

## **East Brandywine Township Oral History Project**

Interviewer(s): Alexandria Kochinsky and Carol Sinex Schmidt

Interviewee: Don Hannum

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Allie: For the audio, if you could just state your name for us and how long you have been a part of or familiar with East Brandywine Township?

Don: My name is Donald Hannum, I live in Wagontown and I've been in the area all of my life. I was born in West Chester at the Chester County Hospital. I lived in Downingtown for twenty-two years and then West Chester, Milford Mills and now Wagontown.

Allie: I'm excited to hear about Milford Mills, because it was already Marsh Creek by the time I was born.

-Laughter-

Allie: You said that you were born in Chester County Hospital?

Don: Right.

Allie: Earlier, you'd mentioned the year. 1930?

Don: Right, 1930.

Allie: Okay. Where to begin...

Carol: Where did you live in Downingtown?

Don: I lived in the West End, on W. Highland Avenue which was at that time was part of Caln Township.

Carol: Okay.

Don: Later, Caln Township added that last block of Downingtown and became Caln Township.

Carol: So, what street or road was it?

Don: It was on Highland. 426 Highland Avenue.

Carol: Oh! So that would be at the end, towards Thorndale?

Don: Yeah. Not the last block down, but maybe third from the last.

Carol: So, you went to Downingtown School's?

Don: I went to Thorndale, which at the time was called Caln Consolidated School and it was all of the one-room schools consolidated to that one. I went there in first grade through eighth and then went to Downingtown High School. I didn't go to Junior High because then, there wasn't any Junior High in Caln Township.

Allie: Okay. So the consolidated school was kindergarten through eighth grade?

Don: No kindergarten. First through eighth. There wasn't kindergarten at all, I think it might have just been through one of the churches or something like that. Nothing organized.

Carol: Don, was your family from the Downingtown area?

Don: My mother was Anna Hoopes, and she lived on the east end of Highland Avenue. 225 might have been the number. My father was from West Whiteland, he was a farmer. George Henderson Hannum, Jr.

Carol: What brought them from farming to this area?

Don: I don't know. My mother worked in retail clothing ... I guess it was Yargood's .... in Downingtown? She was the bookkeeper. She went to West Chester Business School.

Carol: Where was that?

Allie: Was it West Chester University?

Don: No, it wasn't a part of that, it was a separate school.

Carol: What about church, did you go to church around here?

Don: We went to St. James Episcopal in the east end. There was a mile marker right where we lived on Lincoln Highway and another at the church, so it was just a mile.

Carol: And where did your dad work?

Don: He farmed, but he also worked as a Philadelphia dairy inspector and then Harbison Dairy, Philadelphia.

Carol: What did they inspect?

Don: The dairy and the cows and farms. From there he got a job with Harbison Dairy in Philadelphia. He was also a dairy inspector there. They would inspect the farms that shipped milk to those dairies. He'd make sure the cows were clean, the barn was clean. He had to check the privy to make sure there was a spring on the seat.

Carol: Oh, really?

Allie: Oh my gosh.

Don: There was a certain amount of light and space that had to be separated between the cows and horses at that time. There weren't very many tractors.

Carol: Was that a state inspection that was required?

Don: Probably, it probably was part of the state. Harbison was a pretty respectable dairy, I think they are still in business.

Carol: I remember the name, yeah.

Don: He traveled all over. He had Milford, not Milford Mills. What's east of Eagle?

Allie: Chester Springs?

Don: No, not Chester Springs. Before it Byers.

Carol: Lionville.

Don: No. Anyway, there were a couple of places in Maryland. A couple of others. I can't think of one, north of Bloomsburg. He always had a job. I don't think he ever had a good job compared to nowadays, but he never was out of work.

Allie: Mhm.

Don: I was born in 1930, which was the worst time that you could be a child. We never had a lot of money, but we never seemed to want for anything. Maybe we just didn't want much.

Carol: Could be that your needs were more minimal.

Don: We had a backyard, with a beautiful forsythia bush that grew down to the ground with space in the middle.

Allie: Like a big tunnel?

Don: Yeah, like a big tent underneath. Nothing grew under there but dirt, but we had all these nice little roads.

Allie: I know that you talked about your mother's work, but did she always live in this area? How did your parents meet?

Don: I don't know. She was born in Downingtown, off of Viaduct Avenue.

Allie: Did you have siblings?

Don: I'm an only child.

Allie: Did you have family nearby, that were related to your mom?

Don: She had two brothers and two sisters.

Allie: Did they stay local when you were growing up?

Don: One of the brothers lived with his parents, one lived in Coatesville. One of the sisters was on Horseshoe Pike and the other lived in Milford Mills.

Allie: How long had Milford Mills been around? In my brain, I associate it with a later period. Do you happen to know when it really got its start? It had a mill, so it's older.

Don: I have no idea. I'd have to look into her (Catherine Quillman's) book.

Carol: At the time, these small villages were active around the mills. I was telling Allie that if you grew up in Lyndell, you didn't know much about Bondsville.

Don: That's right. Well, in those days traveling you just didn't do the same way you do now. I drove down Bondsville Road today, and I haven't in years. There's hundreds of homes down there now.

Carol: There are going to be more, too.

Don: One of the local shop owners just passed away. Kermit Good. He owned Good Machinery.

Carol: Oh, did he? I didn't know that.

Don: Ed Russell worked with him. It was a machine shop.

Allie: Is that why that was recently up for sale?

Carol: Yeah, it must be.

Don: I saw him in the skin cancer surgery center about a year ago and we had a nice chat, because we have a good friend of mine in common, Bill Keen. But I saw that he just passed away.

