**Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois**

**Jeffery R. Halcom Oral History Interview**

Phil Schneider, Interviewer

July 11, 2017

**Phil Schneider (PS):** This is a oral history interview with a Jeff Halcom. Interview is taking place on July 11th, 2017 for the Madison County Historical Archive. My name is Phil Schneider, I'll be conducting the interview. Jeff can we start off with your full name?

**Jeff Halcom (JH):** Jeffery R. Halcom

**PS:** What does the R stand for?

**JH:** Ray.

**PS:** Ray? So you've lived your entire life, or most your life in Madison County, correct?

**JH**: Correct.

**PS:** Tell us what it was like growing up in the county?

**JH:** Well I grew up- in a- on a farm. A 300-acre farm about ten miles outside of Edwardsville. So we had a pretty simple life. We raised our own livestock had our own garden. You know, we- my mom didn't work, my dad was a carpenter and he farmed. So we just lived basic, we lived off the land. And that's about what we did, we farmed and did what we could to make ends meet. And that's what we did.

**PS**: Ok. So I should have asked this first but what year were you born?

**JH:** 1960.

**PS:** 1960. So you were- you lived in what town as a kid? In Edwardsville you said?

**JH:** Edwardsville was my address.

**PS:** Your address. But you lived out in the-what out in the country?

**JH:** Out by- yeah- out in the country, out by Holiday Shores.

**PS**: And so you said your dad was a carpenter?

**JH**: Carpenter by trade.

**PS:** Uh huh, so he'd get up and do- so how how did that work [mumbling]?

**JH:** He'd get up and go, he'd get up and go and farm or go and work cause from 7 to 3:30 and he would come home and get on the tractor. And go out and plow and this and farm.

**PS:** Wow.

**JH:** And then my mom would take care of the livestock. And the garden and us kids would help with whatever they needed. [Talking over each other]

**PS:** [taking over each other] Ok. So there was- you had a brother or sister?

**JH:** I had - I have one brother.

**PS:** Ok. So what was it like growing up with kids on the farm?

**JH:** Well we just had each other to play with cause our nearest neighbor was a mile away so we just played outside and did our jobs. You know it was really a pretty simple life, we didn't really have a whole lot but we were happy because we lived off the land and we just did what we needed to do. And you know.

**PS:** So what- you used to live off the land. And just beyond farming did you do a lot of fishing or hunting?

**JH:** I didn't hunt myself, my family did. They deer hunted but we, you know, raised our own garden. Had our garden for all our own vegetables, canned. Then we raised our own livestock, pigs and cattle. Butchered all them. My mom had one time cured our own meat even, smoked our own hams and everything. We cut- we had a wood furnace, we did not have, you know, we didn't have air conditioning. We had a wood furnace, we cut wood every weekend. So that's how, you know, what kept us going.

**PS:** So it seems like you had a busy life?

**JH:** It kept us pretty busy. There was always something to do.

**PS**: Mhm. But as a kid did you have time for fun?

**JH**: Oh yeah. I was always playing in the sand pile or building toy guns or playing army or mowing grass, whatever my dad- my dad always a list for me to do but we had- we enjoyed out life. We had a good life.

**PS:** So you said you had a busy life in the farm but you guys had fun. You- were in the summer times, you had more chores to do or what?

**JH:** Yeah. We paint buildings and stuff. And then when I was a little older I worked with my dad in construction, you know, doing gopher stuff. Stripping forms, setting up forms, digging up basements, pouring concrete. Pretty well whatever they needed done. Then I made a little extra money, I think I made two dollars an hour [laughing] or something like that.

**PS:** That was back in the seventies?

**JH:** Yeah probably. Yeah probably like in the mid-seventies.

**PS:** So you'd go and you'd work a full day?

**JH:** Yeah, yeah I'd go to work with him and come home with him.

**PS:** Yeah. So you think that's where you growing up on the farm and then working those kinds of jobs early on, you learned how to be a hard worker?

**JH:** Yeah I guess. I mean that's my whole family, always been that way. We always, you know, work all day and sometimes- we never really went on vacation. I mean we'd butcher 12 hogs and we'd just all get in and do it. The whole family would do it, our whole, you know, my mom's brothers and sisters and- we'd all get together do it. And get it done and everybody got something out of it and that was- I never took a vacation till I was 18.

**PS:** Where did you go?

**JH:** Florida, which- with some of my friends- which I got really sick cause I got really sun burned. And I would never do that again but.

**PS:** It was an experience?

**JH:** Yeah it was an experience. Never been out of- [clears throat] Well I think I was 16 when I went down to De Soto, Missouri. Been to the Springfield Fair, De Soto Missouri, and then when I was 18 I went to Florida. But I had never been anywhere else. Not, no other state or anything.

**PS:** 'Cause you didn't have time?

**JH:** Well- we just didn't have the money. We just didn't have any extra money. We just- didn't, you know, we did what we could do.

**PS:** So- were there a lot of farms in the county at that time?

**JH:** Yeah, about everybody. You could have a small farm back then. Yeah, it ain't like the big farms now where everybody one guy farms 30 or 40 didn't properties. You know, we had a small farm with 300-acre farm but 140 were tillable. My grandpa farmed 600 acres and there was a lot of smaller farmers, you know, farm 200, 300 acres. You could do it back then, but things have changed a lot.

