

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mr. Harold Grimmell in his home at 358 Emerick Avenue, Fort Erie, Ontario, and the date is September 3, 1985.

R.H: Good afternoon Mr. Grimmell.

H.G: Good afternoon.

R.H: Can you please give me the date of your birth?

H.G: December 18th, 1918.

R.H: And could you please tell me where you were born?

H.G: I was born in a barn actually, it was a barn moved from Bowen Road on to property at 204 Highland Avenue, which my father remodelled and made into a home. I was born there, of course there were very few streets, the streets were all mud at that time and we just had boardwalks out to the streets and we didn't do too much moving around on a rainy day.

R.H: Were there many homes around your neighbourhood then?

H.G: No, there were very few homes on Highland Avenue at that time. I understand that in 1903, Highland Avenue only went as far as Emerick and ended there. We didn't have a Highland Avenue or the Bowen Road in 1903 but this was shortly before my time, of course, but I thought it very interesting to compare and there were very few homes west of Central Avenue, or in that area.

R.H: What was the business area like at that time?

H.G: Well, the main thoroughfare or the main business section of course would be Jarvis Street, as it is today, the buildings were all pretty well frame, wooden buildings. The street wasn't paved, it was just stone of course. Now, I can't recall.. When I was a boy, the Town Hall was there, but I think it was put in and constructed in about 1914.

R.H: Who was the mayor then?

H.G: At that time? Oh, dear, I can't give you that information.

R.H: So, the streets weren't paved, were they cobblestone?

H.G: They were just stone.

R.H: And what about the sidewalks on Jarvis Street?

H.G: Oh, mostly board. This is before the '20s now. In the '20s they started to put in your cement sidewalks.

R.H: What school did you go to?

H.G: When I first started school, I went to kindergarten at Phipps Street School, which it was called then, and of course later, it was changed

to Rose Seaton School. They just finished constructing an addition in front of the school which made it very nice and I certainly enjoyed going there. We had some lovely teachers.

R.H: Can you remember the names of some of your teachers?

H.G: Oh, I can remember quite a few of the names of the teachers that I had. Miss Kitch was the first teacher that I had in kindergarten. There was a Miss Weaver, Hilda Weaver, she had just come to Rose Seaton School in '27 and I had her in '29. There was a Miss Radford who just passed on recently. By the way, Miss Weaver is still with us, she is living in the Pines Nursing Home in Bracebridge. I also had... I mentioned Miss Williamson, did I not?

R.H: No.

H.G: I had Miss Williamson, Miss Mossip, and Rose Seaton herself. She was an excellent teacher.

R.H: Were they strict?

H.G: I tell you now, if you were sent down to Miss Seaton, why-she very thoroughly questioned you as to why you were there and of course if she felt it warranted a little punishment, you just held out your hands and you got the strap. Of course, this did a lot more good I think, than just plainly standing there scolding you, because you thought twice before you did it again. Yes, she was a very excellent teacher. Of course, most of the teachers were very good. I enjoyed them. We had a man teacher but I can't think of his name, I'm sorry. He was the first man teacher at Phipps Street School and he handled the physical education part.

R.H: What did your father do for a living?

H.G: My father came to Fort Erie in approximately 1909 and this was before my father and mother were married. They came from Buffalo, both my mother and father were born in Buffalo and when he came to Fort Erie, he was already trained in plumbing and heating and specialized as a tinsmith. He worked for a gentleman who had a store on Jarvis Street, his name was Mr. Smith. He worked for him for a couple of years and then he had the opportunity of bettering himself, so he went to work at the Shipyards down along the Niagara Boulevard and he worked there for approximately four years. When it closed down, I think primarily due to that fire that we were discussing...

R.H: Do you mean the fire on the M.T. Green?

H.G: Yes. He then went on the railroad for a year or two and he could foresee no real positive future for himself, so he decided to go into business for himself at 204 Highland Avenue, as a plumbing and heating man. He hired three or four men and one of them was a Jack McDermott who learned his trade with my father, and it's still in the McDermott family. Mickey McDermott, is running his father's previous business and it looks like it is going in to another generation, so that looks real good for Fort Erie. Dad was the first one in Fort Erie to install oil burners. When installing oil burners, he decided, well, they would have to be supplied with oil. Of course, coal was the major heating process in all the homes and factories, but when oil came out and the oil burner, he installed one in our home and from then on he realized the potential of it. He decided to, not only install them, but to supply the oil to wherever he installed them. So, he did this, and he installed oil burners in the Horton Steel, the Canadian Niagara Power Company, several of the churches in Fort Erie and the Arner Company. He bought an international truck and Horton Steel put a tank on it and meters. he went ahead and sold oil at a ridiculous price, which you would call today, for something like nine cents a gallon, delivered. Of course this oil wasn't as highly refined as your stove oils today but it just gives an idea of the inflation we are into right now. When he was delivering this oil out of the building, he put in a pumphouse at the bottom of Courtwright Street.

R.H: Where exactly was this located?

