

**Interview with Don and Jan Rayala**  
**10/2/18**

Janelle: Welcome to Don and Jan Rayala. This afternoon it is Tuesday, October 2, 2018. And you are both so good to come in and do the interview. It will be really nice to get to learn more about you, and then share with everybody in the community. We'll get this written up afterwards and have it available to read and it will be really nice!

**Ok, Don. Maybe I can have your full name.**

Don: Ok. Donald A. Rayala.

**Janelle: When were you born?**

Don: January 29, 1936.

**Janelle: And your parents...**

Don: Both my parents came from Hurley and the Ironwood area. My grandparents, both maternal and paternal, came from Finland. So my whole family are all Fins.

**Janelle: What was your dad and mom's name?**

Don: Well, my dad's name was Charles, Charlie Rayala, and my mother's name was Lillian Rayala.

**Janelle: And they were both born here in the United States.**

Don: Yeah.

**Janelle: Lillian was from Hurley?**

Don: Mostly from northern Wisconsin around the Hurley and Oma area.

**Janelle: And Charlie?**

Don: Probably the upper Michigan area.

**Janelle: The U.P.?**

Don: The U.P., yeah.

**Janelle: Okay. And their parents both came straight from Finland and settled in northern Wisconsin.**

Don: Yes, my grandfather on my mother's side was mostly into logging. My grandparents on my father's side had a small dairy farm in upper Michigan, north of Ironwood. That's how they made their living. My grandfather moved around a lot. As we go along we'll find out that he came to Manitowish Waters, but he bounced around a lot.

**Janelle: Well, they went from a cold climate to a cold climate didn't they?**

Don: They certainly did! (laughter)

**Janelle: Did your father have many siblings?**

Don: Yes. I don't remember how many. He had at least 3 sisters and a couple of brothers. I'm not positive on that.

**Janelle: And your mom? Did she have a big family?**

Don: My mother had 2 sisters also and 3 brothers, I believe.

Jan: There were 1 step-sister and 2 step-brothers.

Don: Yeah, there were step-sisters and step-brothers, but the immediate family were the ones that I was familiar with.

Jan: His grandma was married to a miner, and he died of consumption. Then she remarried after a few years and married Don's grandpa. Then they had, I think, 6 children.

**Janelle: A lot of children! And I didn't introduce you right away, Jan. This is Jan Rayala.**

Jan: I'm Don's wife from De Pere, Wisconsin.

Don: So I was born in this little log cabin that I gave you a picture of.

**Janelle: Oh yes, can I look at that one?**

Don: Doctor Kate Newcomb was the officiating doctor at that time. The famous Doc Newcomb.

**Janelle: There's the picture of the cabin that Don was born in delivered by Dr. Kate.**

Jan: One room.

**Janelle: This is a one room cabin.**

Don: It did not have any electricity or plumbing for the first several years.

**Janelle: Now Don, there's a lot of children in your family so you were born in '36 in the cabin.**

Don: There's 8 siblings.

**Janelle: You have 8 siblings.**

Don: 11 in the family. 8 siblings and then counting me.

**Janelle: What is the order of everyone?**

Don: My brother Charlie, then I'm second.

**Janelle: You are second, okay. Then the rest of the kids' names?**

Don: Well, then Audrey was next, my sister. Then brother Mike was next. Jerry, Martin, then Carolyn. Then Bonnie was next. Then Tari.

**Janelle: 30 years between Charlie and Tari.**

Jan: Our children have aunts that are younger than they are.

Don: Very confusing in school! (laughter)

**Janelle: Where did you start school?**

Don: I started in Manitowish Waters, here when it was called Spider Lake. We had a one room school and one teacher taught the 8 grades that were in school. I don't remember how many kids were in the school, but the classes, most of them, averaged between 6 and 8 or 9 students per class, so that was that many children in the room. Maybe there were some classes with less, I'm not sure. But the teacher had to teach all 8 grades in one room.

**Janelle: And this school, where was it located?**

Don: Right here on 51.

Jan: The regular school.

Don: At that time it was a one room. Then when I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade going into the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, they added the second room. We had 2 teachers. So we had 1 to 4 and 5 to 8 after that in the school.

**Janelle: So your house, your cabin, it was how many miles north of this school?**

Don: Maybe 5 or 6. We lived on the county line, just before you get into Iron County, along old 51 right next to the river. So from there to the school was maybe 6 miles.

