

Interviewee: Everett Armstrong

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Date of Interview: March 19, 1992

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Everett Armstrong
Side One

Jack Templeton [JT] interviewing Everett Armstrong [EA] on March 19, 1992, for the Friends of Stewart Library's oral history project about Grinnell during the Great Depression and World War II.

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

EA: Well, I was born in '17, so I would have been, what, thirteen years old.

JT: Who was in your family, then?

EA: Well, my mother, my father, and brother and sister. Brother Harry and sister Margaret.

JT: Were they older?

EA: I was the oldest. Harry was eighteen months younger than I was, and my sister was four years younger than I was.

JT: Where did you live?

EA: We lived on Chatterton Street, 918 Chatterton Street in Grinnell.

JT: Had you lived there for quite a while?

EA: No, we moved from the country. First off we moved up on Elm Street, 1517 Elm Street, from the country. That was in about 1930. Then we moved down to Chatterton Street, and then we moved up just one more house north to Fifth Avenue.

JT: Who owned that last house?

EA: Well, the last house was owned by a lady by the name of Carrie Pilgrim, which people might remember. She was actually an old maid, really. It was in an estate.

JT: What type of a house was it, one story, two story?

EA: It was a two story house—still there in fact. Still standing and still in pretty good shape, actually. Two story house, small—wasn't a big house.

JT: In those days, did it have all the modern facilities?

EA: It had all the modern facilities, yes.

JT: The street was paved?

EA: No, the street was not paved. Neither Fifth Avenue or Chatterton Street at that time were paved as I recall.

JT: Was it just bare mud then?

EA: No, I think it was gravel or something. I am sure it wasn't bare mud. In those days they used cinders a lot on the streets from the power plant, from the coal. There were probably some cinders on it, but I am sure it wasn't paved at that time.

JT: Sidewalk?

EA: Yes there was sidewalk.

JT: Wooden

EA: No, cement sidewalk.

JT: What did your dad do?

EA: My dad worked for the county. He worked for the county for many years on road maintenance.

JT: Now, in your early days you lived on a farm.

EA: Yes, I was born and raised on a farm.

JT: Where was that?

EA: That was in Chester township, north of town, five miles north of town.

JT: How did you happen to leave the farm.

EA: Well, my dad—my folks during the depression lost the farm. That's the reason we left it.

JT: That is what I was kind of wondering.

EA: Yes, they lost the farm.

JT: One of the group.

EA: They couldn't pay the taxes.

JT: Was he able to get a job?

EA: Oh, yes. In fact when we lived in the country, my dad had always worked the roads in some form or another. When we lived in the country, he worked for what they called the township. He was township maintenance which was done with horses and a road drag. And they dragged the roads every so often just to get the ruts out of them. So when he moved to town, then it went from the township to the county. The county took over the road maintenance at that point.

JT: Could you work out your taxes?

EA: You could work out your poll tax on the road and that's what he did. He had people working out their poll tax, which as I recall was a dollar or two. I know it wasn't very much. They would work all day with their team and the scraper for a dollar or two dollars, whichever it was, and I don't remember now what the amount was; it wasn't very much. I don't recall now what the poll tax was for.

JT: What was your mother's place in the family.

EA: She was just the mother and the housekeeper.

JT: She didn't work out of the home.

EA: No, no, not in those days, never did.

JT: Your dad, you say, worked for the county after he came to town.

EA: After he came to town, he worked for the county road department.

JT: At age thirteen you would have been junior high school, or what?

EA: No, when we came to town, I was in the eighth grade. I finished the eighth grade in town. Before that I had gone to country school, and then after the eighth grade I went to high school here. I graduated from high school here.

JT: Say that again. Where did you go to school?

EA: Country school up to the eighth grade and then we moved to town. I was in the eighth grade.

JT: Where did you go in the eighth grade?

EA: To what is now the big building, the old high school.

JT: Not Cooper school.

EA: No, no. Because at that time at the high school there was seventh and eighth grade as well as high school. I went to eighth grade there at that school, which was called the high school in those days.

JT: How was your house heated?

EA: We had a furnace, just an old hand-fired furnace.

JT: How did you get the coal?

EA: In those days, people hauled coal. They hauled Iowa coal, which was the cheapest, of course. There were many people who hauled coal—would bring you coal, and dump it in your basement. It was hand-fired. We didn't have a stoker or anything. Just a plain, old hand-fired furnace.

JT: Did you have a telephone?

EA: Yes, we had a telephone.

JT: Now at age thirteen, did you have some chores around the house. Did you and Harry have to do.

EA: Oh, I am sure we had to. We had a garden. As I recall, we even raised some rabbits. We had a bunch of rabbits that we raised, tame rabbits. We took care of them. And I also worked in the grocery store. I started working in the United Grocery Store when I was still in eighth grade.

JT: Is that right.

EA: Yeah.

JT: At the United, you say.

EA: Yes.

JT: Who had the United? Who owned that?

EA: Well, I guess it was still United Food Market at that time. Paul Ray was the manager at that time. It was located at that time where the Ben Franklin Store is now. That's where the United was at that time, the United Food Market.

JT: When you started to work there? It must have moved from there.

EA: Oh, yes, it moved from there over to where Pagliai's Pizza is now, which in those days was the old armory, Or at the time we moved the United over there, it had been the Dodge garage run by a fellow by the name of Knight, Knight's Garage.

JT: Was it locally owned?

EA: Knight was—

JT: I meant United.

EA: Oh, you know I don't remember. I think it was owned by Hobart Ross in Des Moines, the one who owned it for years afterward.

JT: I was just wondering whether that was the first of the chain stores, like HyVee.

EA: Yes it was.

JT: Were there any others in town of that type?

EA: I don't think that there were any other actual chain stores at that time. There had been a fellow by the name of Thompson that had run grocery stores here previous to that and he had owned that store originally—Thompson Food Market and his name was Link Thompson, but he was just a local fellow. He didn't have stores all over the country. Hobart Ross owned United, and at that time they had I think there were three or four stores. He had a couple of partners and one of them was in Indianola, three of them owned, and I have forgotten who the other one was. There was another partner. Between the three of them, they owned, I think they owned four stores. And the one here in Grinnell was Hobart Ross's. And then they branched out and eventually got bigger and bigger and bigger and became the United chain. Eventually, I think they owned as many as seventeen or eighteen stores.