H.G: It was on the corner of Courtwright and Niagara Boulevard. It's the smaller one, there's another larger one at the left going down the street and it's now Dave Spear's. At that time, it was owned by Herbert Guess, the big building, where Dave Spear is now but dad went ahead and... instead of just having a pumphouse in a building, he went ahead and built a garage. He sold gas out of the front and pumped the oil out of the back. He had the railroad install a siding with the agreement that he would transport all of the liquids, or gas and oil, through the railroad. This is the agreement they made with him.

R.H: Where was the siding?

H.G: It was right in... The siding went right in behind our garage. There

was already a spur, a track that went over the Niagara Boulevard to a coal yard, which has been dismantled several years ago. But they ran off of that run, they made a little spur and cut into the side of the hill and he installed two tanks. You were permitted to install gas tanks at that time, above ground. He put one 10,000 gallon tank and he put in a 20,000 gallon gas tank which was a split tank. You could put 10,000 gallons of gas on one side and 10,000 of oil on the other side. Later on, he sunk other tanks under the ground when it was apparent this is what you had to do. Anyways, the oil business was quite good at that time in the '30s, regardless of the fact there was a Depression going on. It wasn't until the '40s that father decided to go into selling cars along with his business. So, knowing that the gas station at the corner of Courtwright and Niagara wasn't large enough, he made an arrangement with Herb Guess to buy his property and we had the Chrysler and Plymouth dealership there. At the same time, we also had a small dealership on the other property, of the Austin from England, and sold Austins on the one property, and the Chrysler and Plymouth out of the other. We expanded quite well, and the boys, when they came back from the airforce, went in... Myself, instead of going back to Fleet, I went into business with dad.

R.H: So, he established that business in the '40s?

H.G: In the '40s. The dealership in the '40s and then into the '50s.

R.H: And of course, by that time, the ferry boats had sort of gave up the ghost, so to speak, right?

H.G: Well, yes, you take your ferry boats when I was a boy, we often used them 'cause we had relatives in Buffalo and East Aurora, in the country, south of Buffalo and we often took the ferry boats to Buffalo 'cause there wasn't a Peace Bridge. Of course, that was before 1927. When the Bridge was put up of course, there was a great boom. I can recall standing and waiting for another boat, they usually ran two boats at one time. One would land on one side, and one would land on the other. You'd buy your tickets on the boat, except those that were on the upper decks. You could go by foot and not drive your car, and of course, they had ramps on there and everything to the boat. You bought your ticket as you went on the boat. In fact, you bought it at Elliott's Drugstore

if you recall. Of course, they had Immigration and Customs officers at both sides of the river and you had to go through them as well, the same as you do today. Immigration was separate along with Customs. There were two men, a customs officer and an immigration officer. Today, you just get interviewed with a customs officer. It was a very exciting period, particularly during the winter months. It was very rare the boats didn't run, except when the ice got too heavy in the river. We didn't have any boom then to stop the flow of the ice, and of course, as children we thought it was so exciting to go across the river and watch those big, we called them icebergs, when we were in the boats going over there. Of course they had some really large boats. There was one that could carry over 50 cars and...

R.H: What was the name of that one, do you know?

H.G: The Toledo. There was another one, they're just trying to remodel that and they've got it in the Buffalo Harbour now... Oh, the New Orleans or something, I believe it is that one. I remember riding on it. They had other boats that were running between Buffalo and Crystal Beach and they were quite popular, particularly when they closed Erie Beach. If you recall, they had a little train that ran between... We went on that several times. That ran to Erie Beach.

R.H: Do you know what that was called?

H.G: Boy, oh boy. The Sandfly, I think we called it that. The Sandfly Express or something like that. It had a very small engine and it had several cars and it was quite popular, particularly on holidays. It was very popular you see, because the boats would come over, then people from Buffalo, and to those that didn't have cars, it was very handy. We had the concessions at Erie Beach which were quite good. We had the Hurricane or... what was the name of some of the rides? Not only that, but they had quite a few birds, and animals, monkeys and everything in cages. They had a regular park there where they displayed all these things that small children would enjoy. It was just like a miniature zoo. It was very disheartening to the younger set when they decided to close Erie Beach in preference to Crystal Beach.

R.H: Do you know why they closed Erie Beach? Did it close because of Crystal Beach?

H.G: Well, I think it had a great deal to do with it because your cars were coming more into existence and people were able to travel to Crystal Beach, and of course there was quite big money going into the building there. There was homes, homes along the waterfront, summer homes and then eventually, year round homes. Also at Erie Beach [I think Mr. Grimmell means Crystal Beach] they had excellent facilities. You had your huge beach there which people just loved to go to. So, all these things had a drawing and this is what primarily, what phased out Erie Beach. They were trying to make a decision to what beach they were going to keep open, whether they were going to put their money into Erie Beach or were they going to put it into Crystal Beach. At that time, a lot of the factor there was the fact that they had a very good normal swimming area.

R.H: You mean at Crystal Beach?

H.G: In Crystal Beach. It has always been rocky at Erie Beach. At Erie Beach we had a fine pavillion, beautiful swimming pool, nice Dance Hall, everything was there. It seemed a shame when it was closed, I know we were very disappointed because it was so easy for us to get there. You could get there on your bicycle.

R.H: So, then you had to transfer your loyalty to Crystal Beach, right?