Jan: It's still there.

Don: Yep, the cabin is there.

Jan: It's been enlarged.

Don: Yeah, it's been covered up. The log cabin is still there, but it's been built over completely. So if you were to tear the additions on you'd get down to the log cabin. They left it right on the whole thing so it's still there.

**Janelle: Oh, they built right around it and inside their house.**

Jan: When we moved here we lived in that cabin at first for a year and a half. At that time there were 4 rooms and a bathroom.

Don: When we came back to Manitowish Waters. But I don't remember what year we did get electricity, but it probably was close to the time when I started school, I'm not sure. I know we didn't have electricity at the time I had polio real bad when I was 4 years old. I know what we didn't have electricity at that time because we were still using kerosene lamps to live by.

**Janelle: And you remember that you had polio, or were you told?**

Don: I remember the day I had polio. I was laying on the floor and didn't know what was hurting me real bad. My dad didn't know what to do. They must have contacted Doc Newcomb. She discovered we had polio. Then they quarantined our house for 4 months, so we were quarantined for 4 months while I had polio.

Jan: Then Charlie and Mike had a touch of it too.

Don: But my dad didn't live in the house. He was working so they didn't quarantine him. He brought the groceries and set them on the front steps. So that's how we survived for those few months that I had polio. Then I was in braces for a considerable period of time. They took me to specialists in Ashland and in Green Bay for physical therapy. After braces and physical therapy, I pretty much recovered without any major problems, so to speak.

**Janelle: That's a miracle! So when you started school you were able to...**

Don: Then I was able to do it.

**Janelle: You were able to go to school.**

Don: Play and everything else. I must have recovered from it fairly well through the therapy, put it that way. When I was in school I don't remember the first couple of grades too well, but I know that we

played a lot of baseball and stuff like that later. And ice skated. We always had an ice skating pond out by the school that the older students took care of.

Jan: But his mother also always said that if it wasn't for his dad, he may not have walked because he was supposed to keep the braces on and not walk, they told him, and his dad made him walk. She said that she didn't think he would be walking if it wasn't for that.

**Janelle: He did the opposite of what the doctor said.**

Don: Well, I broke one of the braces anyway. So I thought the world was coming to an end. (laughter) You know how kids are at 4 years old. I suspected it might have been a handful. But I do remember the day I had polio. That was the only thing I remember, except for the therapy and the extended therapy that I had to do. 300 of these things and 200 of these things. You know, foot exercises. It was very difficult doing it because I always wanted to go outside and play with the kids. My mother made me do these 300 before I could go out and that probably had me crying sometime because I had to stay in the house and do my exercises. I remember doing that. But she made me do them every day that I was supposed to do them. But I remember the number. I had to count to 300 for certain exercises. Then 200 for certain different ones. So that's what these doctors advised. Apparently that was a good idea so it worked.

**Janelle: Yeah, and you know your numbers before school started! (laughter)**

Don: Everybody did at that time. I don't think they do now days. (laughter) You had to know your numbers then. Anyway, that was interesting.

**Janelle: That is! Did you know other people in the area that had contacted polio?**

Don: No, I do not. I really don't know. I don't know how serious it was, and how I got it, we don't know because all of a sudden it was there. It wasn't an epidemic of sorts, but they did quarantine us so that's as much as I know about it.

Jan: He had a lot of things happen to him growing up. Before he was a year old he fell back against the wood stove and hit the back of his head.

Don: The cabin was heated by a wood stove, of course. A lot of people don't even know what they are. They called them box stoves at that time. They were hot. You shouldn't get near them. I must have fallen against it. To this day I'm still bald in the back of my head from that.

Jan: And another time is dad ran over him when he was 18 months I think your mom said. He ran over him with the car and he left for work and mom had to wait until he came home to get him to a doctor.

Don: I don't know how I survived that. That I don't remember.

Jan: And how old were you when your brother accidentally hit you over the head with an axe chopping trees?

Janelle: Oh, my gosh!

Don: We were making a bike trail and I was bending down holding the brush while he swung the axe. And of course, you know how kids are. They got ahold of Doc Newcomb again, and she came over and stitched it up.

Jan: You said you didn't feel anything until you put your hand in it.