JT: That must have been one of the first chains.

EA: Yes, it was. It was, it was. A very modern grocery for that point in time, especially when they got over into that old armory building where the Pagliai's Pizza is now. That was a huge building, a huge grocery store for that day.

JT: What were your duties?

EA: Well, when I first started, a thirteen-year old kid, I never will forget. I started filling vinegar jugs during the canning season in the summer. People did a lot of canning and they would bring in their vinegar jugs and you had a fifty gallon barrel full of vinegar that you put the vinegar in the jugs for them. That and carrying out groceries, sacks of flour and sacks of sugar and things like that. That was my first job there.

JT: Did you stay with that?

EA: Yes, I stayed with that all the time I went to school, and then I finally went to work in the meat department at the grocery store. I don't know when I started there—don't remember what year it was. But it was still in that location. That was before it moved. Worked for a fellow by the name of Eddy Peterson. He was the manager of the meat department. Then I worked for him until after I graduated. In fact, I worked there for two or three years after I graduated. I think I left there in '37 or '38.

JT: All on the job training.

EA: No, no. After I graduated from high school in '35 I went to work steady there.

JT: What I mean, as far as the meat, learning to cut the meat.

EA: Oh, yeah, yeah. My first job as a meat cutter was learning to wrap a pound of butter. They gave you a pound of butter, you wrapped it, and then you unwrapped it, and then you wrapped it again, and then you unwrapped it, and you wrapped it again. That was to learn to wrap packages rather neatly. You didn't—they didn't turn out that neat, but they were supposed to.

JT: Did you cut yourself very much?

EA: Quite often, constantly.

JT: Bad enough to go to the doctor.

EA: Oh, yes. Many times.

JT: Who did you go to?

EA: Doc Porter. The minute I'd come in the door, he'd say, "Well, today you're going to get the day off from this."

JT: Lets talk about that doctor and hospital thing a little bit. Were you ever—any of your family sick enough to have to go to the hospital?

EA: No, I don't think any of my family was ever in the hospital that I recall. Of course, you didn't go to the hospital in those days like you do now.

JT: How about doctor? Did you need to go to the doctor?

EA: Oh, yes. You had to go to the doctor. Our family doctor was old Dr. Parish, John Parish's dad. He was our family doctor. Then when Dr. Porter came to town we switched to Dr. Porter. My mother ended up going to Dr. Porter all the time. I guess my dad did too, what little he went.

JT: Where was his office then.

EA: At that time, it was at that time up over Spurgeons, upstairs over Spurgeons, way back, way early. And then he later built the building that, oh, who is in it now, the broker.

JT: Jones.

EA: Edward D. Jones, that's where he, Doc Porter, built that office and he was in there for a good many years.

JT: But Parish was on the corner, then.

EA: That was John Parish. That was a young Parish. Old Doc Parish was, John's dad, his father, who we went to when we were younger was up over what would be—I can't even think who is in there now. Like where the old hardware store was, where Cunningham Plumbing was. They just moved out, George and Rolf, up over that.

JT: Wasn't Parish in that building on the corner?

EA: That was John Parish. I don't think his dad was ever in there. I don't know, maybe he was. Maybe when John came back in, he and his dad were together for a very short time.

JT: Who built that building?

EA: That was the old *Herald* [Ed. note: *Register*]. We use to have two newspapers here, the *Herald* and the *Register* and that was, well I have forgotten which was which. But that was one, I think that the [*Register*]. That was the *Grinnell* [*Register*], it was a newspaper office.

JT: One of the Dr. Parishes took it over.

EA: Took it over after the newspaper went out of business.

JT: That would have been the young one.

EA: John Parish, yeah. The old man was O. F. Parish. When John got out of the service, he came back. I think they were together for a while, but then his dad retired soon after he came back. He had been worked to death during the war anyway. Most of them were basically.

JT: How many were there here in town, then.

EA: Oh, probably three or four. I can remember there was Dr. Talbott, Dr. Parish, and Dr. Evans. That's about all I can remember. There weren't a lot.

JT: Did you ever have to go to a dentist then?

EA: Yeah, yes. Matter of fact the first dentist—and I can't remember, we were trying to think of that the other day, I can't remember her name—was a lady and she lived in a house down somewhere in the west part of town. I can remember going down there, but I can't remember

where it was. And her drill she operated with her foot. It wasn't electric. She operated it with her foot like a sewing machine, you know.

JT: While you were working, what kind of hours did you put in?

EA: Oh, about anywhere from seventy to eighty hours a week.

JT: Even while you were in school?

EA: No, no, no. In school I just worked before and after school. But after I went to work steady there, you worked from seven in the morning until six at night, five days a week. And then on, in those days it was Thursday nights you were open, it was sale day. They had the big sale down at the sale barn and all the farmers came to town.

JT: Grinnell wasn't a Saturday night town?

EA: And also a Saturday night town, but Thursday, too. They would come in for the sale on Thursday. The men would come in and go to the sale and drop the women off and they would hang around town. Then the men would go to the sale and stay at the sale till the sale was over and then go have a beer or two and then come in and buy their groceries. So you never got out of there before seven on Thursday night or sometimes later.

JT: Did you handle eggs, too.

EA: Oh, yeah. Eggs and cream. You bought cream and eggs both. Canded eggs and tested cream.

JT: What did you do to draw business to your store as opposed to somebody else's store.

EA: Well, advertising was always a big thing. There was always a big ad in the paper and just try and be nice to the people, really. That was one of the big things at United, was to be friendly to the customers. One of the things they preached.

JT: This working probably put a little crimp in your outside activities.

EA: Well, of course, you didn't have enough money to have too many anyway in those days.

JT: What did a kid do in those days for entertainment?

EA: Raised a little cane, I suppose, same as they do now, only not quite as much. I really don't know. We use to go to dances quite a bit. After I was out of high school, of course, when I was working. And, we had a skating rink. Usually, kids had something to do; they had some work to do. Most of them had something.

JT: What about the temptations? Were they somewhat the same, I think a little bit like booze, for instance.

EA: Nah, wasn't much booze. The booze wasn't floating around in those days like it does now.

JT: Prohibition would have been in there for a while.

