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Wendell and Barb McAfoos Oral History Interview

Meghan McNamara, Interviewer

Alton, Illinois

November 16, 2018

Meghan McNamara (MM): The following interview took place on November 16, 2018 at the home of Barb and Wendell McAfoos. This interview is on behalf of the Madison County Historical. Barb and Wendell, you want to tell me a little bit about when you were born, and how things were whenever you were in your youth?

Wendell McAfoos (WM): Well, in my youth, and Barb's background is pretty similar to mine as well. But basically, we were a family where the father worked, the mother stayed home, and that was pretty common. Now we're talking about in the 1940s. I was born in '43, Barb was born in '44. But the fathers worked, the mothers stayed home, raised the kids. Our environment was really a neighborhood environment. One of my earliest memories of the neighborhood was bread and milk. Milk and bread was delivered to our door by the White's Milk Company, and of course they provided bread and rolls as well. But as part of that neighborhood scene as well, our refrigerator in the early days, in the '40s was not a refrigerator, it was an ice box. And ice was delivered as well by a horse drawn wagon. And they drove up and down the streets and you would go out, buy a block of ice, and my mother would get a block of ice, chip it up, put it in the ice box, and that's what kept things cool. It was not really a refrigerator, but it's part of that same era of having an ice box. In maintaining our yard, we had a push mower, one of those rotating wheels with multiple blades, and you just manually pushed. So you mowed your grass with a push mower, a manual sickle, there was no such thing as power tools, you know, in those days. And heating our home, our home and most all other homes in our area, which was a working-class neighborhood, all the homes in the '40s were heated by coal. And every home had a coal bin where the coal supplier would back up in to, or drive into your driveway, and then dump coal from the truck into the coal bin. And then of course, to maintain heat, a family member would shovel coal from the coal bin into the coal-fired furnace. In later years, the coal-fired furnaces were refined, and they became stoker coal furnaces, where there was an auger that would draw crushed coal into the burning pit of the furnace, and then that was in the early '50s. Then in the later '50s, oil became more popular for furnaces. So existing furnaces were converted to oil burners, and then gradually into the '60s, those furnaces were inverted into natural gas. So from the '40s to the '60s, you had coal-fired, and usually that meant that the heat was distributed on the ground floor, and there was no heat on the second floor of most bungalow type residences. But at any rate, there was no air conditioning in those years, in the '40s and '50s. That didn't come into the scene until mid to late '60s, before air conditioning became vogue. As well in the early years, our entertainment, family-wise, was basically by radio. So in the '40s to early '50s we listened to the radio. And there were programs like The Phantom, and Amos 'n' Andy, and there were usually thriller type programs. The whole family would sit around and listen to the radio. But in 1950, or the early '50s, television came to be. So of course, that was black and white television. My family was one of the later families to get a TV, so we used to go to the neighbor's house and watch television. The neighbors made

us stand behind their sofa. And we're talking about being a five, six, seven year old kid, you know, watching television, which was black and white, and there were only three channels. So clothes as well, of course my mom did all the maintenance of the clothes. We had a washing machine which was a ... What was it called, Barb?

Barb McAfoos (BM): Ringer.

WM: A ringer washer, and a manual wringer. But my mom would wash the clothes, clothes were hung on clotheslines to dry, and in the winter or rainy weather, then everybody had clotheslines strung in the basements in order to dry clothes. My mom, among all the other domestic duties, was ... There were no perma press that we called clothing-

BM: Perma press, yeah.

WM: ... perma press clothing. Most everything was cotton in those years, the '40s and '50s, so everything had to be ironed. And growing up, there were two things that strike me in my memory. In our kitchen, where I came from a large family of nine children, a large kitchen table, but our oven door was always open, and with the oven on to provide additional heat to the kitchen, but there was an ironing board in the kitchen, because my mother was always ironing clothes for all of the kids, my dad and all the kids. And growing up, I just thought it was natural to have an ironing board in the kitchen you know, like you might have a stove and an ice box and an ironing board. I mean, that was just the thing to expect. But life revolved around the neighborhood in the '40s and '50s, and everything to do with the neighborhood. The ... Go ahead.

MM: I just wanted to have a question. You were born and raised here in Alton?

WM: Yes. Born and raised in Alton.

BM: Wendell was born at home. Isn't that right?

WM: Yeah. And we grew up in the Milton area, which was Wood River Township. So we were unincorporated part of Alton. We became annexed into Alton in the late '50s. So we had a volunteer fire department, we had no streetlights, no sewers, the streets were oil and chat streets. And going back to the coal fired furnaces, everyone took their clinkers, that's the burned coal, they would take their clinkers out to the street and smash the clinkers up to use as aggregate to support the roads. But all the recreation in the neighborhood was in the neighborhood. All the kids played at the local school playgrounds. There were no organized sports in those years, and certainly no girl's organized sports. All the sports were neighborhood, local sports and they were all boys. Then looking at in those years as you go up from the '50s into the '60s, excuse me, automobiles. Automobiles were big, hokey machines. They were all stick shift transmissions in the 1940s and '50s, and the automatic transmissions didn't come into play until mid to late '60s.

BM: They were all metal. No plastic.

WM: Yeah. Automobiles were all metal, metal bumpers, you know, everything. In 1960, I took my driver's test, driver's ed class, and that was with a stick shift automobile. But no automatic transmissions,

and gasoline in that period of time, actually in the year 1961 when I graduated high school, a gallon of gasoline was 25 cents. In younger, earlier years, it was close to about 15 cents. And I remember also that cigarettes, because I was like a junior in high school in 1960, and started experimenting in smoking, and you could get a pack of cigarettes, and I remember it was Star Cigarettes we would buy for 10 cents a pack. And that was in 1960.

MM: Where did you go to school at?

WM: Went to elementary school at Milton School, which is on the corner of Milton Road and Fernwood, and went to junior high school at what was East Elementary School. And then Alton in those years, the '40s, the '50s, the '60s, actually the '50s forward, because Alton went through a school building and renovation program in the '50s, but there were all neighborhood elementary schools, a bunch of them. Then there were four middle schools. So it was East, West, North and Central. And Central was the black middle school, or junior high school. And during those years, it's interesting. I graduated in '61 as I had said, but all through the '50s, and the schools were desegregated in the '50s, I think somewhere around '55. But I never heard of segregation, never noticed it, realized it, didn't know what it was. I just grew up in an all-white elementary school, middle school. I played sports, I competed against all the other schools. When we went to Central or Central came to our school to compete, we competed, but I never thought anything about Central being all black.

