV: Oh, yes.

MV: They're just four and eight and you know things are...

RM: Something every night?

MV: Keeping them busy.

DV: Ok, back to Greenfield!

RM: We're still talking about Greenfield.

DV: Are we?

RM: Sure. [laughter]

DV: Well, the Rockford House.

RM: Tell me about that.

DV: [unclear]

MV: We went bowling there.

DV: I was trying to think this morning...did they open the bowling...Doc Torbla had it. Then he sold it to a guy, I don't remember his name, he ended up losing--

MV: Then Bill Sipe.

DV: Bill Sipe and the big guy from Delano. I don't remember if then they put in the bowling alley and then the dance hall, or was it the dance hall and then they put in the bowling?

MV: Did they do the dance hall and then they put the bowling alley in?

DV: The other way around.

MV: I think it's the other way around, right, because we went bowling there when we were just first married. Then they took that out and put in a dance and ballroom. Our oldest daughter washed dishes at the Rockford House when she was a teenager.

DV: Then next door they built the Maverick. That was a classy--

MV: Fancy, classy.

DV: Dress code.

RM: So what did you wear when you went there?

DV: Just a suit. You know, dressed up.

MV: You didn't always have to, it was more casual than--

DV: Yes.

MV: --but you didn't go there with holes in your jeans and an old, dirty flannel shirt.

DV: They had beautiful prime rib.

MV: Like a roast it was...just melted in your mouth [laughs]. Never found one since that was that good.

RM: Where did they get their meat from?

MV: I don't know.

DV: I picked it up. I don't remember anymore. I'd pick it up the orders on the way home once or twice a week.

RM: You don't remember where you stopped?

DV: Some...

MV: Wholesaler...

DV: In Minneapolis is all...man oh man, that's too long ago [laughter].

RM: What else did they serve there?

DV: Well, they had the normal--

MV: Normal supper club menu. They did serve hamburgers too, you know. They had a band. One band I remember was called the Rebels?

DV: Oh, that one big one. He went off into the--

MV: Then there was that that cowboy, that western...what was his name? [laughs] He was kind of history, but he sure could draw the crowds. What was his name? Glenn something [still laughing].

DV: I'm blank.

RM: What did people like about him?

MV: He sang country western cowboy songs.

DV: He kind of mingled with the--

MV: With the people. The Rebels, they were younger. I think there was four of them and they had the band and the--

DV: They didn't stay there.

MV: They were there when Dana and David got married.

DV: Yes, because we had the--

MV and DV: --had the reception--

DV: In the basement of the Maverick. It was a beautiful dining room down there.

RM: How many people could fit down there?

DV: Couple hundred.

RM: It was a pretty big place.

DV: Oh, yes!

MV: We had the grooms dinner down there, too.

DV: Yes, but then of course, nowadays this building is divided, the Maverick.

MV: The Maverick is gone.

DV: Yes.

MV: But it's that little mall thing that's there now with Billy Bob's.

DV: It's the old building, the old Maverick building.

RM: It took up the whole building and then they've divided it into the mall?

DV: Yes, yes.

RM: That's a sizable building.

DV: Yes!

RM: How come it went out of business?

DV: The original that built it, he's done that in many towns. Then of course it changed hands.

MV: Then it went and changed from the Maverick to the [Don speaks simultaneously] Country West Country West, when Dana and David's reception was there.

RM: If there's more people in town now, why aren't there more people eating at places in town now? Why do we have less—

DV: Minneapolis is too close. We got our all class reunion and we got a place in Buffalo, a bowling alley, and it's a nice. Huikkos--

MV: Event Center.

DV: I don't know about the other one on the highway now, I haven't been there in years.

MV: Which one?

DV: Tight there, just before you get into Buffalo on the right side.

MV: Used to be 55 East...

DV: Then they changed hands so many times.

MV: the [unclear] originally it was called.

RM: Oh, that little restaurant? It's a biker bar now.

MV: Pardon me?

RM: I said I think it's a biker bar now

MV: yes!

DV: Could be.

MV: Yes.

DV: We don't get down there too often to know. We used to go out to the Lockadells, that was out at Buffalo Lake, around the lake, that was a hot spot, for awhile, for food not otherwise. As far as the other entertainment, outside of Lake Sarah, that's about the entertainment then. No, I just talked about it the other day. Shady Beach.

