Interviewee: Gene Breiting
Interviewer: Jack Templeton
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Transcriber: Jennifer Pustz

Gene Breiting

Side One

This is an interview with Gene Breiting [GB] being done on Wednesday, March 18, 1992, by Jack Templeton [JT]. This is for the Friends of Stewart Library Oral History Project about Grinnell during the Depression and World War II.

JT: Gene, let's go back to, say, 1930. How old would you have been in 1930?

GB: Seventeen.

JT: And have you lived here all your life

GB: I was born and raised in Grinnell. I lived on, was born in, 922 Pearl Streeet in Grinnell.

JT: I see. What did your family consist of in those years?

GB: Well, I hesitate to say this, but my mother was a single parent family. And I lived with, in a small house—it was a two-bedroom, two-story house—my mother and grandmother and two aunts. And I think a normal growing up period in my life.

JT: So, you were an only child then?

GB: Right, uh-huh.

JT: Uh, let's see, you went— So at age seventeen you would have been in high school then, wouldn't you?

GB: Well, I graduated in '31, and then my birthday, when I was eighteen, was just a month later, in July. So I guess I was kind of early out.

JT: Yeah. I got to thinking about all the problems that kids have nowadays, and I got to thinking about that age group. How would a, how would a young man in those days that saw a nice young lady and wanted to get to know her better, how would he go about that?

GB: Well, I guess in my case it wasn't too big a problem because I got a job right after I got out of high school in '31, and I was, I was a meat cutter. And my boss was Lawrence Ballard. And Lawrence Ballard still lives— He is fifteen years older than I am. So I think that makes him ninety-three at this, at the present time. And, of course, all the mothers, a lot of the mothers, brought their girls with them

when they came to the meat market. So it was no problem having contact with a lot of the young ladies.

JT: Well, if you wanted to have a date, say, what, what was the leading attraction in town to do, or to go to or—

GB: Well, you went to the movies. That was the— I think that was, as far as I was concerned, that was the big, big thing to do.

JT: What was here for a movie?

GB: Well, we had the Iowa Theater. I think, though—at the time I'm thinking of, it may have been called the Colonial Theater. And the Strand Theater. The Strand Theater was operated by the Marts. And I don't recall the— I can remember a grandfather, and the father, and then George Mart. George Mart was in high school just a little ahead of me. And then he later took over the management of the Strand Theater. I don't recall the management of the Colonial Theater. The Colonial Theater was later renamed the Iowa Theater. And that building has since been torn down. It's now occupied by— It's on the corner, on the southeast, southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Main Street. Redden-Miller office outfitters is located there now.

JT: After you went to the movie then, I've heard people talk about various ice cream stores and what not. Was that a kind of a custom?

GB: It was for a lot of people. I never did go there very much. I used to go there when I was much younger with one of my aunts. She'd take me and she was well acquainted with the proprietors of the, of the Candyland. I think that was Pete Staffanou who was one of the owners. And there were two. Jim Jorres and, I think Ted Staffanou was also in there. There was three Greek men.

JT: Did the churches, as an example, did they sponsor much for the kids in those days or—?

GB: Well, we used to have youth groups. When I was very young I used to attend church, Sunday school regularly, but I think along about eight or ten I dropped out. And then I started going— I was going to the Methodist Church then, at that time. Then I started going to the Presbyterian Church with my wife.

JT: Talking about kids today and yesterday, you hear so much about drugs and that type of thing. How about alcohol? Of course back in—that would have been Prohibition time. But did alcohol enter into the young kids' outlook on life any?

GB: Oh, yeah, I think I experimented with it. Never was [laughter] too enthused about it. I can remember getting awfully sick one time. But I remember when I worked in the market, I got news of, that there was—whiskey was available

from, I think it was from one of the Criswell boys. I can't remember for sure his name, but I think he later lived in Montezuma.

JT: That was bootlegging?

GB: Yeah, that was a bootlegging operation, so I bought a gallon. [laughter] I don't think, I didn't give very much for it. Seemed to me like it was around a dollar. And a big clear glass jug, you know, a whole gallon of whiskey. And I was working then in the market, and—

JT: Do you think they had made it themselves? Or had they purchased it from somebody?

GB: Oh, yeah, yeah, I'm sure. No, they made it. They had, they had a still. I just had the impression that it was south of Grinnell somewhere. I know that I could have easily gotten into the liquor business, because I just happened to mention to another young friend that I had this, and he started spreading the word around and I had guys coming in wanting to buy it from me, wanting to buy a quart, you know, or something like that [laughter].

JT: What about tobacco, was that a— Did people try to prohibit that? And was it an out behind the barn thing?

GB: Oh, yeah. Well, when I was real young, I can remember making corn cob pipes out of— There was lots of corn cobs around because people used to have them in their, in their sheds, you know. They used them to start fires with. So there were lots of corn cobs available and we used to make corn cob pipes and try to smoke corn silks. That was pretty rank stuff, but later on, about high school and shortly thereafter, we experimented with cigarettes and cigars and pipes. But I never cared much for it, so I didn't pursue it.

JT: Was that about the limit of the drug problem, if you want to call it a problem, alcohol and tobacco, in those days?

GB: I think it was.

JT: You mentioned this meat market. Was that a lone meat market? Or where, where was it located and what was—

GB: When I went to work for Mr. Ballard in the meat market it was located in one of the combination grocery store and market. And it was known as Thompson's Market and it was owned by Link Thompson. And he had several stores. He had a store in Belle Plaine and Marshalltown and Newton and Grinnell. I don't know whether there were any others or not. But the location was where John's Furniture Store is now [Ed. note: Main Street]. And it was there for a couple of years, and then the United Store, the United Grocery Store was across the street, where Ben Franklin

is now located. So the United Store moved north to where Pagliai's is now [Ed. note: Fifth Avenue]. And then Thompson moved across the street into the location where the United Grocery Store had been.

JT: Was that your first job?

GB: That was my first job. I worked for Mr. Ballard for five years.

JT: So you started at twelve years old or something like that?

GB: No, no, no. That's when I got out of, right out of high school, yeah.

JT: Oh, right out of high school.

GB: Yeah. Well, you know, jobs were scarce. And I was paid ten dollars a week and the hours were about sixty-six to seventy hours a week. And we worked, through the weekdays, we worked from seven o'clock in the morning till whenever we could get away in the evening, which we tried to be about six o'clock or later. A lot of times it was six-thirty, you know, before you could get away from the place. And then on Saturdays, well, you had to show up at six o'clock in the morning and work till midnight, with an hour off for lunch and suppertime. And then there was once a month, you had to take inventory, and that usually lasted until one-thirty or two o'clock Sunday morning. So you knew you put in a week's work.

JT: As far as cutting the meat, was it just, it was on the job training then? You start a job—

GB: Yeah, uh-huh, uh-huh, yeah. It took a while, you know. To begin on, it was counter-hopping and waiting on the trade. But I gradually got into the meat cutting.

JT: Where did the meat come from?

GB: We bought meat from Iowa Packing Company in Des Moines, and Cudahy in Omaha, and Swift and Company in Omaha.

JT: It wasn't a local situation, then, where some—

GB: No, no, but there were, two meat markets that had local operations where they produced everything locally. McNally's was one of them, and I think the other was a combination of two stores, it was Ira Goodrich and he was part of the operation of the other one, and Ed Ahrens, which was called the North Provision, that was the other operation. And they had slaughterhouses outside of town. And they did their own.