MM: It was just normal?

WM: It is and was what it was, and never thought about it.

BM: We really just, I mean, you really just didn't know. I mean, you didn't have things like water fountains with "white only" or "black only," things were never like that. And I know going to the shows, I think the Grand Theatre, the black kids always sat in the balcony. I don't know if they had to sit there or not, but I remember one time going and wanting to go up to the balcony, to sit in the balcony. And Gary, my brother, you know, said no, we're going to sit here. And Wendell was telling me that in the theater that he went to, that the black kids, what, they always sat on the side, Wendell?

WM: That was the Uptown Theater and, no balcony, there were three sections. And there was a center section, which was always all white folks, the section on the right was always white folks, the section on the left was always black folks. And that's just where people sat. Never thought a thing about it. That's where people gravitated towards. And Barbara and I had this conversation about Alton High School, where there was one area at Alton High School, it was the corridor between the gymnasium and the main building, and all the black kids had their lockers in that area. And they were not assigned the lockers in that area. It was interesting that I was assigned, as a sophomore in high school, I was assigned to a locker in that corridor. And I went down there with all black kids, and I remember being approached by, and I'll never forget, Donald T. Davis, a black kid, played football who I knew, and he wanted to trade me lockers. His locker was in the main corridor where all the white kids congregate. So that's what we did. We traded lockers, I spent three years up in the main corridor with all the white kids, and Donald T. took my locker and ... But that's what they did. People wanted to be with folks that they were comfortable with, and I never thought anything about it, never thought that that was a racist, or segregated kind of attitude, it's just what folks wanted. And so that's what we did.

BM: Also, I only remember one child in school who was mixed, and that was Charlie Smith. And he played the flute, and he sat next to me in the band. And he's the only person I ever knew of that came from a mixed family. I mean, you just ... well, it was hardly unheard of and black then, black kids were really black, I mean, they were dark. And, you know, you look at the black community now, and it's just not black anymore.

WM: But back to the schools. All the years, elementary, junior high school and high school, again I graduated in '61, Barbara graduated in '62, there was no public school busing in Alton in those years. I walked to all of the schools that I went to. And when I got to Alton High, there was busing, but I noticed, it was interesting, because all the kids who came in on the buses to Alton High always wore their green FFA jackets. So those were the Future Farmers of America kids. And they were being bused in from Cottage Hills, Godfrey, and those rural area, and those were the only people being bused into schools.

BM: They did have buses. They had buses from here on State Street to go to Alton High. I'm sure they did.

WM: Well, most of the kids that I knew that came to school or that took buses, they were city buses. They weren't "public school" buses, you know, your yellow public school ... They were just city buses, and that's how ... You either walked to school, or you got a ride from a family member or if you were well-to-do, then somebody had a car, one of the kids would have a car. Of course, that would be elementary, but there was no public school corridor type busing. You walked to school. And so again, you know, that's what we did, and didn't think a thing about it.

BM: What did we do for lunches?

WM: Oh. That was the... Now for me, I thought that, you know, in high school, you know, we had the cafeteria food, and I thought that was absolutely great. For 35 cents you could get a plate lunch, and for 2 cents extra, you could get an extra carton of milk. And for another penny you could get a couple slices of bread, and I thought that was just fantastic you know, to be able to get a plate lunch and get that much food. Now again, in high school, the affluent kids like Barb, she drove to school, but they would go out to the Morning Star Drive-In, or to Block's Drive-In and get a Redbird Special, which would be a burger, fries and a soda, which you used to be able to get for a dollar. And that was in 1961. But I didn't have a car and didn't know anybody that had a car, and so I stayed and ate healthy in the cafeteria.

BM: Well talking about eating, I was thinking about the fact that you know, women cooked. And when they cooked, they always, you know, one of the main ingredients of cooking during that early, you know, in the '40s and '50s and '60s was they always fried food. And Crisco was-

WM: Crisco.

BM: Crisco was a staple in everybody's house, and I know in going through my mother's things I found a grease strainer and you know, she would either cook bacon and fry bacon and she would always save that bacon grease and use it for flavoring green beans or something like that, and I mean, you just, you know, you just saved all of that stuff. And then as well, people saved things. They didn't just buy things and get tired of it and just throw it away. I mean, you used it up and you wore it out and you didn't usually get something else until you know, that whatever you had was gone. So it was just a completely different

philosophy. Hey, let's talk about our toys when we were little.

MM: Can I interrupt before we go on to toys? We talked a little bit about the teachers, and the way that they had to dress. Was that-

BM: Well, teachers, you're talking about teachers when I was teaching.

MM: Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

BM: Okay? That was when I was teaching back, you know what I mean, teachers always had to be, you know, as my ... as our teachers, men always wore suits. And then the women always wore, you know, dresses. They always had a dress.

MM: Okay. We can get to that whenever we grow up.

BM: But talking about segregation as well, I guess our classes probably became segregated when I was in about fourth grade, and there weren't a large proportion of black children there. But as the population and people moved and things like that, it got larger and larger. But you know, it was fine. Nobody had any problems with it at all.

WM: Going back a little bit, there are a couple things about again, neighborhood. Everything revolved around the neighborhood. For example, there were no supermarkets in the '40s, '50s. There were grocery stores, and depending on how large of a neighborhood, there were multiple grocery stores, a little exaggeration but there was almost a grocery store on every corner. And that's where you did your shopping. And as time went on into the '60s, larger stores were created, but they weren't chain type stores. I remember there was the Davis Market, which was like a supermarket. It was up on the corner of Brown and Washington Avenue. Paul Davis owned it. In later years, Tri City Grocery Store became as a chain, popular. But there were neighborhood grocery stores all over town. Likewise, gas stations were all over town.

BM: Service stations.

WM: Service stations.

BM: Yes, service stations.