MV: Shady Beach.

DV: That was a nice little supper club, very nice.

MV: It was an old house.

DV: I don't know if it's there or not.

MV: I don't know.

DV: I haven't been on that road for so long.

MV: It's on the south side of--

DV: Lake Sarah.

MV: Lake Sarah.

RM: Can you tell me more about that? What it looked like?

DV: Old.

MV: Old log house. Well, there were logs on the inside and they divided up the rooms. When they converted it into a restaurant, they used this room for one dining area and this

room over here would be another dining area, and over...so they kept the individual rooms, yet they were still connected.

RM: So there were a few tables in each room then?

MV: Yes. One had a big long table.

DV: We used to, once in awhile when we had ladies night with the Lion's Club, we'd go out there because, like in town here, we switch from restaurant to restaurant. One got outlawed because we weren't satisfied with this.

RM: So Shady Beach, you said they converted it. What was it before?

DV: A hotel, a motel...or a house.

MV: It was an old house.

DV: Yes.

MV: Big old house.

RM: So they rented rooms, like a bed and breakfast would?

DV: No.

MV: No, no, it was just somebody's house, ran like a home.

RM: They had cabins on the property?

DV: Well, that was down below the hill. I don't know if there's cabins...they fished out of that area.

MV: It might have been cabins.

DV: It could have been down there, I didn't get down there that often.

MV: Yes.

DV: the other bar, like the one I mentioned on the way to Delano that was, more or less, just a bar, or saloon--

MV: Over the railroad tracks.

RM: Just for beer?

MV: I don't know, I never was there that long.

DV: I presume.

MV: Must have been gone by the time I was there.

DV: Old Harff lived over there, owned it for a long time. It wouldn't be hard liquor, it would be just beer, and then you go out there by Greenfield and you have the Transformer. That was just a little junk joint.

RM: "Junk joint?" [laughter]

DV: It was...uh...it wasn't a place where you take your wife, let's put it that way. I mean, not that there was anything wrong with the people there, but it was just low ceilings and...across the road where Sipe had his restaurant...I don't remember if that was just a dance hall and beer, or...that was Bill Sipe's Dad.

RM: Do you remember his name?

DV: Fred.

RM: And that was where Highway 55 came through at one time, right?

DV: It went right between, yes. Of course, see his business would take some of the people from the highway, you know, they would pull in there.

RM: They would come into Sipe's?

DV: Yes. And then that house moved out into Rockford.

RM: Which house?

DV: It was right behind the...what is the garage down by the bridge? I think it's the first house, where Bonnick's lived...Carrie.

MV: Carrie and...

DV: Either the first or the second house.

MV: It was moved into there? Behind Lanny Hanson's garage.

DV: Yes.

MV: On 55 there? That used to be--

DV: Mobile station.

MV: Mobile station.

DV: then Johnny Mutterer's restaurant.

RM: There was another restaurant?

MV: Oh, yea, Rockford Drive In...oh man!

DV: Right between this gas or mobile or--

MV: What was the old mobile station--

[voices talking over each other]

DV: They had to move this little restaurant, they moved it over closer to the river. Johnny Mutterer and his wife ran it for years, people liked to just come in and eat.

MV: People travelling through, they had to stop at the drive in. It wasn't a drive in, but it was just called that, you know what you'd say a drive in is today?

RM: They didn't come out and serve you?

MV: No, they didn't serve, it was just called the Rockford Drive In

RM: It was right on the intersection of what's now Highway 55 and the Lake Rebecca Road?

DV: This side of the river.

MV: Main street, main street.

RM: So closer to the bank?

MV: Yes.

DV: The river bank.

RM: Not the muddy bank, Mr. Fort Knox? [MV laughs] So tell me more about that. Nobody's mentioned the Drive In yet.

MV: Johnny's...Johnny's Drive In.

DV: Probably seat, what? Had about three booths?

MV: Yes, three or four booths, then it had a big counter.

RM: A U shaped counter?

MV: Kind of a square one, yes. I mean, L-shaped. They always had high school girls for waitresses and Elsie and Johnny did the cooking.

DV: After awhile Hubert Lieder took it over.

MV: Best, best food.

DV: Hubert Lieder took it over from Johnny and Elsie then, or was it the other way around?

MV: The other way around.

DV: The other way around.