Carol: I hadn't seen him in many years, but I knew the name.

Don: The guy that had the grocery store here...

Allie: Cropper?

Don: Before that.

Carol: Iron's.

Don: No.

Carol: Bryant maybe?

Don: I'm not sure. Cropper's had the stores move around a couple of places, but there were people who had the store before that and they closed it down and moved it to Coatesville behind Santee's Drugstore. Well, at the time. The survivor now owns Hatt's Hardware in Caln.

Carol: Were there any organizations that you were a part of when you were in Downingtown?

Don: I was kind of an outsider, because when I went to high school, I was one of two people that came from Thorndale. At that time, the school was divided between Downingtown and Coatesville. You had the choice of which you wanted to go to and only myself and one other person came to Downingtown. So, I didn't know any people other than those I'd played with and they had all gone through Thorndale, too.

Carol: I didn't know that that end of Downingtown went to the Thorndale schools. It seems odd to me.

Don: We were in Caln Township.

Carol: Right. Caln comes in down 322 in an odd way. So, when did you move to Milford Mills?

Don: Let's see, well, we were married in 1953.

Allie: Sorry to interrupt, but what is your wife's name?

Don: Louise England Cotler. She's from Narberth.

Carol: How did you meet?

Don: We both went to Taylor Business School in Philadelphia. We met on the train. We might have had a class together, but I traveled the Paoli local from Downingtown to Philadelphia and she went from Narberth and that's how we met.

Allie: That's neat. A lot of time to talk on those trains, huh?

Don: Not for her.

Allie: That's right, Narberth is further down.

Carol: So, Taylor Business School was in Philadelphia. I think my mother might have gone there. I know that she went to a school in Philadelphia, though I don't know the name of it. Where was it at? Do you remember?

Don: No. It was an eight-story building and was really narrow. The reason that I went there was because a neighbor of mine, my best friend, Bob Lillard, went and liked it. I guess that's really why I went there. He seemed to enjoy it. He went to West Chester University for a year and didn't like it. I graduated from Taylor in '52 and I think we lived at home and then moved there in '54. We lived in an apartment on Washington Avenue for a year. When we moved to Milford Mills, we lived there for five years.

Carol: What drew you to Milford Mills?

Don: The house that we bought from Charlie Bowman, he built the house. The backdoor opened into the meadow of my aunt and uncle's farm - Earl Mercer and Natoria - but we called her Tori. That's why we got there. It was nice, open country. My wife and I both like to hunt small game and fox hunt , so it was a nice spot.

Carol: What kind of hunting?

Don: We hunt small game and fox hunted. We have fox hunted. She rode a horse when she was a student at Lower Merion and so she went to Radnor Hunt and somebody gave her a horse there and of course, she loved it. She had to give up her horse for me, so I'm indebted for life.

-Laughter-

Carol: Where in Milford Mills, what road?

Don: I guess it was, Lyndell-Eagle.

Carol: That's what it was called that I remember.

Don: Marsh Creek, past the mill and out onto ... where's the paper mill?

Carol: Dorlan?

Don: Dorlan. There was a row house just east of the creek. Creek? Crick?

Allie: TomAtoes, TomAHtoes.

-Laughter-

Don: There was a row house with four homes and Maggie Parrot lived in the first one. I think Charlie Parrot lived in the next house. On the east end, somebody else.

Carol: There was a woman who worked in my dad's store in Lyndell. She was always so kind to me and I liked her so much. She lived in those row houses. Stella, I think?

Don: I've got that. The end house. The next separate bungalow was us. The next house to that... I think their last name was Estelle. His name was Raymond Estelle. I don't know what her name was.

Carol: I don't know. I remember vaguely as a small child going to her place. I think she was taking care of me when my sister had to go in the hospital. I've always wondered about her. I don't know anything.

Don: I don't think it would be Stella Estelle.

Carol: This could be wrong, but I think she was divorced. She didn't have children.

-Muttered Conversation, Interruption-

Allie: You both giggled when you brought up Maggie Parrot. Who is that?

Don: I guess it was Margaret. She was a widow when we knew her. I don't remember much. Son, Charlie Parrot was next door. Earl worked at G.O. Carlson and he was quite a talented artist.

Carol: I just always thought it was a funny name.

Allie: Oh, okay.

Don: There was a story about the people in the end house. It was told that she was seeing a man in Eagle who wasn't her husband, and things must not have gone too well one time because he beat her up and left her for dead.

Carol: Oh my gosh!

Don: It was quite a story.

Allie: Do you think that's the story about the woman in the well?

Don: That's a different one.

Carol: What do you remember about that?

Don: I think I only know what I read in Catherine's book. Nobody was arrested.

Allie: She was killed and he wasn't arrested?

Don: No, she just barely lived.

Carol: They probably still wouldn't have arrested him for almost killing her, back then, right? It was kind of more...

Allie: Disciplinary?

Don: My aunt and uncle's farm was all the rest, back around us and east.

Carol: Their name was Hannum?

Don: No, Mercer. Across the street was a Dr., with a PhD. I forget his name – Maroney (sp?) He was a neat old guy.

Carol: Earl Mercer, Jr. was he the one in a band?

Don: My uncle, Earl Mercer, he used to call figures at a square dance. But, his son, his name was also Earl Mercer and I think he did stuff. The band was Guy Mercer, sort of a country thing. A violin, guitar, piano or drums. They were good and played everywhere.

Allie: Related to you?

Don: I don't know what their connection was. I'm sure they were and we just weren't close enough.

