

Charlie Matthew Rayala, Jr. II

Interviewed by Janelle Kohl

12-8-15

Janelle: Today is Dec. 8th, 2015 and I am interviewing Charlie Rayala. I am going to ask Charlie some questions about the history of the area. And history of himself. Charlie, I don't have your middle name.

Charlie: Matthew. Junior. My dad was the same and Chuckie(Charlie's eldest son) is the same. He is the third though.

Janelle: You're the second.

Charlie: Yes. I am the second.

Janelle: What were your parent's names?

Charlie: Well, my dad was same as me. And my mother of course was Lillian. Nissala to begin with was her maiden name. My mother lived in this(MW) town before she was married. She and her family, in fact, there are two other buildings that are still standing there that my grandfather built we had had some money that he had in Manitowish Waters. Both of them are on Rest Lake. One on the other side was built kind of as a logging camp at the time it was a big building. It is still a big building. I don't know what they have done to it since then. The other one was the old Luken's place. I don't know who owns it. I think a couple of nuns own it now or something, it is off of Ilg Road. It is on Rest Lake. My granddad had them built. He had them built, then we had an uncle that was living next to old Arvid Sippala. He was actually from Finland and he was, see my grandmother on my mother's side was married twice. He had black lungs from in the mines and he died and then she married Andrew and then she had Sam, Matt, Andy, then

my mother and Jenny. So she had a tough life too. But she was a nice old lady.

Janelle: Charlie, what state were you born in?

Charlie: I was born December 22nd, 1934 at Grand View Hospital up in Ironwood, MI because the family lived south of Hurley, the Hurley area and that was where the hospital was because we didn't have a hospital down here. The reason they had a hospital up there is because they had the mines working so they needed a hospital. There were a lot of people up there.

At that time, Dr. Newcomb used Tomahawk hospital. That was quite a distance. But anyway, after I was born, then the folks moved into, bought, two 40's here in Manitowish Waters and a log house and they moved here when I was just a baby and I went and measured that log cabin and it was about 18 X 20 on the inside. We all got pictures of us older ones. But I don't remember much of my early years but my brother Don was born about a year later and the rest came along. By the time we got done, we had 4th or 5th kid was being born, we were still living in that log cabin. Pretty high class, we had to use the outhouse. But we had tough going in them years. I started grade school I was pretty young. I guess they would take you a little bit young and when I started school I couldn't speak English. All I could say was my name and my birthdate because we all talked Finnish at the time. So we are all Finnish, except our off-spring. When I started school I couldn't speak English hardly at all but then they kind of picked on me the kids and they followed me around and giving me a problem. I remember picking up something and throwing it at one of the guys...Vernon Roe. In fact, he went through all grade school and high school with me. One day I hit him, and I think he wore a scar the rest of

his life. And then they put me in a closet. There was only about 18 kids in school. And so we got over that period and then, but went through school. The last I had in the 8th grade there we had 8 different teachers. One year we had a teacher last for 2 years. But then one year we had 2 teachers that year.

Janelle: What school was this?

Charlie: Right over here. The old school house on Hwy. 51. That was half that size. They added on to it about the year I got out of there because then they started to get more kids. But there was only one room. They were starting to use the basement after while but then they added on to the school. In 8th grade I had Wally Engel for a teacher. You know Wally Engel? He is 100 years old. And in all of my siblings, I think every one of them had Wally Engel. I think I was the first one. I was in 8th grade when he was there and the rest had Wally and he was my favorite teacher. He was a good man. I am glad he lived to be 100, and he is still living at this time.

Janelle: It sounds like your family was here for a very long time.

Charlie: Yes, the folks were here when they were kids.

Janelle: So your mom married your dad and they started off in Ironwood.

Charlie: At that time, they had lived just south of Hurley. My mom was born on a farm just this side of Hurley. In fact, she told me she was born at home. I was the only one that wasn't born at home. My brother Mike was born at the neighbor's house.

Janelle: How many kids are in your family?

Charlie: There is nine of us. I have four brothers and four sisters. I am the oldest. Me, Don, Mike, my sister Audrey, we had tough going.

After that, dad had enough money so the rest could go on to college. All my sisters had a chance to go on to college. I think Don got a little bit of schooling but it was pretty tough going. We lived in this small house, and it is still there, on the county line. But later dad added on to it. What happened was during the war, everybody was tied up. And it ended up right after the war, dad was able to have some of the pine trees harvested and they paid for some of it and he took lumber so he could build this house. They drafted...they couldn't, or wouldn't draft dad because he had too many kids but they did send him to Alaska for a while to do some carpenter work and stuff up there. They made him serve, but not in the army. He was part of the army engineers. They put a bunch of people up there and they spent some time in Alaska during the war. They didn't want to send somebody in there when they had a bunch of kids and then they get killed or something. This was WWII. I was in school I think when Pearl Harbor was bombed. I think I was in my first year of school. When I started in school I wasn't there very long and they found out I had Polio, so they closed school down for a while. We got it from the neighbors that came to visit, it was someone from Boulder Junction that visited them. But they didn't know but my dad noticed, that my back or Don's back, there was something wrong and we got over it. I think me and Don had the worst of it and I think Mike had a little bit. But Don was the only one that ended up wearing some braces and that. And we all come out of it OK. But it was just amazing. Doc Newcomb would stop around and check on us and make sure we were doing things.