**PS:** Ok, so that's a, so what's changed or what- what caused things to change?

**JH:** Well everything, I guess, progress. We quit farming 30 years ago. And when we quit farming, they told us, we rented that farm, and they told us we were not progressive enough because we didn't have the large equipment to you know do 3-400 acres a day. We just wasn't fast enough, and it's just that's the way it's gone with technology and everything. All the tractors and everything have gotten bigger and the equipment has gotten bigger and it's just spread out and that's why a lot smaller farms folded up. 'Cause they just couldn't keep up with the- and then the cost of machinery went up and it just made everything more difficult, you know.

**PS:** Did you- when you were in school did you plan on continuing farming? Like was that your plan?

**JH:** No, I did not plan on it because it was a struggle. You know, you work a full-time job and come home go out and plow till one or two in the morning, then get back up and go to work again every day. And then you had to buy your machinery and your seed corn and your gasoline and your diesel fuel for the tractors. And you know, and like we had some bottom ground cleared and then we would pick up that we had that cleared. We started planting, well the first two years we lost all the crops because of the ground wasn't- it had not been farm, it was timber ground. So then, you know, that just really- we couldn't even get anybody to buy the corn, it wasn't good.

**PS:** Ok I feel like we're jumping around a little bit. Let's go back; we'll talk about being a kid and going through school. What do you remember about going to school? You went to the Edwardsville School District?

**JH:** Edwardsville School District. I mean, I had a learning disability, so Edwardsville was a good school to go to because it took care of the problem. But I mean, I went to three different grade schools 'cause I went to Morrill for first, second, and third. Midway for fourth and fifth. And Hamil for sixth. And then I went to Edwardsville to the junior high and then to the senior high, which is all changed now.

**PS:** Yes it has.

**JH:** I mean it was pretty good. I mean, school was school was not easy for me. And being a farmer, I didn't really see that I needed all that higher education [laughing] you know. To me it was just, you know, I like working with my hands and as long as I was doing that I didn't really, you know, but- I mean it was pretty good. I mean we had a good school district, and it seemed like everything went pretty well. We always managed to make it work; I ended up graduating so there's something to be said about that.

**PS:** So as you were growing up in your teenager, I'm sure you- did you have any other folks around you that had more money? Maybe a little more well off. So what did you and your brother do? So how did you guys enjoy yourselves as teenagers when some other regular things like going off to the movies and spending a lot of money wasn't an option for you?

**JH:** Well didn't really mind. Mostly stayed at home and worked in my woodshop and then I got involved in church. Went to church youth group and that. And just, you know, whenever I wasn't doing that, I was either with my grandpa because he had a farm or working on our farm or, you know, trying to make a little extra money here and there.

**PS:** What was it like going to church back in the late 70's maybe early 80's?

**JH:** I enjoyed it. I started going, I went to Sunday school as a child and then my mom got sick for a while, so we quit going and then I kind of got back once I started driving. Started going back to church and I enjoyed it, got involved in the youth group and doing stuff and I spent a lot of time at church. And I enjoyed it. I thought it was a good experience.

**PS:** What were some of the things you guys would do?

**JH:** The youth group we'd go to Six Flags and we had a stand at the Bethalto Homecoming. You know, we'd go to concerts, Christian concerts and stuff like that.

**PS:** You ever play any sports in high school or in?

**JH:** No I did not.

**PS:** No?

**JH:** That wasn't- I just was never that coordinated to do sports.

**PS:** Did you do any recreational sports like with the church and what not?

**JH:** I did church basketball at one time. I tried church softball but that- I could do ok at basketball but I couldn't do very good at softball, so I didn't even mess with it.

**PS:** Was it just you did basketball for the fun of it or did you enjoy the competition?

**JH:** just for the fun of it. I'm not a real competitive person.

**PS:** So you know you weren't going to go into farming?

**JH:** Right.

**PS:** So what was your plan then? Like going into high school and after highs cool.

**JH:** When I was in 9th grade I decided I was going to be a machinist. And that's what I put my mind to and so that's why I became a machinist.

**PS:** How did you decide that?

**JH:** Well I took a shop class and then I liked it. And I'm mechanical so I started reading all the books the teacher would sell me, he would sell me the old textbooks and I'd read all about machine work and I decided that 9th grade. And then in- I took another shop- more shop classes in 10th grade and then I went to a vocational school in Collinsville for the last two years of my high school. And then I got a job as a apprentice machinist at a high school.

**PS:** So where was your first job at then?

**JH:** Madison M&M Machining Gear. Yeah.

**PS:** Now soon after that you ended up moving didn't you for a while?

**JH:** Right. We had the big snow of '82 and it shut everything down so after that I was laid off. So I was working at gas stations and wherever I could find a job. And I had met my wife and she's from Pennsylvania, so we ended up moving out there and I got a job at a knitting mill and then I got a job at a place that made automotive drive line parts. And then I got a job at an aluminum excursion facility,

**PS:** Sounds like- so where those just- you were laid off a job or found a better job?

**JH:** Well I started at a knitting mill driving a fork truck and then I found the better job. And then I worked at that job and then I had been trying to get in at the aluminum mill and then I finally got in there. So then I quit there to move back to Illinois. And take a job at Granite City Steel.

**PS:** So what was it like working at the Steel Mill, was- is and keeps going back and forth- a big part of Granite City, what was that like working there at such a volatile place?

**JH:** Well the place I was working in - in Pennsylvania was a really nice shop and then I interviewed at Granite City Steel, but I didn't tour the shop. And then when I- the first day I started it was like stepping back in time to the 40's because they were - they just weren't doing things, you know, very modern. Everything was antiquated and stuff like that. So that's what ended up, you know, but I fit in there, so I worked there for almost 12 years.