Carol: Where did you work when you lived there?

Don: When I came out of business school, I started at the Pennsylvania Railroad as a traveling auditor. I worked there for a while, and I was auditing a station in Kentucky. I remember that I got a phone call - you didn't get an email or a text - that I should go in and turn my books and stuff in the next day because I was going to be laid-off. I asked why and they said there was going to be a railroad strike - a coal strike. John Lewis was doing a coal strike. I went and turned my papers and everything in, and the next day they called me and told me to go back to work. The strike was called off. I wanted to get married and couldn't depend on a job where the threat of a strike was going to get me laid-off again, so I quit. I found a job that very same day. I was off work for one day.



Allie: Oh my gosh!

Don: I got a job at the Downingtown Manufacturing Company. My uncle, Bill Mercer, was the Chief Inspector there and in those days, you could get a job like that. So, I worked there at the Downingtown office. I saw an ad in the paper for fifty-five dollars a week with the Richard Armstrong Company for Coates Bridge. Did you know Richard Armstrong?

Carol: No.

Don: Well, anyway, I went over to apply for the job. I got the job and went back and told them (Downingtown Manufacturing) and they told me that they would give me a raise. I asked how much of a raise. I was working there for a dollar an hour, and my raise was going to be \$1.01. I laughed at it. They offered another fifteen cents. I asked if I had to quit every time I wanted a raise. Soyanaara

-Laughter-

Don: Fifty-five dollars a week, I didn't know there was that much money in the world. Now, you probably have fifty-five dollars in your pocketbook.

-Laughter-

Don: I stayed there for forty years, and I was satisfied.

Allie: What did you do there?

Don: I ended up the office manager. When I went there, there weren't any. There was a draftsman, a secretary, the owner and myself - that was it. I did everything.

Carol: Oh, wow. Yeah.

Don: I did the accounting, payroll, purchasing, bill paying. Everything.

Allie: You said that was in Coatesville?

Don: No, Coates Bridge. It's in East Bradford.

Allie: Oh, okay.

Don: I stayed there until 1992, then I retired.

Carol: But Beloit was in Downingtown, right?

Don: Beloit was in the east end of Downingtown.

Carol: Yeah, that was a big company. Wasn't it?

Don: They made paper mill machinery.

Allie: You mentioned that your wife went to business school as well. What did she wind up doing for work?

Don: She worked at a five-and-ten, or some retail store in Narberth. Then, when we got married, she got a job at Pepperidge. We lived on Washington Avenue, so she could walk to work there on the east end of Downingtown. It was closeby. We had a child, and then she stayed home.

Allie: One child?

Don: Two, girls.

Allie: Two girls! Did they grow up in the Downingtown school district?

Don: No, we didn't live there at the time. When they started school, we had moved from Milford Mills to West Goshen right outside of West Chester. So, they went to West Chester schools. Then we moved to Wagontown and they finished out there.

Carol: So, do you remember anything of East Brandywine at the time? Or, was it not very familiar to you?

Don: I know that we didn't get a paper delivered. The only way to get a paper was by mail, and my aunt would do that because it was the way to get the news. That was the only way to get the news, through the paper. I would go up there to the Lyndell Store for the Sunday paper. We used to shop for flowers at the greenhouse, there.

Carol: McBride's? Oh, no. Carl Bauss. He owned it when I was growing up.

Don: I don't know. Guy Mercer lived on the hill, just west of Milford Mills. On a steep hill there. He had fox hounds, although everybody fox hunted then.

Carol: Really?

Allie: We've heard that before, from someone's relatives who hunted.

Carol: Miley.

Don: He lived on the beer baron's place.

Carol: Is that what it was?

Don: It's all those houses now.

Allie: What did you call him?

Don: Piels?

Allie: No, no. The beer...?

Don: Beer baron.

Allie: What is that?

Don: Beer.

Allie: I know that! But, I've never heard that expression.

Don: Maybe I just coined it. I never heard of it either.

-Laughter-

Don: They owned the farm there. I know that Larry Addis who lived there always had hounds and horses. And Dr... veterinarian who lived right near that farm... he was a fox hunter, too. All of the hunts who had three or four hounds on a Sunday morning would go out.

Allie: Did your wife ever participate? I know that you mentioned that she hunted.

Don: She kept a horse at Earl's place. She was thrown on the road there one time. I don't know what happened to the horse, because he wasn't violent or she wouldn't have kept him. But that day he threw her off and she landed on her head. She's lucky she had a hard hat on.

Carol: Wow, yeah.

Don: She did lose her glasses. That was on a morning. I think a Sunday morning. Instead of church, I suppose.

-Laughter-

Don: My cousin and I went out that afternoon where she was thrown and after the Sunday traffic, there were her glasses.

Allie: Just laying there?

Carol: Bent or broken?

Don: We expected to see them just flat, but they were fine. Pretty amazing.

Carol: Was the mill still in operation in Milford Mills when you were there?

Don: No.

Carol: I didn't think so.

Don: I don't know what was going on there then.

Carol: How about McClure's mansion?

Don: I think people lived in the mansion. There was a nice swimming pool there. It would have been across from Chalfont Road.

Carol: When I was a kid it was a hotel for a short while and then a camp for Jewish children who would come out of Philadelphia. I don't know what those time periods were.

Don: It's a derogatory phrase nowadays, but nobody thought anything of it back then to use the term, 'Jews'. We didn't think we were saying anything wrong.

Allie: Yeah.

Carol: I don't know one little thing about fox hunting. Do you, Allie?