Janelle: How old were you then?

Charlie: Five or Six years old. Something like that. Just kind of got started that year of school and they closed the school down for a couple of weeks. And we was out for a while and I don't remember.

In school, we were all in the same room. I think they should really do that in a lot of schools because we picked up a lot of things. Even in the first and second grade, we were listening to the other classes and I think that was one of the better things. We got a much broader outlook on life. I got through grade school alright and then I come to high school we had our choice but we picked Hurley to go to school. We coulda went to Mercer, we coulda went to Minocqua or we could go to Hurley. Well, some of the guys like Jim LaPorte had already started in Minocqua and he didn't want to switch to Hurley because they made you take some math there and he didn't like it. But anyway, Jim graduated from Minocqua. When we started there was four of us going to high school and we were the first ones started going to Hurley. There was four of us, me, Vernon Roe, Homer Sykes and Jim Perkins. We used a 35' Oldsmobile the first year or so we went. Jim Perkin's dad was a retired bus driver from Milwaukee and they moved up here and started a little resort so he was transporting us up there. We traveled just for a year or so and then we had more kids coming and somebody bought a carry-all and toward the end they had a bigger bus. Then of course the other school they were going to was St. Ambrose school in Ironwood. The Catholic school. Some kids were going there. They had a bus running from here up there to go to the school up there in Ironwood. I think our neighbors were Catholic, I think they went there.

Janelle: Do you have any interesting stories about being in high school that you would like to share?

Charlie: Well, because we were traveling so much we really couldn't go out for sports. Vernon Roe played some football. But the only kind of classic thing we did was a senior class play. It was "Life with Father" and I was Father. And Homer (Sykes) was a comedian, the youngest kid. But we had a ball. Helen Wiser, we used to get a bag out of her.

We had a good time. Of course, I always had my class picture underneath the Concrete General in the Ladies Home Companion. And I did take 3 ladies to 3 proms from different schools. I took one to Mercer School to the prom, and I took one to Minocqua to the prom and of course then took one to Hurley to the prom.

Janelle: Did you marry one of these ladies?

Charlie: I didn't marry one of them, I met my wife about the year I bought the garage, then I married her the following year. What happened is I worked in the area, in fact, me and Don we started pretty young. We were working for LaPorte's store during high school for \$10 a week. I was only 12-13 years old. My brother Don was working for Rudy List by the park. We were doing yard work and we were working there for 2 weeks or so and the state comes around and checked our ages and they fired us. They couldn't keep us because we weren't old enough. Well, what happened then, dad happened to be building a house for one of the cranberry marsh guys. So we went to work for John McFarland. What happened was the house needed painting . Well we doubled our salary to \$20 a week. But I remember crying because I lost my job. Me and Don kept busy and after we got going. We worked pretty much all the resorts, Deer Park and that. One summer I think we worked every day. We got kinda rich one time. We bought a Whizzer motorcycle. It was a bicycle with a Whizzer motor and whoever worked the farthest could use that to get to work. But I don't think we ever had a new bicycle. I think mine was one I got from Jim LaPorte. I got that for about \$10 or something. We had 2 ½ miles into town on old 51 on everything we wanted to do so we rode a lot to go to work. We had a lot of fun with that Whizzer because you put in a gallon of gas and it would go for almost 100 miles before you had to put some more in it.

Janelle: Do you still have it?

Charlie: No. What happened was dad bought a '35 Ford Pickup and you know how much room they had in there. Well, at prom I went to Mercer because one of the neighbor kids had a date, and I think Don had a date, and 3 girls in hoop skirts. I don't think they wanted to ride in a cab because they couldn't fit in there. So they rode in the back. That was in Mercer. We had a lot of fun.

I had to say my mother and dad had it pretty tough. They had to raise a bunch of kids and things were tough I tell you. And everybody around here at that time had a little alcohol problem because they were struggling all the time and they had to stop to have a beer or two but it was kind of a sad situation sometimes but in the end we did alright. I graduated from high school.

Janelle: What did you do after high school?

Charlie: Let me think for a minute here. After high school we were going to get drafted. What happened was that I worked at Radliff Media Shop making TV towers. In fact, some of those triangular towers that we still have around here, that is some of the work that we did. We did that for quite a while. I know one year we were a little bit slow so I said why don't we quit and help the cranberry marsh. Once I committed myself to the cranberry marsh, why then as sure as hell we got busy so what I'd do is work in the marsh then I'd come back and weld for a few hours at the shop. I was getting rich at two jobs. And then I've got to think what happened after that. We did a lot of odd jobs, but that is one where I learned some skill about welding and stuff. And then I went in the service.