**PS:** You ever get laid off while you were there?

**JH:** Nope never did, not one time. Cause things were pretty good right then.

**PS:** You said that the shop there was antiquated, is there a reason why think the one- why you think the shop here in Madison County would be antiquated compared to the one you experienced out in Pennsylvania?

**JH:** Well I guess it was just the way they had set it up and ran it for all them years. And the steel mill had a bonus system and it was a really odd system the way they had things set up. And if you had used smaller tooling to get a job done then you would make more bonus so the guys was always trying to invent ways to make more bonus, you know. To make more money. And it was just, I mean, it was standard machine equipment, but it was just not up to the standards that we had at the time, you know. It was all pretty far back to the 40's and 50's, you know, just like- literally like walking back into a book.

**PS:** What was it like working there? Like walk me through a day at the steel mill.

**JH:** Ok, you'd clock in, go to the locker room and get changed into your work clothes. And you'd get a job, just depended on, you know, sometimes they had emergency jobs they - you had to get done. Then sometimes you just had follow up on a job that was already in progress or and you'd just- or you'd sometimes get a new job you'd have to get the print. They'd give you the print, you'd go find out how much material you needed, you'd go out and saw it and put it in the lay of the mill or whatever you had to do. And machine it and, you know, most of the time you'd you would follow it through till the end, it just depended on the size of the job.

**PS:** So you worked in the shops and you were- so what was your responsibility as far as the overall picture?

**JH:** My responsibility was to make and fabricate like crane axles. They had these things called crest tong bits that they picked up those slabs with. Boar crane wheels, boar locomotive wheels, make locomotive axles. Boar couplings to go on the end of motors and shaves that drive- a coupling would drive it and it

was set up so it would be a little flexible. So in case it didn't match perfect. We worked- we did- we machined these things called bottom rolls it went into the galvanized line where they coated the galvanized material and it was a big stainless steel roll that went down into the vat of molten zinc and the sheet would run around this and that's how it'd get coated with the galvanized. We would work on them just everything, work we did- work on electrical motors. Just whatever they needed. Sometimes we'd go out in the field, work on stuff just depended on what they needed.

**PS:** So you were like a- you didn't work on a finished product you were working on support for the mill itself?

**JH:** Yeah, yeah. We didn't work on the- we worked on the equipment that made the finished product.

**PS:** Got you.

**JH:** So like, you know, we'd work whatever our capability was. Some of the stuff was too big for us but most of the stuff, you know, like we worked on the overhead electric cranes. We'd worked on those crane wheels or the blocks and tackles that were on them. And the crane blocks or the drums, the electric motors for them, stuff like that. The fork trucks, we'd work on fork trucks parts, stuff of that nature.

**PS:** So what- what was the biggest jobs you might have done there?

**JH:** The biggest job I ever done there weighed 14 tons. It was a big bearing capsule for the hot strip.

**PS:** So how would you handle a job that big?

**JH:** We had 15 ton- no was it 15 or 20. We had a big crane, we had a big overhead crane that you would handle it with. Set it up on boarding mount with.

**PS:** When you worked at the mill when you came back to Illinois the Granite City Steel Mill was behind the times. Did they ever update that at all? I mean it's been years now.

**JH:** Yeah well I was there, I just kept asking them to get newer- some newer tooling and stuff of that nature. And we ended up getting a newer keys heater that was a lot better. Keys heater cuts keys ways and stuff, internal key ways. We got a boarding mill, half million-dollar boarding mill. And new saws. A nice bridgeport milling machine that had a digital readout on it, none of the lays had anything had any kind of electronics on it, you know. Everything was still from the - all these lays were from the 50's.

**PS:** Uh huh

**JH:** So.

**PS:** So what was the- the digital allowed you to get more precise?

**JH:** Yeah more accuracy, easier, you know.

**PS:** So how'd you convince them that- I mean- cause you said before that bonus for using less tooling you get more money right?

**JH:** Yeah, well what happened was that they stopped that program and they went to a fixed bonus. So it made it more fair that way. So then, since we had a fixed bonus those guys wasn't pushing for that anymore. So we - that way it made it more fair so then, a lot of the old time guys wouldn't even still- use the digital read out. They would refuse to do because they- it was something new, you know. And they didn't want to do it but.

**PS:** So what they would either what - they would pass that job to somebody else?

**JH:** They'd pass it on or just not use it, you know, just do it the old way. Look at, count the dial revolutions, do it the old fashion way like they'd been doing it for 30 years, you know.

**PS:** They contend it was better or they just? [Talking over each other]

**JH:** They just weren't comfortable doing it. Cause when I hired in there there was probably 8 guys that were headed to retirement. So then we got a new group of guys in so everything was turning over so it made it better for- to, you know, get things updated and stuff of that nature.

**PS:** So how did you go about getting- it seems like you were the driving force behind getting new stuff?

**JH:** Well I was kind of, yeah I was kind of- I just kept asking and telling them if we had this we could do this, you know. We could do this better and we could get more jobs in because a lot of the jobs at the Steel Mill would get contracted out and we was always trying to fight to keep them in there. So we would have more work. Well to do more work you had to have more equipment, you had to have better equipment, you know, to compete with the outside people.

**PS:** Yeah

**JH:** So one time we did. We had a contest with Linhart Tool and I and ourselves and we beat LinhartTool.

**PS:** So what was that contest like?

**JH:** Well it was a big job, it was a big slab of steel that started out, I think it was 8 inches thick, 3 foot wide and we had to machine these slides out of it. But we ended up getting it done before Linhart.

