

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mr. Milford Zimmerman in his home at 3550 Main Street East, Stevensville, Ontario, and the date is September 19, 1985.

**R.H:** Good evening Mr. Zimmerman.

**M.Z:** Good evening.

**R.H:** Could you please tell me your date of birth?

**M.Z:** 1916, July 18th, 1916.

**R.H:** Where were you born?

**M.Z:** I was born in Bertie Township about halfway between Fort Erie and Stevensville.

**R.H:** What street would that be?

**M.Z:** It would be like College Road now, College Road. It runs from Niagara Christian College to Stevensville.

**R.H:** What school did you attend?

**M.Z:** I went to S.S. No. 7.

**R.H:** Where was that? Was that far from where you lived?

**M.Z:** It was about three miles.

**R.H:** And you had to walk that far?

**M.Z:** Yes.

**R.H:** There was no bussing of course?

**M.Z:** No.

**R.H:** Do you remember who some of your teachers were at that time?

**M.Z:** Oh, Miss Reddy was one of my teachers, and Miss Stevens. I think that was the only two teachers I had then when I went to school there. I went to Fort Erie then in 19...

**R.H:** You moved to Fort Erie with your family?

**M.Z:** Yeah, we moved to Fort Erie in 1928, I think it was. I went to Douglas School then.

**R.H:** What area did you live in then?

**M.Z:** High Street, two blocks from Douglas School.

**R.H:** Was that the South End?

**M.Z:** That was the South End.

**R.H:** Of course they didn't have the Central Avenue Bridge to connect the...?

**M.Z:** No, no, it was Fort Erie and Bridgeburg then.

**R.H:** That was Fort Erie, the South End, and Bridgeburg was the North End, right?

**M.Z:** That's right.

**R.H:** Was the South End busy then?

**M.Z:** Yes, but it... In 1927 when they opened the Peace Bridge then things were... It was quite busy before that. You see, the only way you could get into Canada from the States in this area was by ferry. They had three ferries running between Fort Erie and Buffalo. The Racetrack traffic and stuff from Buffalo came across on the ferries, from Buffalo to the Racetrack. That was before the Bridge was opened. So it was quite busy, yes.

**R.H:** Did you ever go on the ferryboats?

**M.Z:** Oh yes, lots of times.

**R.H:** Can you remember what they looked like?

**M.Z:** Well, one time traffic was so heavy that they had three ferries running at a time. There was one tied up on the American side, one tied up on the Canadian side, and one in the middle of the river. One for unloading and loading at the docks. As soon as one pulled out, the other one pulled in. There was three ferries running at a time. The City of Toledo was one of the ferries and the New Orleans was another one. They were the two common ones, and then they had other ones. They run... their peak season was the summertime. The only problem with the trip that the ferries had, was in the spring when the ice started. The ice would cause some problems. If the ice was too heavy, then they'd have to stop service for a while. I remember one time the ice was pretty heavy and one of the ferries got caught in the ice. It took her down the river to the International Bridge, hit the Bridge and just took the top deck off the ferry.

**R.H:** Was that the New Orleans?

**M.Z:** No. Oh yes, it would be the New Orleans, and not the City of Toledo. The City of Toledo was a bigger... was the biggest one.

**R.H:** That's what I was going to ask you, were they different sizes?

**M.Z:** Well, two of them were about the same size, but the City of Toledo was the largest one of the three. The other were pretty well the same size. I can't recall the name of the third one now.

**R.H:** But it was the New Orleans of course that hit the International Bridge, was anyone hurt?

**M.Z:** No.

**R.H:** You don't know anyone who worked on the ferrboats, do you? Did

they employ Canadians? Were they American ferryboats?

**M.Z:** Well, it was something like the Bridge Company. I don't really know who owned the ferries but I don't know if it was an American company or Canadian company, I couldn't tell you that.

**R.H:** But they did employ Canadians?

**M.Z:** Oh sure, Paddy Fix was one of the pursers. I can't remember the names of them all. At that time we were just kids. We used to ride the ferry and go over to Ferry Street and Grant Street, to the show on Ferry Street.

**R.H:** You mean the movie theatre?

**M.Z:** Yeah, they had a movie theatre just at the top of Ferry Street before you got to Grant Street. At that time you never got uptown because there was no way of gettin' uptown unless you went over and took a streetcar uptown. There was no other way of going uptown.

**R.H:** So you just went to the movie theatre on a Saturday?

**M.Z:** Well, a lot of the kids did, but I never went very often because I always had plenty to do. I was out playing ball in the summertime and playing hockey in the wintertime. There was always swimming and stuff, and we always had plenty of recreation.

**R.H:** So Fort Erie offered a lot of sports to kids, did they?

**M.Z:** Oh yes, there was a lot of sports in Fort Erie. You had baseball, hockey, lacrosse, softball, pretty near any sport that you'd find in any small town.

**R.H:** Did you play for a team, and was it sponsored by anyone?

**M.Z:** When I first started playing ball, I played for the Fort Erie Juniors Baseball Team. Jimmy Farrell and Scotty Reid, they started the junior ball team. That's the first junior ball team that I can remember in Fort Erie.

**R.H:** They started it?

**M.Z:** Yeah, that's right. They organized it. We played in the Niagara District Junior League then. We played in Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Port Robinson, Port Colborne, Merrittown, and Thorold. We were in that league, and that was under 20, the age, when we were kids.