Janelle: Were you drafted into the service?

Charlie: Well, I had my name pushed up because I was, you could do that. Jim had already been drafted and he was the only buddy I had here so I waited a while and I had my name pushed up so then I got drafted. And I took my first leg in Fort Leonard Wood, located in Missouri.

Janelle: Was this the Korean War?

Charlie: Yes. After the 8 weeks I came home. I signed up for the Air Jump School. Like a dummy. They took a whole bunch of us and put us in the whole 3rd Armored Calvary and shipped the whole 3rd Armored Calvary over to Germany. I mean there were 3 boat loads of us. And it was rough crossing over there. After while I got smart, I quit eating because everyone else was throwing up. The North Atlantic was rough. Both coming and going. I got smart and on the way back I didn't eat anything either, and I made sure I got a top bunk so no one is throwing up on me.

Janelle: Do you recall the year that you joined the service.

Charlie: 1955. You went in for 2 years. Anyway, I did get into 5 more countries. I could take one leave. I got to see the Vatican, Catacombs, all that stuff. Not that I paid much attention to it but, which I probably should have, but what the heck. I was only 19, 20 years old. But I wouldn't trade that experience in the service for nothing. It was one of the better things. It helps you grow up a little bit. And you respect the country. So anyway, I come back from the service. I hope that I'm not forgetting anything . I didn't have much to do but somewhere along the way I must have made enough money to buy a '52 Ford. Which I thought the world of. That was my first real car. I went to work for Rose Company in Milwaukee for a little while. I went there because I had some welding experience and I thought I'd get a job welding. Well, they didn't have me welding. They had me doing some other stuff and

what happened is I was working with a 110 ton press. I was bending some things and I wasn't watching myself and I had a stack of steel come down my leg and I broke my leg. Fractured it so then I was laid up for a while. They fixed me up, and then I went home and I couldn't do nothing but I stayed and had to go back one more time in a month or two and check with the doctor, but it really didn't affect me much.

There were some other things that happened. When we were growing up my dad had a bad car accident and he was in the hospital for 5 ½ months. He had a head-on crash. A Trutt boy. He is buried over here, him and his dad both. The head-on was right by Dog Lake near the Ole' Shillelagh. He wound up in the hospital for a long time. Well, that was really tough on everybody. That's where a small community came in. They had some dances and stuff to raise some money and the people were really good to help. That was nice to be in a small town at that time.

Well, anyway, going back to when I got out of the service I went to Milwaukee, then I didn't work there anymore but anyway the process....Tom Crawford had the garage. That was Charlie Pea's brother from the Pea Patch. Well, Tom talked to Charlie Pea to come up here sight unseen to buy the garage because he was retired from the service. He was in the navy. I don't know why Tom didn't want to be called Tom Pea, so he changed it to Crawford. But anyway, Tom Crawford he came up here and started the garage. I don't think he was in the garage too long and then the doctor told him that if he stayed in there he was going to die of a heart attack. So he wanted to sell. In the meantime he had it pretty good. He got quite a bit of the lake frontage there and the garage property and I think it was old man Wanatka backed him and he charged him 1 ½% interest. But Tom got her done and paid for. I had worked for Tom. So we decided to buy it. It was me and Don first went in there. That didn't last very long. Then Don

found some more work on the Cranberry marsh and he did well. My brother Mike was in there for a while until he got drafted. Then I was left. I had 3 mortgages I had to work out. I had to pay Tom Crawford for the property, then I had to pay him for the inventory. I had to pay Dad back because he put some of that land as collateral to buy the place. I tell you, it was pretty scary. You know, only a dumb pinhead would do something like this. But anyway I started gung-ho. We were selling local gas and had gas pumps and I was going to set the world on fire. Well, I worked from 7 until 11 the first year and that didn't pay. When I got married I hadn't bought the house yet, there was some cottages there so I remodeled the cottage and we were living in a sort of shack there but then I got another mortgage. So I bought Crawford's house. I will say this, I probably wouldn't have made it for guys like Crawford. So many people helped me out or I never would have made it. There are some good people in town. It got a little scary because, you know after you bust your rear end, it got so that I would, I started drinking a little heavy because it was just getting to me and then we were fighting to make a go of it. Then I remember that one year, the first year I was there, the month of January, it cost me \$200 for fuel to heat the garage. This is when gas was 15 cents a gallon. You couldn't do that. So I ended up insulating the garage, fixed the front. We had 2 sliding doors and the wind was whistling right through it. So we fixed that, put in an overhead door and did that. That was about all we could afford to do and then of course I got involved in a lot of things. I was in the fire department before I went in the service. In fact, before I went I think we always had a fireman's banquet. Well, they gave me a pen and a pencil as a going away gift. And in fact, if you go to Aurora Borealis, there is a picture of one of the first fire trucks. We had the open one. Me and Jim used to drive that. We would go like hell with no brakes, they only had brakes on the front end. But then of course I