H.G: Oh yes, and of course, once that was closed, why-everybody went to Crystal Beach. Many times we would go to Buffalo, take the boat... They had a boat going to Crystal Beach and they had one going to Detroit. They had a huge boat going to Detroit that you could take for an excursion.

R.H: What was the big attraction about Buffalo?

H.G: Well, it was a big city, it was for us. They had shows there and everything was so huge. Downtown Buffalo was really booming, the shopping areas... You could go over and buy a suit for \$9.99.

R.H: How about when you brought it back, did you have to pay duty?

H.G: Oh yeah, you paid duty, but it was very minimum. Anything you brought back was...

R.H: So, it was worth it?

H.G: Oh, it was worth it. There was one thing that I was going to mention, this might be related to our family and I've always been tied in with our church, our church life, as superintendent of Sunday school for 25 years...

R.H: What church would that be?

H.G: This was Central Avenue United Church. We used to have a boys camp up along the lake, up at Morgan's Point and it was there that I got my bronze medallion for live saving. I decided to, along with a young man, Delbert Davidson, and myself, got our bronze medallions together. Of course, I just about drowned my poor buddy 'cause I had to carry him over stones and everything else and apply artificial respiration and everything, which you do today, the same thing. Delbert and I worked together for many years in life saving and perhaps Del should be given credit for his perseverance in seeing that children got this experience, life saving experience. Between him and myself, and the Royal Life Saving Society of England, we passed hundreds of children, not only in our own community, but also children along the way that were children of families who had permanent homes here and summer homes here. Delbert would instruct them and then I would go ahead, come out and stand on a raft, and pass them. It was just astonishing how well he had trained them and how well the children did. You know, for their ages...

R.H: How long was the training period?

H.G: The training for the child, of course he had to be a swimmer to begin with, and usually a strong swimmer or we wouldn't take him, it usually took Delbert approximately two weeks to train them. He would train them to do all of the rescue methods, the types of artificial respiration that was being used and mouth to mouth had just come into effect. We were at that time using the Holger Nielsen Method, which was quite successful but of course when you came to the mouth to mouth, why-it was much more successful because it could be applied in the water. If you had a boat, if you had him over a boat, you could save a child before you even got him in the boat and every second counts, I say child but any grown up as well. He did a great deal of work and he was lifeguard down at the Baby Hole for many years. He has to be given credit for saving an astounding number of people, I think it was 96 over a period of time. So, I think he is an asset to our community.

R.H: Didn't he make some kind of swim that was kind of daring in those days?

H.G: Well, Delbert used to enter into swims at the Toronto Exhibition along with Frank Williams and some of the other boys that were

real good long distance swimmers.

R.H: I thought more on the lines of something local, didn't he do something locally?

H.G: Well, they used to have competitions, I don't know who ran it but I think it was sponsored by the town. We had a little competition swimming, and they'd swim from up the river by the Peace Bridge down to Williams dock or Cozy Dell. Whoever won that, was the champion swimmer of the river. Most of the children at that time thought they were the champions until they got tied in and found out there was somebody else who was a little bit better.

R.H: So, I guess there was a lot of sports in Fort Erie. It was quite a sports town, wasn't it?

H.G: It was perhaps one of the most interesting sports and the most popular. In the '20s and '30s there was the championship team, hardball team of the Mentholatums, we called them. They consisted mainly of young men in our own community who were working at Horton Steel, on the railroad and... also lived in the approximate area of the ball diamond which was located on the Niagara Boulevard at the end of Central Avenue. We had quite a large complex of buildings due to the fact that the number of people who were attending these games and the support they were getting, they were in turn willing to pay to get into the games. So, they fenced it off and had stands, and at the bottom part of the stands right along the front where they could almost touch the catcher and the pitcher, they put in box seats. The people paid a certain fee for a year's tickets. Of course, everybody in town used to go to these games. I'm afraid if anybody wanted to rob a bank, it would have been an ideal time because there wouldn't be anybody downtown in the business area during a Saturday afternoon when the Mentholatums were playing some other team, and particularly when it turned out to be a championship game. It was really an exciting time. I wish something like this could happen again.

R.H: So, did they play for the Mentholatum Company, or did they sponsor them?

H.G: The Mentholatum Company were the ones that were supporting them, they supplied them with uniforms and such.

R.H: What was the team called?

H.G: Just the Mentholatums.

R.H: Who were some of the people that played for the team?