**R.H:** Was that a travelling team then?

**M.Z:** That's right. That was the only team that we had. Actually, there was no local junior leagues. There was other leagues, but not junior leagues. There was like an industrial league for the older fellows.

**R.H:** Were these for companies that they worked for, like the Mentholatum Company?

**M.Z:** Well, they were a senior team. the Mentholatum too. They were older, they were men, not kids teams. After the Mentholatum team, we played ball for intermediate teams and they were pretty much the same places or towns that were in the juniors. McMorran's, that used to be a clothing store in Fort Erie, they sponsored an intermediate ball team. Horton Steel had sponsored an intermediate team for years. We won the Ontario Championship in 1950.

**R.H:** Who did you play against, do you remember?

**M.Z:** We played off the finals with Listowel. In the game a piece, the third game was played in Brantford. We had a real good crowd following at that time. There was 2,500 people from Fort Erie in Brantford for the third game on a Saturday afternoon. We had a really good following.

**R.H:** That was practically the whole town of Fort Erie out there, right?

**M.Z:** They pretty well were. Everybody was there. In the wintertime... One time they had a local industrial league in hockey which took in Fort Erie and... Spears Garage, they had a team in Fort Erie, that was the local garage. Ridgeway had a team which was Willson's Garage in Ridgeway. Then there was a team from Stevensville and Chippawa, and there were two teams from Buffalo. They played three games every Monday night.

**R.H:** Who was the coach?

**M.Z:** We were fortunate at that time because the Buffalo Bisons professional team played hockey in Fort Erie, and all of the players that played for Buffalo, lived in this area. They lived in Crescent Park and Fort Erie, so they lived in this area. The coaches for these teams were professional hockey players also. We had different coaches. Bill Tougher coached the Spears team at one time and Lederman coached the team. There was a number of them over a period of years.

**R.H:** They just coached the hockey team, right?

**M.Z:** That's right.

**R.H:** What about baseball, who were the coaches for that?

**M.Z:** Jimmy Farrell and...

**R.H:** Yeah! they did coaching as well as organizing?

**M.Z:** That's right, then when we got intermediate... Why-after we had

Butler, Cecil Butler... He used to be the barber on Jarvis Street. He was interested in the ball. Skip Howe who used to be an insurance man in Fort Erie, he coached the first intermediate team that I played for. Then after... Jimmy Farrell, he still coached intermediate afterwards too. When I quit, I managed to coach the team for Horton Steel, the baseball team for Horton Steel, the one we won the championship with. I managed to coach that team.

**R.H:** Who were some of the players in that team?

**M.Z:** Oh, there was Al Spear, Casey Jones, Ray, my brother, and Al Reid.

**R.H:** Did your brother ever get to the big league?

**M.Z:** No.

**R.H:** Didn't a Zimmerman make it to the big leagues?

**M.Z:** My son went to play hockey. He played professional hockey. He never played baseball.

**R.H:** Well, getting back to the baseball team...?

**M.Z:** Well, there was Ray Busby, Jack McKeough, and Tip Logan. Tip went to Hamilton, he played football for the Hamilton Tiger Cats.

**R.H:** Did he really?

**M.Z:** That's right. He also played... he signed a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers to play ball. He played one year, I think, professional baseball.

**R.H:** Did these players work at Horton Steel or did Horton Steel just sponsor them?

**M.Z:** Some of them did. Horton Steel sponsored them, and if some of the players didn't have a job, why-they would give them jobs.

**R.H:** What was the average age of these guys then?

**M.Z:** Oh, they'd be from 20 to 35. They'd be anywhere from 20 to 35 years of age.

**R.H:** Where did you practice?

**M.Z:** At Oakes Park.

**R.H:** You still went to Oakes Park then?

**M.Z:** When I first started playing ball, junior team, we played down at the river diamond. The diamond that's around the river now. It's on the Bowen Road. We played there first and that's where the old Mentulatum team had their home diamond there. Oakes Park, Oakes donated the land over there on Gilmore Road, and some of the money to build the park there on Gilmore.

**R.H:** When you say Oakes...?

**M.Z:** Harry Oakes.

**R.H:** That's the Harry Oakes, the millionaire?

**M.Z:** That's right. He owned a lot of property in Fort Erie at one time.

**R.H:** I see, so he donated that land on Gilmore Road?

**M.Z:** So he donated that property on Gilmore Road, for a park. That's where we have the ball diamond, the sugar bowl, and the library. All that property was donated by him.

**R.H:** Did quite a few of the players make it to the big league, like Tip Logan to football?

**M.Z:** Well, he went to play football. A couple of them signed to play minor ball. They were professional, but in the minor leagues, they never made it to the American International League.

**R.H:** When did you go to play for the Buffalo Bisons?

**M.Z:** I never played for the Buffalo Bisons.

**R.H:** You never played for them?

**M.Z:** No, in 1929 I started working in the clubhouse and then later as assistant trainer. In 1933 the trainer that we had, he was also a trainer for the Buffalo Bisons Baseball Team, well, they went south for spring training. It was about the time when the hockey playoffs would start, so he went south with the ball team and I took over as trainer for the hockey team, for the playoffs. The last few years I was the trainer for the Buffalo Bisons before the Arena Collapsed. When the Arena Collapsed, then of course, they moved to Niagara Falls to play in Niagara Falls, but the crowds and finances were bad, and they finally folded up in 1936.