got drafted and then they improved things. The fire department started with Crawford. He was the first chief and Al Gingberg was the next one. He was there for a year. Then I took it over because there was a 2 stall garage attached to my garage and that was the fire department. Then after I got in, we had an ambulance with it. The ambulance sat outside. Well, when I came back I was on the ambulance crew. In fact, I made about 85% of the calls, being there. I can tell you that if we didn't have the ambulance warmed up, I can tell you, with that bed they bounced right up because it was freezing. But anyway, then we worked and we added another stall to the firehall there. So we had another place to store the ambulance, so at least it was a little bit warm. That was a 1954 Ford, and we bought it in 1955. We bought it from I think from the city of Wausau. What happened is somebody donated a Cadillac ambulance. At that time they were nothing but converted hearses. We had that '54 Ford for quite a while until I got to be chief and then besides other things that I was involved in. The snowmobiles were first coming. In fact we sold snowmobiles and we would take them to make a buck. We added on to it and then I was chief for 30 years and then I had a bad accident in the meantime. I think I put 80 days in the hospital for that and smashed both my knees. There was nothing wrong with the machine. It ran fine. We had put a lot of miles on our machines, me and my brother Don. We did a lot of snowmobiling. That's what I was selling, Arctic Cats. Anyway, it kind of ended up I started up with snow skiing, and the hills were just starting, Blackjack and them up there. We were doing some skiing and I gave up skiing because I was afraid I'd break my leg. That's why I took up snowmobiling and broke both of them.

Janelle: Do you recall what year that was?

Charlie: Somewhere around 40 years old or something. Well, you just had some really tough going. This happened on the 15th of December

so it spoiled the Christmas for the whole family because I was laid up. I had Paul Tirpi working for me and he was good enough to keep the garage operating and I could do the bookkeeping at the hospital and we made it through that. Paul stuck with me for quite a while. I had several people with me through the years working at the garage. But Paul was a big help when I had that problem. Well, we got over that. I was active in things. I taught Hunter's Safety for kids and stuff like that and a lot of other things. I was in the Lion's club in Mercer before we started ours. I was President of Mercer's Lions Club. Ted Koehler ran where the Ole Shillelagh is, he said "I think we can start a Lions Club here". I kind of told him "I don't think so." But anyways we got the ball rolling. Well, we had to quit the membership. We got up to 79 and we didn't know what the hell. If you look at the town hall you will see the original one. I think there is 79 names on it. Ted was the first president. I was the second president. At that time we'd have a turkey shoot or something we were lucky to make \$300 profit and most of the time it was our own money. We were the ones shooting or something. But we got the Lion's club going at that time. In fact, Bob Maletzke and I received life memberships in Lions from our years in helping, and getting Lions Club going.

Janelle: Do you recall what year that was?

Charlie: I couldn't tell you. Well, my dad was a member, and my brother was. If you look at the list there was probably a date on it. We built her up pretty good. The Lion's Club was doing really good but we had to quit the membership at 79 because we felt we couldn't handle more than that. That worked out pretty good. And then through the years I became a Life Member of the National Rifle Association. And then I have an American Legion Life Membership and paid up my dues and now have a life membership to that too. I don't have to pay anymore of that a month. I am a life member of them three clubs.

Janelle: And then too you were a big part on the town board here in Manitowish Waters.

Charlie: And then for a while I even didsee the town had the county plowing the roads at that time and then me and Jerry Trapp started, of course we were too dumb to charge what we needed and didn't make any money. But I remember plowing for the town. And we stuck our neck out and never really got enough out of it to really pay. We couldn't keep up with things. We just didn't have enough money. But I plowed town roads, me and Jerry Trapp for a while. Then Jerry quit then I had the whole thing. Ended up they finally started buying their own equipment and stuff, which was fine.

Janelle: So you did the plowing independently for the town?

Charlie: Yea.

Janelle: That is a lot of plowing.

Charlie: Yes, well I had to do anything to try and make some money. Then I started to get into real estate, with Judy Arnold. I was with her for 25 years. I made some money but the last five years, I quite last December. A year ago.

Janelle: Did you work with the town offices before the county?

Charlie: Yea, I was on the town board for a while.

Janelle: Do you remember what years? Was it in the 80's or 90's?

Charlie: It probably was in the 70's. I was just on the sideboard. I wasn't the Chairman or anything. We had a pretty good board, but it wasn't too much going on. The town was just starting to grow.