JT: There was a good number of stores of either grocery or meat market, weren't there in town at that point?

GB: Oh, yeah, uh-huh.

JT: Seemed like an awful lot of them.

GB: Yeah.

JT: How do you justify that? I mean, how could the town support that many?

GB: Well, let's see, I don't know. To begin on, I could remember Barkley's Market. That was a grocery where DeLong's now has an outlet store. And then there was Ramsey. That was Rick Ramsey's grandfather probably. He had a store where—that's been torn down. It's approximately where the addition to Brenton Bank is [Ed. note: Broad Street] right in that area. And then there was the North Market. It was a little farther north than the middle of the block on Broad Street. And there was a grocery store on, way back when I was very small, on Commercial Street, by the name of Dawley. And that's where you could buy penny candy, lots of it and lots of it on display. And there was another grocery store where the Koffee Shoppe is. Let's see, can't recall the name of it, I know it.

JT: How would the population of Grinnell or the trade territory compare with today?

GB: Well, I think population-wise, Grinnell was a community of about five thousand. And there was lots—there was a lot more people in the rural areas, and people lived pretty close together, you know.

JT: So, I suppose the population, trade population, could have been somewhat comparable then. I guess it always seemed to me that there was an awful lot of stores for—from what I've heard, you know, over the years.

GB: Uh-huh, yeah. Well, the Pearl Street was not a paved street when I lived there.

JT: Let's talk a little bit about your, about that house. You say it was a two story house?

GB: Yeah.

JT: How was it heated?

GB: Heated by a, we'll call it a cook stove, a coal range in the kitchen. The kitchen was kind of a lean-to on the back of the house, on the east end. And the, and there was a round heating stove in the living room. And early on it became my job to bring the coal from the shed at the back of the lot, and the kindling, daily. You nearly had to bring about two buckets of coal in. And we got kindling. We got nice wood from Spaulding Manufacturing Company. They had a big wood working operation.

JT: You didn't have to use corn cobs?

GB: No, we bought kindling from the factory, and they'd bring a load, you know, and it was brought to the shed and thrown in the building. And—

JT: How about the coal?

GB: The coal was always, they were both delivered by a team, wagon and team.

JT: Was there a company in town that dealt in coal?

GB: Well, there was—

JT: Coal in summer and ice in, or coal in winter and ice in summer, or—?

GB: No, the ice was manufactured there at the building at West Street and Second Avenue, yeah, on the south west corner. I think that's now where there is a veterinarian there and also a landscape business in there. But there were lots of coal dealers in town, I think Richardson Phelps Lumber Company, and York Lumber Company, and earlier Watland Lumber Company. And I can remember there was one coal dealer, my grandmother used to buy and pay for her coal, it was located in what's now a vacant building right across the street from Thorndike. A different building from what is there now. It was a little wooden shack. But I think—did I mention that there was Watland Lumber Company? Watland Lumber Company was a big lumber yard on the corner right there.

JT: It also dealt with coal then?

GB: Coal and lumber, uh-huh. Right there on the corner of West Street and Fourth Avenue on the south-east corner.

JT: What about plumbing in those days?

GB: [laughter] Yeah. I made some notes here about that. There were a lot of outhouses, up and down, I think I counted, as near as I can remember, on Pearl Street there—our block was divided with an alley that was a "T" rather than running straight through the block, you know. It was a kind of a "T." But at least in the area where we were, there were six outhouses behind the houses there. But we did get plumbing, oh, I suppose I was about ten or twelve, we got an indoor toilet.

JT: What about water, running water?

GB: We had, we had running water all the time I lived on Pearl Street.

JT: And you were born there, you say, you were born in that house.

GB: Right, uh-huh.

JT: So, then how long did you live there?

GB: Well, my grandmother died in '25 and my mother died in '29 and then my aunt, who was my guardian, she died in '35, and that was it. So then I got a—

JT: So you were pretty much on your own then.

GB: I got a room on Spring Street, just close, within a block of where I had been living. And I lived with those people for, let's see— That was, Imadelle and

Paul Wilson, they took me in and provided me with room and board. It cost me five dollars a week for my room and board and laundry. And then they went to the farm. They started farming, and I lived with Imadelle's mother. And their name was, let's see, McCasslin, Art and Alice McCasslin. They were wonderful people.

JT: Before we get—I forgot to ask you about electricity. What was the situation there?

GB: Well, we had electricity, but we—

JT: As far as you can remember, all your life, you didn't get into the kerosene lamp.

GB: No, well, I can remember there being kerosene lamps around the house, but I think they may have been just for emergency use. But you know the little electric meters, they were small, and the wiring—there were four, there were two wires in and two wires out, you know, to meter your electricity. But by the grapevine, I found out that there was a—you could take a piece of wire and make it into a 'U' shape with two ends bared and you shoved it up into the connections and you beat the electric, you beat the utility company out of revenue [laughter].

JT: Was it, was the electric company, utility still the same, the same as it is now, or was it ?

GB: Well, there was a, a utility company, I don't remember what it was called, but I know there are records of it because I've seen pictures of it at the library. The facility or the machine that produced the electricity was a big steam- operated, steam-engine-driven dynamo, and it's located right in this, where the Iowa Southern Utility Offices are now. There was a huge building there for a boiler and then there was room for the generating facilities. And then north of it was a storage yard for coal. And there was siding there where they could run the coal cars almost in between, well, what's Lannom, what is now DeLong's brick building, and the utility company office. And this was unloaded by a big clam-type of scoop and there are pictures of it at the library. And—you know an interesting thing—they could not provide enough electricity for the Spaulding Manufacturing Company, and the, and the community. So the Spaulding Manufacturing Company, they had their own electric producing equipment down there. And they had big boilers and a big—

JT: That's why that big chimney I see is still—

GB: Yeah, and a steam-engine-operated dynamo up there. And the engineer that operated that, he lived across the street from me. And he took a liking to me, and I, at one time, he took me with him when he went to work early in the morning and I stayed with him all day long at the factory. And we started the generator in the

morning and then he had all kinds of tasks to check around and see that everything's right, you know.

JT: Now, where, when, was this, and your age?

GB: I must have been seven or eight, very young. But then he took me on a tour of the whole factory, and I can remember walking hand in hand.

JT: Did that become a routine with you then or?

GB: No, that only happened once.

JT: Oh, the one time.

GB: Only one time. One time deal. But at that time, a black man who fired the boiler, and his name was John Lucas, and he was a lay minister and very likable person. And his voice— When we were small, we used to go down there, along side the factory building, and he and the engineer—the engineer's name was Rockwood, that was his last name—and they would be at the window there near the boiler room, and we could talk to them, and it was interesting, fascinating to me.

JT: It's interesting that this Lucas was a black man. What was the black population?

GB: Well, it was pretty small. There were the Renfrows and there were three or four girls and two boys. And the boys names were Paul and Rudy. Rudy was the older one. I didn't know him. But Paul Renfrow was in one of my high school classes, I was acquainted with him. And they lived in a house on First Avenue about two and a half blocks west of West Street, on the north side of the street. And it's a house that has a retaining wall in front of it. And they still own the property, I think. Edith, the youngest girl, lives in Chicago.