EA: Yeah, I am sure there was some. Then after Prohibition, after we got beer, yeah, one of the big places was the Three Elms. That was quite a gathering place for young kids, the younger, the older younger ones that could drink beer and go to those. It was a pretty decent place. It was just a tavern but they would have even a lot of college students came in there.

JT: If you took a girl out on a date, what would you do?

EA: Well, you went to a movie. There were a lot of movies. That was a main thing to do, especially on Saturday and Sunday night. Sunday night was go to the movies. Used to have some pretty decent movies, and at that time we had two theaters.

JT: Did the theaters—how did they attract you to go to my theater instead of the other theater?

EA: Just by different movies, just by the movies they had, really. They had different movies; they didn't have the same thing.

JT: Did they have give-a-ways.

EA: Yeah, they had that. What did they used to call—the big thing was Bank Night.

JT: What was that?

EA: They gave away so much money and if nobody won it that night, it would build up until it got to be—

JT: Your ticket stub.

EA: Yeah, yeah, just if you showed up and if you were there.

JT: What about dishes? I think I remember my mother getting dishes given away or something like that.

EA: At the theaters. I don't remember the dish part. I don't remember that. I don't remember any dishes. If we did, we didn't get any. But there was, well, there was always something. Of course, there wasn't much more to do than go to the movies.

JT: How did you get around?

EA: We had automobiles. The first car I bought was a 1936 Chevrolet, the first new one I had. I had a model A Ford before that. But in 1936 I bought, no in 1938, I bought a brand new Chevrolet.

JT: How were you able to afford that?

EA: Well, I couldn't. I was making eleven dollars a week then and the car was \$825. I'll never forget that. Had everything on it you could get on it. Had a radio. That consisted of a radio, four doors, and the seat covers. And a heater; it had a heater.

JT: It was a what again?

EA: It was a '38 Chevy.

JT: Four-door.

EA: Yeah, four-door. \$825.

JT: And you bought it new.

EA: Bought it brand new. \$825.

JT: You were probably one of the highlights.

EA: Yeah, I was because it was an odd color and I was single at that time. And I should never have bought that red car.

JT: You graduated from high school in '35.

EA: Yeah, '35.

JT: You stayed—you went to work full time then.

EA: At United, yeah.

JT: You stayed at United. What was your next move then?

EA: Well, I went from United to— National Tea Company had a store here. I managed that for, oh, about a year, I guess. I was manager of the meat department in that.

JT: What sort of a store was it?

EA: It was a grocery store. National Tea Grocery Store.

JT: That would have been a chain again.

EA: That was a big chain, yeah. Too big for Grinnell. Their headquarters was in Minneapolis. All their prices were set in Minneapolis, and that's why it wasn't very successful. You couldn't do business with the prices set in Minneapolis for Grinnell, Iowa. It just didn't work. It was in

where, well it would have been in where John's Hardware is now—one of those buildings in there. That was where it was originally.

JT: You were the manager there?

EA: Of the meat department.

JT: About twenty years old—twenty-five.

EA: Well, I was probably twenty, twenty-one. I don't even remember what year that was, to tell you the truth. It was after 1938, I know. The reason I went there. I got eleven dollars a week at United, and I went over there at twenty-two dollars.

JT: My.

EA: That was quite a jump, I can tell you that.

JT: Those would have been what we would think of as pretty hard times.

How did did people pay for their groceries?

EA: We didn't realize they were hard.

JT: Is that right.

EA: No.

JT: Why do you say that?

EA: Well, I guess we didn't know. We hadn't had anything. Well they were hard. There was a lot of unemployment. WPA was on. We used to have a lot of what they called grocery orders, county orders, that gave people so much. We would give them coupons every week for food. I suppose it would be similar to what food stamps are now. I don't even know what food stamps are now.

JT: Do you think that was county run?

EA: Well, I think it was county and the state, with the help of the state. The state was probably in on it too.

JT: It wasn't a federal thing?

EA: It might have been federal. They would issue books. They would issue coupon books. And I don't know how many they got or what they had to do to qualify for them. But if they would come in and buy something, you just tear out the coupons. It was in denominations of twenty-five cents and fifty cents and you'd just tear out enough coupons. I don't remember what the

books were, probably ten dollars or something like that, and I don't know how many they got. But there were a lot of people on that. And WPA.

JT: Was that run out of an office here locally or?

EA: Yeah, they got those here and I don't know where that was.

JT: You don't know who headed that up.

EA: I would assume it was Sam Reagan—the welfare office, what they use to call the welfare office

JT: City you think, or probably county.

EA: I think they called it the county welfare office, I believe.

JT: It was here in Grinnell. It wasn't in Montezuma.

EA: Yeah, yeah, right here in Grinnell. Sam Reagan and Aletha McNeal ran it for years. And it was on the corner by that parking lot—the building they are trying to tear down, the State Bank is trying to buy. That's where the office was, on the very west corner there. I don't even know what's in there now, I don't think anything is. I don't get down town much anymore so I don't know.

JT: But that office would have been set up for a number of years, I suppose.

EA: It was there for quite a while, quite a while. The WPA was going pretty strong at that time. Now I don't recall how that worked.

JT: Did you see them doing anything, the WPA? Did you see them do anything around town that you could visually see?

EA: I don't recall. One thing they did was they would go out in the country and cut timber for wood for people to heat their houses with. My dad was in charge of one of those. He would take a bunch of people out and they would work in a timber that somebody gave them. They would cut wood.

JT: How did they do that?

EA: By hand.

JT: Crosscut saw.

EA: Crosscut saw, yeah, and an ax.

JT: How did they haul the wood in.

EA: Well, I think the county hauled it in trucks. I think the county hauled it in. That was the WPA work force that had— They did other things. I think they put in some sidewalks, and I can't remember all the things that were WPA connected. There were some things that they did.

JT: When was Broad Street widened in that?

EA: No, I was on the council when Broad Street was widened and that wasn't until 1940, when I was on the council, until 1940—I don't even remember.

JT: After the war?

EA: Oh, yeah. After the war, '48 or '49. In the late '40s, early '50s, that's when. [Ed. note: EA was on the Grinnell City Council from April, 1949 to April, 1951] See there was a lot of—Broad Street was lined with a lot of trees. We got into a lot of trouble because we cut down all them trees and widened it out. We had all kinds of trouble over that.