**R.H:** That was the hockey team?

**M.Z:** That's right. That was the Buffalo Bisons Hockey Team.

**R.H:** Weren't they a Canadian team?

**M.Z:** They were all Canadians.

**R.H:** Were the players from around this area too, or were they from all over?

**M.Z:** They were like most professional teams, they were from all over. Lederman, he was from Kitchener, Lloyd Groves, he was from Kitchener. Bill Tougher, he was a goal-tender from Kingston. Of course that carried over about four or five years, and there was probably 30 or 40 players coming and going, so I couldn't name all of them.

I could if I sat down and... but it would take some time to name them all. Frank Nighbor from Ottawa was the coach and general manager of the hockey club.

**R.H:** Did you say they played over here a lot?

**M.Z:** Well, they played all their games in Fort Erie. They never played in Buffalo.

**R.H:** Was this at the Fort Erie Arena?

**M.Z:** In Fort Erie. The old Peace Bridge Arena.

**R.H:** Is that what it was called then?

**M.Z:** Yes, because it was owned by William Baird from Buffalo. He was the one that owned the Peace Bridge, so it was called the Peace Bridge Arena. At that time, a lot of those people from Buffalo were given a special rate on the bridge, on game nights. They used to give them a special rate on the bridge, on game nights. A carload could come over from 6 to 10:30 p.m. and it only cost them 25 cents on the Bridge, return, for a carload. He cut the prices for the people coming across.

**R.H:** Was the fee to get over, was it normally for each person in a car?

**M.Z:** That's right. They used to pay 25 cents...

**R.H:** For each person?

**M.Z:** No, 25 cents for the car and then 10 cents a head. During hockey game nights from 6 until 10:30 p.m. they used to pay a flat rate. It didn't matter how many people were in the car.

**R.H:** You say that Bill Baird was responsible for the...?

**M.Z:** That's right.

**R.H:** Was he the owner of the Peace Bridge Company?

**M.Z:** He was one of the ones who was instrumental in getting it. There was different directors and so on. You see, William C. Baird, I think he owned the majority of shares. Mr. Baird... His son owns a lot of property in Point Albino now. He owns about a 100 acres across the point there. That's the younger Bill Baird that owns that, but he was also involved in the Arena at that time. It was actually his father who was the one that got it started. It reverted to him then.

**R.H:** I thought the money for the Arena came from the toll on the Peace Bridge, did it?

**M.Z:** No. When the Peace Bridge was built they said that when the Peace

Bridge was paid for why-it would become free. They always keep spending enough now that it's never gonna be paid for. It has to be improved, it's like everything else the price of stuff goes up. So, actually, the Peace Bridge will never be free because of the fact of the cost and stuff, the maintenance of it.

**R.H:** Have you any idea when the Arena was built?

**M.Z:** It was built in 1927, '28.

**R.H:** The Peace Bridge was in '27, so was it just after the Peace Bridge opening, that it was built?

**M.Z:** That's right. I think it was opened in 1929. [The Peace Bridge was officially opened in 1927] The first hockey that they had, they used to call it the Niagara District Industrial League, and Tabor was instrumental in starting that.

**R.H:** Starting that league?

**M.Z:** Starting the league, the team, yes that's right. They had two teams from Buffalo and like I said before, Fort Erie, Ridgeway, Crystal Beach, and Chippawa. Those games were played, three games on a monday night. Six teams played on a monday night, one right after the other. They drew good crowds there... Well, he was quite a promoter, and he'd take 250 or 300 tickets over to some of the big companies in Buffalo and distribute them. We played to 2,500, 3,000 people on a monday night, quite often. They weren't always paid attendance, but they were good crowds. It was well attended.

**R.H:** Did you have good ice?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah. It was really good ice.

**R.H:** I imagine they had someone to bring in the ice from outside, or did they have artificial ice?

**M.Z:** Oh no, the ice plant was there even after the rink collapsed, they still had made ice there. He got his ice for iceboxes and stuff like that.

**R.H:** So the ice plant brought the ice in?

**M.Z:** Well, it was just the same as it is now, exactly the same as it is now. There was a refrigerating plant the same as they've got now, with pipes under the floor. Maybe now they have made a lot of improvements, but at that time the ice machines that they had here, wouldn't have made ice in the middle of the summer like they do now. It was good ice. They had to have good ice because you



see the, the Buffalo Bisons played in the league with Detroit, Cleveland, Syracuse, Windsor, and Hamilton. The Arena here was as good as these big city rinks. In 1929 they had three professional teams playing here. They had the Chicago Black Hawks, and N.H.L. played their home games here.

**R.H:** At this Arena?

**M.Z:** At the Arena in Fort Erie. There was another Buffalo Team, the Buffalo Majors that played in the American Association. They played their home games in the Arena in Fort Erie. The Buffalo Bisons that played in the International League with London, Windsor, like I said before, they played their home games here. There was three different leagues playing in Fort Erie every week.

**R.H:** That was really quite a place, wasn't it?

**M.Z:** Some of the farmer stars of the National League like Charlie Gardner who was the goal-tender for Chicago, and Taffy Abel, Johnny Gottliegh, Doc Romnes, Red Horner, Charlie Conacher, Joe Primeau, Andy Blair... Some of the players who played for Toronto Maple Leafs, they played here. Bucko McDonald who was with the leafs, he also played for Buffalo at one time.