H.G: Well, there was several businessmen... turned out to be businessmen in Fort Erie. There was Ira Atwood, he owned and operated with his brother, the Atwood Funeral Home and also, the Atwood Furniture and Appliance Store on Jarvis Street. There was a Jim Fraser who... I believe he worked on Customs and lives in the second house up from the ball park. Of course, whenever Jim got to bat, the people would always holler, "Come on Jim, show them where you live and put the ball in your backyard", because if he did, it was a sure home run. There was a Charles Graham, a very popular man and an excellent ball player who played field. He was a man who worked for the Mentholatum Company. I don't know if he had any reason for it being called the Mentholatum Company but he had an excellent job with the Mentholatum Company in Buffalo, but lived in Fort Erie. He was born here in Fort Erie. There was Shorty Seebach, who was an excellent pitcher. If the team was getting into trouble, why-they always called on Shorty Seebach to get them out of the hole. There was another pitcher by the name of Joe Donaldson. They didn't have too many pitchers. They depended on only two or three men to do the pitching for the games. There was also... My brother played for a short time, Earl, he played in the field and also relieved in catching. There was a Jim Hall who very easily could have become a professional ball player in his day if he could have held his temper. Invariably, there would be a lot of action at the plate due to Jim figuring that the fellow should have been put out when he was safe. Of course, sometimes it even ended up in a quick fight but this all added to the ball games. You know, underneath the stands we had concessions where you'd go and have a hot dog or pop, ice cream, popcorn and of course in those days, it was only a nickle or a dime. Since the company didn't supply too many hardballs for a game, they had about six hardballs altogether for the game, we kids used to run across the road and fish them out of the Niagara River so they could continue and carry on the game. When we got the ball, why-they rewarded us with a nickle for bringing the ball back. They would miss the odd ball but the majority were returned to the game.

R.H: What year was this team in its prime?

H.G: It was in the early '30s as I recall. It was in the early '30s when they were in their real prime.

R.H: Did Ray Young ever play for this team?

H.G: Yes, Ray Young was on that team and Wes Benner was another who worked at Horton Steel. I'm sorry I can't give you more names 'cause there were quite a few other men, prominent men in Fort Erie that... Well, on this team...

R.H: Did you say they won the Ontario Championship?

H.G: Yeah, they won the Ontario Championship for several years I think. Of course, they were an excellent team. Jack Day played for them and I think Haggerty, they lived on that corner house right up on Central Avenue and Bowen Road.

R.H: Did you say the baseball diamond was right at the corner of Central Avenue?

H.G: Right. Central Avenue was not cut through to the Boulevard yet and so it gave us a good size diamond facing the river towards Bowen Road and it was a lot larger therefore, since there was no houses on the left side of the field.

R.H: Is that baseball diamond gone now?

H.G: There's a ball diamond there. Children play there at the diamond. It has been re-marked out so that they play in a different direction and it gives them a lot of room.

R.H: What was your first job, even part-time?

H.G: Well, my part-time during the Depression was with my father of course, in helping him in his gas station. Everybody had to work in those days in order to keep food on the table. My father was a plumber so he could do some plumbing during the Depression. He built the gas station and it progressed quite well due to the fact that we boys could help, why-this pulled him through. In 1938 when I graduated from high school, I worked at Fleet and I worked there for several years 'til '42.

R.H: Was that an American Company?

H.G: No, it was a Canadian Company, Fleet.

R.H: Yeah, but I believe it was an American Company to start with, right?

H.G: Well, Jack Sanderson was the president at that time and some of

These other men that were prominent citizens, were involved.

Now that you bring it up, I'm not sure whether Jack Sanderson was an American citizen or not.

R.H: So, you went to work there in '38, it wasn't that old then, was it?

H.G: Oh yes, it had been around for quite some time, I would say... You must have a record here of the year that Fleet started, with Jack Sanderson. He started the business, but it was already established when I went. They were building unit two when I went and I worked for a man with the name of Marty Taylor who was in charge of the parts department, in the factory.

R.H: What was your job then?

H.G: I became assistant to him and we were building the Hampton Bomber, the fuselage in the Hampton Bomber, and I was his assistant and when Marty left I was in charge of the parts department on the Hampton Bomber.

R.H: You went there in 1938 which was just before the war, so you are saying that they were already working on...?

H.G: Oh yeah, they had unit two which was just about complete by that time. When I went, they were still building of course, but our stores in the part department were being put in and they were getting into full swing, because I think they had in the back of their minds that war was coming up, and that we would be involved 100 percent.

R.H: Did they have contracts with countries other than Canada?

H.G: Yes, they sold planes to other countries, trainer planes and did some repairs, just sub-contracting but not on a large scale at that time. Their main production was their own aircraft, the Fleet Finch and they built the Cornell which was an American aircraft. It was designed in the States, but they came mass production at Fleet during the war and they were distributed and sent to... The majority of our basic training fields where pilots got to learn flying... I was on the one station at Pendleton, the other side of Ottawa where the only aircraft we had there, the primary aircraft was the Cornell. They worked out very well, they turned out real well.

R.H: Did a lot of people work there?

H.G: Oh yeah, it moved from about a 100 people to 2,500 at one time. In unit two, there was a good 2,500 people working there.

R.H: And you did have women working there during the war?

H.G: Oh yes, a good many women worked on the line as well as in the offices. They had a lot of women working there. When you considered that nearly every able-bodied man joined one area of the service or the other, and this left a shortage of young men to do the jobs. Lots of them were not trained, they had to be trained the same as the boys had to be trained.

R.H: So, did they work on the assembly line at Fleet?

H.G: Yes, oh yes, we had girls who were riveting, assembling, not just at Fleet, but nearly all companies across Canada and the United States. They did everything.

R.H: Weren't a lot of these girls from out of town?

H.G: Oh yes. Well, of course Fort Erie expanded quite a bit and this is why they had to start putting up these wartime houses. This was one area of it, the reason they put them in and then of course after the war was over, they gave servicemen and their wives the priority of buying them for a very minimal fee. For \$3,800 you could buy one of the large houses and for \$3,200 you could buy one of the small ones. Of course they had boardwalks and everything, but they were a well built home. They were well insulated and everything, and the wood was A-1.