JT: What about the CCC?

EA: That was going pretty strong at that time. That's what happened to a lot of the people who were my age group who couldn't find anything to do. They went to the CCC, which was a very good program. I think they ought to have it today.

JT: There were quite a few of them that did leave?

EA: Oh, yeah.

JT: Where did they go?

EA: Oh, various places. They went different places. I recall there were some from here who went to Pine Lake up at Eldora. They built that. The CCC built Pine Lake at Eldora. I know there were several from here. I can't tell you any names who they were now, but there were several went to there. They went various places, different places, to different projects, is what they did.

JT: Did people run a bill?

EA: At the grocery store?

JT: Was that a common occurrence?

EA: Yeah, yeah,

JT: More a common than not.

EA: Yeah, more a common than not common. Most of them—well, ones who had a job would run a bill because they only got paid once every two weeks or something like that. And then usually if they were good for it, they would come in at the end of two weeks and pay their bill. And

those who weren't good for it, weren't going to come in anyway. Yeah, that was quite a thing. My dad ran a bill at the grocery store, always. He always ran a bill. My mother never. She didn't have anything to do with money. She couldn't even write a check. When my dad died she didn't even know how to write a check. He had always taken care of everything and just paid cash for it. He didn't even have a checking account either. Most of them didn't believe in the banks at that time because most of them had lost everything they had when the banks closed back in the late '20s.

JT: Did your family lose some money then?

EA: Oh yeah, my granddad lost everything he had, and my dad did too—what little he had. Everybody lost what they had.

JT: That was part of the reason he lost the farm.

EA: Yeah, couldn't pay the taxes on it. The farm was free and clear. He was left the farm by his dad.

JT: I was going to say, you mentioned your granddad. I was going to ask you. Had your family been in this area for quite a while?

EA: Yeah, my Granddad Armstrong was here for—boy, I don't even remember him, I don't even remember him. I don't even remember my Granddad Armstrong. He died very shortly after I was born. He is buried out in the Chester cemetery. He had been here for quite a while.

JT: Do you have any idea where he came from?

EA: No. Other than Ireland, I don't know.

JT: But you think he did come from Ireland?

EA: Originally, yes, originally he did.

JT: Any idea what year it would have been?

EA: No, I have no idea in the world.

JT: How about your mother's family.

EA: They came from Sweden. Or my grandfather did. He came from Sweden.

JT: What was her maiden name?

EA: Her name was Carlstrom.

JT: Carlstrom.

EA: And they lived just north of town where Glen Harris lives now. That was his farm out there.

JT: You think her folks came from—

EA: Her father did, came from Sweden originally. He landed in Chicago. Now this is another thing I don't know too much about. And I can't ask anybody because everybody is gone. And you know, you don't think about those things until you get a little older and wonder where in the world they came from and what they are doing.

JT: Thinking of how hard it was to get anything and being on welfare and so on, were there any local charities? Did the churches enter into things?

EA: Oh, I am sure they did. I don't know of any in particular right off hand, but, yeah, I am sure there was a lot of help given by various organizations and churches and other things. Everybody kind of seemed to help everybody else more in those days than they do now anyway.

JT: Was there much feeling against, class feeling, for people who were on welfare as opposed to—

EA: Oh, there was some. I don't think it was any great amount. You know, there are always people who were ne'er-do-wells who were always on welfare and always would be.

Side Two

EA: Had a lot of them, a lot of them. Because we had two railroads, two railways in town, east and west and north and south. We had several trains through here everyday. And you would get a lot of bums especially from the railroad in those days. Of course, there wasn't enough traffic on the highways to get it from the highways. But they would come to your door, and my mother used to feed them. Anybody who came to the door, she would give them a plate, made them eat outside on the step. She wouldn't let them in the house, but she usually fed them.

JT: Were you afraid of them?

EA: I wasn't afraid of them. My mother, she wasn't exactly too happy about them being in the house, but I don't think she was particularly afraid of them. There wasn't—you didn't hear much about things like that happening in those days, about them causing any trouble. Other than the fact that they were hungry and didn't have anyplace to live. They all congregated down on the tracks, down at what's now Lake Nyanza, or what we called it. I don't know what they call it now, I guess it's Miller's Lake or something. But there was—the trains watered down there and fueled down there, and that was the jumping off place for them. I guess they'd get tearing and decide they'd better get off before they got kicked off. Of course, I don't think they bothered them that much in those days.

JT: I was going to ask you, was there much attempt—

EA: I don't think there was. I just think they more or less let them go, pretty much.

JT: Would you call this a Hooverville down there? Did they have shacks built?

EA: No, no. There were no shacks that I know of. I don't know why. Maybe it was because of the water, the lake, Lake Nyanza. Maybe it was because there was water, and they could—

JT: You mentioned watering the trains. How did they do that?

EA: They had a tower. Didn't you ever see the railroad watering towers for the trains, where the steam—?

JT: Yeah.

EA: Well, they had a tower down there.

JT: How did they get water in that?

EA: I don't know how they got it in there. To get it out they just ran it out through a funnel. But I don't know how they got it in there, really. I really don't know.

JT: Was Lake Nyanza down there all the time?

EA: Yeah, I think that they probably got the water out of Lake Nyanza.

JT: Before that—

EA: I am not sure who built Lake Nyanza. It has been there as long as I can remember. But I am thinking that maybe they pumped the water out of Nyanza into that tower. The tower wasn't a big thing. It was just a small one like the old railroad water towers were. Just enough to fill a steam engine, once or twice maybe.

JT: Thinking of the store again here, where you were meat manager, there were quite a few dead beats, I suppose.

EA: Oh, yeah, yeah, a lot of them.

JT: So you were doing some charity on your own.

EA: You knew it when you were doing it. You knew it when you wrote somebody's name down that they would come down next week and pay you. You knew it was a charity thing, more or less.

EA: What was your next move, then, from National Tea?

EA: When I left National Tea, I went to work for Iowa Southern, for ISU on a line crew. And I worked for them until I went to service. That would have been in, late '38 or '39. I have forgotten now what it was. I worked for them all one winter, the first winter. Was all outside in the winter time and

then I went to the service in '41, in February of '41, or March of '41.

JT: Did Iowa Southern furnish electricity for Grinnell, then?:

EA: Uh-huh.