**R.H:** The Buffalo Bisons?

**M.Z:** Bisons, that's right.

**R.H:** You mentioned why they collapsed, not the Arena, but the Buffalo Bisons, can you tell me again why they folded?

**M.Z:** Well, the rink collapsed here from the weight of the snow in 19...

**R.H:** Yeah, the Arena collapsed in...?

**M.Z:** It collapsed in 1936, March 17, 1936. The weight of the snow collapsed the roof and after that why... I said before they went to Niagara Falls to play, and after having drawn all these crowds from Buffalo, why-they just didn't travel to Niagara Falls to see hockey, so the fans support wasn't good. Fans support didn't continue.

**R.H:** They weren't incorporated into any other league, were they?

**M.Z:** No, they were in the same league, and they were still the Buffalo Bisons.

**R.H:** But when they folded, did they go elsewhere?

**M.Z:** No, no. They just folded and then there was no more Buffalo team until they built the Memorial Auditorium in Buffalo, and then they started a Buffalo Bisons there, that's Pepsi.

- R.H:** So you really didn't have any competition with the Memorial Auditorium not being there, did you?
- M.Z:** No. After one year I think they had the Buffalo Majors... They played some hockey in Buffalo, but they played in the old Broadway Auditorium. It wasn't suitable for hockey, it was just kind of a barn, so they didn't last too long either.
- R.H:** What was hockey like then, was there a lot of fights then, like there is now?
- M.Z:** No, it was a much different game.
- R.H:** Has it changed then?
- M.Z:** Oh yes. You had to be... Now all you have is to be able to skate fast and be tough. It was more of a finesse game and stick handling then, and positional play, but now it's just... it's nothing. I really don't appreciate hockey nearly... The hockey they play now is nothing the same as they played in those days. At that time they only had 12 players on a team when we played. Another thing, at that time you see, your rinks weren't heated. I mean it was cold, and it was much more adaptable to hockey than to have the warm arenas that they have today. So of course players lasted longer. I mean they had years of hockey, they didn't wear out like they do in those hot rinks. All that smoke and stuff...
- R.H:** How long did they last, what was the average age?
- M.Z:** Well, they would run into ... You see, now every year your players now are getting younger. At that time if a... it wasn't very often that you went right from juniors into professional hockey. You had to spend some time in the minors, but now they sign them at 18, 17 to 18 years old. Of course they probably won't last that long, they'll be through, a lot of them, when they are 30, or maybe before that. At that time playing in the colder rinks, and there was no smoking in the rinks, which was hard on the respiratory system, so they would last, and still play good hockey at 35 or 36 years old. Some of them went longer than that, but now it has just cut the life span for hockey players.
- R.H:** You were saying the Arena collapsed on St. Patrick's Day, what year was it?
- M.Z:** It was 1936, the 17th of March, 1936.
- R.H:** Was there anyone in there at the time?

**M.Z:** Yeah, I was in there. There was thirteen in it when it collapsed. I wasn't in it when it went down, but I was the first one that noticed it was going down 'cause I was working for the Buffalo Club at that time, and it was just time for them to practice. I was the last person on the ice.

**R.H:** You mean the Buffalo Bisons were in there?

**M.Z:** No, they weren't in there either yet 'cause I always went early. I went up early and I had a bunch of small hockey sticks to be autographed for Wheaties. Wheaties were the... sponsored the broadcasts for hockey. They had a bunch of sticks that they had brought over for me to get autographed for them. I took them in and layed them out in the dressing room, and I was there a little early and it was snowing pretty heavy, , so I just put my skates on and went out for a skate before they came in. I was on the ice probably for 20 minutes or so, and then I went into the dressing room. A couple of the players came in, Bud Jarvis was one of them. Bud Jarvis and Cliff Barton came in, and while we were in the dressing room, they were autographing sticks. I heard a... it sounded like somebody dropping planks in the rink, so I walked out from the dressing room to the edge of the ice. They used to have two big Texaco signs, that were probably 8' high and 30' long that used to sit up on the tie-rods. Just as I walked on to the ice, I saw these signs fall over, off the tie-rods. So I went back to the dressing room and I told the fellows in the dressing room "You better get out of here, because the rink is going to cave in". They kinda laughed at me but they just had their T-shirts on. They got their hockey shirts on, and I said "Well, you stay here if you want to, but I'm going, I'm leaving". So I went out and on my way out, Mrs. Anderson was working in the office, and I told her "That she'd better get out". Bill Warner, he was working in the rink. He was one of the maintenance men in the rink, and I told him. I didn't stay around to see them out, 'cause I knew the rink could cave in. I went out the front door and by the time I got across the Street, I turned around and looked, there was a pile of bricks in front of the door where I came out, about 6' high. The engineer had his car parked in front of the rink, and the skate-sharpener had his car parked in front of the rink. Croucher, he came out and looked around and he said "Boy, I'm

glad somebody moved my car", and I said "Well, you'd better look again because you can see a little bit of your car there". It was underneath the bricks, you couldn't even see it. My dad was working in the back of the Arena. They were getting ready for the Buffalo Skating Club Carnival the next night. Dad was putting up the props and his car was parked on the street, and the bricks went and fell and tore the side off of his car. As soon as I got out and things had quietened down, I knew my dad was in the building, so I turned around and went back in looking for him. He came out around the outside looking for me. He'd gone out the back door and I went out the front door. Nobody was hurt, out of the thirteen of us.