Don: I didn't feel it much until I put my hand in it. My fingers kind of went in the slot. Then I started screaming and running home.

Janelle: I had a feeling Doctor Newcomb made many trips to your home.

Don: Oh, sure. She was a doctor. How they contacted her beats me. I don't know. But she took care of everybody. When I was born, how they even contacted her to get her there in time for the birth unless they planned it somehow. No communication. It's just interesting. I don't think people realize just that many years ago, 80 some years ago, how destitute people were in the country. Where there was nothing.

Jan: Especially up here.

Don: But I don't know how they communicated at that time. I really don't know. I often wondered how they got the doctor there. But she did come to the house. I remember her coming to take care of us and the other siblings as well.

Janelle: What do you remember about her. Does anything stand out?

Don: Yes, being a kind, rolly polly lady. She had a coarse voice. She always carried that little satchel around. She had her spectacles. Whatever she had in the bag she took care of everything it seemed like. But she was just a rolly polly, friendly doctor. She must have liked kids since she was always friendly. But she had a coarse voice. I remember that. If I heard it today again I'd probably know it because she was there that much. But as you know from history, they've called her "The Doctor in Snow Shoes." That's probably how she got around a lot too, I don't know.

Janelle: Just transportation, that had to be really hard.

Don: Yeah, it had to be really difficult. The roads were plowed most of the time when I was old enough to realize and to shovel the mail box out. But I don't know how she got around otherwise. I know she had a Model A with a half-track on it at one time. It's probably recorded at the museum. That got her around for a while. That's how I know about it. I didn't know her husband. I never met him.

**Janelle: What the highway blacktopped or was it dirt?**

Don: No, it was blacktopped at that time. It's still there, that same highway. It goes right past the house. It's called Old 51 I believe. It's very near the river. Our house is probably within 200 yards of the river, so we were close to the river. We spent a lot of time in the river when we were kids.

**Janelle: Is that where you got water or was there a well?**

Don: We had a hand pump in the house. Right in the house there was a hand pump where we got the water. Probably, quite interesting, my mother gave us baths in a tub all the time. She had to pump the water and heat it up and all that sort of stuff. Every Saturday we got a bath when we were kids in this tub. The tub was sitting on chairs. That's how we survived.

**Janelle: You remember your Saturday bath!**

Don: Yep! That's the part I remember because we were older then, and at that time we got electricity because then we could listen to the radio. They had different shows like "The Shadow" and "The Lone Ranger" and all those shows. We could listen to those Saturday nights while we were (taking baths). And then "The Grand Ole Opry" also was on. So those things we could listen to while my mother... and this was all in one room. There wasn't anything added on at that time. So she did a lot of work.

**Janelle: Yes! But in a way, a little easier to watch if everybody is only in one room.**

Don: Yep. That's all it was. That's all you knew, and that's the way you lived. You just accepted everything. I had a happy childhood, don't get me wrong. We had family on the Iron County side that had 2 children, a daughter and a boy. They were near our age so that was the only 2 playmates we had between us. We had fun. You accepted for what you had; outdoor john and all that stuff. That was just the way you lived. I've always said I had a happy childhood. That was fine. I don't regret anything there. I don't have any bad memories of my childhood.

**Janelle: It sounds like fun living on the river.**

Don: When we were old enough we had to fish. My dad made us go fishing to catch fish and we ate a lot of rock bass. We had to clean them and my mother fried them. Then as we got a little bit older we did a lot of hunting. Me and Charles, my brother, mostly did all this. We'd go partridge hunting, rabbit hunting, and deer hunting. My mother did all this wild game cooking. I don't know how many rabbits... at that time rabbit hunting was very good. We'd go out in the woods in snow shoes and bring rabbits home, or we'd go out and get partridge. Then venison we had. In the summer we had to pick berries, blueberries and whatever else was around to pick. A lot of blueberries. My mother canned blueberries that would fill up half of these shelves almost. We'd have blueberries for the whole winter. The whole family would have go out and pick blueberries and raspberries and blackberries and whatever. Mostly blueberries because there were a lot of blueberries around at that time which there isn't now.

**Janelle: There isn't...**

Don: Well, not as much. What happens is blueberries, not to get into a lot detail, but blueberries should be burned back every once in a while. We haven't had any forest fires and so that's one of the reasons blueberries don't regenerate as much. There are blueberries around but not like before. Before you could walk in any wetland and there were blueberries, any place you went. But not anymore.