MV: Johnny and Elsie had it the last.

DV: Yes.

MV: Now they're both gone, they're all gone.

DV: There ain't many of us left! [laughter]

MV: We had two, his niece and this girl, live with his sister, niece, Dianna was Lynn's friend, and she lived with Lynn.

DV: She was from a bad home.

MV: It was difficult.

DV: She got pushed around the country and she ended up at my sister's.

MV: Then when they were seniors, Diane and Dianna and Lynn, his sister's family moved to Wisconsin. Well, the girls wanted to finish high school in Rockford, so they asked if they could live with us.

DV: Diane says, "no way!"

MV: Yes [laughs] she was a waitress at Johnny's then, and so was Lynn, but she said, "I'm not living with that crab!" [laughs] because he'd come in there and if they didn't bring a glass of water instantly he was ornery.

DV: I want service.

MV: [laughing] So she said, "Not with that crab, I'm not living with!" [laughs] well, she did end up with us. To this day, she's one of our family, you know, along with Lynn.

DV: She still calls me a crab.

MV: Yes.

RM: I can see why [laughter].

DV: But she was a sweetheart. Still is.

MV: They lived with us their senior year. Then, when our daughter was a senior, she had a girlfriend. Debbie is our oldest daughter, and her friend's parents were moving to North Carolina.

DV: He was a teacher.

MV: She wanted to finish her senior year, so then Debbie came and lived with us. We had two Debbie's in the house.

DV: That was--

MV: Confusion. Mass confusion. So then she graduated, and she went to her folks. Then who was the next one that came to live with us? Then Danny. His oldest sister's youngest boy. He was thirteen, but when he was twelve, his Dad had a massive brain hemorrhage and died. So when he was thirteen, his Mom died, but she knew she was dying, so she asked if we would raise him for her. So we took Danny in. He's just six months older than our own son, Darren, so he lived with us and finished high school and off to the Army. Then the last one that lived with us was our grandson, Joshua, for three months. He wanted to finish his high school because his mom moved up here! [laughs]

RM: You guys need a foster care license!

MV: Yes! [laughter]

RM: It sounds like the kids who stayed with you did a lot of work at these restaurants.

DV: Oh yes, yes.

MV: Danny worked at the North American grocery. Lynn and Diane worked at Johnny's restaurant, and Debbie? Did she work at--

DV: I don't know, I can't keep track of it.

MV: --Lieder store with our Debbie? There was a five and dime store called Leider's store, which was downtown. The Red Owl was down town in Rockford, too.

DV: What's the business...they have land rentals and were in the store where Lieder's, well, where the bakery was there.

MV: The bakery, Rockford Bakery.

DV: Then there was Lieder's Store, and then the barber shop.

MV: There was a little bar in there, too.

DV: In where?

MV: There by--

DV: --Oh yes!

MV: Whatever that one was called.

DV: I don't know, there's another. Those bars changed hands often.

RM: Near the café?

MV: No, this was a little bar. I mean, you walked in and about here to here was the bar all along the building; it wasn't as big as what this is.

DV: Oh yes it was.

RM: Which street was that on?

DV and MV: On Main Street. It's part of that building that burnt, what, two years ago? A year ago?

RM: At Cowboys?

DV: Yes.

MV: Cowboys, yes.

RM: So it was in the same building?

MV: No.

DV: Yes...down.

MV: No, well, Cowboys was a new building.

DV: Yes, could be.

RM: So it was closer to [Highway] 55?

DV: No, the other way, from where the Cowboys was.

MV: It was [unclear] building was.

DV: See, down the Bridge Street and Main Street? There was a gas station on each corner. Texaco.

MV: Where that apartment building thing is on the corner?

DV: Then across the street, the gas station went out and they had another grocery store, Jerry and Jean.

MV: Oh yes, Lef...Leffler?

DV: No.

MV: Jerry...

DV: Woolfert.

MV: Woolfert! She was a Leffler...she was a Leirson or something [laughs].

DV: Yes. Then they were there for several years. I don't know. And then they sold to Winkler, from Jerry and Jean.

MV: Yes.

DV: Winkler took over from them.

MV: I don't know how long it was open, but it didn't stay open long, that's where the Crow River News office is.

DV: Now, yes. Across the street, of course you've got the barber shop there. For years, that was just kind of a dump, brick and stuff you know, and then going toward the school house, there was a building there. Old Erkle had that, and the post office was in there. There was rooms upstairs.