JT: Have they done that all-

EA: Uh-huh.

JT: As long as you can remember.

EA: Well, I don't know. I think it was called Iowa Southern then. Of course, they had their own plant at that time, that they generated their own electricity here, right here. It was the old coal fired plant. They had generators.

JT: In the vicinity to where it is now?

EA: No, where the office is now, right there, where their office is now.

JT: How long did that last?

EA: Oh, that lasted for a good many years, really. I don't know when they abandoned that thing, actually. I really don't know.

JT: Grinnell didn't have a municipal system. It was always outsiders?

EA: No, no. And I am sure it was Iowa Southern. I don't know that that was the name at that time, but it has been the same company, more or less, ever since.

JT: When did you go into service, then?

EA: March of '41.

JT: March of '41. You went in real early.

EA: Real early.

JT: Were you drafted?

EA: Yes, I was. Yeah, I had a low number. Went in March of '41 and I got out in July of '46.
[Ed. note: EA corrected to July of '45]

JT: Did you get home very much?

EA: I got home once during a five-year period. I was overseas for thirty-four months, overseas for over three years.

JT: Where did you go? Pacific?

EA: No, I was in the European theater. We made the initial landing at Casablanca on November 17, 1942, and from there on all the way on up through and came home from Germany.

JT: When did you get home then? You were on leave, I suppose just before you went overseas. Was that the way it was?

EA: No, no, it was after I had been in about, oh I guess, about six months. I had basic training at Camp Robinson in Arkansas, and we went on maneuvers in Louisiana in the summer. And when we got back off maneuvers, then we got a seven-day furlough, and that's when I got home. Well, I think I sneaked off once and came home at Christmas time for three or four days or something. Took a long weekend, but it wasn't counted as a furlough because they didn't know I was gone.

JT: I don't suppose you—did you notice any difference in the town?

EA: When I got back?

JT: Yeah. Well, no, I meant just during that—when you came home on leave. You probably hadn't been gone that long.

EA: No, no, I hadn't been gone long enough at that time, because I'd only been gone for maybe six, eight months at that time.

JT: Did—how did the war change Grinnell, thinking of prosperity? What changes were there?

EA: Well. I really don't know because when I came home you couldn't get anything. Shoes were rationed. I had to go a ration place to get shoes, get a ticket for shoes. Gasoline was rationed.

JT: That was still in '46. ['45]

EA: '46 ['45], yes. I think shortly after that they took the rationing off, but when I got home you had to, I had no problem getting them, because I had been discharged and got out of the service, but you had to go get a slip to go get a pair of shoes. And of course, I had no clothes, at all, after being gone for five years. So I had to have all new clothes.

JT: How did you see times here in Grinnell after you got home.

EA: Well, I really don't recall. They were—of course after having been in the service that long, you know, it was completely different. And so I don't know. And after having seen all the poor countries that we had seen in that time and the destruction that we had seen, I guess maybe things looked just pretty good here. The economy, I don't really recall. I didn't have any trouble getting a job. Everybody wanted me to go to work.

JT: What did you do then?

EA: That's when I started in business. The power company wanted me to go back to work for them, and I didn't figure that I— In the first place, I didn't want to do anything for about a month or so. But I just decided I didn't want to go to work for them. Before I went to the service, I had on my own—wired a bunch of— They had built a bunch of power lines down south of town. And I had wired a bunch of houses, farm houses, down there, just on my own before that. So people knew that I had done some of it. And when I got home there had been so few people that they could get to do anything, they started ringing my phone off the wall to see if I would do this or do that. And I just kind of decided that if they were that anxious to have me do something, I'd just start in business. So I did.

JT: How did you learn the wiring business, as an example?

EA: That was another thing. I had worked for an electrician here in town by the name of Burchard right after I got out of the National Tea. I forgot about that. I worked for Burchard for a year. He was an electrician and wired houses and things, I did other things.

JT: You learned quite a little.

EA: I guess I learned all I knew from him at that time. Matter of fact, we did the whole DeKalb Plant down there when DeKalb first moved in there.

JT: When it was downtown.

EA: Yeah, when it was downtown, the old washing machine factory.

JT: Burchard, you mean.

EA: Yeah.

JT: Was he still in business then when the war was over?

EA: Yeah, he was, but he wasn't doing much and he was one who was getting pretty old. He was getting older, and I think he later went over to Newton and went to work. He didn't have a whole lot of ambition. I mean to go out and do things on his own. So when I came back, that is when I started in business for myself, I started out in my folks' basement. I wasn't married. I wasn't married when I got home. I didn't get married until I'd gotten out of service.

JT: How did you meet your wife?

EA: I met her in Little Rock when I was stationed there. She was from Little Rock.

JT: When you were down at Camp Robinson?

EA: Yeah, when I was at Camp Robinson.

JT: So you kept that going?

EA: We kept that going through the mail.

JT: Gene Breiting told me that he could remember you going—

EA: The World's Fair.

JT: Tell me about that.

EA: I can't tell you about that. You know I was talking about that the other day, and I need to talk to Gene. The only thing I can remember, there were four of us who went. Gene Breiting, Bob Pearson and I, and a guy by the name of Smith. I don't know how he was in on it because Bob Pearson worked with me at the grocery store, and I don't know what year that was. I think that was '33, but I am not sure. I am not sure.

JT: Apparently it was two years.

EA: Yeah, there was two years. I think we were the last year, as I recall. But anyway, I was just talking to somebody about this the other day. We bought a train ticket, a round trip ticket from Grinnell to Chicago. A round trip ticket from Grinnell to Chicago was nine dollars. You could buy a round trip ticket on the Rocket for nine dollars. We had our train ticket, and I remember that I had twenty-one dollars to go on, because the morning we went down and got on the train, my dad come down and he said, "You got enough money?" And I said, "Oh, I got plenty of money to go." We were going to be gone for a week.

JT: So you'd have been fourteen, fifteen then, sixteen?

EA: No, no, this was in— What year would that have been?

JT: '33, '34.

EA: Yeah, I wasn't that old, I guess, was I. No.

JT: Because you said you were thirteen in 1930.

EA: Well, I was born in '17. So I would have been seventeen.

JT: Was that one of your first excursions?