R.H: Did they build them in the one area?

H.G: Well, mostly in the West End area, they were constructed. Catherine Street, Henrietta, Mary and all your other side streets right over to Gilmore Road, was all wartime housing. They seemed to have built most of them in that area. It was very accessible to Fleet you see, and apparently there was a large area there that was vacant. They could get the property at a reasonable price and then, if you lived in the house for three years, they reduced the price another \$600.

R.H: Didn't they also give them land?

H.G: Oh yes, when you got out of the service. If you wanted to farm or if you wanted to do some... buy a piece of property. At one time it had to be something like ten acres, something like that, a fairly good chunk of property and if you wanted to put some fruit trees on it, then they would subsidize, or they would give you a grant for that, the home and everything on the property. It was a real good chance to do something like that.

R.H: [When you were working at Fleet, how much did you make an hour then?]

H.G: The basic pay for anyone starting, was 35 cents an hour. At first we were only working a 48 hour week, which was at a straight rate. There wasn't any time and a half. We even went into a point where they had to turn out more aircraft than that, so we went on a 60 hour week. It was from 7:30 in the morning to 5:30 at night, six days a week and you didn't get any overtime. I think we worked under those conditions for about a year, and then they changed it and they payed us for 66 hours instead of 60, which gave us time and a half for anything over 48 hours. It worked out anyway that they were giving us time and a half for some of the time over the 48 hours.

R.H: Do you know where these women lived, that worked at Fleet?

H.G: Yeah, I'm just trying to put a location on it... I can't give you that information, I don't know for sure. If they weren't married, they went to peoples homes and boarded. Many of them lived in private homes.

R.H: Did they keep any of these women on after the war?

H.G: Oh yes, many of them were kept on after the war. If I had not been going into business with my father, I would have possibly tried to go back to Fleet. Of course, there wasn't the demand when I came back in '45 of your work-force there, because things had tapered off, and there weren't as many working there. Of course, they had good men already established in these jobs, the same one as I left, but I think over a short period of time, I might have been able to get in there and I would have been a retired man from there. So, I only worked there for three or four years. When I came out of the service, I went to work with my father. He bought the Herb Guess property, I think it was in '46 that he bought that.

R.H: What property was that?

H.G: The Herb Guess property where Dave Spear Motors is, right there at the corner of Courtwright and the Niagara Boulevard.

R.H: Did you continue working there?

H.G: Yes, we had a fairly successful business with Chrysler and Plymouth. The cars were very difficult to get because of the demand and this was the toughest part for us. The first few years were bad

when we had a list of names of people that wanted cars regardless of colour or what motor was in it, or anything else. They would have taken a car for any price because most people during the war didn't even have a good tire on their car. The cars were practically run ragged and were ready for the junkyard. Everybody wanted a new car, but you just simply couldn't get them.

R.H: Couldn't you get parts for cars during the war?

H.G: Well, your tires were rationed, your gasoline was rationed, you could only drive your car so far during the war. You were just doctoring you car up until the day when you could buy a new one. A new car was just a thing of the past for the war years. If you bought a brand new car just prior to the war, well then, it was still a five year thing or six years. It was nearly seven years before industry got to the point where they could meet the needs of the people. The demand was there, but it couldn't be supplied by the industry.

R.H: Where did your cars come from?

H.G: Well, ours came out of Jimmy James in Welland. He was the dealer and we were the sub-dealers so he only gave us as many cars as he could get in. This is what made it tough for us but once we had the franchise of a full dealership then we got more cars. Of course, by that time you had to really go out and sell them, so it made a different story. Of course, when you are establishing a business, a fairly large business, it's all ups and downs and a lot of expense. I left the business in 1950, got my visa, went to Buffalo, and worked there for a few years. I worked at various dealerships. I'm a licensed mechanic by trade. I worked for a George ONeill on the corner of Lafayette and Main for six years until he went out of business. He decided to sell his dealership and he sold it to another man which I didn't care to work for, so I marked time for a year with another party that owned a garage. It wasn't a dealership but I worked for him as a mechanic for a year. I decided to get out of the actual physical labour of doing the mechanical work on the cars, and be a service man and car repair assistant. I went with Don Allen who was the largest Chevrolet dealer in the world. At that time, he had 17 dealerships across the state. He had a huge dealership on Main Street in Buffalo which took up three city lots. I became assistant service manager there and

also the foreman. When that business sold, I went into business with a man by the name of Reggie Dowdell and we went into business with Lincoln and Mercury dealerships. By marking time, we went back to my former place at Lafayette and Main and set up a dealership there of Lincolns and Mercurys. Ford Motors promised us a new location at Sheridan Drive which is really prospering right now and we never did get it, that dealership area. So, it turned out that we had to dissolve the business and I went to work for Great Lake Motors which were Mercedes Benz and Triumph, on Main Street. In fact they are the only Mercedes dealer in Western New York. I became their service manager for three years until '72 when there seemed to be a slump in the actual automotive business particularly. I went with Bob Bain Chevrolet out in Cheektowaga on Transit Road. I worked there as their shop foreman and collision foreman for three years and I won't say why I left. From there, I went to Ray Lax Chevrolet in Blaisdell, that's beyond Bethlehem Steel there. He then decided to close his place down, so I went to work for an old established firm by the name of Carroll's Chevrolet in Orchard Park and became service manager there for about four years until my retirement.