**Janelle: Interesting! Now did you have a farm too, or a little bit of a farm or garden?**

Don: No, we had a small garden which we didn't raise a whole lot. We did have, a little later, we had hogs. We raised pigs. Then my dad would butcher those and we would have that meat, the bacon and whatever else you make out of them. So we did raise hogs in a little pen right by the house. Then we had some geese for a while too. I remember those. But aside from that, no, we did not have any farm. My dad was in the logging business at that time. Then he went into contracting after that.

**Janelle: Okay, that's what I was going to ask. Your dad was mostly into logging at first. Then he went into contracting?**

Don: Yeah, into contracting. He started building homes around here. Several homes, even on the road here that he built. Then he built the concrete lift pumps for the cranberry marshes. He had some experience building concrete structures working with a gentleman named Harry Barr that was putting fish-ways in at different areas where there's a dam so that fish could go from one level to the next. So he had the experience, and so the cranberry growers, when they started, hired him to build these concrete structures that you see out there; lift pumps. That's where I learned how to do some of that too when I worked with him. In high school, I worked with him one summer building, I think, two of them. One for Indermuehle and one Folsom I think at that time. Those are major projects to build a structure like that out in the middle of a swamp or wetland. I shouldn't say swamp. It's a wetland.

Jan: He worked for Bill Sell logging, and that's how you bought your...

Don: Yeah. When he started, that was before they were married. He was working for Bill Sell. We lived in Winchester. It was a large logging operation. My dad, I don't know what he all did, but he drove truck and everything else. Then he was able to... Bill Sell sold him 80 acres where our homestead is. That cottage that you see, that log cabin. So that's how he started. He used to bring the logs to Manitowish. There was a depot there and everything else. A guy with a telegraph. Then my dad would be loading with a drag line one log at a time onto rail cars. I remember being there with him when he was doing that. That's how they loaded the logs. He did drive the logging truck a lot because we had the truck in the yard a lot. So he worked for Sell and maybe other ones, I'm not sure.

**Janelle: Do you know where these logs went?**

Don: No, I do not know. They probably could have gone all the way to Milwaukee or Chicago. Once they're put on rail they must have gone further south, because otherwise you would have gone to local lumber companies here. But at that time there was major logging in this area between Winchester and



Presque Isle and Manitowish Waters and the whole surrounding area. Major Logging. Nice big saw logs which you don't see a whole lot of them now. What we're getting is second generation or we're getting larger trees again. Or third generation, I don't know. Like on our land that we own, we own about 500 acres in Manitowish Waters now, and a lot of it's forest land. A lot of the trees now are getting large enough to where you can't get your arms around them. So we got some huge pine trees coming back. but years ago was logged off. In fact, there's a railroad grade that goes through our property where they used to haul logs from this area. It goes through two 40's and then it goes all the way to Powell, through Powell Marsh, and there's the town of Powell before where they used to own logs years ago. That's near Sandy Beach Lake. That's some history before I was here.

**Janelle: I was going to say, there was a fire there, out that way.**

Don: Yeah, there was a huge fire in the Powell Marsh. I don't remember when it was. In the late 40's maybe? I'm not sure exactly what the date on that was, but there was a huge fire that went through the Powell Marsh. But it didn't affect our property that I own now. They confined it to the Powell Marsh somehow. There were fires. Of course, there were lots of forest fires years ago because they couldn't control them. Especially after logging. It was tinder for a fire, no doubt about that.

**Janelle: What did your mom do? She was very busy in the house! Had she...**

Don: Yes, she was! Besides that, I could remember when she did laundry for a lot of the resorts to make money. They would bring the laundry to her. Personal laundry and the resort laundry. Mostly otherwise she took care of the kids, but she did a lot of laundry.

Jan: She had to heat the water, all the water, heat it. And she had a scrub board and did this outside.

**Janelle: And she probably made her soap too.**

Don: I don't know if she made her soap or not, but I know there weren't any machines or electricity at first when she started. She did it all like this. It's just amazing. When you think the short span of time that we're dealing in here, 80 years or so, but in her lifetime all this was happening.