Allie: We went to Radnor Hunt a couple of times as a kid, but I think it was the races not fox hunting. I can't make any educated statements here.

-Laughter-

Carol: When you said you'd go to hunt, was that every week or once a month?

Don: It was usually on Sunday morning or any other afternoon that a couple of guys were free. It wasn't organized. Several farmers had their own small pack, maybe five or six hounds. Earl had five or six hounds, Guy Mercer had eight or ten; the guy who lived down at the other rowhouse - Dave Finger - he had six or eight hounds.

Carol: There was a Elsie Finger too, right?

Don: That was Dave's wife.

Carol: Arilla was her real name. I don't know why I know that.

Don: There was someone else, too. I should have brought my wife, she'd know.

Allie: This is usually what happens, don't worry. We start talking and get you thinking about things that you haven't thought about in a long time.

-Laughter-

Don: Ordell, I don't know how to spell it, but he was another one.

Carol: I think Ortlip. I went to school with an Ortlip.

Allie: Was it unusual that your wife participated?

Don: It was unusual for them, because no women did. It was always the men farmers.

Allie: Good for her!

Carol: Yeah, maverick!

Don: Another cousin of mine, Clarence Rice, lived in Chester Springs. He had a larger pack of hounds, and then his cousin that wasn't related to me, had a pack of hounds. When they all got together, there were sixty or seventy hounds. It was a sizeable pack.

Carol: Now, when you say hounds, what kind of dog was it?

Don: Fox hounds.

Carol: Did they train them?

Don: You could train them, but it was loosely done. They just took the pups out a few times. If it was a cold morning, Louise would say that it was a nice morning for cubbing. That meant taking out the young hounds.

Carol: Oh! And they called that cubbing?

Don: Yeah.

Allie: I never heard of this before, it's neat.

Carol: Yeah! And would the hounds chase after the fox?

Don: These guys knew where the foxes were, generally. The fox weren't usually in their holes in the mornings, and these guys knew where they ventured to. They would hunt those areas. On breeding season, they might jump a fox that was miles away. It might be in Lyndell, Eagle and go all the way to where Shady Maple is. That was hard on the hounds, they'd drop when they'd get tired and the owners would have to go back at night to pick their hounds up.

Carol: This is a stupid question...

Don: There are none.

Allie: I don't know, I have one that I'm hesitating to ask, too.

Carol: I think it's the same thing.

Allie: Do they hunt the fox, or is it the chase of the fox?

Don: It's the chase of the fox.

Allie: My next question was what happens to the fox?

Don: I don't ever remember them catching the fox.

Carol: Now we feel better. Don't we Allie?

Allie: Whew!

Don: It's like when you play hide-and-seek when you're a kid. You run until you're tired and then it tapers off. Now sometimes, they would go back at night to dig the fox out so that they could put him in a cage and keep him for the next week. Then, they'd have the fox dropped.

Allie: The dogs wouldn't catch him?

Don: They could never catch him, the fox is just smarter.

Carol: That's interesting. I never knew what was really involved.

Allie: It's the thrill of the chase. I was thinking that you track it down and hunt it.

Don: I don't remember them catching anything.

Carol: Are there very many foxes around now?

Allie: Probably not, with all of the development.

Don: Too many people.

Carol: You see pictures with a certain uniform. I'm guessing that in the country you didn't do that so much.

Don: No. The organized hunts, like Radnor Hunt, they'd wear the pinks. They call it pink, but it's really red coats. They would wear those with riding britches. It's expensive stuff. But us, we'd wear blue jeans or overalls.

Allie: You mentioned, in agreement with Carol, that if you were in one part of town you really didn't know what was going on in another. Did you know anything about the Bondsville-area or Guthriesville?

Don: I know that there was a Temperance League. I don't know if it was called the Christian Temperance League, but anyway, there's a little building there in Lyndell.

Carol: The Grange.

Don: Yeah. The CTL would meet there. My aunt, Tori Mercer was the president there for years. My mother was for years, also. I don't think there's much writing about that. It would make an interesting subject. Mrs. Bennetch was a doll collector.

Carol: I had trouble getting information. Up the street there was one as well.

Don: The Lyndell Christian Temperance League always had a picnic.

Carol: No alcohol, though.

Don: In those days, picnics were everywhere. The one-room schools had picnics. I never went to those schools, but my aunt was there and that's how I got invited. It really wasn't dedicated to their students only, anybody could go.

Allie: So, it was more of a community event.

Don: Yeah.

Carol: The primary aim for the CTL was that there should be no alcohol, right?

Don: I don't think they were protestors or anything. I think their main thing was that you'd give a nickel a month or something and they would give candy to the old folks' home in Pocopson. I don't remember them protesting booze.

Carol: Prohibition was in the 1920's, right? So, that would have been before that. The picnics were a big social thing then. Interesting.

Allie: One thing we found interesting, or at least I did, was the discovery that barbeques in the literal sense didn't exist. It's so funny to me, because they have always existed in my lifetime. We looked this up a couple of interviews ago and those weren't around until maybe the '60s.

Don: My Aunt Tori had a beautiful front yard with maple trees and picnic tables. You could collapse them and take them apart to store them for somebody else's picnic. Nobody ever cooked anything. If there were hot dogs, they were boiled in the kitchen. There were no hamburgers.

Carol: So you brought food?

Don: Yeah, everybody just brought along stuff.

Allie: It sounds like a big potluck.

Don: Yeah.

Allie: What sorts of things were on the menu?

Don: I don't think that cold cuts were ever a part of it.

Allie: No lunch meat?

Don: There might have been fried chicken.