EA: Oh, yes, that was the first time I had ever been out of Grinnell, I think. But we got on the train and we went to Chicago. I was just telling my wife about this the other day. We had twenty-one dollars, and I don't remember how we did it. We rented a room that was close to the fairgrounds in Chicago. Now how we got onto that I don't know. I don't remember what we did for eating, but the four of us lived in one room, and we could walk to the fairgrounds. We didn't have to have any transportation or anything. And again I don't remember how, what we did for eating. But I got by on that twenty-one dollars. Coming home on the train, I had fifty cents left. And they came around on the train—we were dead tired. We hadn't really had that much sleep. They were selling pillows for twenty-five cents, not selling but renting pillows for twenty-five cents, and I can remember my last twenty-five cents to rent a pillow so I could get some sleep on the way home.

JT: What do you remember about the fair?

EA: Not much, really. Of course, we took in everything. It was free, which most everything was, actually.

JT: Was that the one that had this trylon perisphere? Does that mean anything to you? [Ed note: New York World's Fair, 1939-1940]

EA: No, not really.

JT: This is kind of off the trail here, but I can remember going to one, and I never—didn't they have one about '39, '38?

EA: Yeah, they had several in there, and this, the one in Chicago is the only one I was ever to and I don't know. Didn't they have one in Seattle, somewhere? I don't remember. And to tell you the truth, I don't remember a lot about the fair. We saw a lot of things that we'd never seen before, and as I say most of them were free. I mean, it was just a matter of going around and looking at things. But in those days twenty-one dollars went a lot further than it would go today.

JT: Was there quite a boom then, right after the war?

EA: Yeah, things picked up.

JT: In building, in that aspect.

EA: Yeah, things picked up considerably. Well, when they cut everything loose. There were so many things you couldn't get during the war. And there were still some things that were tight after the war. I can remember one thing in particular was copper. Copper wire, you couldn't—when I started in business, it was very difficult to buy copper. And remained that way for quite a few years, actually. I think the government was stockpiling some of it at the time.

JT: You became a businessman right out of the blue.

EA: Yeah, yeah. Just as soon as I got home. Well sort of, I am what they call a curb-stoner.

JT: I am thinking about leading up to the council. How did you get—how did that all work out?

EA: Well, I don't know. I got roped into that. Somebody came and asked me. I was living in the first [Ed. note: third] ward. I lived down on First Avenue. I don't remember who had been councilman from the first [third] ward. They hadn't had much representation, and they wanted to know if I would run. I said, "No, I didn't have any—" There was an old fellow by the name of Craig that just kept after me and after me. And I finally said that I would run, but I was not going to have any, do any campaigning, wasn't going to do anything about it at all. If somebody wanted to write my name in, that was fine, but I wasn't going to do anything. And I didn't. He said they would take care of everything. Well, I don't know what they did, but George German and I— He was running against me. At the end when the voting was all done, I think there was four votes difference and I won. I really lost, is what really happened.

JT: Would the fourth ward, then be like it is now, in the northeast quarter. [Ed. note: southeast]

EA: I think the wards were basically the same as they are now. However, they have changed this fourth ward [Ed. note: second, now first] here just recently. Our dividing line use to be the street out here and now it's the alley back behind.

JT: But it's basically the same, the northeast quarter.

EA: Yes, it basically the fourth [Ed. note: first] is the northeast quarter. The wards are the same that they were.

JT: Was this street widening one of the big issues?

EA: That and curb and gutter. We put in all the curb and gutter. There were no paved streets, and we put in a lot of curb and gutter. Made a lot of people mad. Cut down trees. Broad Street was just lined with trees on both sides, and it was a narrow street. So they had to cut the trees down to widen the street, of course.

JT: What was the argument to widen it so much?

EA: Well, parking for one thing, and they just— The city hadn't done anything for so long and they just wanted to have a little progress.

JT: Why couldn't you have bought a parking lot?

EA: Well, I can't remember that at the time, but I remember there were— Well, Stan Jorgensen was on the council the same time. I and Stan Jorgensen and Ray George. Ray George was against everything. We built the disposal plant out there, redid that. That was suppose to last for a hundred years. It's already outdated at this point in time. That is the only recognition I ever got for being on the city council. My name is on a bronze plaque in the disposal plant. And I don't even remember what year that was. I ought to go out and see sometime what year that was built.

JT: Streets out in the residence area?

EA: A lot of them were not paved, no. Oh, there were some that were, but there were a lot of them that weren't. There were a lot of dirt streets in town, a lot of them.

JT: What do you remember? I was thinking about horses. When did they cease to be?

EA: Well, I don't remember too much about horses after we moved to town. I remember there use to be two feed sheds in town, where you tied your horses up. If you came to town and you would tie them up. One of them is where Eisenman, where the Ford garage now is, was Eisenman's. That was a feed shed there and the other one is down where the Budweiser, where Grinnell Beverage is. That was a feed shed down there.

JT: What do you mean by a feed shed?

EA: Well, they called them feed sheds. If you came to town with a team and wagon, you could pull in there for half a day for fifty cents or something and water your team and stand them in there. There were hitch rails all around Central Park down there, too, that you could tie up to if you wanted to leave them outside. But most everybody wanted to take care of their horses and put them in the feed shed where they could water them. Had a big watering fountain. They could feed them if they wanted to, and I don't remember what the cost was.

JT: They furnished the feed for that or you had to bring your own?

EA: You know, I don't remember that either. I don't remember. I suppose it depended on, if you didn't bring your own they would furnish it, and I really don't remember about the feed. I remember tying up there a good many times because we used to—I used to have to come to town with the four horses every Saturday and a running gear of a wagon. This was when my dad was working on the road and we would haul home culverts. the big steel culverts, you know. Put those on the running gear of a wagon. We'd put, oh I don't know, three or four on there and stretch out the running gear on the wagon and put those culverts on there and put four horses on them and haul them home from town here.

JT: This is while he was working for Chester.

EA: In the country, yeah, yeah, in the township.

JT: By the time the war started, I suppose, there were—

EA: Horses were kind of fading out by then. They were fading out when we left the farm. We used to raise horses on the farm. And when we left the farm, horses were beginning to phase out then. Everybody was beginning to get tractors and that was in—we left in 1930. We moved to town, I think it was 1930, '29 or '31—I'm not sure which it was. But horses were beginning to fade out then, kind of. Tractors were coming in.