**Janelle: So your parents were very, very busy raising you, working... This is the way of life up here.**

Don: Way of life and logging wasn't high paying jobs either. He probably did better in contracting when he got into whole construction and stuff like that. The other thing I remember a lot in my childhood is cutting firewood. That seemed like an endless project. Cutting firewood and hauling wood in the house. Charlie and I did a lot of it. We used to even skid the logs out of the woods with an old pick-up truck that we had and cut them up by hand. We didn't have a chainsaw. So we had a lot of work. We had a lot of chores, but we had a lot of work too.

Jan: But you worked every summer.

Don: Yeah, I worked every summer at resorts around here, and then I worked for Rudy and Garnet Liss that owned Rudy's Rest Haven. You probably remember that in history. So I worked there for I think 3 years. I used to go over and do all the yard work, and mop the floors, and haul the garbage, all that stuff.

Jan: And screens...

Don: Yeah, I built a lot of stuff for them. I was sort of a handyman carpenter, even at that young age. I remember going there real early in the morning. I'd bike from our place to Rudy's. Mop the floors during the summer twice a week and wax them once a week. They had the dining room, kitchen, and the bar. The whole area which was quite large. All they said was, "Try and be quiet because they were all sleeping upstairs." But that was alright. He treated me very well. They were very nice people to work for. And Garnet was a fantastic cook. She was the chef there. She was a southern belle, so to speak. She was out of her element being up north here, so they always went back to Florida for the winter. Then I would go over and check the place out when I had the time. When I was about 15 he had a Model A car that we'd use with a trailer that we'd haul all the leaves and stuff often. So he left the car with me, and so I had a car when I was 15 years old to go back and forth with and run around with so it was amazing. Rudy owned a large piece of property. He owned all along Ilg Road. He had 2 cottages there. He owned all the property going to Rest Lake where the beach is now. It was all wooded and made a trail through the woods to the beach for the guests. So what is all clear and is our park now was our woods at that time.

Jan: He used to drive up to Hurley to do their banking all the time.

Don: He would send me up to Hurley. He had a big Chrysler car. He'd send me up there early to do his banking. When I was in high school, I would take the banking up to Hurley to school, and then I'd put it in the safe at the school. Then at lunch time I'd take the bank bag to the bank. Then they would do the deposit. Then I'd take the stuff back again. So I did that several times during my high school period.

Janelle: They had a lot of trust in you.

Don: Well, you trusted people at that time, it seemed like. It's funny how that is. But Rudy and Garnet were very good to me. Then from there I went to work with my dad at the cranberry marsh and building these pumps. That must have been in '53 or '54, somewhere in there. Early 50's I want to say.

Jan: '54 you worked for Weber's for the summer.

Don: Yeah, '54 I worked at Weber Cranberry Marsh as a farm hand. That fall is when I left after I graduated high school. That fall I left for Green Bay. I went to a business college for 2 years. Then worked at a super market as a stock boy. Pretty soon I was head stock boy. In another year I was assistant manager of the grocery department.

Janelle: And is that where you two met?

Don: Green Bay, yeah.

**Janelle: Did you meet at work or at college?**

Don: Well, we actually met through one of her friends was working at the store. She kind of told me.

Jan: She introduced us.

Don: She introduced us, yes. So that's how that started. And 60 years later here we are! (laughter)

**Janelle: 60 years!**

Jan: We celebrated our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary July 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Janelle: July 4<sup>th</sup>! Oh my gosh! So you were married in 1958. Okay. So this was in the 50's. Did you have to go into the Korean War?**

Don: No, I didn't. That's an interesting story, too. I was waiting around for the draft. They were drafting people at that time. I went for my physical. They took me to Milwaukee, a whole bus full of guys from Green Bay. We had planned our marriage already in the fall, in October or whatever it was. But then when I was supposed to be drafted moved on, Jan moved our wedding date up to July 4<sup>th</sup>.

Jan: So that when he was done with his basic training, then I could follow him and join him not knowing that once you get married you're reclassified. You have a different classification. So then I got pregnant and that took him off the board all together! (laughter)

Don: See, at that time there was enough men being drafted in Vilas County here so that the age bracket was a little bit higher. So I was up past 21 already when they were looking for draftees. So that's how I kind of slipped through the cracks you might say. Not knowing that we accidentally did it ourselves. We just figured, "Well, we're going to be in the service." But the classification changes because there were enough draftees so they could eliminate people. That would be more costly for the government. So they didn't want to support the married couple.