JT: Well, he was a lay minister for—the black population had their own church, was that what it was, or was it something?

GB: I don't know, I don't know. Well, you see, this, John Lucas, he was a different family than the Renfrows, the Renfrows—

Side Two

JT: Any other non-whites in Grinnell that you were aware of at the time?

GB: Yeah, there was another family by the name of Tibbs. I know Harold Tibbs. I can't remember the other. There was another boy, and the father. They lived on down south Summer Street. And Harold Tibbs, who was a young man—can't remember what his age would have been, probably fourteen when I worked in the meat market—and he used to sell the *Saturday Evening Post***.** He brought me a

Saturday Evening Post every week. I paid him a nickel for it. Isn't that amazing? It was a big magazine, but let's try to imagine how much he made from the sale of a five cent magazine. His father was, I guess you'd call him a boot-black shoeshine man, that worked in one of the barber shops, I think, what they call the, right across the street[Ed. note: Fourth Avenue] from the Koffee Shoppe in Grinnell, where the Hair Hutch is. And the barber shop belonged to Jay Parrot.

JT: Were there any Orientals or Spanish, you know, Mexican types in town?

GB: Mexicans. Yeah, there was. Let's see, Tony Torres, worked for the utility company. He was a janitor-type person. I don't think he had any children of his own, but he had, he had relatives. I remember, when I started to school, at Parker School, Simone Torres started about that time. And they lived in buildings provided by the railroad about just east of Reed Street on the north side of the railroad track. There were, I can remember, it seemed to me like those buildings were all painted yellow. They were the maintenance sheds where the railroads for their little putt-putt cars and all their tools. And then, I can't remember how many of these little buildings there were, but there were buildings there provided for these Mexicans. And—

JT: They were transient though, were they?

GB: Well, you know, Simone dropped out of school. I don't recall when. I don't think he went very long, but he still lives in Grinnell and he is a maintenance person for Latcham Enterprises in one of his apartments. And I see him in town occasionally.

JT: What would be your comment on how they were—these non-whites as an example—were integrated into the community? I don't suppose there was enough of them to make much difference.

GB: No. As far as I was concerned they were just like one of the rest of the guys.

JT: Thinking about Pearl Street reminds me of one of the things that they were kind of interested in was Uncle Sam's Club. Do you know anything about that?

GB: No, I don't. And, you know, it was only like, probably two and a half blocks south of me, just across the railroad tracks.

JT: It was in existence then.

GB: Oh, yeah, uh-huh. I would like to mention about Pearl Street and the dirt roads, and the farmers bringing their cattle to market and driving them down Pearl Street. And they would go south across the railroad track and make a left on Second Avenue. And the stockyards was where Macy had his cement facility. It was a good-

sized stockyards there. And that's where the cattle would be driven. And there was usually a mess, you know [laughter]. If it was wet, why they chewed up the road and also the parking, because there were cattle everywhere.

JT: Were they just dirt or was there no gravel on them?

GB: Just, just plain dirt.

JT: There was no gravel at all.

GB: No.

JT: So in the winter you had a problem—

GB: Well, not, not really because early on all the traffic was by wagon and team. And they—in the summertime, you know, we had ice delivered to the house, block ice. And also, well, they had a year-round grocery delivery system. Can't remember what they call it, was it co-op, cooperative grocery delivery system. The merchants would put up orders that they would get by telephone, or maybe somebody—one of the family members—would drop a note off at the grocery store and then the order would be filled up. And then this cooperative delivery picked up orders from a number of the merchants, grocery merchants, and delivered them to the homes.

JT: With team and wagon.

GB: With team and wagon. Mules! They were the team. And when they start—

JT: And how was this co-op compensated then?

GB: I have no idea how that was worked out. But it originated in a building that's now gone and located across the street south from the Chamber of Commerce building, right there in the area just west of Manly's law office [Ed. note: Fourth Avenue]. It was a big building there, and that's where the thing started. And they had mules and the wagons in that building. And then they moved it down—the facility was moved down to—let's see, that street, that would be Second Avenue, on the north side of Second Avenue between High Street and State Street. There was a large red barn there where they had storage facilities.

JT: You mentioned orders being put in by telephone. What was the telephone situation?

GB: Well, uh—

JT: Prevalent?

GB: The telephones were few and far between. We didn't own a telephone.

JT: You didn't have one?

GB: No. Close— You see, we had a neighbor two doors away that had a telephone. That's—and probably in either direction, they had telephones, but we did not have a telephone.

JT: Orders were left and put in by phone and so on. Did most people run a bill at the store?

GB: Oh yeah, uh-huh, run a weekly or monthly bill.

JT: Did they do that at quite a few stores? How would that work?

GB: Well, they had to have a bookkeeper, a person who did nothing but take care of all that accounting. And you've seen these little order pads. They're about three inches wide and about five inches long, and duplicates, you know. And the orders would be written up and one of the sheets would go with the order and the other one would go to the bookkeeping department. And those—I can remember those bookkeeping systems. They were big things and they had lots of slots in them for these orders and the little spring clips that kept each one in place, you know.

JT: Was there a tendency for a family to run a bill at a lot of different stores so they could, I'm thinking about evening out their expenses—pay one this month and one the next or?

GB: I don't know about that.

JT: I just wondered how that, how that would work.

GB: I remember one of my summertime—when I was oh, eight years old, one of my summertime projects was to harvest what they called dill, dill plant and dill seed that people used for putting up, canning pickles. There also seemed to be an abundance of that stuff in our back yard. And I'd get empty, new empty sacks from the grocery, and then put a bundle of this dill in each sack and tie it up, you know, at the end, and put as many of those as I could put in a wagon, and take them to a grocery store and sell them. I don't recall what I got for them, but it was a nice little business where I picked up a little bit of change.

JT: Using this dill, was there much home preservation of food?

GB: Oh, yes.

JT: Did you folks get into gardening or— I suppose, everybody had a little garden.

GB: Well, yeah, we had a garden, and it was not one of the nicer things to be doing, to try to keep weeds out of the garden in the summertime when it was so terribly hot, you know. I probably did it under protest. It seems like the— I can't remember so much canning in our own household, but I suppose there was some, probably tomatoes and maybe some apples, canned a few apples.

JT: Were the prices at the stores pretty competitive, you know, from one store to the other, for say a can of peas or ground meat or— and then what did the stores do to entice people to come to them?

GB: Well, they had grocery ads, just like they do now. After— I know in the meat department, we'd put ground meat on sale but we would try to sell it sometimes at the very lowest, probably a nickel a pound, for ground meat, beef or pork. Actually it was pretty poor quality, I'll tell you that, now that I look back on it. It was not graded as well as it is today.

JT: Gene, how long did you long then for the store as a meat cutter?

GB: I worked for Mr. Ballard for five years.

JT: So you would have been about twenty-two or twenty-three?

GB: Yeah. One of the gimmicks of the local merchants was the establishment of what they called "Golden Wednesday." And I think they gave coupons, like theater tickets, you know, or double coupons, and merchants would give these to their customers for their purchases. And then on Wednesday, they had this drum where all the merchants put their tickets, and they rotated this drum, just like a lottery thing and they had a drawing, and—

JT: Where was that done?

GB: It was usually done somewhere on, in the middle of Fourth Avenue.

JT: Right out on the street?