**PS:** Was that before the equipment upgrade or after?

**JH:** That was after.

**PS:** So this was about what year?

**JH:** Oh my this was, probably 97, 96, 97.

**PS:** So the Steel Mill had already contracted a job out to them and you just wanted to do it to prove to the bosses or?

**JH:** Well yeah we wanted to prove it we could handle it. And we did, we showed them that we could do it.

**PS:** So you guys were trying to fight to get more work?

**JH:** It was a constant fight to keep work in the shop- in the mill because it would get jobbed out. Which Linhart Tool and Dye is now out of business.

**PS:** So you said that when you were there the mill like you never got laid off but there was kind of struggle to keep the work going?

**JH:** Yeah. I mean to keep it in house, to keep it you know. Cause there's a lot of times they'd send the work out and then- they'd comeback in and it'd have to come back to our shop for us to remodify it because it wasn't right.

**PS:** So they'd be paying the first contract and then paying you guys to fix it?

**JH:** Yeah.

**PS:** So when you were working at the mill your- you'd come in- you said you'd get emergency jobs. What might an emergency job be?

**JH:** Oh if they had a crane down that would be like in the hot strip or in the coal strip or something that had a bad coupling or bad barring box for the wheels or something like that. And they needed it in a hurry and all. What would happen was is the bearings would go bad and they'd usually- by the time they found out there was nothing left. I mean it was in bad shape. So you know, the longer that stuff was down it was costing the Steel Mill quite a bit of money because of the time down you know- shut the stuff down.

**PS:** So your job was to keep the mill running basically?

**JH:** Kind of yeah, part of it, yeah.

**PS:** Ok. So you worked there for over 12 years, why did you leave?

**JH:** Because I got a chance to go to work for a company called Dow Jones and Company. They print the Wall Street Journal as a machinist there. And I was gonna make about 150 bucks more a week, so that's why. And it was a good job, it was in air conditioning. The Steel Mill was not air conditioned, I worked straight afternoons of 115 in there in the summertime so pretty hot.

**PS:** Yeah. So ok, so part of it is increasing pay and better conditions. Do you- was the steel mill was it all bad or was it a positive experience to work there?

**JH:** Oh it's a good place to work, it's a dangerous place to work. I worked in a shop and a lot of people worked out in the where the slabs are it and the coils and that. And when you'd go out of the shop boy you'd have to really keep watching because there was them big haul trucks and everything. And I mean you can get run over real easy. I mean they had machines that could pick up 400 tons of slabs up at one time, that's a lot of weight. A lot of weight.

**PS:** So do you- you moved to your new job, it was a safer better condition, better pay, did you like it better- is it a job?

**JH:** I like it. It's a good job, I miss machining full time. This is more of a maintenance job where you repair and, you know, something breaks you repair it. And machine goes down you figure out why it went down, then you repair it. Ink line blows off or one of the ink pumps on the printing press goes bad you repair that. And then sometimes you have other things. And we fabricate stuff, guards, shields, make stuff like that.

**PS:** You now work in more a maintenance base job. So what does your job entail now?

**JH:** My job entails now is when I'm working afternoons when we're printing paper, to make sure the press stays running. Make sure the paper goes out the door, that's the main concern. Make sure that the equipment- if something breaks down get it fixed so we can keep going. That is the main what I do now. When I'm- then when I work days there I maintain the equipment. I do preventative maintenance, grease bearings, lubricate stuff, change filters, ah, stuff of that nature. Plus also there's also the department I'm in now also had buildings so sometimes I have to do building maintenance and plumbing, things of that nature, painting stuff, you know. Take care of the water, air, ink, stuff like that.

**PS:** So you went from the steel industry which was doing ok when you left

**JH:** Right

**PS:** But has since had some tough times to the newspaper industry which is now entering into some tough times. What do you- why do you think that is- what do you think is affecting?

**JH:** Well everything is going digital. So that is why they thought- they've been pushing real hard to go digital, which they have done a lot. But then they found out that a lot of people still want to read the paper, they want to hold the paper. They, you know, they don't want to look at it on the computer screen where they gotta scroll every time they wanna look at something instead of just opening the paper up and looking at the whole page and they can see whatever they wanna read and read it, ya know. And right now, the paper revenue is greater than the internet revenue. So that's another one of the reasons, they've downsized a lot things but it's still, you know, ah- the papers still we're still printing it so that's the main thing. Hopefully I can retire from there with that.

**PS:** I mean how many years left do you have to go?

**JH:** 8 years.

**PS:** So you've been there now almost 12 years or 15 years?

**JH:** 17 years.

**PS:** 17 years ok.

**JH:** Yeah 17 years in August.

**PS:** So what have you noticed in 17 years, you've worked there now more than you worked at the Steel Mill.

**JH:** Right.

**PS:** So what have you seen ah change in the industry?

**JH:** Oh, a lot more the Wall Street Journal used to just black and white. And they had, what's it called, spot color a few adds. But now they've got a lot more color which generates them a lot more money because the color ads are more money. So that is one of the things because we put in a lot more bigger printer presses with more color capability to be able to print that color. So we can print more color than most of the newspaper in the general area.

**PS:** So do you only print the Journal at your press?

**JH:** Right. Right now we print the Journal and the Barrens. The Barrens is a weekly financial publication.

**PS:** So in your life you went from working on a farm to you being in like the heart of industry to where now you got more of a- I mean still you work with your hands but it's more of a polished like a polished job. What are- when you look back at your working career what do you miss what have you learned? Like what the state of the steel mill industry now, what are your thoughts about?