Going back to the fire department. I said we had to do something to store so much equipment. I was chief. So I went to the town board and wasn't thinking too much but anyway I got committed to \$50,000

to build a fire barn. There wasn't one here. Well, we had to go through a lot of permits, jump through the hoops. We had a lot of good people. I remember the last permit Fred Bartling flew down to Madison to get it so we could start on it. We all worked together and we had a lot of good people then years. The cranberry marsh they were just getting going. It was tough going for them. But anyway, we had an architect say we weren't going to build this building...we started out with a 60' x 60' building... he said we weren't going to build this building for anything less for about \$96,000. I say....we are going to build it and we are going to do it for less than \$50,000. Well, we had somebody in town that had built big buildings and he was living up here, Willy Schuman built it and we got done. We had a little bit of trim work or something on the inside and had a local guy in town that said he would give us the rest. So we built it for \$50,000. And at that time we had upgraded the ambulances, and we got the big ambulances, we sold raffle tickets to buy our first Pontiac hearse...high head room. We raised a lot of our own money. By the time I left, we had the new fire hall and of course they have added on to it since. That was paid for and we had a new a new ambulance and we had some good friends. I retired from there then, because I had been there 30 years. I was 55 then. I stayed on the department for a little while. I was one of the first EMT's that was trained by the state of Wisconsin. All the rest since then have been trained by Nicolet College.

Janelle: What date did the Fire Department start?

Charlie: It was going before I went into the service...1955. So it was 1953 or 1954.

Janelle: So it started after the cranberry growers had been here for a little while.

Charlie: Yes. That was a big help for the garage. Of course, in the early days I could carry them for quite a bit. Because they needed stuff. They paid me eventually, sometimes they had to wait for a crop. They were good bunch of guys. Young guys. Some of them were a little older than me.

Some nice people came up here. When I was in the garage business, the best thing that ever happened to boost up my business was snowmobiles. From there on things picked up because it was bringing people up. That was the best shot in the arm we ever had was the snowmobiles. The ski hills started a little bit but that wasn't much. The snowmobiles they brought a lot of stuff to this county. This started in the late 60's, early 70's.

Janelle: When did you get involved in the county politics?

Charlie: I got in about 25, 26 years ago.

Janelle: Were you doing that, and the real estate, and the garage?

Charlie: Oh yes. I was doing anything I could do to try and make a buck. I made some good money in real estate. I remember one of the first ones I sold at that time was almost \$700,000 and that was a real fortune in them years. That was Dave Cella's property.

Janelle: Was there a boom time in real estate?

Charlie: Well, that was kind of a big deal to sell at that time. It was good real estate sales them years. I did make some pretty good money. Every place I tried all kinds of things to make money. I even sold paint one time in the garage. Some of it is still there that never sold. I tried so many things trying to make ends meet. Crawford, I say, bent over backwards. He didn't want the place back so he bent over backwards to help me get it done.

Janelle: Did he build the garage himself? Or someone else built it?

Charlie: No, what happened was Tom decided to build the garage and he bought this Quonset hut to begin with. He hauled it from down below to up here. He came from Lake Geneva or someplace. In fact, he had a little trouble. He loaded it so high he came in one of those overpasses and he hit something with it. Anyway, he was pretty ambitious and he built the garage and it is a Quonset hut and it still is. It is still a metal Quonset in the back. Then he added the room where you put the garage and you can drive in to work. The only thing I've done is make sure it is insulated so you can heat the place and we changed the front and got rid of the sliding doors and put in an overhead door in there. Then, of course I remodeled that cabin and we kept that for a while and we moved it to the house and I had to add on to the house because we had all the kids. Tom and Alice had only one daughter. So I had to add on to the house. In fact, there was no basement where I had it. I put a basement where I added and went up two stories. It was pretty tough going.

Janelle: You worked very hard and had a big part in growing this town. You have to be so proud of yourself!

Charlie: Well, sometimes I made mistakes. Now I am primarily at the garage. In fact, I am working so Chuckie can have control. In fact, I have turned the property over to him. I have already turned the garage over and there was another piece of land there that I gave to son Brian.

Janelle: Chuckie had the most interest in the garage?

Charlie: He kinda was forced into it. It's kind of a shame. Anyway, he took ahold of it. He is doing alright and Jeanine his wife is just the peach of a girl and she started to take care of the bookkeeping and I'm trying to teach her stuff. In fact, she is doing a good job. Her and I get

together once a week or every couple of weeks. We get the bills paid that have to be paid. It's getting tough in this country to make a living with all this stuff we have had. All the regulations, stuff has to carry insurance. It is just terrible.

Janelle: Do you recall what places on the County Board you held?

Charlie: I probably was on practically every committee that was created. I was Chair for a while. There was something I learned is you don't trust the news media. They twisted.....twice I have been screwed by the news media. Three times. This last one in the Milwaukee Sentinel. A little while ago. The Lakeland Times....what a work over that is. But anyway, they put me behind Obama and them for being crooks. Something about the landfill. Then I was on the Landfill Committee for 27 years, the one on County G. I have been on the Highway Department. I am chairman of the Highway Department right now. The main thing was highways because I think we really don't have enough money to maintain the highway for both the state and the county. We are doing our best, but right now we are having some problems. We don't have a highway commissioner. Personality conflicts.

Janelle: I remember you were on the Library Committee, that was when I started here at the library in 1991. You've been on the Roads Committee and Social Services.