R.H: Getting back to when you were a child, did you go to the Bertie Fair?

H.G: We always went to the Bertie Fair. It was a very exciting time. The Racetrack which is remodelled now, was completely different in those days of course than it is now. I could safely say that, all the schools, all the children, all the teachers and the majority of the parents, spent a day at the Racetrack at the Bertie Fair. It drew in the farming community, there was always a display the same as at the C.N.E but on a much smaller scale of course. There were cattle, horses, chickens and all these sort of things that attract children. We just thrived and looked forward to this, and of course there were games for the children. It was all organized by the schools and we'd be competing, one school against the other in running races, three legged races, you name it, whatever you could do. It was really a big day of cotton candy, candy apples, all the goodies and everybody looked forward to going. It was a very exciting time. I think I can safely say, the majority of the people in Fort Erie looked forward to the Bertie Fair. It's a shame it's not going

on today.

R.H: Do you know why it stopped?

H.G: The war came on for one thing. Now, I don't know the exact year that the last Bertie Fair was in operation, I really don't know, I know it was on, when I was going to high school. I think it was the late '30s when it stopped. I couldn't tell you the exact date, perhaps there are historians in Fort Erie that know the date it started and the date it ended. I don't have all that information in the back of my mind. All I do, is remember it as a child and how exciting it was.

R.H: Do you remember what the Racetrack looked like then?

H.G: It was used for racing of course, well, that's why it was put there. It's been there as long as I can remember.

R.H: And the Bertie Fair didn't interfere with the racing at all?

H.G: Oh no, they'd have it on a day when there was no racing. The season for racing was over. I'm trying to think how many days the Bertie Fair was there, but I think it was a few days. It wasn't just a one day deal, it was more than that.

R.H: Did you ever go and watch the races?

H.G: Not very many times, about a dozen times in my whole life here and I'm now 67.

R.H: I believe a lot of people used to watch it up there by the Grand Trunk, right?

H.G: Oh yes, I'm not saying... I shouldn't have said that, when you said watch it, I was thinking of going in. When playing and watching it from here, I'd often watch it from outside the Grand Trunk. That's why they put those trees up there, so you couldn't watch it. I should imagine it interfered with the horses 'cause that's where they started from. Of course there were people standing there cheering and throwing firecrackers, and that didn't help too much.

R.H: You were going to mention something about your mother, what was that?

H.G: Well, I was just going to insert just a little something, I always thought it very interesting. My mother, her mother lived in Chicago and she had one sister and three brothers and during the Chicago fire, her father died in the Chicago fire trying to put it out. They escaped out through the lake as so many did and why they chose Buffalo

I don't know, maybe 'cause the boat was going there. Anyways, they left there and landed in Buffalo, lived in Buffalo and that is where my mother was born. Her mother was born up in Buffalo and they became quite a prominent family and owned a couple of big companies in Buffalo. It could be to the credit of my grandmother and her mother, their perseverance during the trying times that they went through at the turn of the century, that they were successful.

R.H: What was your mother's maiden name?

H.G: It was Jessie Alice Stumpf. (Mr. Grimmell is showing me the family album) Here's her wedding invitation. This is some of my mother's work, 189...

R.H: She was quite an artist.

H.G: Yeah, she was a very good... They were married in Buffalo, June 21, 1911. This is mother's mother and father. This is my great grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side. This was my father's father, he died in '47 from a broken hip. This is my mother's brothers and sisters, they owned the Stern's Electric Company in Buffalo, it took up the whole city of Buffalo. They made electric motors, some of them you couldn't put in this room.

R.H: Do you remember when our hospital was built at all?

H.G: Oh yeah, it was under the process of being built and I can remember before it was built 'cause when I got my tonsils out at 12 or 13 years old we had to go down to Niagara Falls. Of course, they considered it a lot more dangerous then, than they do now. Now, it's just a matter of going into a doctor's office, but in those days they wanted to put you right in the hospital and give you ether. Ether always made everybody sick, it did me. We were in and out and I don't think we stayed overnight, but they made you stay 'til late afternoon and mother stayed with me and brought me back home.

R.H: But, do you remember when the hospital was built?

H.G: Yes, I can remember seeing it being built.

R.H: Who was your family doctor?

H.G: Our family doctor was Dr. Streets. He was one of the first ones, and there was Dr. Collins, I recall him, and after I came out of the service, my wife's family, they always had Dr. Derbyshire. Dr. Derbyshire was very good to us, he was wonderful. We wouldn't even have our daughter Linda today if it wasn't for Dr. Derbyshire.

I can recall when she was just a tiny baby, she was born in '44 and I had just got out of the airforce in '45, we were living on Torrance Street in one of the wartime houses. In that year, there was a terrific snowstorm and it turned out she had double pneumonia.

R.H: And how old was she then?