**JH:** Oh I think it's a shame. I do not agree with the politics of some of the things that have happened in the past, you know, because I'm not a big proponent of greenhouse stuff. So I really don't think, I think the Earth- everything revolves, you know, and changes after a while. It changes and it just repeats itself, and I think that them closing down the Steel Mill and getting all this foreign stuff in is really bad. But I know that the company I worked for was National Steel and right after I left it went bankrupt and US Steel bought it.

**PS:** What year was that?

**JH:** I left in '99 and I think US Steel took it over in 2001. And they changed things a whole lot. US Steel's like one of the biggest steel companies in the United States, maybe the world. But they changed things a lot but I know it seems like the steel industries, the whole time I worked there, you know, it's like it was a struggle. They was always having a struggle making money. But I don't know, you know. Granite City division always made money, it was the other two divisions in Indiana and up north that kind of drug us down. That's one thing I will say about any place I ever worked, in Madison County they're hard working people. They are- most of them have a good work ethic, and they can get the job done, you know. We always made - we always had a really good result at Granite City Steel.

**PS:** So if you were- ok, we- we talked about your career a lot lets switch to your personal life. So you left for Pennsylvania cause you got married and that's where you wife was from.

**JH:** Right

**PS:** And then you guys came back, came back with one kid?

**JH:** With one child yeah, one child

**PS:** So you came back and you went back to the Steel Mill, right?

**JH:** Right.

**PS:** So what was that like working- I- your dad you said worked a full time job and farmed. And now you're working a full-time job, you're workin' ... was it an 8 hour or 10 hour shift at the Steel Mill?

**JH:** It, most of the time it was 8, sometimes I'd work 16. It just depended.

**PS:** So you had one kid when you came back and then soon thereafter you had two more?

**JH:** Right.

**PS:** What was it like then, you know, you switched jobs to the- working at the press, right, it had better hours and stuff. Was it better for your family?

**JH:** Well kinda it was but the only bad thing about working at Granite City Steel was is that I worked straight- straight afternoons or midnights. And I didn't like midnights. so I worked straight afternoons so the only time I really seen the kids was my days off or, you know, if I'd get up before they'd leave but yeah I worked 4-12 so I didn't always see them before they went to school. I mean it's a little more difficult that way when you work shifts work but that's just part of the industry. The job I have now I work days and afternoons and all my kids are grown so I don't see, you know, I see them whenever they come over and that. But I don't... But that's the only bad thing about you know industry is you gotta work off shift so that makes it a little harder on your family. That's about it on that.

**PS:** And then you've been- you've had two significant injuries, right? You had an eye injury, was that soon after you came back to Illinois?

**JH:** That was a couple years after I came back. That was actually helping my grandfather, we were putting logs- he had a sawmill and we were putting logs on a trailer and chaining them down. And the chain binder slipped and struck me in the eye.

**PS:** Were you off work for that?

**JH:** For 5 weeks.

**PS:** And then you had an issue with was it your foot, your ankle?

**JH:** My left ankle, yeah. I had to have it fused.

**PS:** And so with that one there you were of work too, right?

**JH:** Yeah I was off 9 months for that. It was pretty rough.

**PS:** So what was it like, cause you seem like a pretty hard working guy, worked your whole life, what was it like then to be off work for those extended periods of times?

**JH:** well I'm very fortunate in the fact that the company I worked for has short-term disability. So on the 9-month deal, I got paid for 26 weeks of the 9 months. And then I was just kind of toughing it out for the last, you know, months. Then I finally got back to work. But it- it's tough when you don't, you know, don't have no income.

**PS:** Yeah. Is- is your experience seem pretty normal, [mumbles] you've worked with a lot of people. Is that experience pretty normal to have that kind of safety net at your work or?

**JH:** Nah, I wouldn't say so. You mean as far as the short term?

**PS:** Mm-hmm.

**JH:** Yeah, I mean the better jobs have it but some of - some places don't have it all. So you're, you know, it just depends. But I'm pretty fortunate to have.

**PS:** Yeah. If you were at the Mill would you have had that?

**JH:** Yeah they had a something on that order, but I can't remember exactly how long it was for. They had some form of a short-term disability.

**PS:** So then you've raised your kids in the same county, different school district, right?

**JH:** Bethalto, yeah.

**PS:** So how's that like, mean it's been many years in between there. But you grew up in the county and you've raised your family in the county, is- was that a conscious choice or just kind of happen that way?

**JH:** Well I wanted to stay around close to my mom and dad area. I mean- it just kind of happened that way. I thought about trying to get the kids in the Edwardsville School District but it just didn't work out that way. I found a house in- outside of Bethalto, which is in Bethalto School District. So that's what I ended up doing. Which, all of my, two of the three kids didn't have any problems. But one of them, he, my boy, he had a little bit of trouble but for the most part, it worked out pretty good, I mean. But I have two other girls and they- they didn't have any trouble like my son had but it worked out. I mean, we got it done so, it seemed like it worked out ok.

**PS:** Mm-hmm. Do you think, you know, have the schools changed a lot since you went through?

**JH:** Oh yeah.

**PS:** And how have they changed?

**JH:** Well the schools, all the schools have got away from the more of the blue-collar stuff and they're leaning more towards the white collar stuff. But you have to have blue collar, I mean cause a computer can't fix everything, a computer can't fix itself if it physically breaks down. So I mean, you gotta have the

blue collar stuff which the school stopped doing that kind of stuff and it's kind- I think it's bad. I think our country's in a shortage right now with that stuff. And, you know, I think that that is one of the things that has changed lots since I was there. And I wish they would reinstate it but I don't know what, you know, will happen there.