WM: Where basically they pumped gas, changed oil, fixed tires, and did all the maintenance. But they'd be one and two bay service stations. And the service stations really started going south in the '70s. And then by the '80s the chains, the convenient marts started developing, places like QT, et cetera. And then you didn't do service anymore because there were places like Jiffy Lube and everything became specialized. And whereas in the old days, cars were simple enough that anybody could work on a car. And that's what they did.

BM: Oh, if you're talking about shopping, shopping changed as far as clothing and things like that, women sewed. I mean, all through our junior high school years, we used to wear these blouses and these skirts, you know, just a skirt, and we'd get these big ruffle petticoats that went underneath, which were

layers and layers and layers of different kinds of netting, and we'd always sew ribbon around the bottom. And we were doing, you know, watch American Bandstand and you could get those skirts going, and it was really, really fun. And so parents really, or mothers, women, sewed a lot of their children's clothes. Then you had the more affluent stores like downtown where Tony's is, that's where Vogue was. And Vogue was more of a high-class clothing store, and then of course there was Sears, the Sears and Sears Roebuck, and Snyder's, and Montgomery Ward was very important at that time, you know, everybody did their catalog shopping. There were several shoe stores downtown, and I'll never forget one of them where you would go in and you would put your ... They had an X-ray machine. And you would go and you would stand in this X-ray machine, you'd put your feet in these little slots, and you could look down in these tubes, and went down and showed the bones in your feet and showed where your toes were and how close they were to the end of the shoe. And of course, that was highly dangerous, people had no idea. But there were, you know, it seems like now there's just a lot of bars and things like that downtown, but it was, Penny's and Ben Franklin, the five and dime stores, and I mean, it was just ... Downtown was just booming as far as shopping. And so you know, clothing stores have certainly changed.

WM: Cafeterias. There were no cafeterias until we got to high school in the '60s. But-

BM: We made our food to-

WM: ...I remember in the elementary grades, you could always tell how affluent a family was by what the kids brought their lunches to school in. And of course, the more affluent children brought their lunches in a metal lunch box. The middle-class kids brought their lunches in brown paper bags. And then there was a group of kids like the McAfoos kids, who didn't have brown paper bags. Our mother would wrap our lunches in newspaper, and then tie it together with string. And we weren't the only ones, but we knew the pecking order, that even though those of us with our lunches wrapped in paper, those of us carrying brown paper bags, and-

MM: There was quite a few of you though, wasn't there?

WM: Oh, yeah. There were a lot of kids-

MM: No, I mean McAfoos kids.

WM: Oh, yeah. There was nine of us. There was nine.

BM: Wendell was number six out of nine. And were all of them born at home?

WM: No. Alan ... Number seven, eight and nine, no. Eight and nine were born in hospitals.

BM: Okay.

WM: So first of us-

BM: Now, let's talk about toys as children. And as toys, we didn't really have any. We had very, very few things. I think I probably had a doll, and I know I had probably a tricycle or a bicycle and roller skates. We also had scooters, and sleds. Oh, and talking about sleds, we used to sleigh ride all the time. And

there were, I mean, if you'd have a snow, you'd have this deep snow, and they never cleaned the streets. And you know, we lived where my mother lives, it's right next to Sanborn Hill. Well, I mean, we'd sled on those streets for a week. And just, I mean, just up and down and up and down, and I mean, it was just wonderful. And of course now, you know, all the street cleaners come on and they salt everything and it just ruins it for sledding for kids. But as far as toys, everybody played outside. You played things like kick the can, hide and seek. I know my mother's house, none of the houses around it, the newer houses, were developed and so that was all fields. And everybody in the neighborhood used to come up in our yard and just absolutely play ball and just do everything. And that area was just really a location for the whole neighborhood kids to come in, and it was just so much fun. We used to make our toys a lot. Boxes were probably the best toy you could have. Wendell can tell you about being the Knight of Kotex because he used a Kotex box for his shield and because it was the biggest box you could get at a grocery store. But my sister made a dollhouse out of mine. We used to get boxes and put them together and get out places for us to sit, and we'd make space ships, we would use things like wooden spoons and knobs and to drive our space ship and we'd be flying through space. We used our imaginations. And I was the youngest of three, and so well, we'd always play cowboys and Indians and I'd always have to be the one who would die. Or we'd play Tarzan and Jane, and I'd always have to be Cheetah. You know, it just didn't really work out too good. But I mean, it was just so much fun. Back then, if you played cowboys and Indians you could have a gun and holster and things like that, you know. You having a gun and holster on you today if you're a kid and you'll get shot. I mean, it's just ... We all had BB guns. I used to sit around and try to shoot the frogs out of my mother's lily pool, and we would practice target shooting in the back yard. We used to play Mumblety-peg, did you ever play Mumblety-peg?

WM: Oh, yeah.

BM: And, which is-

WM: With pocket knives, yeah.

BM: ...extremely dangerous. And you have a knife and you would hold it in between your two fingers and flip it so that it'd go down and stick it into the ground. And you would do it by somebody's feet. And they had to move their foot out to where the knife landed. And you'd do it like with this finger, this finger, each of the different fingers. And is that how it was, Wendell?

WM: Yeah. You basically would throw the knife to the outside legs of your opponent to get them to ... and they had to stretch out to where you threw the knife until they spread far enough apart that they couldn't spread any further. So the winner would be the person that spread the furthest.

BM: We always used all sorts of things to make toys. Popsicle sticks were absolutely wonderful. And then over in Hogg Hollow, there was a plastic factory that developed there, and they had all of these scrap pieces of plastic that they threw away behind their thing, and we would get that scrap plastic and make whips and lanterns and all sorts of things from it, I mean.

WM: Go back to the Popsicle stick. Because this is something that all of the kids did. We would go to the local corner grocery store and of course, all the kids would get popsicles and then they'd throw the Popsicle sticks on the ground, until you just had piles and piles of Popsicle sticks mixed in with the

gravel. What we would do is we would go and reclaim the Popsicle sticks, and then clean them off, and build cabins and houses out of the Popsicle sticks. The people would be ... They'd have a conniption fit now thinking about you know, touching something that somebody had been eating off of, but we did that constantly. [crosstalk] The other thing is, this was again in the '40s and '50s, and so war movies about World War II, and still cowboys and Indians was popular because the Wild West was from the 1880s, '90s, but what we used to do, we would play War and to have badges on our shirts, the bottled soda, and of course in those days, the soda all came in recyclable bottles. And when you popped-

BM: No cans.