Charlie: Yes, in fact I am on the Human Service Board in Rhinelander too. I was on the Council of Fire Service Training for six years, for Fire Department training. That was when Tommy Thompson was there. In fact, I got to know Tommy Thompson when I went up to one of his things up in Hurley. It was when we had a hell of a snowstorm. In fact, I hosted at Little Bohemia when he was up here campaigning.

Janelle: That is an honor.

Charlie: Yes, there were things we could talk to him about. You could laugh about a few things and go back through the years when Jim LaPorte and I were young. We had Miss Wisconsin up here and me and Jim were supposed to be hosts and bow our heads and all that bull. It seems like I was always busy doing something.

Janelle: Yes, and you continue to have a busy life.

Charlie: Yes, the county election is coming up in April. I already turned my papers in so I am running again. I enjoy the county board. I think I was Chair at a time when we had 7 (seven) new members. This last time I think we had 12 (twelve) new members. We work hard trying to bring revenue into the county, like with snowmobiles. Anything we can bring money in. I have a problem with bike trail people with the respect they don't pay. The ATV people pay their own. Snowmobiles they maintain their trails and that, but the bike people ride free. They don't need a license. And I've got nothing against biking because I think it is good for you and it is good for the kids and you get some exercise and stuff like that but I did meet some people in Washington D.C. that were head of a big bike outfit. See, I've been to Washington D.C. a few times with the Wisconsin County Highway Association. I was chairman of that too for a while and I think I was to Washington D.C. three times. I could have went one more time but I didn't go the last time for some reason and they paid for it. But that is an experience, too.

Janelle: When you take on a job, you really take it seriously.

Charlie: Well, I hope someone remembers me for that. When I think about it, I kinda forgot about the council and fire service training that we were at but I was on that for 6 years and we did a lot of good there.

What happened is the full time fire department thought they had everything but, 90% of our fireman are volunteers. When I was on the fire department before I retired they decided to pay me \$250 a year just for being chief. But I didn't really want it but they passed it because Benji Roemer pushed it, I think. But the last 3-4 years of it I was getting \$250. That didn't even pay for the fire council meetings that we had throughout the county. It would cost you more than that. I went to three or four of them. Because you always have a drink, pay for food. I pretty much went to them.

I am proud of one thing with the County Board. When I got on the Board, the tax rate was \$3.12 / \$1000. It went up quite a bit this year and everyone's jumpy about it. It went up 20% but we still are at \$2.28. We never got close to that \$3.12. Since then, we've rebuilt the highway shop in Arbor Vitae. We built a new one over in Boulder Junction, too. We remodeled the Court House. We've added a jail. We did all of this without sapping the taxpayers.

Janelle: That is a lot to be proud of.

Charlie: Well, me and the present County Board Chair, Ron Debruyn, we were head of a lot of committees and stuff even happens. Steve Favre came in, he is the surveyor. He got to be Chairman. Well guess what, me and Ron never got any committees, or chair of any committees. The only thing that happened is that in the Highway Dept. they pick their own Chairman, so I got to be Chairman of the Highway Committee. That must have bit his ass, but I never gave it a thought but Ron Debruyn brought it up and said "You notice we never got any Committee Chairs anymore?" He gave it to everybody else. I don't know why he was jealous of us or what the hell. It really didn't bother me, I was still on the committees and can be just as effective as if I was

Chair or not. Yes, there are many times I stay awake at night thinking about County business.

Janelle: I am sure you do.

Charlie: Well, I have a lot of good friends and a lot of good family.

Janelle: So your County work is something you are very proud of.

Charlie: Well that and the Fire Dept. Got that going. See, I had that accident when I was on the Fire Dept. The hospital used to get mad, you see, we had these meetings and there would be a whole bunch with the hiring committee in my hospital room. There were some good people like Don Coan. Well, I used to laugh. What he would do is he would send me a prime rib dinner at the hospital sometimes. And the nurses would come around and look at the stuff and say "You didn't get this here." I had to laugh, but he did that several times. Me and Don got along fine.

I will tell you one thing. I gotta give my mother a lot of credit. She did a lot. Like we would go pick blueberries. She would can 100-140 quarts for the winter time and we ate a lot of venison in our life, had to. Well I remember one year. I started hunting when I was about 12 or 13, I think. I had been hunting just a couple of years and him and I got two big bucks. He got a 16 pointer, I got a nice 9 pointer. Well, that was when there was no deer south of Wausau at that time. Everybody came up here to hunt. In fact, there is a record of 1923 they said they killed the last deer in the Wausau area. There was no deer south of there so they all had to come up here. Well, I started when the hunting and deer season came here. It should have gone only two years but it went three years but they decimated the herd a pretty bit. But anyway, going back to the story I shot the 9 pointer and my dad shot the 16 pointer, well we sold them. The old man got \$75 for mine and he got

\$100 for his. Well, we could get more venison but that gave us other stuff to buy food otherwise. At that time that was a hell of a lot of money. But that is the way it was. We hunted a lot, we fished a lot. We lived right by the river. The river was across Hwy. 51. Well, 51 ran between us and the river at that time. When I was in the service , I come back, it was probably one of the last trains still running and carrying passengers, and family had been expecting me for about 3 days. They didn't show up that day, so I hitched a ride from Ken Perkins to the house where my old Chrysler was still sitting . Well I cranked that up then went looking for them. Well, they were just down the road. I don't know what the hell was going on, but anyway it was kind of a neat thing. Like I said, it was probably one of the last times that the train ran.