RM: Were there rooms above any of the bars?

DV: I think, yes, the one on Bridge Street [unclear] Red Vest.

MV: You mean the Red Vest?

DV: What's the Red Vest now? That burnt, too.

RM: The Red Vest did?

MV: Oh, yes.

DV: No...Bob Anderson was... his Dad-in-law owned the....

MV: what are you...?

DV: On [highway] 55. The old Rockford House.

MV: He owned what? There? The Rockford House?

DV: His Dad did.

MV: Oh.

DV: His in-law Dad.

MV: Yes, Dad-in-law.

DV: Then the Red Vest, the old one burnt down. They saved the Masonic Hall.

RM: Do you know when the fire was?

MV: I know it was in January, it was colder than blazes. We had been up to Long Prairie to see my folks and we came home.

DV: Couldn't hardly get home because of the fire trucks and everything. Then the Masonic Lodge--

MV: That's above the restaurant.

DV: There's a restaurant down there.

MV: Along Bridge Street.

DV: Then of course, the other way, that was the Bank, where the--

MV: ABC Lettering is now.

DV: Yes.

MV: But that—

DV: Water came into the--

MV: Vault.

DV: Vault.

MV: They moved-- this was in 65--they moved the--

DV: Whole--

MV: Whole bank into what was the--

DV: Vacant--

MV: Dentist office now.

DV: Yes...it was just a vacant--

MV: There was no [speaking together] no security, no nothing!

MV: Here's this...I mean, it's a wonder they weren't robbed during the flood, because there was just in this...building! They didn't have a vault, nothing! [laughs] It was really something.

RM: How did the flood affect the entertainment and the bars and that kind of business?

MV: Bridge Street was under water, so that took care of that.

DV: Yes.

MV: They sandbagged into this intersection so the water didn't come to the rest of Main Street. It stopped, so the Barber Shop was not under water.

DV: That's right.

MV: Then Main Street, that block, to Highway 55, that was not underwater. They sandbagged it so that it stopped.

DV: I'm not sure, I haven't noticed it lately, but if you look on one corner of the Red Vest, you'll see a white paint about yea high [indicates with hand]. Maybe it's still there.

MV: It was a little higher...

DV: Well.

MV: It was almost about two feet.

DV: This fella from the state came out and he said...Stoop was his name...he said, "Mark this, this is how high the waters coming."

MV: He made that mark on the wall.

DV: It's NEVER been anywhere near that. He was right THERE.

MV: It was RIGHT on. The water came up to that mark, and that's as--

DV: He was a smart man. Then the Corps of Engineers, they came in there, this was a different year...

MV: No...? It was still '65.

DV: They came in and bought all this property along the river and they hauled trucks in there. They hauled trucks in, day and night, and built that hill.

MV: It was worth it.

RM: Oh, the levy?

MV: Yes, the earthen dam.

DV: They've held her back. Then the road between Rockford and Hanover, they re-raised that as they built, you know.

RM: That must have been disruptive to the businesses then?

DV: Oh, absolutely.

MV: There was nothing really going on then, as far as business, except up...well, no, there wasn't a Rockford Mall then, up on the hill.

RM: Was Highway 55 moved about the same time?

MV: No...

DV: You mean through town?

RM: Yes.

DV: Well, it was after that bridge got built, the one that's there today.

MV: But she wants to know WHEN...it was before '65.

DV: Oh, YES.

MV: Your Dad sold them some land out there by your farm? For [highway] 55 was coming into Rockford? For an easement? When they built the road up? You said that he had sold some land.

DV: No recollection, because he didn't live that close to Rockford. It had to where you go to Delano now. There you went up through the woods on [highway] 55 and then they rebuilt it.

RM: The reason I asked, was because Highway 55 went between Sipes and Transformer Inn and they had a lot of traffic funneling through. When they moved it, how long did those two bars survive?

DV: I don't think it was too long.

MV: Transformer, I don't remember...

DV: That was the last one, but that was, just kind of like I described, it wasn't a...

MV: Yes, it was just a little hole in the wall.

DV: Then they built the highway with the bridge and it went right straight through, didn't have to come through town.

MV: Through the town.

RM: The highway 55 bridge that's there now?