H.G: Well, she was just over a year old and we called the doctor to see what we could do and he said, "I'll be right up". I said, "Doctor, you'll never make it". The snow was up over your waist and none of the plows had been out and they certainly didn't have the equipment then, that they have today. He came up, and he got as far as Central and up the first street about Douglas, and that's where he got stuck. He got out of his car and came right up to the house. You wouldn't find too many doctors today doing that, but he came and gave her the medication and I know that she wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for him coming up that day. She was really in bad shape, 105 degree temperature and they were using penicillin, so he gave her a shot of pencillin and just overnight, it helped.

R.H: How long did that storm last?

H.G: Well, we had several bad storms. We had a bad storm in '42, '44, and '45. I was stationed in Pendleton in '45 and we had a terrible storm. We were snowed in there for a week.

R.H: Was it worse than '77?

H.G: I think we had more snow in that area. You see, that was the other side of Ottawa and it gets much colder, it was 35 degrees below, and that's nothing out there. We were packing the snow on the airfield 24 hours a day with big rollers being pulled by caterpillars. The rollers were five feet high and 12 feet long of corrugated metal and they were heavy, and they'd pull three at a time. We worked night and day out there to keep that snow packed down so that the planes could land on it and take off. We drove a truck with supplies on it and after they drove the truck there, I took a yardstick and taped it down, and I could just feel the ground at the end of the yardstick. In other words, that snow was packed hard enough for a truck to drive on, three feet deep, so you can imagine how high that snow would be. The bulldozers, they were huge things. In front of the hangers, they had to push it off the end, well, you know how they used to pile coal, well, they just went right up on to it

and kept on going and going. We weren't permitted to have cameras on the station, or else I could have some beautiful pictures and stuff like that. I wish I could have sneaked one in.

R.H: The equipment they had in Fort Erie wasn't too good at that time, was it?

H.G: No, it wasn't, it was very very... Well, you take now in '36 when we had that storm and out near the subway there, you could walk along the top of snow drifts and touch the telephone wires, it was that deep in some areas. Well, I guess it was just as bad as '77, they say it was worse, but I don't know. When you are a kid something is a lot worse than it is when you are an adult. So, everything was closed down except the store which was at the corner of... He was open and the hotels, so I walked up there the next day after the storm and I had to really wade through snow and I got a quart of milk, which you could get for a nickel, and I got an old paper... There wasn't any papers out, but he was the only place open and I don't know if there was any places open in the South End. You know, this was called Bridgeburg, not Fort Erie, it was called Bridgeburg at that time.

R.H: What areas were under Bridgeburg?

H.G: Anything north of the railroad tracks.

R.H: Can you remember when the Central Avenue Bridge was built?

H.G: That wasn't built until 1947 or something like that. It wasn't built 'til '47 or '48.

R.H: So, the North End was called Fort Erie before that was built then?

H.G: Oh yeah.

R.H: Do you know anything about the smuggling?

H.G: Definitely. When I was a boy we would go down to the docks, there'd be one down at the bottom of Highland Avenue, there's one... There was about four docks, and the trucks would park right on the Boulevard and they'd have like, chutes, like a coal chute, except it was made out of wood, and they would get on the dock and they'd stack up the liquor in there. I don't know if it was beer or whiskey, I can't remember. I know they transported some of it in burlap bags, it was in burlap and I can still see them stacking them up there. They would stack them up six or seven feet high down there, and they'd load these boats and the customs would be standing right there

and they would be checking every bottle and everything that went into that boat. They would load it right up to practically the gunwale and it wasn't 'til after dark, they took off. By that time customs had left, but the Canadian Customs weren't concerned, you see it was legal in Canada but it wasn't legal in the States. It was up to the American Customs to catch them, they had nothing to do with that. If they were taking the liquor across, they could say they were taking it down the river but everybody knew what they were doing. Many a boat was sunk intentionally. They in fact had a cord that they pulled, that would practically open up the bottom of the boat so that it could sink before they could... They'd scuttle the boat before the coast guard could get a hold of them. Once they were in the water, the men and no boat, they couldn't prove anything except that they were out there swimming. They'd pick them up and take them back. If you had all the liquor that's down in the bottom of the river, you could sit back and laugh at the world. We used to go diving for beer and the odd bottle of liquor, along from... oh, about from the Fort Erie dock. It was mostly around Frenchman's Creek and Cozy Dell. Russell Smith was noted for this, he never bought a bottle of beer in his life, and he would swim along and the kids would follow him, and he'd go down, pick up the stuff, and hand us the bottles. We'd take it into shore and when he'd get down to Frenchman's Creek, he'd come in and then he'd walk back and give us each a nickel for the bottles. By the time he got back up there, he would have a wagon full of beer and liquor. It was very common, you could go everyday and get it, but after a while with the current, the way it is... It's the same as what they are trying to do in some of these other places where they're after buried treasure or sunken treasure, why-it gets discoloured. Some of the fellows that scuba dived down there... a couple of the guys have quit because when they get down there, if they are out fairly far, there's huge rocks going along and it could be very dangerous. There aren't too many real deep areas in the river but there's enough rough areas.

R.H: Do you know anything about the illegal gambling that went on in Fort Erie?