Carol: Ham, maybe?

Don: Ham, roast beef.

Carol: Potato salad?

Don: Yes, potato salad. Macaroni and cheese, of course.

Carol: Jello? That was big.

Don: I don't think it would go too well.

Carol: Too hot, maybe.

Don: There was pie and cake. The big meal would be at noontime and the farmers would go home to milk around four o'clock and then would come back and do the same thing all over again.

Carol: Oh, really? So there would be a picnic for lunch and then a picnic dinner?

Don: Yeah. I don't think we ever had green salad, either. I think that there were cucumbers.

Carol: Sliced tomatoes, maybe.



Don: Oh, yeah.

Allie: Having a home out in this area, did you have a garden? Were you inclined to use that land?

Don: My aunt had a garden. It was a large garden, maybe a half of an acre. My uncle passed away and then her son, Earl, tried to keep a garden but it was too much. We lived in Milford, so we tended the garden.

Allie: What sort of things did you grow? What did well out here?

Don: Tomatoes, cabbage, lettuce. We never grew corn, because Earl grew corn in his. Sweet corn, for humans.

Carol: There was a difference between corn you grew for horses.

Don: My other cousin lived up Font Road. The Waters'. It was Fred Waters and he married my cousin who was a Messner.

Carol: Yeah, I think the Messners lived up there.

Don: The CTL really should have some research on it. The lady who most recently did it... she might not be living now... she had a large doll collection. Does that mean anything to you?

Carol: No.

Don: I can't think of her name.

Allie: She was affiliated with them, though?

Don: Yeah, she was one of the last ones who did it. You know, they didn't own the grange, so I don't know why they were meeting there.

Carol: They met at the grange for some time, and then there was one that met up the street here in the building across from the entrance to the drugstore. We always called it the Pink House, because it was painted pink on the outside. It's not any longer. There was another organization that I can't remember, but the CTL met there, too.

Don: Right up the road from Lyndell lived people by the name of Wagner. Does that mean anything to you?

Carol: Yeah.

Don: I went to school with Frank Wagner.

Carol: And then there were the Downings.

Don: That was the other inhabitant of the rowhouse. Bill Downing and Helen Parrott.

Carol: Oh, okay.

Don: He married a Parrot. On the other row house was Dave Finger and his wife. She had a little convenience store there, Band-Aids and milk.

Carol: I don't remember, but remember hearing about it in Milford Mills. But Bill Downing...

Don: He was an artificial breeder. He worked for Atlantic, I think.

Carol: I remember that. He used to come into the store a lot. So, they would artificially breed the cows.

Don: You could choose the line you wanted to have. If you thought that one line might be better, a bull or what have you.

Allie: Since we're creeping up on the holiday, this is just one of those things on my mind; since your wife's family wasn't local, did you travel out to the Philly area?

Don: Most likely stayed out here. I don't remember going to her place for holidays. Her father had a grocery store, Cottes's Market in Narberth and that kept him busy. Usually on Christmas, some of the other holidays too, we would rotate between the aunts and my mother hosting. Aunt Elsie never cooked her own turkey.

Allie: Where did she cook it?

Don: She would have a Baret's bakery in Downingtown do it for her.

Carol: Really?

Allie: Oh my gosh! I didn't know that you could do that.

Don: Bakeries still do. You can take your turkey there and they'll cook it.

Allie: What a way to live. Who would have thought, that's so wild!

Carol: I never heard of that!

Allie: What was that area like? I know we're talking about East Brandywine, but Carol's parents were from southwest Philadelphia. So, when you were in business school, what were some of the biggest differences compared to today in the city?

Don: You know what the Chez Vous is?

Carol: No.

Don: It's a dance hall in Upper Darby where they would dance three nights a week and rollerskate the other nights. Louise and I used to go there to dance, not to rollerskate. Right across the street from there was a Whitecastle restaurant.

Carol: They are still in existence, I think.

Don: If you went to dance, you'd park there.

Carol: So, if you went to dance would you drive back home at night?

Don: Yeah.

Carol: At that time, it was a long drive. You didn't have the bypasses and so forth.

Don: There were fifty-one red lights between there and our home..

Carol: Fifty-one red lights between your house and Louise's.

Don: That's one of the biggest differences, the traffic. I mean, there were trolleys. I don't think they still have one.

Carol: There was a trolley from West Chester to Darby, I believe.

Don: That sounds right, because there was a trolley from Coatesville to West Chester.

Carol: There was one in Downingtown, at one time.

Don: I haven't talked much about East Brandywine much, have I?

Allie: That's alright!

Carol: Do you remember when they were starting to build Marsh Creek?

Don: The township supervisors at the time that I lived there were Arthur Green and Alan Dewees and Norman Shay. I went to school with Alan and Arthur was my cousin Earl's father-in-law. Everyone knew one another. They knew that I was in accounting and I guess they had a

need for someone at the township. So, they asked me if I wanted to be a township secretary-treasurer.

Carol: For which township?

Don: That would have been Upper Uwchlan. So, I was a Secretary-Treasurer for five years. I used my first years pay to buy a typewriter.

Allie: When you decided to leave Milford Mills, was that because of Marsh Creek coming in?

Don: When I was Secretary-Treasurer, they were having meetings with the state to create a dam.

Allie: About what year do you think that was?

Don: '57 or '58. We had meetings at the township building which was where it is now, at the old schoolhouse building. I also remember having meetings at the Eagle Tavern. It wasn't a dinner meeting, but there was a sunporch there and we'd meet there. I knew that the dam was coming, and there we were. Our house didn't float, so I decided to get the hell out of there.