DV: Yes, the old one. That was for a year, and then they had an accident on the new bridge and they had traffic, so they sent all the traffic back down Bridge St across this old bridge.

MV: Semis and everything! Yes!

DV: Evidently, the wrong person, or the right person, crossed [laughs]. They cut it off to even pedestrians.

RM: When was that?

DV: It's a long time ago. When the river would come up, the ice would back up against the bridge.

MV: The old bridge.

DV: We lived two, three blocks away and you could hear that--

MV: Bridge--

DV: Shaking.

MV: Vibrating. Then these guys that were on flood watch, they would get on that old bridge that was swaying back and forth, and push with poles, push this ice under the bridge so it would go down the river instead of taking the bridge out.

DV: Instead of making a dam.

MV: Because it would, you know.

RM: That sounds like the log rolling.

MV: Yes! [laughs]

DV: We didn't get out there, you were on the bridge

MV: But still, that bridge was just...oh, just rattling, swaying...

DV: You did mention about the highway coming through these [Sipes and the Transformer Inn] then it comes back out to what is now, it's pretty close to Loretto, where it comes back, well it's where it is today. But it must have gone all the way in through Corcoran.

MV: Corcoran?

DV: No, no, never, [highway] 55 never got over that way.

RM: So when they closed the bridge down to even pedestrians that *really* put a strain on the bars and the things down town.

DV: Oh sure, oh yes.

MV: They did repair it to the point that you could walk across it. I mean, they tightened up the bolts [laughs].

DV: I felt it, well, pictures like on that plate [indicates to collectors plate of Rockford] It was a beautiful history of this old bridge. There ain't many of them around any more.

RM: No there's not. How about Lake Sarah? You know, speaking of beautiful, historical, things. What do you remember about driving around the lake and the old resorts?

DV: Herman Mielke sold, rented boats. I don't remember, I think we could buy a little candy bars or stuff but I'm not positive.

RM: There was a little gazebo down there? A little round building?

DV: Could be, I don't remember for sure

MV: Have to ask Joanne [Rogers] when we go to the all-school reunion.

DV: Yes. She's in my class.

MV: It was her Dad that had that little place.

DV: They rented boats and that's where we went fishing. On the other side of the lake, I don't remember of anybody to be a landing, you know, to put in a boat. It was because of the high ground, you couldn't. You know where Mielke had his resort, you had from here to...twice as far from here to your car you know, of level ground.

MV: Then there was a landing also on Sarah where these houses start, you know, along the shore, where all these houses are on [highway] 55, just at the very beginning there was a landing there, remember...?

DV: Oh yes!

MV: Then they closed that down.

DV: I don't remember who had it or anything.

MV: No.

RM: If you were classmates with Mielke's, did you ever go out there and help with the ice cutting?

DV: Dad hauled them. When they were cutting ice--cutting water [laughter] and they put it in the truck, and they'd haul it wherever they sold it.

MV: They took it to an ice house.

DV: An ice house, yes, packed it with--

MV: Sawdust.

DV: Sawdust.

RM: Where did they get the sawdust from?

DV: I imagine, probably Greeling's sawmill.

MV: Sawmill, yes.

RM: Where was that?

DV: On [County Road] 92, about three quarter of a mile, or a mile, beyond the railroad tracks. A lot of people bring their logs in, then he'd cut it up into lumber.

RM: S people were still logging their own land?

DV: Yes, that went on for years.

MV: I don't remember that when we got married, though, not in '56 anymore.

DV: No, I don't think so.

RM: It was more the '30s and '40s?

DV: Yes.

MV: Yes.

RM: What kind of trees were they cutting down?

DV: I suppose Oak and Elm.

MV: There weren't too many Pine. Then there was a nursery, Daniel's nursery, on...

DV: 92.

MV: 92.

DV: That's just across the railroad tracks. It'd be the first area on the right.

RM: So people would take their logs to the saw mill and get them cut and then Mielke would just pick up the saw dust?

DV: Evidently so...somebody hauled it home, because he didn't have any way of...he didn't have any log saws there, you know, to do the logging. I'm sure he must have got from there.

RM: Did you ever see him do the ice? The water?

DV: Oh, yes, yes!

MV: Yes...hard water [laughs]

DV: They'd have it on...they had poles. They'd poke it, so it would get on the conveyor to take it up into a vehicle, like a truck.