GB: Right out on the street, or maybe down there by the corner of the park opposite the bank building. There's a nice picture upstairs in the library where I'm standing on the back of our pick-up—it belonged to Doris' father. And I'm in that photo, when we were having one of these drawings. And you'd be amazed by the number of people that showed up for this drawing.

JT: Was that an attempt to get away from Saturday night, maybe, you think?

GB: Well, it was to get people into town, you know.

JT: Other than Saturday night.

GB: Other than Saturday night. And maybe get a little spin-off from people just being in town, you know, to entice them to buy something.

JT: Now that Saturday night thing was a big thing and they've gotten pretty well away from it now.

GB: Yeah, well, what I remember about Saturday night, of course, I was always working, but we were— They held dances above the store where John's Furniture Store is now. And I can remember that old floor just jumping [laughter]. But there would be more than one dance. There would be a dance also down there

above the building where DeLong's has his outlet store now, and also above Trendsetters. That used to be, where Penney's store used to be. So, lots of farm people came in and went to the dances. I never attended any of those dances. Something that I've always regretted.

JT: But after you left the meat market, what was your next job, Gene?

GB: Well, I went to California for six months. I read these captivating ads for being a diesel mechanic. And I fell for the bait and went to one of the schools out there in California for six months, and never did anything with it.

JT: But it was an actual school?

GB: Yes, it was, uh-huh.

JT: And did they give you enough training that you could do some good?

GB: Yeah, I think they did, yes, uh-huh.

JT: What'd they charge you for that?

GB: Hum, seems like it was around two hundred dollars.

JT: And that would have been, oh, about 1935, '36, something like that, I suppose.

GB: Thirty—thirty six.

JT: How'd you go out there?

GB: Went out on bus.

JT: Oh, the bus.

GB: Uh-huh. There was another fellow in Grinnell by the name of Ray Dean, he thought he'd like to do that too. And so we went out together. But he changed his mind after he got out there. He had a relative out there, and of course, we split up and I don't know what he did after that.

JT: But it was a six-months course.

GB: Uh-huh. Approximately, uh-huh. I had an aunt and an uncle that lived—I lived in Pasadena, and they lived in Westwood. And it was about a forty-five minute journey by street car and bus to get to their place.

JT: But after that was over, you came back to Grinnell?

GB: Came back to Grinnell and got married. Went to work for Doris's father. And we got into the new and used furniture business, and then we got into the appliance business. And I worked there for eight years.

JT: What was, what was the name of the store?

GB: Grinnell Furniture Exchange.

JT: And where was that located?

GB: Well, originally it started out in the—where Parish and Cram have a location, but that operation encompassed all of those buildings. And then it was kind of consolidated and then we moved to Fourth Avenue where the bakery is now. And then we moved to Main Street where DeLong's outlet store is now. And I was, I had always been fascinated, since my meat cutting days, with refrigeration. So I got a home-study course and mastered that. And there were lots of refrigerators that could be serviced and repaired and were not, what we call, these sealed units, the hermetic units that we have today. They were—they involved separate motors and compressors and all the accessories. And there was lots of repair work to do.

JT: The ice box had pretty well gone out by then?

GB: Yeah, well, there were lots of refrigerators being sold, yeah. And we gradually worked into the newer sealed-type units. And the war was coming on, you know.

JT: Yeah. Who—go over this store organization again. Who did it belong to, Gene?

GB: It belonged to Doris's father.

JT: I see. And who was he?

GB: His name was Herbert Hutchison. H.W. Hutchison. And his wife's name was Ruby. And we worked for them for eight years.

JT: You say "we."

GB: Doris and I.

JT: You mean you and your wife.

GB: Yeah, uh-huh. She did the book work. And we acquired three children by 1943. And people were being drafted right and left, and I felt like I was doing an essential service, taking care of the refrigerators and appliances in the community. I was not working in an essential industry. But by that token, I landed in the draft. And so I was drafted into the army, having been married eight years and having three children.

JT: And what would your age have been then?

GB: Let's see—thirty, I was thirty.

JT: And I guess the draft limit by the end of the war was thirty-eight, I think. Wasn't it? Didn't they go as high as thirty-eight?

GB: I think so, because after I finished basic training and was on my way to Europe, on the boat that I was on, I ran into a man who was a neighbor of ours. He had no children, but he was thirty-seven, or thirty-eight.

JT: Um, thinking about the economy and the war and how things were changing, did you get, could you notice on the times you came home from service, on leave if you got any—maybe you didn't get much—but could you notice the economy changing any here in Grinnell during that time? Thinking about how did the war affect Grinnell?

GB: Not, not really, because when I came back the war was over. And that meant a slackening of the industrial output. So, I think in this community, there were not many jobs. It was kind of a bad time in my life.

JT: From that early—from that period?

GB: Yeah, coming back. I tried to make it on my own for a number of years.

JT: As a repair man?

GB: As a repair man. But that business petered out because of the type of machines that were being produced. They were more service-free.

JT: So then, then what happened?

GB: Well, then I went to work for a Maytag dealer, local. And I did service work for him on his washing machines, conventional washing machines and automatic washing machines, and clothes driers, and small engine repair. There was a lot to, lot to do there all the time. And help take care of a retail store. And he also had a bottle gas business that he had taken over, which my father-in-law and I had established during the time we had the furniture and appliance business.

JT: Was that out of business by then? The furniture, the—your father-in-law's?

GB: He sold out during the time I was in the service. Yeah, that was a non-existent business then. Then I worked for that dealer for a couple of years. And then I worked for the water department for a couple of years. And then I went to work for the Thermo-gas Company. I think I worked for them for about five years. And then I went to work for the Department of Agriculture, in the Weights and Measures Division, operating an LP gas meter prover. Measures the accuracy of the meters, the delivery meters for LP gas. And that was a political job that lasted one year. I was in at the time that Liddy was not in office, and as soon as he got back in office, why, he gave me the ax. And then I got a job down to Amana.

JT: How were you able to get that?

GB: Well, let's see. There was a period of time there—let's see, after I left Thermo-gas company—that that we bought and operated a soft-serve ice cream business for six years, my wife and I. And that was a job that lasted from March to about the first of October. And during that time I also worked for Thermo-gas. So I

had accumulated quite a variety of experiences. So Amana was in a, a hiring period and I was fortunate enough to be hired as a supervisor with my past experiences. And I worked for them for eleven years.

JT: Was Amana, Amana is now a part of—

GB: They were a part of Raytheon at that time.

JT: All along?

GB: At that time.

JT: How was that started originally?

GB: Amana?

JT: Was it started by the Amana Society?

GB: Well, there was a man by the name of George Forester that started the business there in the early thirties. And he started out—

JT: While the Amana was still in the con—

Side Three

JT: This Amana experience may be a little removed from Grinnell, but I think it probably should be of interest because it's close enough I think that a lot of people are involved with it. Ah, but thinking of the beginning, Gene, that was still, what I'll call a closed society over there. Say, when he started the business, is that right? I mean, did those, did the Amana residents, the members of the society, were they the workers then?

GB: Well, yeah, but there were people from other local communities that were working with the factory.

JT: Even before they went out of it.

GB: George Forester started that business by promoting the meat locker businesses, for people brought their sections of their home-killed meats and brought to the lockers and the locker cut it up and wrapped it and put it in their freezers and kept in the storage there. And then his refrigerator business evolved from that. I think he built home lockers, big upright freezers, you know.