JT: Was there—how was the situation of farm versus city? Was that a rural versus town?

EA: In what respect?

JT: Oh, just thinking about how did people look on, town people look on the country folk.

EA: Well, kind of down, a little bit, not really great. But it always tickled me. My mother would say, "Those town people" you know "don't do this and don't do that." And then when we moved to town we'd say, "Now you're a town people."

JT: What about gardening, food, home preserving of food and so on.

EA: We always had, on the farm, we raised all of our own food. Bought nothing but flour and sugar, really.

JT: Even before—when do you think the Depression started?

EA: Well, it is hard to tell you because we were always poor. So it's hard to, but the Depression, I suppose, started in '27, when it was really bad, '27, '28, and '29 and '30. Along in there, I guess, would have been the time. It wasn't the fact that we were poor. We didn't know we were poor because we had plenty of food. We were never hungry. Raised all of our own food. We had livestock, we had a big garden, had an orchard. My mother canned every year. We butchered all the time. Your meat—there was no refrigeration, of course, in those days. And I can remember, when we butchered, you butchered three or four hogs at one time. We had our own smokehouse. You'd cure the ham and you'd grind and stuff your own sausage and then you'd put the sausage down in big twenty gallon crocks covered with lard. And that's the way you kept it down in the basement, just covered up with that lard. When you wanted some sausage, you'd— That's why my cholesterol is so high today. You wanted some sausage, you'd go down and dig it out of that old lard crock, you know, and cook it.

JT: You didn't have any refrigeration.

EA: No, no refrigeration at all. We didn't have any. As a matter of fact, we lived on a farm, we didn't have electricity. We never had electricity on the farm—never did have till we moved to town.

JT: So probably your mother didn't mind moving to town.

EA: No, no. Matter of fact, well, I don't think any of us really did. I think we rather enjoyed it, in fact. Indoor plumbing and electricity.

JT: Can you think of any instances where you know of anybody that actually went hungry during that time?

EA: Oh, I don't know of anybody. No. I suppose there were some people who did. The people who lived in town. Anybody in the country who went hungry, it was their own fault. There was a lot of hunting went on in those days, too. You know, people were hunting for food. You could go out and shoot rabbits at night. They'd go out in the moonlit night and shoot rabbits, you know. We used to have rabbits. We used to eat rabbits all the time because we got tired of beef and pork. Rabbit was kind of a treat for us and we'd go out and we'd— My dad, if he was out on the

road somewhere, he always carried a gun with him and he'd shoot rabbits and bring them home at night and we'd clean them and we'd hang up on the clothesline and let them freeze because we didn't have any refrigeration. So you'd hang them up on the clothesline and let them freeze. And when you wanted something different than beef and pork, you'd go get a rabbit.

JT: What about meat in the summer then?

EA: Well, we didn't have game, of course. We always, we raised chickens, we raised beef and pork and—

JT: You wouldn't butcher in the summer?

EA: Well, no, and if you did, you canned it. You did what they called cold pack it. We used to have cold packed chickens like crazy, and it was good, very good. You'd put it in a jar and just can it. And beef and pork, too. We were down at this locker down at Malcom the other day, and they have this cold packed beef down there in jars. It's like five dollars for a pint jar. But it is still good. It's good, and that's what we use to do. Canned all of our own fruits and vegetables and had a huge garden, huge garden always. But even after we moved to town we had a big garden always.

JT: Did you help your mother with that?

EA: Oh, yeah, we took care of the garden. Of course, we didn't do much with the canning or anything, but we took care of the garden. Mowed lawns and carried papers. That's what you did.

JT: After you came to town.

EA: Yeah, yeah.

JT: Push mower.

EA: Oh yeah.

JT: What about, Everett, what about—people could go to the welfare office to get some stamps for food, but what about rent? How did that work?

EA: Well, you know, I am not sure how the rent situation worked. I suppose they got an order of some kind from the welfare office to take care of their rent. I am not sure exactly how that worked. That's been a long time ago. And I am not sure I knew at the time how it worked. The only thing I remember for sure is the coupon books that they gave for the grocery coupon books.

JT: Were you aware of evictions, anything like that?

EA: Not to my knowledge. No, there were not that many evictions, really. People just didn't do things like that in those days. It didn't seem to me, like, if somebody didn't have a home, they wouldn't send them out on the street, I don't think. I don't really know. I am sure there were

people who couldn't pay the rent because there was an awful lot of unemployment at that time. But I think the county, more or less, took care of the county and the state and or both.

JT: Both the food and the rent.

EA: Everything, yeah, welfare they called it. I don't know where it came from, but it was the welfare office.

JT: Were you aware of Uncle Sam's Club?

EA: Not at that time. No, I wasn't at that time. No. I am sure it existed. I was in later years aware of it, but not at that time.

JT: You didn't go there during the time that you would normally think about going there?

EA: No, no.

JT: Movies. Somewhere I noted--were you a movie operator once? Did you do anything--

EA: No, no, never worked in a theater at all. We used to go to them. We'd go to movies every Saturday or Sunday night, sometimes during the week. The movies, it seemed to me, use to be a lot better than they are now and an awful lot cheaper.

JT: What is your comment about returning veterans in the community? How--we hear all this talk about Viet Nam, when they came home and were spit on and what not. What is your recollection of that?

EA: As far as we were concerned? Well, no, we weren't abused or spit on or anything like that. We weren't abused, maybe, I don't know. It just seemed like you had been gone so long that everybody was glad to see you and they didn't come up and say, "I'm glad you saved our lives," and all this kind of stuff, you know. But we weren't abused. That was for sure. I am not sure about the Viet Nam War. I understand it was not a very good war and I agree with that. But I think they are carrying that a little bit too far, really. They weren't recognized.

JT: In other words, you felt you came home and just kind of took your place.

EA: Came home and started in what you were supposed to do and you were supposed to do what you did. Came home and were ready to take off again. That's the way I feel about it. I don't want to have somebody come up and pat me on the back and say what a wonderful job you did. Even though I know I did.

JT: Did you end up in Europe then some?

EA: Oh, yeah, we went Sicily, Africa, Italy, France, Germany, Belgium. We were in all of them. Everywhere in Europe. Anywhere there was troops in Europe we were there.