**R.H:** Was the snow that bad, that year?

**M.Z:** It was a heavy wet snow and it was a northeast wind. The roof of the building was built like a half circle, like a hoop and if you put weight on one side of the hoop the other side goes up. So, when the wind blew the wet snow over the top of the roof, it packed it all in one corner, on the back. That caused the other side to come up. That's what caused the collapse. If it would have been evenly distributed over the whole roof, it would have never collapsed. It was so wet and heavy, you see it was in the spring, in early spring, like in March, and it was real wet snow and that's what caused the collapse. It was the weight of that wet snow. Buffalo, the hockey team, had two games left in the regular season, and they were in Cleveland, so we left the next day. I was the trainer at that time, and we went to Cleveland. The first two games of the playoffs were going to be in Cleveland so we spent a week in Cleveland at that time. By the time we came home from Cleveland, why-the snow was pretty well all gone already.

**R.H:** What day of the week was it? Were you going to be playing a game that night?

**M.Z:** We had played the night before. It was a Monday night, and we had a crowd of about 3,00 people in there. The Arena collapsed on Tuesday, I'm sure it was Tuesday, and then the next night was supposed to be the Buffalo Skating Club Carnival, and they would have had probably, 8,000 people in there. So, if it had collapsed, then it would have been a catastrophe.

**R.H:** Did the whole building actually collapse?

**M.Z:** No, just the roof. The roof just collapsed and fell in on the ice and down across the seats. It didn't hurt the seats and it didn't hurt the outside side walls, it just crashed on to the ice. It could have been repaired, put back up... At that time Mr. Baird offered to give it to the Town if they would put a roof back on it and it would have cost them probably \$25, 000 to put a new roof on it, but they didn't feel that they could spend the \$25,000.

**R.H:** That was the Town Council?

**M.Z:** Yeah, that's right, the Fort Erie Town Council. Mr. Vasey demolished the rink and just kept the icehouse open for a few years.

**R.H:** So they demolished it then?

**M.Z:** Oh yes.

**R.H:** Who was Mr. Vasey?

**M.Z:** Mr. Vasey? He was one of the owners of the ice... he run the rink for Mr. Baird. He was the Arena manager and when it collapsed, he leased the ice plant from Mr. Baird for to make ice. They supplied a lot of ice in the fall, this time of the year. They hauled a lot of ice down to Bright's Winery for making wine. In the summer, at that time, there wasn't very many refrigerators around. Most people had ice boxes, so they would deliver ice. He kept the ice business going for quite a while after that.

**R.H:** So they demolished the Arena, but when did they build the new one?

**M.Z:** Well, the new one was built by the Lions Club. The Town built the one before that. They gave them money and they built the one before that. It was condemned later, and then the one that is on the present site was built by the Fort Erie Lions Club.

**R.H:** So there has been three then?

**M.Z:** That's right, this is the third rink.

**R.H:** So the Town finally did build one?

**M.Z:** Well, the Lions Club, the service clubs in town, built it and turned it over to the Town.

**R.H:** Yeah, they built this one, right?

**M.Z:** That's right. The second one, the money was financed by service clubs, but the building of it wasn't supervised too well, and it left a lot to be desired in construction.

**R.H:** Was that built soon after the collapse or was there a lot of time between?

**M.Z:** Yes, there was quite a... That wasn't built until... let me see, I guess that would have been in the late '40s when that first rink was built after that.

**R.H:** And the structure wasn't very good then?

**M.Z:** No.

**R.H:** So then they tore that one down, right?

**M.Z:** That was condemned, and then they had to tear it down. The building that is there now was financed by the service clubs in Fort Erie.

**R.H:** So the collapse was caused by the snow, it wasn't caused by anything faulty in the structure?

**M.Z:** No, no.

**R.H:** Who was the mayor of this town when all this happened?

**M.Z:** Well, when it collapsed, Malkin was the mayor. He used to have a store over in Amigari, over in the West End there, just across from the Racetrack. I think he was the mayor at that time.

**R.H:** Do you know anything about the Town wanting part of the revenue that came from the Peace Bridge?

**M.Z:** The only thing the Town could get from the Peace Bridge would be taxes, that's the only thing the Town could get. It was a private concern then. Property taxes is the only thing the Town could get from the Peace Bridge.

**R.H:** Did you ever hear anything about the Town taking the Peace Bridge to court over this?

**M.Z:** I don't know anything about that.

**R.H:** Do you know anything about the Bertie Fair?

**M.Z:** Yeah, we used to get a half-day holiday to attend the Bertie Fair.

**R.H:** Did you really?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah, school kids always got a half-day to go to the fair.

**R.H:** Did they have racing there, like trotters or something?

**M.Z:** Well, they used to have that but I don't think they were bet on. I don't think they ever had mutuals, farm mutuals or not.

**R.H:** When you went to the Bertie Fair, did you notice what they had there?

**M.Z:** In the afternoons they used to have marching bands for the school kids, and they had... It was just like an agricultural fair, something similar to the Welland Fair. At that time, for kids it was quite an event. At least it was a half-day holiday for everybody.

**R.H:** I was told they gave out prizes for different things, is that right?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah, for races and they had all kinds of things.

**R.H:** So it was mostly an agricultural fair?

**M.Z:** Agricultural fair, yes, that's right.

**R.H:** Did they have competitions and things like that?

**M.Z:** That's right, flower shows and stuff like that, and livestock. It was like a... If you go out in the country to these fairs, it was similar to that.

**R.H:** I'd like to ask you again about the sports. When you went to play hockey when you were a kid, how was the equipment? Did you get any equipment given to you at all?