**Janelle: Oh, they don't want to do that with a child then on top of it.**

Don: Then with a child they said, "We're not taking this guy!" (laughter) So I never did get into the service. I took the physical, I passed that, and that was it. That's as far as it got. So just moving our marriage date up to the 4<sup>th</sup> changed our whole life. It would have been a whole different life, a whole different story. My brother Charlie was in the Korean War.

Jan: And Jerry went to Vietnam.

Don: Yeah, brother Jerry was in the Vietnam war. He came back with some issues that he had to recover from. That was a terrible war.

**Janelle: Going back to when you were a youngster, in the school here. How did you get to school?**

Don: Cars were being used at that time. Toni DalleAve and Chello DalleAve were our bus drivers at that time. They had a Buick car and they were the ones that hauled us. There were other ones hauling from other directions. I remember them putting chains on the car to get us to school and all this stuff in the snow. But it was just a sedan. They could only haul, I suspect, maybe we could squeeze four in the back and two in the front with the driver. That's how we got to school back and forth. And Chello did most of the driving although Toni drove a lot. At that time, they were working for Hanson's Hardware. They lived at the hardware store, Toni and Chello DalleAve did. They were running the hardware store.

**Janelle: Oh, this one here?**

Don: Yeah, this hardware store, yes, when Palmer Hanson owned it at that time. So there were other bus drivers. I don't know who they were. Then later, when I was in the later grades, my dad had a Chevy. They call them Suburbans now, but called it a "carry all". It was like a Surburban. He drove bus for a while also. Ken Perkins had one also so they were the bus drivers. They didn't have any buses as we know buses. These were just cars.

Jan: That was with our children, too with grade school. It was just cars.

Don: Yeah.

**Janelle: Yes, it was.**

Don: So things didn't change. When I went to Hurley High School, we had a small bus. It picked up the children all along the route. We were probably the last ones, but we were the last ones in the county, Vilas County, going up. The bus did pick up two people in Manitowish that used to be Chuck's Bar. They had two daughters. I think our bus picked those girls up too at that time. That's what was an interesting thing. All those years of riding in a bus that many miles, and that many snow storms, and everything else, and going up to games. They even brought us up to games, basketball games, all the way up to Superior and stuff and never had it slipped off the road. Never had an accident. Most of them were slippery roads. Rough riding bus, of course, because the roads were rough at that time. Ken Perkins was the driver. He was really good. He took us to all the games that he could. Up to Superior even we went. Any games that were in reasonable driving distance. Sometimes we got home late at night, of course, but he drove us back and forth. He picked us up every day.

**Janelle: It was all community involvement with getting you kids to where you needed to go.**

Don: Yep. That was the first bus we had at the high school. Otherwise it was cars.

**Janelle: So everybody went up to Hurley for high school? Or did some go to Minocqua?**

Don: No, there wasn't anything.

Jan: Some went to St. Ambrose school.

Don: Yeah, there was some Catholic students. Margret "Mutz" Knopp, and Shirley Massiti went up to St. Ambrose in Hurley.

Jan: How about Dick Knopp?

Don: Dick Knopp also. I'm sorry. Yeah, Dick Knopp. Dick Knopp was a good friend of mine. He was older than I was. But he went to the grade school here. All those kids went to the grade school. Then when they went to high school then went to St. Ambrose, those folks. John Hanson, I believe went to Wausau somewhere. I didn't see him after that for quite a while.

**Janelle: Are you in the same year as John Hanson?**

Don: Yeah, John Hanson and myself, Mutz Knopp, and Shirley Massiti were all in the same grade.

Jan: Every summer we get together with John Hanson and Mary Margaret Knopp, and Shirley Massiti doesn't come.

Don: She's in Minneapolis.

Jan: But the 3 of them get together and have lunch.

Don: Every summer we've had our get together.

**Janelle: Did you have best buddies in school maybe besides them that you were able to keep in communication with?**

Don: Not so much, no. Everybody kind of went through different ways. I remember some of the kids we were good friends with, but everybody went in different directions so we didn't. I think Jim Burkowski was the only one that I communicated with for a little while. He was older than I was by a year or two, I'm not sure. But we were good friends. When I was in Green Bay going to college, he and I wrote back and forth a few times. But then we kind of drifted apart. We've had people come back to Manitowish Waters to sort of reminisce and look around and stop in, but otherwise, to answer your question, I didn't have any best buddies that were lifelong friends that we stuck around with. Even John Hanson, now that we're living in the same community, but he went to high school somewhere else and so we just kind of separated.