JT: Did you meet anybody from, that you knew while you were in service?

EA: Yeah, I ran into one fellow, one of the Luttman boys when I was in service. That lives out north of town, who is now dead. I ran into him one time, and I took off one day looking for Bill Ahrens. I knew where he was, and I took off looking for him and I never did find him. I never did find him. Pretty big area over there to find somebody.

JT: What were you in?

EA: I was in an evacuation hospital, which is like a Mash unit, what they call Mash now. It was the same thing as that—750 bed mobile hospital, all in tents.

JT: That would have been a corp or an Army unit.

EA: No, separate unit, just a company, just a separate company.

JT: It would have been attached to what.

EA: Anybody that wanted it, anybody that needed hospital. We were attached to the Seventh Army, the Fifth Army, the Third Armored division, we were attached to anybody that needed—battle casualties. We were a front line hospital. Sometimes we were ahead of the front line. In the Battle of the Bulge, we got ahead of the line.

JT: You were up there?

EA: Oh yeah.

Side Three

JT: How did you get from Italy on up to the northern part of Europe?

EA: Well, we either went by water or by land or by water.

JT: I mean, did you go through Marseilles?

EA: We were in Marseilles.

JT: You went up from the south?

EA: Yeah, we went up from southern France. We didn't go into northern, we went up through southern France.

JT: And yet you got involved with the Bulge.

EA: Oh yeah, yeah. That's where you try to cross the Rhine at the Battle of the Bulge and, yeah, we were sitting right up there. We were sitting at a place called Lorkin, France, and everything

was going back by. And we were sitting there, a 750 bed hospital with patients in it you can't get rid of. You can't just walk off and leave the patients there. We ended up in Augsburg, Germany, then. That's where I came home from. And I don't know, I don't think there is such thing as Augsburg anymore. They have changed the names of all of those places to where I don't know what they are even.

JT: How did you come back, then, I mean. For instance, I came back through Jefferson Barracks.

EA: Well, I came back, we came back, we left Augsburg, Germany, and came back through Casablanca, and then I flew home from Casablanca, to Presque Isle Air Base in Maine, and then went by train to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. That's where I was discharged, Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

JT: When you were drafted did you go in through Camp Dodge?

EA: Yeah. Then I went to Fort Riley, Kansas, and then from Fort Riley, we were there just for a week, and then from there to Camp Robinson, Arkansas.

JT: How did you happen to get acquainted with Phyllis down there?

EA: Well, I don't know. We ran into each other I guess at a dance or something.

JT: USO or something?

EA: Well, something like that. I think we had a company dance probably in an auditorium down there. That's the way we met. Then her mother was such a good cook, I sponged off them all the rest of the time I was there. We were there until, well, I think we left Arkansas in April [1942], went to the desert in California. We were out there until, in California, until November, in the desert. We were with Patten out there. He was training out there. Then went from there back to New York and overseas from New York. Left New York Harbor on November 1, 1942. And landed on Casablanca on November 17, 1942.

JT: You went over as a unit then, you weren't a replacement?

EA: No, no, we went. This was the invasion of Africa at that time.

JT: When were you assigned to this hospital?

EA: From the very beginning. We activated the hospital in Camp Robinson, Arkansas.

JT: Oh, I see. From then on you were—

EA: A hospital. We were a unit. We went wherever anybody needed a hospital. That's where we went. As a matter of fact, we're having this Labor Day, and we're in charge of it in Des Moines, having our fiftieth reunion. We have a reunion every two, well have been having it every five years, but we're getting so old, people are dying off, now we are having it every two years.

JT: Were they people from all over the country?

EA: All over the country. There were a lot of Midwesterners. The original outfit was made up mostly of Midwesterners until we went overseas. Then we got a lot of Easterners. We had 350 enlisted men—350 enlisted men and seventy doctors, and I think forty nurses to make up the company. So it was a pretty good-sized company really.

JT: In order to transport all that stuff, too.

EA: We had thirteen semis and a lot of straight trucks. Everything was mobile. We were overseas for thirty-four months, and in the thirty-four months, I think, I maybe should check this, but I think in the thirty-four months overseas, we moved that 750 bed hospital thirty-two times. Some of those moves were invasions because we made seven initial landings, like in Sicily and Anzio and in France and Southern France.

JT: How did you do those, were you on an LST?

EA: LST, yeah. LST.

JT: And you got ashore at Anzio?

EA: Yeah, we got ashore at Anzio. We got hit after we got ashore, but we got ashore.

JT: Never out of range there.

EA: No, we weren't. We were within— There was a ten-mile square area there, and in that ten-mile square area, was a hospital, an airport, and an ammunition dump, and the Germans were in the mountains all around us, sending down shells every night, and bombing and strafing and everything else.

JT: How was that rescued? I've forgotten how.

EA: Well, they finally broke into them one day. They were sitting in that monastery up there on, there was a Catholic monastery up on the mountain. They could look down and see every move that everybody made down there and they had all their artillery set up in there. And they finally went in one day and bombed the monastery and got them out of there. I remember the day they bombed that thing. There was wave after wave after wave of B17s that went in there. And they just lowered that thing; they just leveled it to the ground.

JT: How was Anzio eventually reduced? Did they break out of that?

EA: They just eventually broke out, both ways. They came in from two different ways and run them out of there. And then we proceeded to go on up to Italy then. That's when we went into France very shortly after that. We didn't go all the way up through Italy. We got up as far as Rome, a little above Rome. And then we turned around and went back to Marseilles and made landing in France, in southern France, back to Naples. And made the initial landing in southern France by water. We went by water. We went by water into Sicily, too.

JT: From Naples to Marseilles. How did you go that? On LST there again?

EA: Yeah, I think those were liberty ships, as I recall. I think that was liberty ships. I don't think that was an LST. Because we went in there at H minus or H plus five or six or so, something like that.

JT: So you had the beachhead?

EA: You had the beachhead itself established when we got there, yeah. On the others they didn't. When we went in on Sicily and Italy, they didn't have, because they needed medical personnel in there to make the landing. They'd run those LST's up on that shore just as far as they could get it. Then when they would unload them, they couldn't get them off. They were strafing those things. Some of those young officers on those LST's weren't too anxious about getting in here and not being able to get out.