JT: Would the fact that Amana, the factory was there, do you think that would have had any effect on their decisions to go out of the communal society?

GB: I really couldn't say about that.

JT: Oh. By the time that you joined them then, they had been in business quite a while.

GB: Yeah. And they were expanded, during a— I think probably it was fortunate that I was hired on as a supervisor, because they were in a period of expanding.

JT: But working there, I'm thinking about again the Amana Society and those people, and would working there have been any different, say, from working at Maytag, do you think?

GB: No.

JT: Because of the—I'm trying to think of the closed society aspect and whether that had any bearing on it.

GB: The compensation was not as good as it would have been at Maytag. There was a period of time there when I actually— I knew more people in the factory, you know, a factory family entity, than I did around Grinnell, because I spent so much time down there. Particularly when I started down there, we started working a nine hour day, and a lot of overtime, three hours of overtime. So, I made a pretty long day, you know, when you figure an hour travel time each direction and a half-hour off for lunch.

JT: And I suppose with the size of their work force now that a lot of them, maybe a majority of them, from, away from Amana anyhow.

GB: Oh, yeah, there's lots of people that a—in Williamsburg and Victor and Ladora area that work down there. There were even people from, when I was down there, people from Tama and Toledo worked down there, Belle Plaine, you know. Then people beyond, from the east side of Amana. I worked in various areas down there, with my background and service. My first job was being supervisor on what they call line repair, taking care of problems as the units are moving along the line. And then I got into final repair and crating. I was a supervisor in crating for a period of time, particularly at night. Then I went on a day shift and supervisor on chest fabrication. I don't know why that was probably the most miserable job that I had, because nothing seemed to go right in that job. Some days we had as many, we'd probably have half as many units go out the backdoor in the form of junk as went out the line in regular production. Then I got into the service parts, and I worked there quite a few years. And that department has been greatly expanded since I worked there. But it was, it was interesting, a lot more interesting than I ever thought that factory work could be.

JT: Uh, Gene, let's get back, one thing that came to my mind, let's get back into the early war days. I was thinking about, how did the people—getting back to your meat market, although you weren't in there—what can you tell me about

rationing and so on, life in Grinnell during the war time period there, with shortages?

GB: Well, um,

JT: I don't know when ration books and things like that started. And I know we had them.

GB: You know we had a division of labor and Doris, my wife, took care of the— she took care of the ration books, so I don't remember much about the darn things! What I do remember is that we acquired a '37 Ford just before—let's see, '37—must have been about 1940. And just before they froze the availability of new tires, I had bought a set of new tires all the way around for the vehicle. And I got, had an association with Duke McCurry and he was, I don't remember what his connection was with the, with the basketball players, but he invited me to convey basketball players to the local communities around Grinnell. And he got me gas ration tickets. So I had lots of gas ration tickets. And the little old Ford was a pretty reliable vehicle, but it had mechanical brakes on it, and they were terrible. It—I put in a—one of these gas heaters in the thing. You remember them? Just can't remember—South Wind or something like that was the name of this one. Boy it really worked! [laughter] We were comfortable in that little old Ford! Yeah, we were comfortable in that thing.

JT: What, did they run on gasoline?

GB: Yeah, there was a—the gas, the gas vapor, it, I think there was two connections, there was one from the manifold, in the exhaust manifold, and one from the intake manifold. And, you see, the vacuum pulled the gas vapors into the thing and it was ignited inside of this little heater.

JT: I know there was an actual fire there.

GB: Yeah, there—

JT: I remember seeing that, but I thought maybe, I didn't know how they worked, I thought maybe it came out from the gasoline.

GB: No, it, the gas

JT: Well, it did, it did originate from—

GB: Well, yeah, it was gas vapor.

JT: It was gas vapor from the—

GB: It was ignited inside of the combustion chamber inside of this little heater.

JT: I can remember they'd drive you out of there.

GB: They were a good heater.

JT: They really did the job.

GB: I wanted to say something about, oh, our recreations early on, say, during and, during and slightly before the high school period. We used to do an awful lot of walking and we would—when the weather was good, you know—we would walk out the Rock Island Railroad tracks, and particularly on Sunday afternoons. And we'd do a lot of exploring. I guess that's what kids do. And then we'd make side trips down to the Arbor Lake, and it was all—

JT: What was going on at Arbor Lake in those days?

GB: Well, when I was very young, there was a lot of activity at Arbor Lake. You know, there was a, there was a large building down there that was partially built out over the lake. And that was a bathing house, where you can dress, you know.

JT: On the east side of the lake?

GB: On the east side of the lake, yeah. And there was a road that went from the north end, along the east edge of the lake, you know, and then wound up around towards the, round up the hill, and over towards where Warner, Warner Steele lives. And—

JT: Is the shape of the lake and so on pretty much like the way it was then?

GB: Yeah, yeah. But there was more lake on the north side of the little bridge. You see—that's pretty much silted in from run off from, well, just from the community, and the streets.

JT: You could swim in it?

GB: Well, I don't remember swimming in it. No there wasn't any swimming up there, but there was boating.

JT: I see.

GB: —up there. You could go under the bridge, and you could paddle a boat up round in there and you could fish up in there. And in the winter time we went ice skating there. And we used to go skating there in the evenings, you know, when it was cold, boy, very cold. And one time, we went down there, speaking of "we," I had friends, a friend by the name of Stanley Smith and Bob Pearson. And one Sunday afternoon we went down to the lake and skated to the south end. Well, with the south end, we were not aware of it, but there are springs down there. And Stanley skated right into the thing, in waist-deep water. It's pretty cold, you know. But we fished him out, and there was nothing to do but skate the total length of the lake, back to the north end, where our car was parked. And then we got him home

and thawed him out. [laughter] But, it used to be fun to go down there at night and—

JT: How old would you have been then?

GB: Oh, probably eighteen, nineteen.

JT: Who would have had the car?

GB: Well, Stanley Smith had the car, he had a little Chevy, two-door Chevy. I couldn't say, probably about a '28 or a '29, something like that. Along about that time I bought a car. I think I must have bought it in about '30, '32. It was a '29 Chevy roadster. And it just had a trunk at the back end, you know. Well, I remember one time we went to see Wayne King after work in Des Moines, and—

JT: That must have been an expedition. You mean, after you got done work at the meat market?

GB: Yeah, right! We slipped one of the guys in trunk.

JT: It wasn't a rumble seat?

GB: No, it was a trunk. It became a rumble seat later. And we got him in without paying fare for him. But I can remember while we were up there they had, there was an amusement park there.

JT: Riverview?

GB: At Riverview. Yeah. And there was a giant slide, and I went down that giant slide and got cross-wise in the thing and injured my knee, because it got wedged in there, you know, in the thing. And it was terrible. I limped around for a long time, with that injured knee. Must have, I don't remember ever going to a doctor with it.

JT: Let's talk about that. What happened if you did get sick in Grinnell? What choices did you have?

GB: Well, I had scarlet fever when I was a kid, but I don't recall a doctor. My aunt worked for a doctor, a Doctor Lauder. And she worked for him for a number of years. And then I think he left town, went somewhere. Then she went to work for a Doctor Gallagher to be—she was a dental assistant. But when I started in the meat market, I went to the doctor frequently to get my fingers sewed up. I cut them frequently, and went to Doctor Porter. Dr. Porter was just new in town then, and he used to sew me up frequently. I have lots of scars on my hand to show for what, those experiences.