Allie: Yeah.

Don: We put our house up for sale. We bought the house for seven thousand dollars.

Carol: Seven thousand.

-Laughter-

Allie: That was my closing costs. That's crazy.

Don: We sold it for seventy-five hundred or something. The lawyer in West Chester lived in Cornog bought that for his daughter. He had a better idea than I did. He probably got more from the state than we did from him. But, we were looking for a place and had a hard time with two kids. We moved to a development house in West Goshen, near the airport. We stayed there and then there were just too many people.

Allie: Oh, okay.

Don: My wife took the kids out one day to the airport for a picnic. A man comes up in a car to let her know that she was in the middle of the runway.

-Laughter-

Don: She took the kids back to the hangar and somebody watched the kids and she went on an airplane ride with somebody.

Allie: That's wild!

Don: You wouldn't do that nowadays. She was managing a horse and pony farm, in Morestein. It came to the point where he was renting from somebody, but she had to get her horses out. We looked all over for a place to live and looked at several, but this one struck us. It was really tumbled down. It might have been twenty-eight thousand. Our cars cost more than that.

Allie: This is the Wagontown farm?

Don: Yeah. It was in bad shape. The first thing that we did was fix the barn; we took all of the cow jacks out and put horse stalls in. Once we had that done, we went to fix the house up.

Carol: Is that where you live now, Don?

Don: Yeah.

Carol: Is that on Route 340?

Don: It's on Wagontown Road, just south of route 340.

-Break-

Allie: Could you talk me through your workday, when you were working at Armstrong? What did an average day look like?

Don: The office was in the basement of an old stone house. The owner, Richard Armstrong, lived upstairs with his family. Like I said, there were only a few others with me in the office. It was a homey thing, especially since he lived right upstairs and was always there. There was never a time when he wasn't there.

Allie: Mhm.

Don: Our normal day was from 8:00AM to 5:00PM, but I don't remember ever being late.

Allie: Did you drive?

Don: I drove.

Allie: What did you drive, what kind of car?

Don: I drove mostly Chevy's. Although, at one time, we had an Icetta.

Carol: I never heard of that.

Allie: Let me look it up real quick.

Don: It looks like a three-wheeled car, but there are four. The hind wheels are close together. It's a one-seat car with one door. The whole front opens up.

Allie: Oh my gosh, is it an Italian car?

Don: Yes. It had a motorcycle engine in it.

-Looking at car on the phone-

Don: Ours was red, and it had a convertible top. The car wasn't much bigger than this table. It was neat.

Carol: I'm sure it was great on gas mileage. Wow!

Don: Ninety miles to the gallon. I'd pull up to the gas station to fill it up and it took two gallons.

-Laughter-

Carol: See, and we think we're so innovative with the invention of the Smart Car. There's something smaller.

Don: Yeah. It had one seat and behind the seat was a ledge over the engine. The two kids were back there with the dog.

Carol: All of you would be in that little car?

Don: Yeah.

Carol: Oh, jeeze.

Allie: Oh my gosh.

Don: I went fishing one time and my wife brought the kids down to the bay, White Crystal Beach. She said she was scared to death driving on a big bridge with that little car. How did you spell that?

Allie: It was I-S-E-T-T-A. It's an Italian car.

Carol: Does it say when they made them?

Allie: I'm sure it does, let's see. It says, "An Italian-designed micro-car built under license in a number of different countries, including, Argentina, Spain, Belgium, France, Brazil and the UK. Because of its egg-shape and bubble like windows, it became known as a bubble car."

Don: Did it have a BMW engine in it?

Allie: It says that, yes. They started manufacturing them in '53. The BMW Isetta was '55 to '62.

Carol: No kidding. I don't remember them at all.

Allie: "It was the world's first mass production car to achieve a fuel consumption of ninety-five miles per gallon."

-Laughter-

Don: Yep.

Carol: We had a Kaiser. Do you remember those?

Don: Oh, sure. Kaiser and Frasier. Kaiser, that's the one you had to step down to get into. It was off the ground, but there was a ledge there. They were pretty neat cars.

Carol: I just remember my dad delivering groceries and I rode along. In fact, I remember going to Milford Mills for that.

Allie: Sorry to interrupt, I was just taken with the idea of this Isetta. So, you would go to work and it was an 8-5 position.

Don: I always left early. I had a flat tire on the way to work one time, and I wasn't late for work. It didn't bother me to go in early. I got more done before the workday really started than after. There weren't very many of us there.

Carol: You weren't punching a time clock, huh?

Don: I wasn't punching a time clock, no. For fifty-five dollars a week, I didn't want to be late. I'd have to go back to that one dollar an hour. Maybe get that dollar and one.

Allie: When you were there, I'm sure it was more laidback than a traditional office space since it was a smaller company, but what sort of things were you responsible for? You said that you did a little of everything.

Don: I did. I did the payroll, ordered material from the shop, processed and paid invoices...

Allie: And what did they do there?

Don: It was a machine shop that made equipment for refineries and chemical refiners. Much like the Downingtown Ironworks did at that time. My boss, the guy who owned it, he started there before starting his own thing at night before it got big enough to do all the time.

Allie: Okay.

Don: That was my day. I carried my lunch.

Allie: Did you have benefits there?

Don: We always had health insurance. I remember when one of our children were born, we had a maternity benefit through ours and she had just left Pepperidge and she still had insurance through them. We actually made money on that.

Carol: Oh my gosh!

-Laughter-

Don: It was probably only like three hundred dollars, but it was exciting.