**PS:** Because your whole career launched off your shop classes?

**JH:** Yeah. My senior year I only had- my senior year my whole time I was in shop except for one half semester which was consumer economics, I had to take that. But the rest of the time it was shop classes and I was also shop assistant teacher, you- they had a program were you get a credit for helping the teacher with the other kids. So I did that for my junior and senior years I did that for two teachers.

**PS:** And you graduated back in uh-

**JH:** 1978.

**PS:** Ok so your kids went to school in what decade roughly?

**JH:** Boy. You ask me a hard question. [laughs] What, in the 2000s?

**PS:** Ok

**JH:** Yeah I guess.

**PS:** So about twenty almost- 25-year gap there?

**JH:** Yeah, oh yeah.

**PS:** And you think that you've observed that shift away from shop and trade-based classes, they switched more to the higher ed Edwardsville stuff?

**JH:** Yeah, computer stuff. Which a lot- you know, most everything is computerized now but you still got to have some mechanical stuff in there. I mean I think it would be a good option for people to have if, you know, not everybody's a computer genius, ya know? [laughs]

**PS:** So you've raised your kids in the county and now your kids raising grandkids in the county.

**JH:** Right.

**PS:** Do you- see how much it's changed so far do you, I mean, looking back it's a good to keep raising family?

**JH:** I think it's a good area. I like Madison County, I mean I grew up here and I, it seems to be like a pretty stable place to raise people. There's not a lot of crime. And it's a good area, it's a big area. But I think that it's a great place to raise kids because you know everything is pretty laid back and not a lot of crime or anything. I mean you're going to have that in some respects everywhere but, you know, not like it is over in Missouri.

**PS:** Mm-hmm. So besides like from work and family you've been a part of the community for a long time. I mean particularly you're involved with the Bethalto Homecoming. What part have you played in that?

**JH:** Our church made- started back in it's over 30 years, we started making ice cream. When they started out it was making it from scratch. And then they started out and then we got a chance to buy some five-gallon ice cream mixtures from Meadowbrook Fire Department. We bought them and we started doing it that way and we just been selling homemade ice cream and cobbler up at the Bethalto Homecoming for 30 something years. And me and my wife are a big part of that for a long time.

**PS:** So being part of that, like that one- you know year after year you kind of watched that whole thing kind of change and evolve. Like what are some of your earliest memories of the homecoming?

J**H:** Back when I was 18 we would go up there, I can't even remember what we were selling, I mean things have changed a lot, there used to be a lot more crafts and stuff up there, you know. And stuff like that, more like homemade stuff that you could go and demonstrations of different things. Wood splitters and just pots and pans. Just all kinds of things were all that's kind of phased out now. And it's all just mostly food stands and the carnival stuff. And just for, just the celebration for people to get together from what they started years ago.

**PS:** So the, you guys make, it's a homemade ice cream?

**JH:** Well by law you can't- we can't make it anymore, you know. So we buy the mix Prairie Farms and we make it in the 5 gallon ice cream mixers. And then we premake it, and then we freeze and then we serve it up there. And then we buy cobblers and make them as- because of Madison County health code. And bake them and then we serve them with the ice cream.

**PS:** Do you feel like that's a, you know, it's a homemade process ice cream.

**JH:** Yeah right.

**PS:** Is that- is that an important thing- that old-fashioned feel to it?

**JH:** I think it does. People love it, they come back up there for it, just for that. I, you know, it brings back old times of what people used to do. Cause some people, some kids nowadays haven't seen an ice cream mixer, they don't even know how the salt and ice reaction works to make ice cream.

**PS:** How does that work?

**JH:** Well when you put salt on ice it lowers the temperature to 19 degrees. There giving you a quicker freezing action than if you just used regular ice in the mixer. It makes a saltwater solution, and it freezes the ice cream quicker.

**PS:** And these mixers you guys use, what kind- are these just standard mixers or are they something special?

**JH:** Well they're kind of special because they're White Mountain 5 gallon. I estimate that the original ones were probably 40 or 50 years old, maybe older. They're quite large and they're just- they're quite expensive to buy a new one now. So if you gotta buy a new one you lay out some money.

**PS:** These are hand power? How are they operated?

**JH:** They are motorized. They have been motorized. You can crank them by hand if you have the willpower to, but that's- we have motors on them and gearboxes. and then that way it gets things going a lot 'cause we make- we make 250 gallons so that's a quite a bit of hand cranking. [laughing]

**PS:** Now they came that way or did you have to?

**JH:** They came motorized, just modified them. So.

**PS:** So that's where your machine comes into play, even though you don't do that at your job now. You still-

**JH:** Yeah I still, I have equipment at home I can use to modify stuff or fabricate whatever I want mostly.

**PS:** So what are your biggest memories of just life here, like if you were to talk about living in the county to someone whose never been here what are the biggest things that stand out to you?

**JH:** Oh just this is a nice area to live. It's ah its farmland, most of it, ya know. Nice little towns. It's flat out here, that's for sure after living in Pennsylvania. Man, I didn't it was very flat out here until I went out there and then I realized you can see where you're going out here, where you can't out there. But, you know, they have the fairs and the things like that and they're always enjoyable to go to. And I like to go to the tractor shows and stuff like that. Just nice area to live in I think. And I don't really, I mean, I grew up here and I just like living here. I mean that's just, I moved to the house I grew up in when I was 6 months old. So I lived there 20, well I lived there 18 years and then we moved off the farm when I was like 18 or 19. And then we moved across the road a built the house over there. But it's always been, you know, a pretty good place. So I always enjoyed Madison County.