**M.Z:** No, you furnished your own equipment and you furnished your own transportation. When we played ball, Jimmy Farrell... when we played junior ball and travelled, he had a car. I had a Model T Ford truck and we all went in Jimmy Farrell's car or my Model T truck.

**R.H:** What were the roads like then?

**M.Z:** Well, they weren't paved like they are now, but they were good. They weren't mud roads or anything, but they were nothing to like they are now. The cars didn't drive 60 or 70 miles an hour either so there wasn't that problem. Our parents didn't take us to the Arena either, and we weren't furnished with a lot of equipment. We had to supply our own equipment.

**R.H:** Did you have the kind of equipment like they have now?

**M.Z:** We didn't have face guards and we didn't have helmets and a lot of things. I think maybe a lot of this equipment that they've got now has caused hockey to deteriorate. It has caused it to be much rougher than it was before. With the equipment they've got now, they get brave and they start swinging the sticks and stuff. Before they wouldn't do that. I got nothing against a good hard body check, but when they start using sticks as soon as somebody bumps them, then they want to fight, I mean, that's part of the game, body contact. Now they've got so that it's hardly safe for you to get along the boards, they'll run you into it, and hit you with a stick. That's why they have all these problems. At that time, you very seldom... oh, you might get a cut, a few stitches, but nobody did it intentionally. The thing that I can't understand is, why referees and owners don't

insist upon the rules being more strictly enforced. These players that they have, are paid so much money and when they are out for a few games, and have to be paid, it's costing the owner a lot of money. It's also costing the players a lot of discomfort. They could control a lot of this by just enforcing the rules. The rules are there, but they relax them and it's the owners that... The referees try to satisfy the owners.

**R.H:** And the crowds?

**M.Z:** The crowds, that's right, and that's why hockey is deteriorating. That's only my own opinion.

**R.H:** What position did you play in hockey?

**M.Z:** I played the wing, I played right wing in hockey and I pitched when I played ball.

**R.H:** So were the rules really strict then?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah, when you were called... when high sticking penalties and stuff were called, they didn't let you get away with what they get away with now. Another thing right now... the standards, they're not consistent. One referee calls one way, and another referee calls another way. At the start of a game they will follow everything, and then the next thing you know they'll relax, and they get into trouble, and then they start getting strict again. That's what causes the problems in your sports.

**R.H:** Did you have any problem getting ice time?

**M.Z:** No. No, we never had problems with ice time.

**R.H:** Did you ever go to Erie Beach?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah.

**R.H:** So that was the big attraction then?

**M.Z:** That was the main Beach here. They had the dance hall there, and the swimming pool, and a zoo. The ferries brought people over and one was called the Sandfly Express.

**R.H:** Oh yeah, I've heard about that.

**M.Z:** It went along the Lakeshore Road to Erie Beach, and they had a boat that came over from Buffalo. They used come over on the ferry to Fort Erie. They could come over from Commercial Street on a boat. From what I can remember of the Beach it was nicer and much more larger than Crystal Beach. The dance hall was beautiful, downstairs was the bowling alley, and they had a big



swimming pool with dressing rooms downstairs, and the second floor was the dance hall.

**R.H:** That was frequented a lot wasn't it?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah.

**R.H:** What about the Bardol family, were they Canadians?

**M.Z:** No, no, he was American.

**R.H:** So they were Americans, when did Erie Beach close down?

**M.Z:** When the stock market crashed, when was that '29?

**R.H:** Is that when it closed?

**M.Z:** I'm not sure, I wouldn't be sure about that. It might have been later than that.

**R.H:** Did they have a lot of rides too?

**M.Z:** Yeah.

**R.H:** Did they sell a lot of food?

**M.Z:** Yeah, there was stands the same as there are at Crystal Beach. It was similiar, what I can remember of it. Part of the zoo was... they had a lot of live animals there. The walk along the beach was nice.

**R.H:** Did they have a boardwalk?

**M.Z:** No, I don't think so. I think it was all concrete as you walked along there. When we came down to Fort Erie, we came to Fort Erie in 1927, oh pardon me, '28, and I was 12 years old then so I can't remember too much detail.

**R.H:** Did you go to Crystal Beach?

**M.Z:** I don't remember going to Crystal Beach at that time.

**R.H:** What about later on?

**M.Z:** Later on! Oh yes. We used to go to Crystal Beach every Saturday night.

**R.H:** You went to the dance hall?

**M.Z:** Yeah, we always had one corner that was Fort Erie. We'd borrow somebodys car, if we didn't have a car we'd borrow one, and we'd go to Crystal Beach on a Saturday night. We always knew were to find the Fort Erie crowd. They were always in one area.

**R.H:** They say that was a nice dance hall, was it?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah, it was nice. That was the Starlight Ballroom.

**R.H:** They had some big bands there, didn't they?

**M.Z:** Yes, they did.

**R.H:** Do you know who any of the bands were?

**M.Z:** Bill Austin played there. He was from Buffalo, he wasn't one of the big bands. He was just a Buffalo band, I don't remember big bands. The only time I remember the big bands, is when we used to go... after the Bridge was opened, we used to go over to Shea's Buffalo that had the orchestra pit, and see the big bands. We went over there when Sinatra was first starting, and the bobby soxers... he was with Tommy Dorsey, he sang with Tommy Dorsey, I remember him being in Buffalo that time. Jeff Fields, Ted Lewis, Eddie Duchin. There was a different band in there every week, at Shea's Buffalo.