JT: Did anybody you knew of have to go to either hospital in those days? Did you have any experience with either one of them?

GB: Well, you know, I've thought about this frequently. I had cousins that lived on Reed Street and Second Avenue. That would be about a block south of the railroad track. And, see, I lived on Pearl Street, so that's a distance of about four blocks. So I would walk either out the railroad track or down west on Fourth Avenue and south on Reed Street to get to the cousins' house, where I spent a lot of time, in the summertime particularly. And in going past the hospital, I would see maybe one car there, on the south side of the hospital. Any number of times I had gone by there and seen maybe one car, maybe no cars! What were—

JT: Made you wonder what was going on there.

GB: Yeah!

JT: Or what wasn't going on.

GB: Well, you know, they had this building behind—it was a frame, frame house—behind the hospital that was called the "pest house." If you had a contagious disease, they put you in the "pest house" But—

JT: But now your scarlet fever was treated at home.

GB: Yeah. I was quarantined for thirty days. It was terrible. But I can remember so vividly walking to the cousins' house on the railroad track or by the street. And in the summertime, you know, the rails and the ties and the stones between the ties, they got so hot on bare feet, it was unbearable. But somehow or another you managed to do it.

JT: Did—was there a lot of barefoot going in those days?

GB: Oh, yeah, all the boys went barefoot. I have an interesting picture that was taken in 1920 by Childs, a prominent photographer in Grinnell. It was taken on the west steps of the old high school building and it was of a group of boys that had taken summer manual training classes that would probably go twice a week for a couple of hours. And they were instructed by a man by the name of Guy Nichols. He was a coach, but he was also our manual training instructor. And there were fifty-six boys in this picture. And on the first row, I'll say that most of them were barefoot.

JT: So it would have been not necessarily choice, but necessity then?

GB: Well—

JT: Or some of each?

GB: I think some of each, yeah. You couldn't wait to get out of your shoes when spring came.

JT: Thinking about the necessity and things of that order in the economy in Grinnell during the Depression, what about some of these programs? And what

effect did they have, like the WPA and the CCC and so on? Is there any evidence of that still around?

GB: Well, I don't know. Of course, I went to work right away, you know. There was probably just a month of elapsed time when I was not working. And my time was pretty well taken up by work. So, I know that some of the younger people got involved with the college, but I don't know in what respect.

JT: But as far as works projects and so on to employ people

GB: That's another story, that's another story. When the Depression deepened, people became, more people became without jobs and had to go on relief. They didn't have money. And then the stores initially started distributing commodities. There were— I remember in particular, that we distributed what you call "bacon squarse." It's jowl meat from the hog, and it's cured. And there's very little lean meat on it, it's mostly fat. And it was the responsibility of the local grocer to distribute this stuff to the people that had— I can't remember what they got. They must have gotten some kind of slip from the local welfare. I think it was a man by the name of Sam Reagan that headed that organization up. And these people that they had to, they would ask us to look for some meat that, some of this jowl meat that had a little meat in it. There was very little of it. It was nothing but fat. And they were restricted to the poorer quality of what they could get from the meat department.

JT: This organization that Sam was involved with, would you—as far as you know, was it a county— It was a governmental organization of some kind. It wasn't a charitable organization, was is?

GB: Yeah. I think it was, I think it was county, uh-huh. Then they'd begin to get food stamps.

JT: It came through county taxes then, that would have been involved with that I suppose. How did your store get reimbursed?

GB: I wasn't involved in that end of it, so I don't know. You don't realize how limited your vision is of these things, unless you're directly involved.

JT: But as far as what I'll call the federal government— I don't know, maybe it all came down through the state, but were there any of these ditch digging enterprises, and were there sewer works or bridge building or anything?

GB: I can remember there was. The county had a firewood project. They would go out, they would get crews together and they would go out and cut wood for people to have for firewood, you know. Along about that time, when things were tough. I was never involved in it, but I used to hear about people who got coal off of

coal cars that were going through town. They would throw coal off of the coal cars and they would pick it up later, you know.

JT: They were going so slow, they would climb on.

GB: Yeah, uh-huh. And I wouldn't be surprised if their—you know, coal storage, at that time at lumber yards, were just in bins that were not locked. There was probably a little looting of that at that time.

JT: Did things get so bad, Gene, were you aware of anybody that was, that really went under?

GB: No.

JT: What was the last resort?

GB: People were more self-reliant because, you know, farmers didn't get much for their products, but they had meat and they had garden produce, and they did lots of canning. So—

JT: What about somebody in town, though, that didn't have access to that. What was their last resort?

GB: Well, they went to the welfare office.

JT: The Sam Reagan organizations.

GB: Yeah, uh-huh. And I don't think—I never heard of anybody that was turned down.

JT: What about the—

GB: They didn't get very good stuff. Later on, you know, this commodity distribution was taken over by the welfare offices. The grocery store didn't— You see, originally, the welfare people, they were not set up to distribute the commodities.

JT: These commodities were, you call that, is that supplies that was in the store that was paid for by the government or was that—?

GB: Originally, yeah, but then later on it was, the government produce, purchased the produce and then they distributed it to these local organizations and they distributed it.

JT: Somewhat similar to what it is now.

GB: Yeah. I can remember people getting bags of grapefruit, bags of oranges. A lot of people didn't like grapefruit. It was something new to them. And we've had grapefruit given to us by people who've gotten those commodities.

JT: Did they barter, barter maybe?

GB: I wouldn't be surprised, but a lot of them just gave them to us, and there was lots of cheese, you know.

JT: Now what about housing. People couldn't pay their rent, was there, were there evictions? How did that go?

GB: You know—

JT: And taxes. You folks owned your house, you said.

GB: Well, we bought a house in—

JT: This one on Pearl Street? Did your family own that?

GB: Yeah, but Doris and I never lived there. And—

Side Four

GB: We bought a house in '43, shortly before I was inducted. And shortly after we moved in, we discovered that the furnace was burned out. It was a cast iron furnace and there was an enormous hole in the top of the furnace. So we had to put a new furnace in. But just prior to that we used to look at houses a lot. And rarely did we ever have to go get a key to a house. In fact, most of the houses were unlocked that were empty where you could get into them with a skeleton key. I don't know how many houses we looked at, you know, on Sunday afternoon.

JT: Were there a lot of empty houses?

GB: Oh, there were lots of empty houses! All over town.

JT: Why would that have been, Gene, that there were so many empty ones?

GB: Well—

JT: Had people left?

GB: Yeah, I think probably a lot of people went to the west coast, all up and down the west coast, because, you know, the military build up was accelerating and that's probably where they headed. There were lots of houses that were empty.

JT: But you don't think anybody really got evicted or the sheriff put their things out on the road or something?

GB: No. I don't know of anyone. I do know of one regrettable thing that happened during our time that we worked for Doris' father. We had friends, young friends, who had bought household goods in Grinnell and they had moved to Des Moines. And they had been unable to keep up payments. And the decision was made, whether it was right or wrong, to repossess the merchandise. And they were good friends of ours. And we went and took their furniture from them. That's something that we always regretted. Somehow or another we should have been able

to work out a deal, maybe. I don't why they, they were having trouble, you know, making ends meet and keeping jobs. And it was just a kind of regrettable situation.