**PS:** So you mentioned earlier that a lot of people here they're hard-working people. How do think those people have responded to the crisis in the past, like the flood of '93?

**JH:** It seemed like they really pulled together. Pulled together and took care of each other. I mean, we were - I was fortunate, I didn't have anything, I didn't live in a flood zone so I didn't have to worry about it. But a lot of the people that did, seems like they helped each other. People, they're resilient after a flood, they seem like they clean it up and rebuild it and get back to it until we have the next one.

**PS:** So you, now that you're an adult you got a little more money in your pocket, what are the things that you have done for fun since, you know, leaving the farm behind? You've got a little more space.

**JH:** Oh we travel. Me and my wife from Pennsylvania so we travel there once a year at least, maybe twice. Or up to Maine, we enjoy that. Work in my shop, I have a wood shop metal shop. I enjoy that. And

then, of course, the grandkids. We have grandkids, we love them and try to spend time with them when we can.

**PS:** Do you remember your own grandparents?

**JH:** Oh, yeah. Yup, I sure do. One grandfather lived till he was 94, didn't retire from farming until he was 85. And they were all wonderful people and I, you know, I can really say that I enjoyed them quite a bit.

**PS:** So you're one grandfather was a farmer, what was your other grandfather, what's his job?

**JH:** He was a millwright.

**PS:** What's that?

**JH:** A millwright, like a machinist, makes the part, the mill ride puts it together.

**PS:** Oh ok.

**JH:** Or, there are different classes of millwrights. There are some that do like work on bridges, put in pilings, do a lot, millwright is a very diverse person. So they do a lot of stuff like that.

**PS:** So what- he lived here in the county as well?

**JH**: He actually lived up in Jersey County, I think. I think he lived right over the border.

**PS:** So he had more of a technical job, and your other grandfather lived nearby- he's the grandfather you'd help on his farm?

**JH:** Yeah. Right. Yeah. I mean the farm life, you know, they had 40 milk cows, 2000 chickens, 600 acres they farmed. So they were quite busy.

**PS:** That was your dad's dad?

**JH:** Pardon?

**PS:** No I'm sorry, that was your dad's dad?

**JH:** Mo, that was my mother's dad.

**PS:** Oh your mother's dad. Ok.

**JH:** Yeah you know, cause you got to milk cows twice a day and you gotta gather eggs from chickens twice a day so. It can be quite- quite taxing, you know.

**PS:** Did they ever hire any help or was it just family?

**JH:** It was just my grandfather and his son. And then my grandpa's son-in-laws and grandkids would help. When they needed extra.

**PS**: So what happened to them, when he retired from farming did someone else take it over?

**JH:** Yeah. He had rented the farm for 45 years. And one of the big farmers when my grandpa retired, then one of the big farmers took it over.

**PS:** So he didn't own his own farm, he rented it?

**JH:** He rented it also. Well the back- the terms we had, like on our farm it was a 300 acre it was 250 dollars a year and a third of the crop. That was to live in the house and farm the land, you know. That was like a sharecropper almost.

**PS:** Yeah.

**JH:** Which nowadays is totally unheard of. You know, you wouldn't- nobody does that anymore I don't think.

**PS:** So is that, would you say that was a, you know, you're living on the farm and you pay for that privilege with part of the crop. What would happen if you had a bad year?

**JH:** Well everybody lost out, sort of. I mean, most of the time it panned out, ya know, cause you'd get two-thirds, they'd get a third. And hopefully, it worked out for you. But there were times, like whenever we had to do bottom land it didn't work out too good. So, you know, that's just the year that they didn't make out so good.

**PS:** Did, do you ever have any dealings with the owner of the land?

**JH:** No, the owner- the people actually owned the whole parcel of property, which is I think 600 acres. These people were wealthy, and they owned- so they had, back in the day, they would come down and visit. But they after they all got older, they had a bank man do it.

**PS:** Ok. So you'd have to, would you literally give them the crop or did you'd have to take it to market and sell?

**JH:** You took it to market and sold it and they just got a check, we sent it right to them.

**PS:** Oh okay. Is that- was that a nice way to live, you think? Was it a simple way to live to pay for it that way at the end of the year, end of the harvest?

**JH:** Yeah, I mean, that was, you just basic- you know, 250 dollars a year to live in the house. And then a third of the crop off a 140 acres, I mean that's that's a great way to live I think. I mean, compared to nowadays it's really something.

**PS:** So do you-you had a busy childhood working on the farm but do you think your life now is any less busy?

**JH:** No, my life's more busy now because I got a regular day job and work all shifts and that. I mean, you know, the farm life it's a great life. You work hard but then you also have slack times sometimes, you

know, in-between crops and stuff like that, that you don't have to be, you know. You get your daily chores if you got animals and stuff like that. But where, you know, you got like a regular everyday job you gotta go there five days a week and do it. So that- I think it's a little busier cause were the farm life, you know, you do everything you do at a regular house but then you'd have your animals to take care of. And you, you know, your crop to tend to. And you know, if you had wheat you had to get it in. and if you wanted bedding for your animals you had to bail the straw from the wheat and then the beans, you know. And then, the growing season has changed some too because whenever we used to have to wait for the ground to freeze sometimes to get the corn out. Were now the- genetics has changed the corn to shorter season corn. So they can get it out earlier.