Carol: Do you remember when the railroad was still operating that went through Lyndell-Eagle Rd from Downingtown?

Don: No. On the east side of the Brandywine, was a milk station. Farmers would bring their milk there in cans, dump it, and then process it. It wasn't a Harbison milk station (inaudible)... Byers had a milk station just east of Eagle. Clarence Rice, who had the fox hounds, his father was a boss of that. He operated that milk station.

Carol: At Byers or Lyndell?

Don: Byers. I never had a connection to that aside from seeing milk cans with that name on it. I think it was Cypherd.

Carol: I think there was a Red Rose for a while, but I think it was many years before that. Warren Marshall had that.

Don: Marshall's were on Lyndell-Eagle Rd. going up the hill, on the right hand side.

Allie: Sorry to hop around, but when you were working at Armstrong and you'd order supplies, where were they coming from and who delivered them? Today, you can go online and have it in three hours. What was that process like?



Don: We had no communication other than telephone and mail. Someone would pick the mail up there and take it every afternoon, from West Chester.

Allie: Was it the same person?

Don: It was someone from the shop. It might not be the same person all the time, but they were always from the shop. So, I'd call them and I'd need to get two or three prices depending on what you needed. Then, once you established where you were going to buy it, the order had to be placed. You'd fold the paper up, put stamps on it and get it in the mail. I had one of those cranks for stamps, but that was much later.

Allie: Okay.

Don: I was doing the accounting, and we had an adding machine. It was real wide. You've probably never seen one before unless it was in a museum or somewhere.

-Laughter-

Don: It had a whole bank of keys. I think it went to like a hundred thousand. It had seven keys across, I think that's how many.

Allie: I'm going to look this up, too. I'm pretty sure that I've seen this.

Don: It had seven keys across and then ten vertically.

Allie: Did they call it an adding machine?

Don: Yeah. It was a crank.

Carol: Yeah, with a crank on the side.

Allie: Ah, look at this. You can buy it for thirty-five dollars on Etsy.

-Laughter-

Don: Is that the one with a whole bank on it?

Allie: It looks like what you're talking about. By Victor?

Don: Yeah, bigger than that though. You could have 100,000 plus 2 (inaudible). We finally got an electric one, with push buttons. That only had ten keys, with plus and minus of course. Everybody marveled at that invention.

Carol: Yeah!

Don: My boss could never understand it. He always wanted to push the equal sign, but he also would clear it. He'd start with zeros. It was always the first digit in what he tried to add, so it was never right.

Allie: So, would the orders come a certain day by truck?

Don: It was a manufacturing company so a lot of steel piping and things like that. It would come by the company we bought it from or we had our own trucks.

Allie: If you had to get it yourselves, where would you go?

Don: Usually, Philadelphia. We did a lot with Lukens Steel Company at the time because they had what we called a byproducts of Lukens. It made custom steel. Their main business were steel plates that went somewhere else for processing. The byproducts division would cut circles out of whatever you wanted, or they'd make a dome for the end of a water tank or something. They could do any size from 10" to 10ft. We rented a truck from a guy in Downingtown. His name was ... Seeds and later Al Burkhart.

Carol: There was a Joe Seeds.

Don: No, I remember Joe Seeds. He lived east of the hospital. Caswallen, maybe.

Allie: I've seen it a bunch, and I can't picture where.

Don: He lived there. We had picnics and would travel around, without special occasion. Seeds had a picnic at that house and everybody arrived and he charged them.

Allie: He charged admission?

Carol: Oh my gosh!

Don: My dad could never get over that, and I'll never forget it. Nobody ever charged. One of the picnic places that we went was Hickory Park. It sat between Milford and Eagle. The covered bridge from Dorlan's led there, and it's township-owned now.

Allie: It's still there. Isn't that the one that's almost beside Moore Road if you turn off of it? You make a right to go into Eagle and it leads you down and the park is on the other. Just shortly before Eagle Tavern.

Don: It might be a mile and a half away from there. I think farmers owned that. It wasn't anything official until later.

Carol: Would you ice skate?

Don: I think we only went for picnics. When our families had picnics, it wasn't just the Hannum's and Mercer's. It was us with the Rice's and the Funderwhite's and Balentine's. It was whoever wanted to come.

Allie: Were those picnics planned well in advance, or more spontaneous?

Don: I think that's more like it. I don't think it was around much organization. I don't remember anybody cooking anything. Anything that was cooked was brought from home.

Carol: The women would have to tell the stories about the cooking part, right?

Allie: There was food and it magically appeared!

Don: Right!

-Laughter-

Don: They might have cooked sweet corn, because I remember husking it at picnics.

Carol: They might have had a campfire kind of thing.

Don: What did we divert from there?

Allie: We were talking about your job and it segued, but in a good way.

Don: Most of the time I was in Milford, when I worked there. I retired in 1992. We moved out of there and I started at Armstrong in '52. I wanted to get married and couldn't work for a dollar an hour. It wasn't so much the wages though, it was the threat of it.

Allie: The uncertainty is not reassuring.

Don: No, it's not. A dollar an hour seemed to be the right price.

Allie: You found something better though, so it all worked out.

Don: Fifty-five dollars a week.

Carol: Do you remember the theatre in Downingtown?

Don: I do. The Roosevelt Theatre.

Carol: Now it's a dance studio.

Don: Oh, is that what it is? That was at the other end of town for us, so it was a real event to go there. We lived in the west end of Downingtown.

Carol: It would have been ten blocks or something, right?

Don: At least. It was a long way. That had a balcony. It was a nice theatre. I don't remember how much it cost to go.