**Janelle: Now after high school you went to the business school, and you got your degree?**

Don: Well, I really didn't get a degree. It was just a 2-year business college. That's all it was. And it was a private business college, and it was the only thing I could afford. When I left high school I would have liked to have gone on to engineering school. It's really what I wanted to do, but we couldn't afford that at all. Then when these folks came around and offered this business college for something I could

afford. I saved all my money when I worked, so I had money in the bank. I could pay the tuition. They were supposed to supply me with a job when I got to Green Bay so I could afford to live. I told them right off I had to have a job. That's the only way I could get in. I was supposed to get a job at an A&P store. They couldn't get me in there, so they did finally get me into work for Farah's Grocery Store which was a privately owned grocery business and liquor business. That's how I started. I went from there to being a manager in the produce and grocery department.

**Janelle: That's pretty good! And then you met and got married. Then what happened?**

Don: Jan worked for a long time at Fort Howard Paper Company when we were first married while I worked and so we were bringing in, at a young age, quite a bit of money. So we were able to buy furniture and rented an apartment and all that kind of stuff.

**Janelle: How long did you live in De Pere?**

Jan: I was born and raised there.

Don: Her folks had a dairy, in the dairy industry, whatever it was.

Jan: We had a dairy and made pasteurized milk and made cheese and butter. My dad died at 49 and there were 8 of us kids. After he died my mother got her high school equivalency diploma and went to nursing school and became a practical nurse and worked and supported the rest of us that were still home. Then I met Don and we got married and we lived there about 8 months. Then he had to make a decision whether he wanted to stay there. His brother Mike was in The Little Star Garage with Charlie, and Mike was going into service. So we had to decide what we wanted to do.

Don: See, I didn't want to be in the grocery business. My shortest week was 60 hours. My longest week was 80. I only got every other Sunday off. I decided that wasn't going to be for me. I couldn't see any future although I was offered a job later. They built a new store in Green Bay and they tried to call me back. They called me a few times when I was in Manitowish Waters to see if I wouldn't come back and manage the store with them. Howard Folsom was looking for a foreman for his marsh after I worked at the garage for a while. So I took that job. Not knowing what it's going to do, but Mr. Folsom was pretty good business man. He wasn't a so called "nuts and bolts" guy. He's one of the original people that started the cranberry marsh up in Manitowish Waters, Howard Folsom was. So anyway, I started with him. After 3 years he asked me if I wouldn't be in a partnership with him on another piece of property that was next to his. So that's how we started the cranberry marsh. But we're getting back to her family too.

**Janelle: Yes. Now how did you feel about leaving?**

Jan: It was hard because my family was there. But Don had told me if we moved up here that I could go home once a month and visit my family. That lasted maybe a year. (laughter) Then we had our daughter Cathy in January of 1960. Then it was very different.

**Janelle: Oh, Cathy's the oldest?**

Jan: Yes. She was a New Year's baby at Howard Young. Well, no, at Dr. Kate Hospital.

**Janelle: 1960? So your first child was Cathy.**

Jan: 1960, yes. Scott is the next one. He's almost a year and a half younger. He was born in 1961, in June. And then Dan was born in April of 1963. And Tricia was born in August of 1965. So that's our family!

**Janelle: You had 4 kids!**

Jan: Yes, in five and a half years. I always said I grew up with my kids because I was 19 when we got married. As I said, Lillian and Charlie lived not even a city block from us, Don's mother and dad. She was having children, and so we just did everything together. We went swimming with the kids twice a day in the summer. We just did everything together. We enjoyed our life. The kids had a good time having their best friends play with them. So it was fun. Lot of work, but it was fun. But at that time Don's mother and dad were on the cranberry marsh. They were the foremen for Weber Cranberries.

**Janelle: So they came over from...**

Don: From the homestead, so to speak. They lived also on Alder Lake, right near where we are. They had a Tri-State Home put in later. That was after they were out of the marsh, but he was on the cranberry marsh for several years as managing Mr. Weber's marsh.

Jan: And then Don's mother worked with the cranberries sorting berries during harvest time.