JT: Well, like these stores and so on, I suppose there was probably a lot of personal charity.

GB: Yes, there was.

JT: That went on—a storekeeper—

GB: Yeah, I thought about that. Maybe, we didn't have much money, but maybe we could have helped them with their payments. Hard to say.

JT: Were there bums, tramps— That situation—did they see much of them?

GB: I only remember bums when I was very young. They, they used to stop at the house on Pearl Street. They'd get off the trains and it was just a block and a half from the railroad. And my grandmother would, would give them a plate of food, you know. Sometimes they would, they would do umbrella repair, or some kind of little tinkering job, you know, to get something to eat. But it seemed like in those early years, before I started going to high school, that there were frequent, that frequently there were men that were on the road.

JT: Did you fear them?

GB: No. No.

JT: They weren't a type that you worried about being violent, they were just down on their luck, so to speak?

GB: Yeah, uh-huh. And they, they always tried to be agreeable. I never saw one that was ugly, hard to get along with.

JT: How did the railroad react to all that free travel?

GB: Well, I don't know. There was lots of it, I know that.

JT: The, they didn't try to evict them from trains too much or have—

GB: Well, I never saw any of it.

JT: Police and that type of thing?

GB: I never saw any of it. I guess that did happen in the, where there were large railroad yards. And there were railroad detectives, you know, that tried to enforce that kind of thing. They didn't mention in this recreation thing, about, much about going to the movies. That was the big thing, you know. Sundays, attending movies on Sunday evening was a big thing. Everybody dressed up and went to the movies. It was a big social thing.

JT: What was admission price in those days?

GB: Well, for kids it was about ten cents, and I think it was about twenty-five cents for adults. And I can remember when it finally got up to fifty cents. I don't

know. After we, after we got a family, why, we didn't go too much to the movies. We didn't have the money to spend. But the admission was probably about a dollar by that time. But I used to read a lot, and I can remember reading, my favorite magazines were the *Pop ular Science* and the *Popular Mechanics* and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

JT: Was the Stewart Library here then?

GB: The Stewart Library has always been here. And—

JT: And it was well used?

GB: Oh, yes, uh-huh. I can remember one of my favorite books that I used to get at the library downstairs was entitled *Boy Mechanic*. There were always things to look at and projects that a kid could try to do himself. Used to tinker with crystal radio sets and battery operated radio sets, you know.

JT: What stations did you get?

GB: They always fascinated me. Well, surprisingly, you could get in a— You could get quite a little ways with a crystal set, unusual conditions. I know, with battery operated sets, you could get just about any place in the country, except you couldn't get anything west of the Rocky Mountains. But we used to listen to Dallas, Texas, you know, and Atlanta, Georgia, and Pittsburg and Schenectady, New York, and Toronto, Canada, and Denver and Yankton, South Dakota.

JT: Did they have headphones, or did it have a speaker on it?

GB: Had both. I bought a set from a man in Grinnell that had the Grinnell Music House. And his name was Russell Shelley. And I bought this little radio in 1932. I had another old radio that I had bought.

JT: This was a manufactured radio, it wasn't one of those?

GB: Manufactured radio. And—

JT: Remember what the name of it was?

GB: The name was Colonial. And I still have it. I restored it two years ago. I had to have the speaker reconed. I found a man in Des Moines that can do that kind of work. And it's a beautiful little cabinet. I think I gave thirty-five dollars and another old radio that I had that was a disappointment.

JT: What make was that?

GB: That, the name of that one was Majestic. No, no, I take that back. It was Midwest, was the name of that. And they were highly advertised in *Popular Mechanics.* And it was manufactured someplace in Ohio, I believe it was. I sent for the darn thing. It was a bitter disappointment [laughter].

JT: Did you ever hear a Radiola?

GB: Yes.

JT: Seemed like there were many names of Radiolas in those days.

GB: Uh-huh. Really were.

JT: I can remember, we didn't have one, but our neighbor did, and we'd go over there and listen to the fights.

GB: Uh-huh.

JT: Joe Louis, I think, was involved about then, I believe, and Max Schmeling.

GB: I have a note here that I'd like to comment on. When I was going to the Methodist Church to Sunday School classes, I can—they were building the— Called junior high now— The Community Center. It's the newer portion of the building there. I noticed that the cornerstone says 1921 on it. And I can remember walking around the scaffolding on that building that was being built there on a Sunday morning. So you see, I would have been eight years old then.

JT: Thinking of churches and this Depression era business, were they involved much in helping out with any kind of organized help that you recall?

GB: I—I was not attending church regularly then.

JT: I mean, from what you know around, seems like nowadays maybe they get organized one with another.

GB: Uh-huh, uh-huh. I don't think that they were.

JT: But the relief efforts were mostly a governmental—

GB: Yeah, uh-huh. When I was going to Sunday School there at the Methodist Church, there was— Our Sunday School teacher was a man by the name of George Armatrout. And he was a blacksmith. And our class was— Our classroom was the boiler room in the Methodist Church.

JT: Which would be in existence today, the church now.

GB: It's the building that is in existence today. And I'm sure they have a different boiler in there, that's automatic now, but it was a hand-fired boiler at that time. But it was clean, it was kept swept clean, you know. But I'd say there were probably twelve to fifteen boys in the class. And I have very good memories of George Armatrout.

JT: In talking about recreation, you mentioned this trip to the Century of Progress.

GB: Yeah, that was, that was—

JT: I'd like to hear about that.

GB: That was great. I bought this—

JT: Was it your car that you used?

GB: Yeah, I bought this '29 Chevy roadster, I must have bought it about 1932. And, let's see, there were four boys, and we decided to go to Chicago. And one of them knew of a camp ground that was sponsored by the fair association. So we drove.

JT: You're saying the Chicago organization that sponsored the camp ground.

GB: Yeah, yeah, the Chicago Fair organization. So, we drove in to LaGrange, Illinois and camped in a big open field, flat, I remember. And there was a screened-in building, like a— Well, it was screened all the way around, it was just a kind of a building to rest and maybe have a lunch in, you know. But across the way, I remember seeing this huge, long, low building, and it said "Electromotive Corporation". That's where they were starting to build the modern diesel engines. I think it was a division of General Motors, Electromotive Corporation.

JT: This was 1933?

GB: This was in '33. While going to the fair from LaGrange, we went on Twenty-Third Street, I think it is, because I remember we just drove right directly into the fair. And there were huge potholes all over the streets, so we would get— We track right on the street car tracks and that was pretty smooth riding. And we spent—

JT: How was your trip from here into LaGrange? Highway 6?

GB: Yeah.

JT: Was that paved?

GB: I can't remember, probably was not all paved.

JT: And this was when, what time of year did you go?

GB: Summertime.

JT: Which I guess was when the fair was open.

GB: Yeah. When we went from there—

JT: But you didn't have trouble with mud roads or anything? How long did the trip take?

GB: I can't remember. Probably took one day.

JT: Do you remember staying overnight? Or—

GB: No, don't remember staying overnight going in, no. No, we stayed several nights there. And then we went to the Dells in Wisconsin, Devils Lake, and we stayed overnight there.

JT: On the way back?

GB: On the way back, yeah. It seemed to me like we came back through Waverly, and then back to Grinnell.