H.G: Oh yes, Herb Guess use to run that. He use to have in the back

room, he used to have a... well, for horse racing. He did all the... They could gamble on a horse in Toronto, they could gamble on it in Fort Erie and not even go to the races. They'd be coming in and out of that side door there...

R.H: Where was this place?

H.G: On Courtwright, that's the one that we bought. We should have bought it for a gambling place and we'd have made more money. But eventually, they clamped down on it so what he did at one time, I don't know whether it was before the gambling or after that he put a ring in his back shop and he put up seats and that, and he used to have boxing matches.

R.H: So, he promoted boxing then?

H.G: He'd promote boxing in Fort Erie and he used that building for that purpose. It was quite successful.

R.H: Was that legal?

H.G: Oh yeah, he wasn't using that as in the gambling thing, it was just for entertainment. You had to pay to go in and see it.

R.H: So, they had boxing matches in that building on Courtwright?

H.G: Oh yes, there were boxing matches carried on in that building.

R.H: Did you see any of these boxing matches at all?

H.G: Oh yeah, I used to spar with one of the fellows that used to box.

R.H: Who did you spar with?

H.G: Well, there... Now, my father, before he came to Fort Erie, he was about 18 when he started boxing and by the time he was around 20, he could have... in fact, he was going to go down to New York City and go pro, but because of a queer quirk of fate he got typhoid fever. In those days they just blocked off the streets, nobody could even go down the street and if he wouldn't have been in the condition that he was in... He weighed about 195 lbs when he died and after he had the typhoid fever, he weighed about 145lbs. He lost about 40 lbs and he never did box again. He was going pretty good and he taught us and we used to spar and we used to... Well, we always had a punching bag in the basement.

R.H: Who did you spar with down at the place on Courtwright?

H.G: It was Harold Osborne, he's gone now and Harold Osborne, dad was managing him at one time, helping him out. He did become, while he was in the service during the war, he did become heavyweight

champion of the armed forces. So he had the potential, he was a neighbour of ours on Highland Avenue. He was a big fellow.

R.H: Do you remember anybody else that you watched?

H.G: Do I remember any of the boxers? There was several here in Fort Erie, I'm just trying to think... Abe Irvine did some boxing and so did... let me see, yeah, he had a brother that used to box too. You see, they imported most of the boxers in from Buffalo and that, and outlying areas. Some of them should have been... Well, they were getting paid but you couldn't call them pros, you know, they just paid them a few bucks and sort of travelling expenses. This one fellow, I remember he came from Buffalo and he was boxing Harold and my dad was sitting right there. He tried to coach Harold and when he came to his corner, he told him, he said, "Look Harold, you got to stay away from this guy. Just do your jabbing and that and just don't let this fellow get a solid punch, or he's going to put you away". The next round he punched Harold on the... he just got too careless and I'll never forget that as long as I live. That guy came up with a couple of punches and boy! It was really haymakers. Poor Harold didn't know where he was, right on his fanny. But, it was quite interesting, the different things, the activities that went on and that rum running was really something. It was all during Prohibition and there was several men such as Herb Guess that collected plenty and Elmer White and a few others that were kingpins in rum running in the area. It was exciting times.

R.H: Why did the boxing get phased out?

H.G: I don't know why that phased out, but I think this was before he decided to put the Racetrack deal in there and thought he could make more money, by doing that. Of course, he became Mayor of Fort Erie and a darn good one. He was an excellent mayor, I voted for him. I'm telling you, I knew the man quite well and he was really honest and fair and boy, if he told you he was gonna do something, he was gonna do it. He didn't beat about the bush and this is what you needed in this... Things have changed so much and I won't say for the better either. Now is there anything else?

R.H: [Did they have any other sports in this place on Courtwright?]

H.G: They had some good wrestling there.

R.H: So, they had wrestling there as well?

H.G: Yeah, it was a...

R.H: Was that a large building?

H.G: It is a big building, but Herb... You see, in sports in Fort Erie, was mainly... I was on a ball team and I was still going to school, high school and we had a very good team. I started off in junior hardball and progressed up to senior but the promoter of that was Jim Fraser. He was the manager of the Provincial Gas and he managed the team as well as promoting it and we had some... We had the Oakes Park and...

R.H: What was the name of your team?

H.G: I don't know if they called us anything, any particular name. It was just Fort Erie.

R.H: Do you mean you played for the Town of Fort Erie?

H.G: The Town of Fort Erie, it was the Town team, that's right and they drew from all of who they felt, was the best athletes in the area and I was always out for athletics, when I was in high school. I was on the track team, in fact, I held the high jump record for about 20 years. I was on the track team, the football team, basketball, and I loved swimming of course. That's why I got into the Royal Lifesaving Society.

R.H: So, you were quite an athlete then?

H.G: Yeah, but I wasn't any super athlete like Del... but I was in all the athletics. I was president of the students union, we called it the students union and I was president of that for two years. I should have taken my grade 13 because I was in everything, the school plays, three act plays. I had a boys group at the church. I started out the one year with the Explorers and they were boys 9 to 11. I started out with about six boys and by the end of the year, I had 32 and I didn't have any help but I was working at Fleet at the time and we were making model aircraft like the Fleet aircraft.

R.H: Well, thank-you Mr. Grimmell for the interview, I really appreciate it.