RM: How big were the blocks?

DV: Ooo! Half the size or a little above the size of that counter, about the size of the stove, probably, depending on how deep the water was.

MV: How thick it froze, yes.

RM: But at least a foot or two?

DV: Oh yea, twelve to eighteen inches, anyhow. More eighteens than twelve's.

RM: They would just get it on the conveyor belt and it would go right into the back of the truck?

DV: There was someone there to push it. You had your sticks that you'd push it into place. Kind of a risky job. I mean it's slippery.

RM: Where were the ice houses?

DV: On the on the place.

RM: At Mielke's?

DV: Yes, yes.

RM: So he'd use it for his resort?

MV: Yes, they did have a resort back there, didn't they? Mielke's resort.

DV: He called it that, yes, but it...well...as I said...boat rentals.

MV: Yes, but they had some cabins, too.

DV: That's right, they did.

MV: Yea. Joanne talks about having to clean the cabins...bet that was fun [laughs].

RM: She worked there with the family business?

DV: She did. She got married shortly out of high school.

MV: Joanne and Pat?

DV: Yes.

MV: Yes.

DV: So that's about all...then all the churches in the area.

RM: That's where you'd go the day after you got done at the bar, right?

MV: Yes! [laughs]

DV: You go through on 4, you have to watch out when the church is close—

MV: On where? County? What four?

DV: When we used to go up to your folks.

MV: Meyers road?

DV: Meyers road...you have to be careful, because they're all walking across--

MV: They didn't have Saturday night church then, it was Sunday morning.

DV: I mean you watched out for them! [laughter] Well, it's the same over there at the St. Stephen...Steven...when we cut across.

MV: Oh! St. Stephen's...yes

DV: You have to watch out.

MV: By St. Joe.

RM: The bar and the church are across the street from each other?

MV: Yes...that's a bit Troback...Troback bar and grill.

DV: Outside of that, we did a little travelling out west.

RM: You need some time away, I suppose.

DV: I was one of these guys...the business couldn't operate without me. Then one year we got suckered into buying a property out in Arizona, and the only way we could get our money back, we had to go out and see it. We went out to see it, we got our money back.

MV: Lo and behold, we didn't know, we kept it, lo...we kept the property, but lo and behold we went out to Arizona, in *July*, of 1971. Went to go get our money back. We fell in love with it! We kept the property, never did anything with it. Years ago we sold it to um—

DV: Oh!

MV: Our income tax--

DV: Tax guy!

MV: Yes.

DV: We had four kids. There was a fella, he was a roofer out of Buffalo at that time. I was unloading stuff there, telling him we were going on this trip, and he said, "You got

air conditioning in your car?" I said, "No." [laughter] Ooooh, he said, "Don't." At that time, JCPenney's had a unit that you could put in your car and it saved the whole trip.

MV: Saved the family! [laughs]

RM: Did any of the bars have air conditioning?

MV: Oh my...

DV: No [laughter] the one...

MV: Open door! [laughs]

DV: No, that one that burnt, the one you had mentioned with the long bar? They had an old fanning mill at the end.

MV: Oh, well, that wasn't air conditioner, that was a fan.

DV: Well, yes, it got the air circulating.

RM: Which one had that?

MV: On Main Street.

DV: Yes, on Main Street.

MV: That little...you almost had to cut your way through when you walked in the door, the smoke! Oh my goodness.

DV: Another little odd thing in Rockford, where the parking lot is now on Bridge Street, ah, Main Street...that's where old Cap Fish had his barn and farm. He'd chase...in the morning he'd take the cows out behind the school house, that's where their pasture was. Then at night, he'd bring them in, milk, put them back out.

RM: Was this in the 40s?

DV: Well, I was young, yet.

MV: What year did you move in off of the farm? '45?

DV: '45, so it'd be shortly in that general area.

MV: Into Rockford.

DV: People kind of forgot about it, Cap Fish used to—

MV: I wouldn't even know who Cap Fish is anymore.

DV: Bud Fish's brother.

MV: I know, Bud Fish's Dad—brother?

DV: His Dad.

MV: Fish's brother. Bud Fish's brother. Bud Fish had the sand and gravel truck in Rockford—

DV: Can you imagine eight...about eight, ten cows and going down the road? Those cows knew just where they were going.

RM: Just where the food was.