When I come down the road, they had fixed the road from Hurley to W and they went right through my deer stand. Anyway, I was surprised. After I got back in the garage business, then they fixed the road from W to Minocqua in 1958.

I grew up north of W, just before the Iron County line. We have pictures of the old cabin from all of us that we have.

Janelle: I would love to get a copy.

Charlie: I thought of bringing one. I will try to remember to get you a picture of the cabin, of where us four older ones were born and raised in. We didn't take a picture of the outhouse.

Janelle: What was your wife's maiden name?

Charlie: She was from Mercer and her name was Hester Organist to begin with, and there used to be a meat packing plant in Saxon that her relatives were a part of. Her father was a logger, or a lumberjack, and he died. He was the nicest guy in the world. He died too young. He

was like my dad. He stressed himself, like my dad. See, my dad died when he was 70. I don't think Max made 65 even. What happened was he was working for the town of Mercer and they had to pull an oil pan off a grater or something and that weighed a couple hundred pounds and he was underneath there and he strained himself and I think that started his health problem. And my dad strained himself doing something and something snapped up here (pointing to his chest) and he was alright for a while but I don't know what happened. But both of them died young. They worked too hard. My wife was from Mercer and graduated from Mercer High School and was working at Simpson Electric plant when I met her.

Did I answer all the questions?

Janelle: Yes.

Charlie: Yes, I had time for hunting and fishing. The other thing when we were raised...we got rich for a few years. We started raising a couple hogs. Then we had a change...you know all these resorts. We could go collect the garbage and bring it over and put it in a barrel and then feed the pigs with it. Now we can't do that. It is against the law. But that is how we fed the pigs and in the process we started getting bears around. One night a sow was there and she had 2 year olds and 2 cubs. There were five bears and dad shot one with his pistol because it was up in a tree. And it was mounted and put in Rudy's old place. It was mounted there for years. It was a nice mount. That cub was put on the barrel and the mother found it and dragged it and carried it and we had a hell of a time finding it. The mother bear dragged it for a long ways. But anyway they did get it and get it mounted. Another interesting thing with Rudy's over there, he had a Mina Bird and there would be no one at the bar and all of a sudden you would hear "Hi, my name is Joe, what's yours?". And then the other thing, when I was a

kid, young, I was with dad and we went in and there was a slot machine right there. You could have slot machines at that time. I remember someone giving me something and I played with the nickle, dime, what ever it was they gave me, and I played but I didn't win anything. You remember those things. Another interesting thing in my life was, if you go into that bar now, that bar next to the Koller Park, the Bavarian, my dad built that 60 some years ago. They haven't changed it. Rudy List had that bar, and he wanted it remodeled and I tell you I am about 12 years old but I was helping dad in the meantime, but anyway my dad built that bar and it is still there, and the back bar. They took out the center thing I think where he had the Mina bird. My dad built that bar some 65 to 70 years ago. Anyway, what I remember about that is we had kind of a party celebration and I was a kid and went there and there was a waitress there and her name was Ann. She must of liked kids because she fed me so much food. And then they had strawberry short cake for dessert and I couldn't eat it because she had me so full and I was so mad at her because I couldn't eat anymore.

Janelle: Where did you meet your wife?

Charlie: I met her when she was with a bunch of girls over at where the Ye Olde Shillelagh is. I knew Ted Koehler, and he says "What's more fun than having fun with an organist."

Janelle: When did you get married?

Charlie: May 17, 1958. We had five kids. She skipped a year, then she had twins. She had 5 under 5 for a while. So she was busy.

My mother, with four of us and fifth on the way living in that shack. Interesting story....Dad had told her that there are a lot of bums walking the streets and he says "Don't feed them any venison" because there was a \$5 fine if she got caught. Well, she served this guy venison and

he turned it in. Well then, he had to appear in front of a judge and the judge says he should get 30 days in jail. He says that is fine, he would have to take care of the wife and family. Well, then they backed off. Instead they said "Don't do that again".

Janelle: Why couldn't you feed the bums?

Charlie: Well you weren't suppose to feed them venison because you weren't suppose to be violating. But venison was our main staple for meat.

Janelle: Well, Charlie, you have had quite a life and you will have other stories you will think about later.

Charlie: Well, I could tell you a couple things that stuck out in my mind with my uncle Andy, OK. This is my mother's brother. The one that just died at 94. He lived by the county line. His last name was Nissala.