Carol: There was a roller rink in Caln, but that was later I guess.

Don: That was later, by the VFW. I think that they are opening it up again.

Allie: I think that they did.

Don: That's going to be a good venture, there's so many people around.

Allie: As a kid, I had some birthday parties there. It was great. That's where everyone went.

Carol: There was one in Exton too, that West Whiteland Fire Company had.

Don: The only skates I had were clamp-on, with a key.

Carol: With a key, yes.

Allie: What?

Don: The rollers had a platform, with clips on the side and front. It cupped your foot.

Allie: So, you stuck your shoe into it?

Don: Yeah. The things hooked on the sides of the shoe.

Carol: You used the key to tighten it up to fit your shoe.

Allie: That's so crazy.

Don: There was a screw underneath.

Allie: Now that you say it though, I think I've used them. I wonder if the Caln Roller Rink had them. I'm not much of a skater, I don't know where else I've used them. I don't think it had a key, but the adjusting to the shoe is familiar.

Carol: Yes. So, your amusement was the picnics.

Don: Yes. There was a field, too. Lloyd's farm. We had a baseball diamond down there, close to Beaver Creek. There was a dam there, a low one.

Allie: Does that get flooded?

Don: The little league field? Not that one. There was no organization to it. He was real nice, but I don't think we ever asked. To go to school, we'd cut across the field. The dam made the water deep enough to swim. You could have a good time there. I had a boat there, once. We made a boat out of a piece of corrugated roofing with a two by four on each end, tarred the ends so it wouldn't leak and it was maybe eight or ten feet long. We'd have our fun with it and then when we'd leave so we'd sink it in one part so nobody would get to it. Nobody would steal it anyway, it weighed a ton. We had as much fun making it as using it.

Allie: Did you float it around, or fish?

Don: Float, more. That creek goes up to Lloyd Avenue. There might still be a pumping station, with a bridge. A nursery school is there now.

Carol: Yes.

Don: A dog park, too.

Allie: That little bridge?

Don: The pumping station was right by that bridge.

Carol: What did they pump?

Don: Water, I guess.

Carol: This is a weird question, and nobody seems to remember but me, but going into Downingtown on Creek Road before Dead Man's Curve there was a water company of some kind. It wasn't Wissahicken.

Don: It was a bottled water company. Tim Hennessy had one. The state representative.

Carol: It was raided for gambling. Men were there gambling.

Don: Gambling bottles of water?

-Laughter-

Carol: I guess it was a good location. I don't know.

Allie: Maybe the beer baron was there.

Don: Piel's Beer. I don't even know if there is a Piel's Beer anymore.

Allie: So, did they actually own a brewery?

Don: Underground. The brewery was somewhere else.

Carol: I think it was P-I-E-L-S?

Don: Yeah.

Carol: It was a beer.

Allie: Locally?

Carol: No, I think it was somewhere around Reading. Don, you were saying that the people who made their money off of that lived here. Is that right?

Don: No, I don't know that they ever lived here, but there was a big house and they were somehow connected. I don't know if anyone is living there now.

Carol: Was it Piel's Brothers? Does that sound right?

Don: Yeah.

Allie: Let me look this up, too.

Carol: I have a vague memory of their advertising being two men. I might be wrong.

Allie: P-I-E-L-S. Also called Piel Brothers, Piel's Beer. "It's a regional lager beer brewed in the East New York section of Brooklyn." I don't know if that is its origin, but that is what this source says. "It was founded in 1883 by the Piel brothers".

Don: They might have lived there. I don't know.

Carol: You know, and this is another question for you Don; at one time people from Philadelphia would have summer homes out here. There's one family named Petri that had a summer home and when they retired, I guess, they moved to this home.

Don: Hibernia Mansion was similar. It was a summer home for the guy who owned it.

Carol: I know that my cousins had a place in Perkiomen. It had a creek. So, that's familiar to you that people would come out here to summer?

Don: Oh, yeah. This was considered a long way. It was thirty miles from Philly. That's a long way. Where do you go to work?

Allie: Me?

Don: Yeah.

Allie: I'm self-employed.

Don: Oh.

Allie: So not very far, just down the stairs for my commute.

Don: How about your husband?

Allie: In Paoli. Devon, technically. He's at the Devereux Foundation.

Don: Oh, yeah? He probably knows some Hannums then, who used to be administrators there.

Allie: Maybe, though he hasn't been there terribly long. It's been less than five years. A lot of people stick around there though.

Carol: Why were you asking about how far the commute is? Are you relating that to the summer homes?

Don: Yeah, yes. This was a long way, if you're coming by horse and carriage. They would come by train, but that's still a long way because you might have a transfer.

Carol: What was the appeal? Was it because it was cooler out here because it wasn't the city?

Don: I think you could do things out here that you couldn't do in a big town. You didn't have to worry about locking your doors.

Carol: Right. You didn't have to worry about that.

Don: Thinking back to where I worked (Armstrong), the office was in the basement of an old stone house and the windowsills were twice as deep as regular with two drawers in it for the payments of the people who worked there. He would pay them through that window.

Allie: I recently saw that somewhere else (the windows). I think it was an old banker or something within the house, and people would come up to it. Probably a similar concept.

Don: It never occurred to me why he was paying them. There was a farm there. I remember that on the way home one time it was snowing and I thought I could make it, but I didn't get through

town. I stopped to put the chains on and there was a hook to make the chains longer and I laid one on the trunk of the car and drove all the way home and it never fell off.

Allie: Really?

Don: I wondered if I was a good driver or if there were just good roads.

END