**R.H:** Did you have to buy tickets to the Crystal Ballroom to dance?

**M.Z:** Well, we had it both ways at one time that I can remember. We used to get three dances for a quarter, you'd buy the tickets, three tickets for a quarter. When the dance was over, they just pulled the rope, and then they'd come in the other gate, the other side, and the group behind the rope would go out. If I remember right, it was three dances for a quarter.

**R.H:** Do you know who built Crystal Beach or managed it?

**M.Z:** The Hall's had that, didn't they Mom? (Mr. Zimmerman is addressing his wife) I don't know if they built it or not but Hall's...

**R.H:** Were they managers?

**M.Z:** I think they were the owners.

**R.H:** They were the owners?

**M.Z:** Yeah.

**R.H:** Was your dad in the volunteer Fire Department?

**M.Z:** Yeah, when we were kids in public school. My brother and I used to carry... when they went away to these parades that they always went to, outside of Buffalo and around. The Fire Company had parades, and Ray and I used to carry the banner when we were in the parades with the Fire Department.

**R.H:** Was this Bertie Township?

**M.Z:** No, it was Fort Erie Fire Department. There was only one then, and the other one was Bridgeburg Fire Department. The firehall used to be right next to where the legion is now, that used to be the Town Hall. It is the legion hall now.

**R.H:** You mean the one on Queen Street?

**M.Z:** Queen Street. That used to be the Fort Erie Town Hall where the

legion is, and the firehall was right next door to it. It was the little building next door. Fort Erie No. 1 Fire department. It wasn't No. 1, there was only one, and the other was Bridgeburg at that time.

**R.H:** So this was all volunteer of course, right?

**M.Z:** That's right, it was always volunteer. There has never been any pay for firemen.

**R.H:** Was there any fires that he told you about?

**M.Z:** No, I don't remember anything, not during the time dad was a fireman. I remember when Von Zuban's Lumber Company burned down.

**R.H:** Did you say Zimmerman's?

**M.Z:** No, Von Zuban's. It was on the Boulevard, I remember when it burned.

**R.H:** That was on the Boulevard?

**M.Z:** Yeah, right near... just south of the Anglican church.

**R.H:** Oh yeah. Was the equipment good at that time?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah, they always had good equipment. the equipment was always... for the size of the... We didn't have any need for hook and ladders 'cause there was never any problem with big buildings. Fort Erie always had good equipment.

**R.H:** What about the water though, were did they get the water from?

**M.Z:** Oh, out of the pumping stations and they were sufficient at that time. I never remember any fires or anything in Fort Erie with any complaints that the water supply wasn't sufficient.

**R.H:** How did they get the guys together when there was a fire?

**M.Z:** With the siren.

**R.H:** They still had the siren then?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah, the siren used to be on the top of the tower there on Queen Street hill. Now it's on the firehall, but at that time it was on the top of the tower there.

**R.H:** Did you work at Fleet?

**M.Z:** Yeah, I started there in 1940, and when I started there, my clock number was 240. There was 240 employees at that time. I worked in the woodworking department. Charlie Jacobs was my foreman and I worked at the big plant for two months, and then they moved the woodworking department to Lewis Street. I went down there to work and I was down there for as long as they had it open down there, and then they moved it back up to the big plant. I was in

charge of the wood mill on one shift. My foreman at that time was Bert Wyatt. I stayed there 'til after the war and when the war was over and the first layoff came up, I asked to be laid off because I wanted to go back outside to work. My dad was in construction in Fort Erie, and I had worked with him before. My brother and I both worked for dad and then when war started, material started getting hard to get, so in September dad says, "Maybe you fellows better see if you can get yourself a job, because we don't know if we are going to be able to get material, and we may not have anymore work". Ray, he went to Horton Steel, he got a job in the carpenters shop at Horton Steel. I went to work at Fleet, that's where you went, into a factory at that time. As soon as the war was over, and I could get out of Fleet, they laid me off...

**R.H:** What was your dad's name?

**M.Z:** Elmer.

**R.H:** Elmer?

**M.Z:** Yeah. I went back to work for him. I worked for him 'til he died, and when died, I carried on for a couple of years then I went to work for the Niagara South Board of Education as maintenance supervisor. I was there for the last 20 years before I retired. I've been retired for four years.

**R.H:** When you were working at Fleet, were you working on parts for airplanes?

**M.Z:** That's right.

**R.H:** Do you know what kind of parts, and were they building any airplanes, the whole plane?

**M.Z:** Oh yes, they were building the Fleet Finch and the Fleet Canuck and they were building the complete aircraft. Tommy Williams, the pilot who just died a few months ago, was the test pilot at Fleet. He just died a couple of months ago and in a month or so he would have had his 100th birthday. He was the test pilot. I knew Tommy, he was quite a character and he was the oldest test pilot, I think at that time. His pilot's license, he just turned it in 'cause he though it was better for him. They didn't take it away from him, he just turned it in on his own because he was just to old to fly.

**R.H:** He would have been a 100 years old soon?

**M.Z:** He died about a month... he would have been a 100 years old in a month. That was only two or three months ago that he died.

**R.H:** Didn't they have women working there during the war?

**M.Z:** Oh yeah,

**R.H:** Didn't they have some kind of bus service to get them to work?

**M.Z:** Yes, they had a bus service.

**R.H:** To bring them into Fleet, right?

**M.Z:** Well, they had a... Where the Catholic Church is now on Central Avenue, there used to be a hostel. A lot of the girls, ladies, lived there and they would have bus service from there up to Fleet.