WM: No, no cans. When you'd pop the top, the caps off of the bottle of soda, it had cork on the inside liner of the cap. So what we would do is we would take the cork out of the cap. We would put the cap on the outside of our shirts and the cork on the inside and press them together, and then that would hold the bottle caps on your shirt. And of course, that would be your badges or your medals, pretending like you're in the military. But geez, it was just great fun playing with bottle caps and Popsicle sticks and rocks. And BB guns and of course, it's almost terrifying to think of now, but you know, we used to have BB gun fights. My neighborhood was similar to Barb's neighborhood, and a lot of vacant land and vacant lots around. We used to chase each other around with BB guns, and you know, shoot each other in the butt, that sort of thing.

BM: Another thing is that living over here on State Street, when we were little, in the wintertime, we would all go out to Fairmont. Fairmont of course, is the most beautiful part of Alton, and we would love to ride our bikes out there and everything. But in the wintertime, we would always go out and we would ice skate on Fairmont Pond. And I mean, we did that for years and years. And they would always build bonfires out there, and you go out and spend your Friday or Saturday nights out, you know, at Fairmont ice skating, and it was just so, so nice. But as far as, you were talking about sports and things? There weren't a lot of sports for girls. But we had what was called Fort Nightly. Did you go to Fort Nightly?

WM: Those were the dances, yes.

BM: Was that in ... We were in sixth grade, seventh grade, middle school?

WM: Middle school. Junior high.

BM: Junior high school. But the boys would select a girl, and you would go and you would take dance lessons, wouldn't you? Isn't that what it was?

WM: Yeah.

BM: Yeah, you learn ... go to dance lessons, dance classes. And then they would have a formal ball for you to go to. You'd dress up and you had your little booklet thing where you had to get your people who would sign you up for dances, and you wore white gloves and all that. And it was just, I mean it was just really, really classy and really nice. And then in-

WM: You would sign your dance card-

BM: Yeah, sign your dance card.

WM: ... who you were dancing with.

BM: And then in junior high and high school, they also had sororities. And they had the Thetas, the Betas, and the Zetas, and they had three different sorority groups that you could you could ask to become part of. So I was a Zeta so, you know. But they had sororities in high school. Do you remember that?

WM: I do.

BM: And we also had socials. And when that was in, that started in elementary school too, wasn't it?

WM: Mm-hmm.

BM: School socials?

WM: Yep.

BM: Then another thing about that era is pets. Pets were, I mean, pets were outside. You know, they didn't have to be leashed, you just let your dog out, and he was just out.

WM: Yep. If they liked it where they were, they'd come home at night.

BM: That's true. We had an old hound dog by the name of Skipper. And Skipper really ran with a pack of dogs. And in the morning, he'd ... Skipper'd sleep inside at night, but in the morning, you'd look out the front of my mother's yard, and out there in the front yard would be probably five or six dogs all waiting for Skipper to come out. And he would go out and they'd just be gone for the day. And you know, I'm sure they were out to mischief because I was told he'd got shot by somebody. But anyway, they were out you know, out doing something.

WM: The kids roamed like the animals, also.

BM: That's true. Pets were outside, and-

WM: My mother used to tell us, this would be like on the weekends, we would get and it might be on Saturday morning, and I'd want to run off with my buddy Jay [Tolley] or some other neighbor, and my mother ... It might be 9:00, 10:00, whatever in the morning, and she would say be home by dark. And we were off in the neighborhood or wherever we wanted to go, but we knew we had to be home by dark. So we just had the run of the neighborhood or the run of the town.

MM: So Alton was pretty safe.

WM: Oh, yeah. It was really safe. And I can't remember of any incidents of people abducting children or anything like that. I mean yeah, it was really pretty safe. Going back to the neighborhood the environment also was, and I've always been amazed at this, mailmen. Mailmen in the '40s, '50s, up to even the '60s, mailmen were actually men. And they were almost always veterans. And mail was delivered twice a day, seven days a week. And these guys that delivered mail, like I said they were all veterans, all out of the

military. And then over the years, that has declined until you've got just, almost anybody carrying mail.

MM: Did you have telephones?

WM: Oh, that's a good ... I had that on my list, actually. That was interesting. In the '40s up to the '50s we had a party line. And so you'd get on the phone and there might be somebody already on the phone. And I never did because I was a kid, but if my mother needed to talk, she'd know pretty much who was on the phone and she'd say, "This is Lucille. I need to make a call if you can wrap it up." But you shared a phone line, so there would be multiple people on one line. But the phones then of course became your rotary dial phones, and then you'd have your own phone line. But they were the heavy, black plastic, you know, they were plastic casings, but they were a durable phone. And as a matter of fact, Barb and I still have several of them in the basement, you know ... We don't use those phones any longer, but-

BM: Well, we had ... Well, number one, if your electricity goes out, only a rotary phone will work. So we do have a rotary phone staying downstairs that plugged up and it does work, and I mean, it's working. Another thing is back ... Like diseases for children, I mean, you got everything. You got the mumps, you got the chicken pox, you got the whooping cough, you had the measles, you know. And everybody got everything, didn't they?

WM: They did.

BM: I think we were vaccinated for polio, though. But didn't Alan get polio? Did Alan get polio?

WM: I think Alan did have polio. But that was another interesting I remember in our grade school going through and getting vaccinated for who knows what it was. But we'd stand in line and we would get these manual shots and you know, with the syringes, and you'd line up, there'd be a whole line of kids, they'd send the third grade up, and you know-

MM: Who was giving these shots in school?

WM: Well, it was interesting. This I don't know as fact, but I don't remember them ever changing the needles. You know, they just gave-

BM: Oh, surely they did.

WM: Maybe they did, but I just don't remember how they do it right now where they slip the thing out and everybody gets a clean shot. And stick that needle in and give a squirt, and they'd get the next kid, and so that's-

BM: They couldn't do ... They couldn't have done that.

WM: That's the way I remember it, but then I was only in the third grade.