DV: Yes

MV: We marched our cows through Round Prairie, cross highway 71, and then, my goodness, it wasn't just a few cows...like twenty-five, thirty? Trying to keep them all together? But they learned. Or we did whichever it was! [laughs]

RM: Whoever held out the longest!

I heard it was pretty warm down on the lake, in the dance halls and the resorts on the summer nights.

DV: Yeeeeawwww!

MV: Oh, I remember a couple times, I wasn't out to Lake Sarah very, very often, but one time it was sooo hot. You would just, I mean, the sweat was just pouring off you.

DV: Oh, that's from dancing.

MV: Yeah, well, right! [laughs] but it you know they'd have windows open to cross ventilate the air, but it still didn't help.

DV: They had big double windows like this, you'd just open them up. It was ventilation. Tipped them up.

MV: They actually weren't windows, they were—

DV: No, they were just...

MV: Just things you could--

DV: Keep the wind out, snow out.

MV: Things you could lift.

RM: Parts of the wall that moved?

DV and MV: Yes, yes

MV: Then in the winter time, you sealed it off.

DV: There wasn't much going on there in the wintertime.

MV: Oh, no, nothing.

RM: So if it was so hot, why did you keep going there?

MV: Well, it was so hot in our little honeymoon cottage out there on highway 55 but we still lived there! It was just miserable [laughter].

DV: We never did have air conditioning in our house in Rockford.

MV: Until we moved up on the hill.

DV: Yes.

MV: Then we had central air.

DV: Here we got one unit.

RM: Just to take the edge off?

MV: Haven't used it too much.

DV: No, a couple nights it was really tough.

MV: But last year I think we used it for weeks on end, day and night, you know, at one point!

DV: Then down there at the park? See that was all flooded out.

RM: In Rockford?

DV: Yes. My sister lived in the farthest house towards Hanover, toward the playground, it was up to the ceiling. Then they moved. I mean, to clean it up, we didn't have anything...to move back in. You think today, you look at that news, you just can feel--

MV: Like in Colorado.

DV: And the tornado that went through there. In Rockford. Or just west of Rockford. East of Rockford.

RM: That one in the '50s?

DV: I suppose. When old Mutterer's barn went. Herbert Kohlen's barn went. They're the only two I can think about, yes.

MV: Did it do some damage to Schliefs?

DV: Woolard Schlieff. That whole barn went.

MV: Let's see, we lived right across the road from that farm. That's where that new... is it a Covenant Church?

RM: Oh, sure.

MV: That little house right [DV: just beyond that] the church, that's where... but they've done so much to it, they've made it twice as big. You know, rebuilt the whole thing.

RM: So that was your little place?

MV: That was our little place for six months.

DV: We capped the basement and that's where we lived for a year, yes.

MV: That was on the corner of Ash Street and what was Elm Street. The County Road that went up to the Elementary School.

DV: We had one of the kids' baptism. It thawed, the water was dripping. I mean it was leaking through the... but we survived! And you know the funny part? The kids never were sick. Man, we moved upstairs and first thing, one gets sick right away! [laughter]

MV: We didn't have a furnace in the basement when we moved in, we had a big old pot belly stove, one of those big old ones that you see in the years back? In the winter time, if we had enough money, he would bring packaged coal home. Then you could pat... stoke it up good, so it would hold the night.

RM: Was that how most of the bars and resorts were heated as well, then?

MV: They certainly didn't have any central heating system.

DV: I don't know what—

MV: I would imagine it would have to be space heaters.

DV: Yes, I would think so.

MV: But this big old pot belly stove, that was something else. Then we did get, didn't we get an oil stove?

DV: Yes.

MV: Was that before we put the furnace in?

DV: See when we built upstairs, it from the time we moved into the basement--

MV: Well, it was our Christmas present the next year [DV: we had the house] a couple days before Christmas we moved upstairs, yes, and we just had Debbie then.

DV: Probably so.

MV: Yes.

DV: Ok! That's all I can think of! [laughter]

RM: Ok, we'll stop [laughter]

I truly thank you so much for—

DV: I'll send you the bill!

RM: I'll wait for it with bated breath [laughter] No truly, if we think of any other questions, can I ask them along the way?

DV: Yes.

RM: That'd be great.

DV: You've got our phone number.

RM: Yes! For sure. That's wonderful.