**PS:** So your corn you'd plant it when?

**JH:** We'd plant it in spring.

**PS:** You'd harvest as late as, what, October November?

**JH:** Sometimes December.

**PS:** Really?

**JH:** Yeah. Yeah. you know, we was talking- my son was telling me we were talking about harvesting crops one day and I said yeah we didn't have a cab on our combine, we didn't have a cab on anything. And he said you're kidding me and I said no, I said you'd sit there in the bean dust and wheat dust, corn isn't so bad but the- everything used to be open, you know. There was caps on stuff, that was a luxury.

**PS:** But you had mechanized equipment?

**JH:** Yeah we had mechanized equipment, we had a combine, we had a corn picker before we had a combine. But then we had a combine, so.

**PS:** Did you own your combine, or did you have to lease it?

**JH:** No we owned it. We farmed with older equipment. I think some tractor was from 1950. Other tractor was from 1960 and the combine was probably from '62. Because you buy it, you get it, and you just take care of it and fix it as you needed. That's another thing, a farmer's mechanic also- well some farmers are, some farmers aren't. I mean, it depends, on the older equipment you just, if you could you'd just repair it yourself some people couldn't so they'd have to hire it.

**PS:** Right. Is that part of where your love for machinery came from?

**JH:** Yeah I guess. I just love- I just like machinery and working with my hands and fixing stuff and... stuff like that

**PS:** Are you in charge of repairing equipment on the farm?

**JH:** No my dad did it most of the time. I mean, when I got older, I helped him but then we were off the farm by the time I was 18. But I've always- I'd help when I could.

**PS:** And you've been around for over 50 years now, so you've seen lots of changes and technology and such. Looking back at life and what technology you grew up with, do you think we're better off now?

**JH:** In some ways I do, in some ways I don't. Because if anything ever happens to this country that the computers crash, everything is run by computer now. The printing press I work on is run by computer. Most of the time when it goes down it's a computer glitch or a computer problem. I- back when I was a kid, we had one phone in the house and that's how, you know, we didn't have to be in constant contact with everybody all the time. So I don't know, I think it's good in some ways and not so good in others, ya know. But-

**PS:** Do you think it's, you know, that kind of technology has some- increased a sense of community or folks know more people or do you think back in the day when you had to be a little more interdependent and rely on your neighbors?

**JH:** Oh I'm sure people know more people from being on the computer and that. I think that we're over sensitized because everybody tells everything they do now, which is not always a good thing. Things were more private when I was your age, you know. Things were more personal, and you didn't tell everybody everything, you know. So that's why I don't think it- I think it's good in some ways and not good in others. But you know that's technology that we live with right now so we will see what happens with it.

**PS:** You use technology yourself, right?

**JH:** Yeah I have a cell phone and a tablet and.

**PS:** And you grew up in the era of telephones and letter writing?

**JH:** Right, yeah. That's- I would call, when my wife lived in Pennsylvania, I called her and wrote her letters. But that's what I did because I didn't call her very often because the phone long distance was high. So, you know.

**PS:** So you wrote letters?

**JH:** I wrote letters.

**PS:** How long did you guys do that for?

**JH:** 6 or 8 months.

**PS:** Before you got married?

**JH:** No, before we met.

**PS:** Oh ok, so you met through writing letters?

**JH:** Yeah, we were pen pals. We met through a mutual friend and then we started writing. We were pen pals for a while.

**PS:** So you think that we're missing out on something by not using [mumbles]

**JH:** Well it's a slower time back when I was, you know, everything is so fast now. Everything is instant, people want everything instant. And I just don't think that it's the greatest thing all the time. Our worlds move pretty fast, every things in a hurry so.

**PS:** Is that always a bad thing or is?

**JH:** Well, I mean it just depends on what it is. I mean, people lose their patience pretty fast anymore nowadays. And I think we need to have more patience and stay with the older values of things. Instead of everything being just, you know, just because I don't want to do this or that I should be able to do it, you know. There's right and wrong and everything, and I just I feel like the computer internet and all that stuff, it's nice I mean but it's going to take us down a different road than what we're used to.

**PS:** So do you think that the next 50 years for Madison County are going to look anything like the 50 years you've been through so far?

**JH:** Well I think it's going to change quite a bit more, but it just depends. I mean, it may not change a lot. I mean things kind of leveled out now. I mean you got to figure the past from 1900 to 2000, that 100 years was one of the most progressive years in, you know, technology and that. I mean by grandpa was born in 1906, in Madison County and he started farming with horses and he went to, and when he retired, he was farming, he was using one of the newest combines on the market. I mean, he went from horses to mechanized, total mechanization with a cab and air conditioning and a radio, I mean. That's the thing, I mean, things have- cars and everything is computer based now so we'll just see what happens. And see what, you know, happens in the county and see how things go.

**PS:** Alright. So you've lived most your life in the county, what are the- think back to your childhood, your teenage years, and coming back as an adult from Pennsylvania, what do you thinks the biggest changes to the county?

**JH:** More modern roads. You know, the roads we used to live on was oil roads. Now them are most concrete. Of course, higher taxes.

**PS:** Are the roads worth the higher taxes?

**JH:** Yeah, for the most part I mean they are. I mean Illinois itself is not doing very good right now, which I don't know if it's misappropriation of funds or bad management or what it is but I would say we need to change some things up there but that's another story.

**PS:** Well Jeff I just wanted to thank you for your time today.

**JH:** You're welcome, it was privilege talking to you.