BM: Also at Alton High, the school curriculum was so much different than as to what it is now. I mean, they just taught ... They had an awful lot of vocational classes available for kids. And they don't have hardly anything now. They taught cosmetology classes, they taught welding, and you know, becoming a

mechanic, all sorts of things. And they don't offer those now. And the choices, and when I was going through school, I mean now, things have changed so much for women as far as their opportunities as to what they can do. And when I was going through school and going to college, I mean for the most part, women ... I mean, they were to be a teacher, a nurse, a secretary, or to work in a clothing store or something like that. They weren't out there, you know, becoming lawyers and doctors and I mean, very few of them were doing that. So things in that area in that timeframe had changed. Another thing was the development of credit cards. Because, I mean, during the '40s and '50s, they didn't have credit cards.

WM: No. We grew up in a cash economy, in the '40s and the '50s. Everything was cash.

BM: Or layaway, you'd use layaway.

WM: Well, that ... Layaway became more popular in the '50s. But after World War II, even before, during and right after World War II, our economy was a cash economy. If you wanted to buy a car, you know, in the '60s a car might cost \$2,500. Well what you did, you just saved until you could buy a car. Credit was introduced, and it really totally changed our economy. And I don't know if it changed it for the good or not, but-

BM: That's why we didn't have anything. But we were so much happier. We talked to each other, and kids played. They played board games, they played cards, parents dealt with their children and interacted with them, and they didn't all sit on a phone and ignore each other. It's just ... I mean, it was so much better.

WM: Well, in the spirit of the time also, if you had a game, you know, kids took care of their games and their toys and their bicycles because they worked for them. And they knew the value of those things. And it just seems like there is so much consumerism today that you know, if something doesn't work, you throw it out and you go get another one. And in our youth, you know, we couldn't do that because we couldn't afford it.

BM: I know my brother always talks about the fact that he always got a new pair of jeans, you know, or pants or whatever it was, for school each year. And so my mom had gotten him a brand new pair of jeans, and we went up to my grandfather's farm, and my ... We always used to go up and we used to slide down the barn roof into a big pile of hay, and my brother would slide down this rope in his jeans and ripped a hole in them. And so my mother put a patch on those jeans, and he had to wear those jeans to school. And he was so embarrassed at having to wear those jeans with a patch on it, but Mom just said, we just can't afford to get you another pair. But anyway, I know that when Wendell and I got married, I was 27 years old. And I had graduated from college, I lived on my own in New York and California, I was quite capable and had a job. And I had several credit cards. But you know, when I got married, that I wasn't allowed to have a credit card in my name? It had to be in my husband's name. So it had to be in my husband's name.

WM: Yeah. The credit card companies, that was a requirement, that was-

BM: So, as far as the economy, that sure has changed.

WM: Speaking of the economy and in the '50s, minimum wage was 75 cents an hour. And I worked as a

bagger in a Tom Boy grocery store, and this actually taught me my first lesson in capitalism. I worked in this Tom Boy grocery store. I worked for a guy who I just thought the world of. I loved working there. I worked an hour and a half every night after school, and then I worked all day on Saturdays, and I did that for two years, my junior and senior year in high school. And finally I got up to where I was making \$1.25. That was in 1961, I was making \$1.25 an hour. And I remember on Saturdays he used to sit down and he would figure out my hours and my rate, and then he would deduct from my pay, my Social Security, my FICA, et cetera, for federal taxes and all, and I don't recall what it was the net would be, but it was whatever your pay is after all your taxes. And when I was 35 years old, now this was when I was 16, 15 and 16 that I had this job. And so from there, I went on to work many places. Firestone Tire, Olin, Laclede Steel, on and on and on and on. And when I was 35 years old and in a career position at that time, I got my first report from Social Security of my earnings from my first job forward. And you know, I looked at that, and that son of a gun who was taking my 75 cents an hour and deducting all those federal fees out of it, he never filed any of that. That did not come up on any of my Social Security earnings, and that son of a gun who I thought so highly of...

BM: Was stealing from him.

WM: ... was stealing from my 75 cents an hour. I thought, oh my gosh. But I didn't realize it until I was 35 years of age and by that time, he was dead and gone. But-

BM: Another thing that's really changed over the years is the development of fast food. And I mean, now so many women depend upon fast food for their kids and you know, instead of cooking a meal, a really good, balanced meal, it's just so much easier to go through McDonald's and something like that, so the development of fast foods has just really changed the home style, sitting around the table and eating, which we always used to do. And believe it or not, even my children, we all sat around the kitchen table in there and had dinner. And so I mean, we had a sit down meal every night. And I remember it was in probably, I was in school down at Carbondale, and so it was either '63 or '64, McDonald's had just sold its first millionth hamburger.

MM: Wow. Did you go out to eat ever, as kids?

WM: No.

BM: Very rarely.

WM: I don't think ... No. I don't think-

BM: What did we as-

WM: No. It was my family and ... As a matter of fact, we were poor. We fit right in that middle-class group, but we were poor. My dad was not a steady earner. He didn't have a wage job. He was a salesman. He had some issues after he came out of the military and never really held a full-time job after that. My mother used to cut hair. And on Saturday mornings, the front porch of our house would just be filled with kids in line waiting to get a haircut. And she also...

BM: Made ceramics.

WM: ... taught ceramics. And so she had classes and she taught ceramics. But actually, my mom was probably the primary breadwinner of the family. And of course, that's why, you know, I had that job in high school. That was the first real money I ever earned, and I was able to go ... You mentioned layaway, I was able to go to downtown Alton to the [Barliff's] Clothier, and he was one of the first that did layaway, and I bought a leather jacket down there. I think I had it on layaway for about six months, and when I finally paid that off, I was so proud of that coat. I thought that was a real chick magnet at that time. But anyway, that was ... but going back to the environment and all, roads and highways, the roads in Wood River Township were all chat, oil and chat roads. But nationally, all of the roads in the '50s up to the early '60s were all two-lane roads. And it wasn't until General Eisenhower became President Eisenhower, but he was responsible for the beginning of the building of the interstate highways. But at any rate, prior to that, most of your highways were all two-lane highways. And Route 66 that's become sort of memorialized now in history, Route 66 originally was a two-lane highway running from Chicago to Los Angeles. And in 1961 right out of high school, I went to Oklahoma. It was the first time in my life I'd ever been outside of Illinois and Missouri, and Missouri being just across the river. But my friend and I took a job working construction in Oklahoma. And he had, at that time his dad had let him use a '53 Chevrolet, and we drove Route 66, you know, out to West Clinton, Oklahoma, west of Oklahoma City. But two-lane roads, you know. I remember where you used to, talk about how culture has changed, in Oklahoma and then also in the southern states, you could stop at a gas station, fill up your tank, and get a bottle of beer. So gas stations all sold beer. And of course, you were supposed to be 18 years of age at that time, and nobody checked IDs, you know, you'd just grab a couple beers, get back in the car, and head on down the road. But that has changed of course.