**R.H:** It was a privately owned bus service though, wasn't it?

**M.Z:** I don't really know what it was, I couldn't say.

**R.H:** How long did you work at Fleet then?

**M.Z:** I was there until 1945.

**R.H:** And then you went into construction with your dad, did you build houses?

**M.Z:** We did everything, we did a lot of industrial work. We did a lot of work for Horton Steel, Hart and Cooley's, and we did work for Fleet too, and the Niagara School Board. We built a number of buildings. We did work for every church in Fort Erie, except the the Lutheran Church and the New Baptist Church.

**R.H:** Did you do work like additions or...?

**M.Z:** Well, some were additions, and we worked on the Senior Citizens Hall on Queen Street, we remodelled that. We built the one on the corner of North and Bertie Street, we built that church. We did remodelling work on the Central Avenue United Church. We worked on pretty near every church in Fort Erie.

**R.H:** You didn't have anything to with the building of the Cherry Hill Clubhouse, did you?

**M.Z:** No.

**R.H:** So, you and your dad built quite a few buildings then?

**M.Z:** Yes, we did, my dad was in business for quite long time. A lot of our work was industrial, commercial.

**R.H:** (Mr. Zimmerman is showing the family tree, and his wife starts to read from it) Harmonious Zimmerman born in Germany in 1778, and came to Humbersone, Canada in 1851. It was that far back.

**R.H:** So your family came from Alsac, Lorraine, is that in Germany?

**M.Z:** That's right, in 1778.

**R.H:** Where did they go from there?

**M.Z:** Well, they came to Humberstone... no they went to the States, to Pennsylvania, and in 1851 they came to Canada. In January 1851 they came to Canada, Humberstone, and that was Harmonious.

**R.H:** Were they given Crown Land then?

**M.Z:** I think so.

**R.H:** So the Crown Grant was given to Harmonious Zimmerman, what date was that?

**M.Z:** 1799, July 6th. Neville, Crown Guarantee to Harmonious Zimmerman the elder, blacksmith, all 200 acres. This deed is too fragile to photo copy. In 1808, July 9th, from Harmonious the Elder to George Augustine Sr., the south 100 acres. 1845, June 24th, Anne Cooper, a widow, to Abraham Zimmerman 35 acres of the above land the deed refers to. An Indenture made by Harmonious Zimmerman the elder, to Anne Cooper, but there is no registration of this accepted above. The above 35 acres are described as the north part of the north half. In 1827, June 8th, Harmonious Zimmerman to Henry Stone, 12¼ acres of southeast part of the north half. In 1827, July 3rd, Harmonious Zimmerman to Henry Zimmerman, 87 acres of the north half. There is no registration of Abraham Zimmerman transferring his 35 acres back to his father Harmonious the elder. However, he must have, because the Indenture of July 3rd, 1847 above, would leave Harmonious Zimmerman 3/4 of an acre of which his home was located, lot 20, section No. 4 in Humberstone.

**R.H:** Is that in Port Colborne?

**M.Z:** Yeah, Port Colborne.

**R.H:** So actually your family had Crown Land given to them, right?

**M.Z:** Yeah, way back.

**R.H:** Can you tell me the names of the players that were on the Horton Steel Intermediate B Baseball Team of 1950?

**M.Z:** I think I can, we played the third game against Listowel, and Brantford and we won the Championship at Brantford. Henry Hamil was superintendent of the company, he was kind of a go-between the ball team and the company. Wray Dunn was the catcher, Al Spear, Mickey McDermott, Norm Plato, Les Banatti, Fred Plato, Casey Jones were some of the players. I coached and managed the team. There was Marvin McReynolds, Dave Bannati, Haddy Johnson, Ray Zimmerman, Dutch Sahli, Jack McKeough, and Allan Jones who were also on the team.

Lynne Zimmerman was the bat boy.

**R.H:** Was he any relation to you?

**M.Z:** Yeah, he's my oldest son.

**R.H:** Is he the one that was the hockey player?

**M.Z:** That's right.

**R.H:** And that's all of the players then?

**M.Z:** That's all of the players that were... that's right, that's the full team.

**R.H:** Do you know any of the hockey players from Fort Erie who turned professional?

**M.Z:** Yes, there was a number of them played N.H.L. hockey, pro hockey. Pierre Pilote was one, Tom Reid, Johnny Brenman, Lorne Rombough, and Lynne Zimmerman who played pro hockey for Houston in the W.H.A. There was Doug Rombough, and Doug Reid who played minor pro hockey. They never made the N.H.L. but they made the minor hockey in the international league. Mickey McMann also was born in Fort Erie, he played for Minnesota and he played in Buffalo for a little while. He made the N.H.L. I think that's pretty well all of them who made the pro hockey from Fort Erie.

**R.H:** That's quite a list, isn't it?

**M.Z:** Fort Erie's had a hockey... There was a time lapse when they had no rink here, so there was quite a few came from here that was able to play pro hockey.

**R.H:** Thank you so much for the interview Mr. Zimmerman, I really appreciate it, thank you.

**M.Z:** Well, I appreciate you asking me. It was a pleasure to help out with the information I had.

**R.H:** Oh, you've helped out a lot believe me, especially with the sports end of it, it's great.

**M.Z:** Well, thank you very much.