JT: How old would you have been then? Let's see, '32, '33.

GB: Let's see, '33, '13, twenty years old, twenty years old. And the next year we went to the World's Fair. One of the same group that went the year earlier. And, let's see, it was Bob Pearson and Everett Armstrong, I can't recall the other guy's name, and myself. And we went in on the train. And we stayed at a great big stone-front house on Michigan Boulevard, on South Michigan Boulevard, not very far from the Twenty-Third Street entrance. And I can remember—

JT: Was it a private house that just took in roomers for the fair?

GB: Yeah, yeah. We had, we had a great big room at the front of the house, second floor. And there was a huge stairway going up to second floor. And we had a private bath. And there must have been two beds in that room. And we had a great time.

JT: You talk about driving and so on. How did you learn to drive and how did you get a driver's license?

GB: [laughter]

JT: In those days—

GB: Stanley Smith's father had a Ford touring car, must have been about a '28 or a '29. It was kind of long and low as I remember it. And we took it out one Sunday. And I just about drove the thing into the ditch, if it hadn't been for him grabbing the wheel and jerking the car back. I was probably negligent in watching what I was doing.

JT: But you learned, how did you learn to do the shifting and all that? Or did they? It was all foot pedals.

GB: It was all foot pedals in the Model T. But then I, for a time there when I was in high school, I worked for a car wash that was in Norris' garage. I don't suppose you know where Norris' garage is? Well, you know where the State Street Station is. Well, that whole bunch of buildings belonged to J. W. Norris. And he had two sons, Paul and Raymond. And Raymond did tire repair and Paul took care of the books. And they pumped gas, and they had a car wash there. And I did chamoising, I did the chamois, I cleaned out the vehicles and did the chamoising.

JT: Now, when was this, what age was this?

GB: Well, I must have been about fourteen.

JT: This is while you were still at school?

GB: Yeah, I did it for several years. I got twenty-five cents for each vehicle that was washed. And I cleaned out the interior with a whisk broom, and chamoised the car after it was washed. Well, we'd do fifteen in a day, in a Saturday, so I was a

wealthy kid. I had a lot of money. And that lasted for a few years, up until about, well, I think it kind of slacked off about ’30.

JT: Did you need to have a driver’s license to drive at that time?

GB: No, I don’t believe so. I used to get in these vehicles that we were washing and I’d just imagine myself driving those things, and I’d shift and I’d go through a routine. And—

JT: Can you remember about getting your first driver’s license? Was it strictly a paper work thing or?

GB: Can’t remember about it at all [laughter].

JT: Or ever have to take a test?

GB: Well, I had to take a test just a couple of years ago when I let my driver’s license lapse. I had to take the thing twice.

JT: I wonder when they did start requiring licenses.

GB: It’s a blank as far as I can—[laughter]

JT: Whether it was strictly a paper work thing in order to do the, to do the, oh, the title to the car and that type of thing. Whether there was anything, well, now they’ve got a license for the vehicle. Do you remember about those?

GB: Well, you know, the, the ’29 Chevy, I didn’t— I probably licensed once. I decided I could, I could get along without it. So I didn’t keep it [laughter]!

JT: Nobody, nobody stopped you.

GB: No. I sold the thing to my cousin. I think he talked me out of it, is what happened. And I think I gave I gave two hundred dollars for it and I sold it to him for seventy-five. So, I didn’t make any money on it.

JT: But you had the use of it.

GB: Yeah, and you know, a kid having a roadster at that time, that was great.

JT: That, that makes me think a little bit about law enforcement. What was the law enforcement situation in

GB: In Grinnell?

JT: In Grinnell in those years?

GB: Well, I remember Alex Manson, he was the chief of police. And he always stood on the corner of Broad Street and Fourth Avenue, when the kids were coming out of school. And that’s the only thing I remember about law enforcement. [laughter] He kept his eye on us. But Alex Manson, I always liked Alex Manson, I thought he was all right

JT: What about traffic control? Was there a need for it or when did the—

GB: Not at that time, not early on. Gosh! There weren't very many vehicles running around.

JT: What were the streets downtown? You mentioned that Pearl Street wasn't— Did they gravel?

GB: Let's see here. Fifth Avenue was not paved.

JT: Was there a storm sewer system?

GB: From West Street west. I can— I remember, you see, I went to school at Parker School, that's about two blocks from where I lived. And Parker School was where Fareway is now. And I can remember how muddy the streets used to get when we would have these downpouring rains.

JT: Were there sidewalks? I know I've seen pictures, not around here, with wooden sidewalks and so on.

GB: Well, as I recall, there was no sidewalks across the streets. You kind of jump from one high muddy spot to the next one, you know, to get across.

JT: How about downtown?

GB: Well, yeah, that was all paved.

JT: Sidewalks or streets or both?

GB: Yeah, when I was a kid. But I can remember these muddy streets, and when you would get across to the other side, you'd pick a good grassy place and drag your feet, you know, trying to get all this mud off your shoes [laughter].

JT: Before you got to school.

GB: Yeah. Or before you got home. I can remember, we used to, from our back porch at home, out to the rear end of the lot were the wood shed and coal shed and outhouse were, we had plank for our walkway. And I remember one time we had this downpouring rain and the planks all floated down the street and they went clear down to Fourth Avenue and I had to retrieve them. [laughter]

JT: Were there storm sewers that went downtown then, too? There were was no— And that eventually all went down to Arbor Lake I suppose.

GB: Right. Arbor Lake, it goes to Arbor Lake and Lake Nyanza— Goes out here to the Country Club ponds. You know, at that time, this whole area here was cornfield. I can remember that well. Thinking about all the trains that used to go through Grinnell, you know, at one time, there were seven Rock Island daily passenger trains plus all the freight that went through here. There were long distance freights, then there was the local freight that came from Des Moines. And they dis—they did all the distributing and switching of cars—cars through to the

local industrial—like the washing machine factory and Spaulding Manufacturing and Swift and Company and the lumber yards.

JT: How'd you get your meat then?

GB: Well, when I went to work for the meat market we were beginning to get meat by truck that came from Omaha. And the meat that we got from Cudahy Packing Company came by, by truck operated out of Marshalltown, called the Boss Truck Line. Iowa Pack, I think had their own trucks. I can't remember.

JT: When you went to California, why did you take the bus instead of the train?

GB: I don't know.

JT: Was it that much more expensive, do you think?

GB: Could have been, could have been. I came back on the train. I came back on the train and came the southern route, probably Southern Pacific. We went through Kansas City and to Des Moines and I had to change trains in Des Moines to get to Grinnell.

JT: But you made it all the way from California to Des Moines without having to change trains.

GB: Yeah, uh-huh.

JT: That's interesting. I've always been interested in trains. But that bus trip out there, it must have taken quite a while, didn't it?

GB: Oh, I can remember stopping in Cheyenne and it was snowing. It was nice weather here, you know, when we left. But that's different altitude out there, you know, and things can happen in a hurry.

JT: Well, that the thing about going through the mountains on a bus. In 19– what, '32 or '3?

GB: It was '36.

JT: '36

GB: Yeah.

JT: But even then.

GB: Yeah. Well, it was a big bus, big and noisy. And, you know, we did a lot of sleeping. And being young, didn't bother too much, the discomforts.

JT: But you made—