BM: You know, Wendell says he was poor. Well, my parents weren't what you would call to be poor, but they certainly were not wealthy. I mean, my mother and father, I mean my dad used to refinish antique furniture, and in what was the family room of my mother's house, we used to have an antique shop. My dad used to collect and sell antiques. And many of them that he sold at that time actually ended up in the Smithsonian. But my mother worked. And so most women did not work, but my mother got a job when I was in seventh grade, and Montgomery Ward came to Alton, and she went in and interviewed for working at Montgomery Ward, and she worked there at that store, which had changed locations a couple of times, the day that they opened, and she finally retired the day that they closed. And so you know, we weren't, I mean my mother and father had three children. My father had several jobs, but he started his own personnel agency in St. Louis. And he was a good provider for our family, but my children's ... My parents sent all of us through school, and my brother through graduate school and medical school. And none of us came out owing a dime. And so there was a lot of priorities towards our education. Alton never did have a public swimming pool, but they had summer sports. And of course, summer sport opened when, in the '50s?

WM: '50s.

BM: '57, was that about it?

WM: Mid '50s, yes.

BM: And I know all of the kids, all of our friends were joining summer sport. And we just begged our parents to join summer sport back then. And you know, they just said no, they just couldn't afford to do it,

so. But it's a shame that Alton is a community that has never provided a public pool for the residents here, and I think it's because it has such a high minority population which is so sad, you know.

MM: What were holidays like?

BM: Well, we didn't ... You're talking about us going out to dinner and things like that? We really never did go out to dinner a lot as a family, it was just too expensive, but we would oftentimes have large dinners for Thanksgiving and Christmas. And as far as Christmas presents, we never got a huge amount of toys. I mean, now kids get toys that just ... I mean, they don't mean anything. They just open them and two weeks later they're tired of them, and they throw them away. Let me tell you, if you make your toys, you sure do appreciate them more.

WM: In our family, again, it was a family of nine kids, but Christmas, you talk about holidays, let's say Christmas. We would get a gift. And it was always an article of clothing. So it would be something functional. One of us would get a pair of gloves, and somebody would get pajamas, you would get an article of clothing. What my dad used to do is just before Christmas, he would go out and he'd go to the markets in St. Louis. And he would come home and he would have under the tree, you know, a crate of oranges and he would have nuts, and I remember the one thing he used to get, and this was only ... I don't know why it was only at Christmas, but he would get dates. And we just loved those dates. But you know, it was all the fruit and the nuts and under the Christmas tree, and that was our Christmas. And decorating the Christmas tree, we-

BM: We made our decorations.

WM: Yes. We made decorations, and the older girls would do paper cutouts, you know, Christmas trees and bells and that sort of thing.

BM: We used to take ... They used to get, was it milk bottle caps that were kind of they were like red...

WM: Those aluminum...

BM: ... and they were-...

WM: Yeah.

BM: ... like an aluminum metal, and we used to save those milk bottle caps, and you would... They were round, and you would cut to the center, and then you could twist it. And it was like a bell.

WM: Shaped a bell.

BM: And then you'd just string them up and hang them and so, oh, we used to make those all the time.

WM: We would sit, and my mom used to pop popcorn. And that was our treat I mean, year-round, was popcorn. But for Christmas, we would do popcorn, and Mom would fix the needle and thread, and so we would thread through popcorn on a long string, and then we would hang that on the Christmas tree as well, a long strand of popcorn.

MM: Did you go to church?

BM: Yes, we did go to church. We went to church all the time, actually. I had my Sunday school pin, where I had probably ten years of perfect attendance. So we went to the First Presbyterian Church in Alton. And you know, one thing I wanted to mention about was movies and how movies have changed. And you know, back in the '50s and '60s, I mean, everything was so wholesome. You know, you didn't have the vulgar and the vocabulary and the cursing and all of that. You didn't have the sex and you know, they talked about it, and they gave you the idea of romance and sex and things like that. But even Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, when they were married, could never be in a bedroom scene where they were in the same bed. They were always in twin beds. And so everything back in that period of time was, if there was a bedroom scene, it was twin beds. And if they had a very intimate relationship or happening, instead what they would do is they would just kind of take the camera and drift off to the sunset and let you use your imagination.

WM: Or go to the ocean scene where the waves are coming in, crashing on the rocks.

BM: You know, it was just so wholesome. It's just show everything and say everything, it's just spoiling things.

MM: Did you go to the movies a lot?

BM: No, not really. Well, yes and no. We used to go to the movies almost every Saturday, and it cost a dime to go to the movies.

MM: Was this the movies or the drive in?

BM: No. Well, we went to the drive in. There were drive ins, but this was ... We used to, I mean, we would walk to the movies. When we were living on Brown Street, there was a movie theater down on Broadway that we used to go to, and then also we would walk to the Grand, and then my grandmother was seriously ill and she had a stroke, and we used to drive up to Whitehall every weekend to see her and just to get the kids out of the house, we would go to the movies. And so we'd go up there, pay, get our dime to go to the movies, and we'd also get a nickel to spend. And so my brother and sister used to always take my money, and they'd tell me that they would share their popcorn and stuff with me, but we'd take my money and they'd buy a comic book and the problem was that they'd never read it to me, and I couldn't read. So just really, they kind of took advantage of me.

WM: The Uptown Theater, where we went, was 14 cents to get into the Uptown Theater. And my mom would give us 15 cents, you know, a nickel and a dime, and so that left a penny change. They had, there was what was called a Holiday sucker. It was like a caramel, a long caramel sucker, and it cost a nickel. Well, we only had a penny. And I wasn't the only one that would just have a penny. So it was sort of a free for all in the movie theater of all the little kids like myself, trying to get somebody else's penny. So you would beg, steal, wrestle it out of their hands, do whatever you could do, to get another four cents so you could buy a Holiday sucker. And that sucker would last all the way through the movie.