Two things with him. One time we were duck hunting and we went to Dead Pike Lake Road. We were really duck hunting, me and my brother Don and him, I think there were three of us in that old '35 Ford Pick-up. Well, we see three deer with eyes shining. Uncle Andy had a '22 and says "I will shoot it and take the one with the eyes shining." Well, he shot and he didn't quite kill it and it went down and then he finished it off. Well, we gutted it out and just took the meat and we quartered it and we had dad come over. We shoved some stuff in the '35 Ford so we had some venison. But anyway, a few days later, my dad was sitting over there at Rudy's, and somebody comes in and says, "Some son of a bitch shot that airport buck." Because they found the horns. And my dad is sitting there "No shit".

Another time with Uncle Andy, we were duck hunting. It was a bluebird day, nothing was flying. But we looked along heads of Little Trout Lake there, and there is a whole bunch of them sitting in a corner, just sitting

there. Well, it is by that cedar swamp, it's a real bastard to get to but we crawled through that thing. We get up pretty close and Andy whispers "I got a good shot here", I said. "You wait a minute and let's get close to the edge and if they fly you get some more." Well, we got set up and he shoots and we jump up, and we don't get another one but he had nine ducks down in that one shot. That's how badly they were resting. We weren't done killing them though. We had nine ducks and one shot. Well, I think my younger brother Marty was there. He didn't even have a license. At least I had a license and Andy did. There were wardens up here and they were pretty good, but if they knew families were using the meat for yourself, they looked the other way. As long as you weren't selling it. They weren't that bad. They didn't get paid that much either.

I don't know, it's been a great life. I've got a few more years.

Janelle: To end the interview, I have to ask if there was anything there was a certain time in your life you would go back to revisit, that you enjoyed so much.

Charlie: I don't know. There might be some things I might have changed, but maybe I wouldn't have done it either.

Janelle: Is there something you are most proud of? You have done so much for this community.

Charlie: I am proud that I have some good kids. We have a good reputation and people respect us.

Janelle: Everyone loves your kids.

Charlie: I have a good family and they are doing well. You know, us boys, because dad didn't have any money, really couldn't go on to college. All the girls got to go on to college and they all turned democrats. Well, Terri the youngest is an engineer for the city of

Duluth. There is a 30 year difference between me and her. Bonnie is teaching out east. Marty, he's retired, he has a doctorate in art. He is living in Philadelphia. He had a couple of different wives or girlfriends. I don't get to see him but once a year. He is a nice guy. And of course Mike, he did good as a plumber and he retired from there because of his wife's health. But they are still together and he is getting by. He is staying across from One Penny place in the apartment building and it's a nice apartment and he gets by with his social security. But it is kind of sad he lost everything. Don did alright. They all got a little farther in life, better fit than I, but actually I don't mind. I helped them a lot, especially the younger boys. I would fix their cars, get gas now and then and stuff like that. It worked out fine. One thing, when I bought the garage, my brother Don was getting ulcers working for Farrah brothers down in Green Bay. It's a good thing he came up. He could have started in the garage, but it didn't work out. At least he came up here and now he owns a cranberry marsh. He worked hard to get her so that's good. I am proud of all I did, but I am not proud of everything and I won't tell you. There is a saying, "A whiskey glass, a woman's ass, makes a horses ass out of all of us."

Janelle: So, you were in the Boy Scout's?

Charlie: Yes, we helped clear the airport landing. Harold Barkstrom was the airport manager. He lived with his wife and daughter over by the hangers over there. But anyway, Jim LaPorte, we kids, he made us a deal. We had to wash an airplane, PT13 I think it was, and when I think about it we used gasoline to clean all the stuff off it. And for pay we either got \$5 or an airplane ride. Well, we both took the airplane ride. Well, that was kinda mistake because he did everything from loops to loops to everything else and by the time we got done I was throwing up! But Harold was a nice guy and I kinda had a crush on his daughter but that never went anywhere.

But Harold got killed on a plane wreck. He moved over by Phillips or someplace there. As a matter of fact, Dad and them were taking flying lessons over here. You took them off the ski hill by Rest Lake. They were taking off. But I don't know if they ever got a license, but they putts around there. They did all kinds of things.

Janelle: So you were a boy scout and the boy scouts helped clear that field?

Charlie: Yes, we went out as kids, we did some of that.

Janelle: Were there a lot of trees?

Charlie: Well there were a lot of roots and stuff we were picking up and there were a lot of trees there, at the time, and we had to clear it out. There is a mistake of a tree that is there because it is going to get too big pretty soon and they will have to chop that off. If it doesn't get too high it's all right. Actually, I used to even mow the airport . They had a mower behind a tractor and there were times when I had time I would run the tractor and mow the grass around there.

Janelle: This has been such a good interview, Charlie. I am intrigued by it all. You really have put your heart and soul into making Manitowish Waters the great town it is today.