BM: When we were little, didn't they use mills to use, to be on the public buses? I don't remember being on the bus very often, but I'm sure I probably was at some time.

WM: Tokens.

BM: Well you had tokens, but didn't they have mills also?

WM: I don't remember that. I never rode the buses. I couldn't afford it.

BM: Well, a mill, have you ever seen a mill? It's a tenth of a cent.

MM: I've never heard of it.

BM: Yeah. They used to have mills. You want to talk about Metro and starting Metro?

WM: Well, that's kind of a fairly modern-

BM: It's 30 years.

WM: Huh? You know, that was, well after childhood, and going to school, military, I started working for ConAgra, and then after 18 years with ConAgra, we parted ways, and we started a health club, Metro Sports. We were there 30 years, and actually, that was, when I look back over that, I mean all of that was pretty much uneventful. It was just event less?

BM: Starting a business.

WM: Yeah.

BM: Well, everybody thought you were crazy.

WM: Well, yeah, they may have been right. For us, you know, starting a business was a big risk. And we just went ahead, forged ahead. We bought what was the YMCA in Alton, which was a 40,000 square foot building which failed for a number of economic reasons, but it failed and was vacant for almost five years. And Barb and I at the time were in Minneapolis with ConAgra, the corporate work I did, but when I came home and had left the company, then we bought that building, renovated it, and ended up running it as a health club. You know, really, I don't know what else to say about that. We just worked every day and raised our kids, and sent them to school and got them married, and got old, and sold it.

BM: Yeah. That's pretty much it.

MM: So we also talked a little bit about some of the stores in Alton, none of them that I recognize anymore. So do you want to talk a little bit about just how Alton, maybe not even just the stores, but the industry side of it as well, has changed, you know, since you-

BM: Well, you know, Alton had an opportunity to be the, what was it, the capital of Illinois? State capital?

WM: Mm-hmm.

BM: But they chose to be a railroad hub instead, and Springfield got it? How did that happen Wendell,

do you know-?

WM: I don't remember the details of that. But actually, the state house circle was the site that they had chosen, you know, the state capital. And we're talking about something going back into the early 1800s. But basically, going back to the history of industry in Alton, Alton was a strong, bustling industrial and riverboat trading community. There was a lot of trading coming off of the Illinois, Mississippi River, and Alton was sort of the hub for that commercial industry. And Alton developed a number of industries, you know, going back to the tannery, which puts all of the cattle, livestock that was slaughtered in the area, then they would bring the skins to Alton and the tannery was here, and Brown Shoe Company had a plant here in Alton. There was the Vinegar Works because of Brussels, Hardin, Calhoun County basically, and Carrollton, [Eldrin], and you know, the vineyard, or not vineyard, but the orchard areas, hauled apples into Alton and the Vinegar Works was down there, so it was a major industry in Alton. There was the Alton Box Board, there was Laclede Steel, there was ... Illinois Glass became Owens Illinois Glass, became Owens Brockway, blah blah blah, you know, major glass producer in the world. It wasn't Alton, but East Alton, Wood River, Olin Mathieson during those years from an industrial standpoint, grew to where there were just thousands of employees at Olin Mathieson.

BM: Who owned our house, the [Tiska] house?

WM: The Levises.

BM: Yeah.

WM: Yeah.

BM: And they were from where, the Box Board?

WM: No, that was Illinois Glass. The Levises were the glass producing family.

BM: Did you know that? The house that you lived in.

WM: So what happened was, all of these industries after World War II, thrived. Alton in the early '50s had a population of near 50,000 people. In the early '70s, a number of things happened. There was a struggle with union power. All of these plants and industries in the community were unions. The union, or the companies, started moving their plants out of the area because of the union wages. And also competition. These plants, like Olin, Owens Illinois, the Box Board, these were all plants that started in the late 1800s to early 1900s, so by the '50s, '60s, '70s, the plants and the equipment were getting old. So the companies, it was cheaper for them to reinvest to communities or you know, places like Mississippi and other southern states that had Right to Work rules so they didn't have to pay the union wages. So industry just started grinding to a halt, and then at that same time, there were some socioeconomic issues. We had developed a larger, because of the industry and the jobs, we had developed a larger minority population than what had originally existed, so-

BM: The development of projects?

WM: So by the mid '60s, and particularly around 1968, then we started having a lot of racial strife in

town. Now bear in mind, I didn't even know there was a race problem. I never thought in terms of anything racial. But then again, I wasn't black. But by 1968, you know, the crap started hitting the fan, and we had a lot of racial strife in the late '60s and early '70s. A lot of demonstrating. There weren't really any riots as such, but there was a whole rash of firebombings in Alton. That changed the community. But the other thing that changed Alton, that changed our community, was in the mid '50s when desegregation became the law, there was white flight out of Alton. So the white middle class started moving to Godfrey, Brighton, Bethalto, moving out of Alton where there were the black people. And so that white flight actually has continued and continues on to this day. There's a young generation of people your age, for example, that had good education, good jobs, and rather than staying in Alton and grow their families, they chose to pack up and go to Edwardsville, Glen Carbon, and the more affluent areas around Edwardsville, you know, the county seat, Madison County seat, so that white flight continues today. So we've gone from a population of about 48,000 people in some period in the '50s, to where right now we are at about 27,000. And Godfrey, which had basically a nonexistent population because they were an unincorporated rural area, so basically in the '50s they had no population, to where today, well, say no population, Alton 48,000, Godfrey today is somewhere in the area of 18,000 people and Alton, 27,000. So, and those folks that moved to Godfrey are basically all white. And good, bad or indifferent, that's what happened. So there was that industrial decline, and then the racial exodus, you know, the white flight from Alton due to the desegregation, has really hurt the community. And the community is still struggling to ... Back in the day, again, after World War II, everybody owned their home. There were some neighborhoods in Alton like in the Wood River Township, the Milton area, that was unincorporated where I grew up, we had no streetlights, we had a volunteer police department, we had no paved roads. But you know, times have changed, and we now have those amenities. But in those early years, not having the amenities, it just seemed like folks were really pretty happy. Maybe dumb, naïve, whatever, but everybody owned their homes in those years, in the city, in the unincorporated areas. Now, moving from 1950-ish, when everybody owned their homes and lived you know, happily and stupidly or whatever, you move forward to where we are in 2018, and in the city of Alton, the housing in Alton right now is 50% rental property. So only half, or fewer than half of the people in this community own their own homes. And the others don't. And that shows in the appearance of the community. People take pride in home ownership, and they'll take care of their homes. Renters just don't, and this isn't faulting renters, it's just ... you know, it's a fact. It is what it is. And you have a community now where only half of the people own their homes to where 50 years ago, everybody owned their homes. That's a big transition, and not a good transition.

MM: We have about ten minutes left. Barb, did you want to talk about teaching at all, or is there anything else that you guys wanted to talk about to kind of wrap things up?

BM: I think I pretty much ... Teaching, no. I mean, teaching has changed a lot, I think, from the time I was in school, but, you know-

MM: What grade did you teach in?

BM: Well, the first year that taught, I taught at West Junior High School. And I taught ninth grade biology. And it was just a wonderful, wonderful group of kids. I mean, all of them, those kids, they were just some of the brightest kids around. And many of them have become very successful. But the problem was my mother's house was located right next to West Junior. And so here I was, 22 or 23 years old, well

after I graduated from college, I went out to L.A. and I lived in L.A. for a while, but when I came back, I got my job at West and taught biology there. And the problem was, here I was young, and probably about 80 pounds lighter than what I am and looked pretty good, and here I was teaching all these young kids, these ninth grade boys. Or... yeah, they were ninth graders at that time, and girls. And they were always coming over to my mother's house. And this was, you know, football games, they'd come knock on my door. And this was not good. And I just thought, I do not want this happening. And so I left my job at West Junior and I went and I taught over in Kirkwood, at Nipher Junior High School. And then I thought, you know, things here, I've tried the West Coast and other things here, and the Midwest isn't working out for me, so then I decided I was going to New York. And I went and taught school in New York for two years. So then I came back and got a job at Pattonville. I was there for 13 years, and Wendell and I went to Minneapolis, and I got to be a nice young stay at home mother for a couple of years, and then I came back and taught a year at University City. And that was just a little too rough for me, and so then I had two job offers. One was at Parkway and the other was at Riverview Gardens. And I just preferred teaching real kids instead of snobby little kids, and I took the job at Riverview Gardens. And so I was there until I retired.

MM: You want to talk about the dance studio at all?

BM: I started the ... Well, yes. I started Showtime Productions. I did it as part of the programming for Metro Sports. We had a dance school that was at Metro prior to that and they relocated, and so in order to keep the programming going for Metro Sports, I started our own dance school, Showtime Productions, and became the largest dance school in the Alton and Godfrey area. And after retirement, my daughter [Meghan] is taking it over and it's nice to see it growing and being so successful.

MM: Did you know anything about dance when-

BM: I don't know anything now about dance. The only thing I know is how to run a business, and I guess I did it all right.

MM: I guess so.

WM: When Barbara and I came out of high school, there was employment opportunities everywhere. There was never a question about you know, if you could get a job. The question always was, where do you want to go to work. Gradually, that changed, and the job opportunities became less and less until, actually, up until just a couple of years ago. Now with the influx with all of the warehouses in Alton, now these are not high paying jobs, they're low skilled jobs, but there are thousands of them. And Amazon is leading the way with a salary of \$15 an hour. They're the highest paid of the warehouse locations. But Madison County has become a hub of warehouse distribution, mainly because of the highways out here, 270, 70, and 63 into Missouri and all, so close to 55, and what's the other one. But at any rate, but the jobs that are here today are ... There are more jobs available, so employment is sort of booming, but they're low income jobs, whereas in the past, with the steel mill in Owens, Illinois, and Olin, those offered more skilled employment, which there is very little of now.

MM: I do have one last question. Is there anything that's the same? Is there any place that's still open? Is there anything that has not changed?

WM: I tell Barbara, and I think about it all the time. There is a bar and restaurant out in Bethalto called The 140.

MM: Geno's?

WM: Geno's 140 Club. And again, early '60s, '61, '62, I worked for my brother in the gas station, and we would go to Gino's and get ... This would be, we would be in our grease monkey attire, and smelly and kerosene and all, and that's what you cleaned yourself with. But we would go to Gino's and get a steak dinner, T-bone steak and fries for \$2.

MM: The price changed.

WM: And the prices are... Geno's is still there, and they advertise, you know, being there since 19, beginning, whatever, a long time. But yeah. Geno's is still there, and that's one of the few places that, me thinking about it, I mentioned it to you going up through Grafton, you know, when we were dating. There was a bar up in Grafton called Lone Star, and it is still there. But-

BM: Well, until a few years ago, I'd probably say my mother's house. But it's changed now. You know, one thing that we don't have that I really am disappointed to see that it's kind of left the area, and that's the Alton Water Ski Club. When I was in my 20s and when I was in college, I wanted to learn how to water ski, and I went down and wanted to join the ski club, and my mother was so upset for me being on the river and she was so concerned, that I would get hurt or something would happen. And I came home from school and I told her I was going to go down to the ski club, and she says, "You're not driving the car down there. You're not going to take the car and go down there." Because they were having ... I'd called the Telegraph to find out how to contact somebody from them, and they were having a meeting at the ... well it was a bar down there on the river, what was that, the Cave, was it called the Cave?

WM: Clifton Terrace Cave.

BM: Whatever it was. And she says, you're not going to drive the car down to some bar.

WM: Actually, it was the Clifton Hotel.

BM: And so I said okay. So I called a cab and went down there. And I went down and met the most wonderful group of people. There were kids from St. Louis and from Alton and from Godfrey, and I joined the ski club, and I probably had some of the best times of my life down there. We skied. I learned to ski. I skied in shows, I learned to fly the kite, I did trick skis, I, you know, was top person on pyramids, I mean, it was just like being Gidget on the Mississippi. It was just great. And you know, I just see that the old clubhouse down there is for sale, and you know, they don't dredge that area of the Mississippi where we used to ski all the time, and so it's just so shallow and boats can't really be there. And it's just sad to see it gone.

MM: Well, I think we're out of time. Thank you so much for letting me interview you guys. It was interesting.

BM: Well, thank you for asking us.