Don: See, at that time we had to sort berries and package them. Jan used to run the packager for us at Folsom's. We were processing the fruit right at the marsh. Right now it's shipped out all the time. At that time, we dried and stored the berries and packaged them in one pound packages or 25 pound cases for whatever the customer wanted.

**Janelle: So you were in the time when, well, not the earliest time, but the time when there was a lot of manual labor yet.**

Don: There was a lot of manual labor. It's physically hard work. It evolved later with machinery and everything else, but at that time it was still very manual labor. Everything was hard work.

Jan: And building the marsh. Now, when you went to take the foreman at Folsom Cranberry Company they had 35 acres planted, and you increased that to...

Don: 63, and at the same time we were building the new partnership marsh. We started the partnership marsh, about 3 years after I worked for Howard he asked me to be a partner. We started the partnership marsh and called it the Folsom and Rayala Cranberry Company. Then we developed

that, and in 1983 I believe it was, Howard was retiring out and getting much older. We had an agreement, so I purchased his share out. Then it became Rayala Cranberry Company in '83, if I have the year right. Since then it's been Rayala Cranberry Company. Then Folsom's marsh is managed by or owned by Tom Folsom, of course. So that was the evolution of Green Bay to cranberries! (laughter)

**Janelle: That's a lot of decisions.**

Don: Yes, it was. It was a lot of decisions and you wonder about them at the time, but it seemed to work out.

**Janelle: I'm sure you're happy looking back, how everything worked out. You were able to move back to family. Well, yours (Don's). But maybe they came up a little bit?**

Jan: They did come up a lot. In fact, my brother lives up here.

Don: They did come up. When we came up north they were up here! (laughter)

Jan: My brothers all came up for hunting season every year.

Don: And fishing. They liked to fish.

Jan: And fishing. I had one brother that bought a place over in Winchester and lived there until he passed away. Then my other brother started a cranberry marsh and it was Trout River Cranberry Company. He sold that, but he still has a home up there.

**Janelle: What is your maiden name, Jan?**

Jan: I was Janice Teske.

**Janelle: Oh, so that's the one on...**

Jan: It used to be Teske-Rayala. That would be Don's nephew that was with them on that marsh.

**Janelle: Okay. And that was your brother.**

Jan: Yes.

Don: He was doing a lot of our accounting. He was an accountant so he was doing a lot of the book work for us; the year-end tax work. He must have seen that he enjoyed this type of life. That's why he worked for Arthur Anderson as an accountant.

Jan: As a partner at Arthur Anderson.



Don: As a partner at Arthur Anderson and he decided he wanted to go into the cranberry business. So that's what happened. I helped him build his marsh a lot. I built the pumps for him and laid out a lot of his properties, and we worked together for a long time developing his property. He soon sold it out after that. I don't know what year it was.

**Janelle: Do you feel that your work with your father on pumps was really helpful to you as you went back in?**

Don: Yes, it certainly was working with my dad building these pumps because I had to build two pumps myself after that fact on our marsh. In fact, when I was in high school he was building Indermuehle's pump. One for Indermuehle and I was in high school taking wood shop and wood working and so I was taking drafting. So he had me draw up blue prints. He had the measurements all out and he had me draw up blue prints because I was learning how to do blue printing. So I drew the blue prints out for that pump that he built for Indermuehle's. So naturally I remembered a lot of the detail to be able to build pumps ourselves. I had to build both the pumps for our partnership marsh.

**Janelle: You're very mechanically inclined.**

Don: Well, I had to be. That's fortunate, yes, but, you're right. I learned that from my dad. If I hadn't been working with him, knowing what had to be done and how to do it, it would have been impossible. It was really hard work because we had to mix the concrete right out there by hand and everything else to make these pumps. People don't realize how hard it works. You couldn't drive a ready mix truck out there. Not across a wetland. So you had to haul it out on little trailers, a little gravel at a time, and then get your cement out there, and then mix it out there.

Jan: You also built the little tractors that pulled all the...

Don: Yeah, I built 3 tractors that, you'd have to hook to the boats.

**Janelle: Oh, okay. There in there.**

Don: Yeah, I think they're in there, yeah. Because you couldn't buy tractors that would go in the water when it first started wet harvesting with the beaters, when we started using boats. Before that we used to just walk behind beaters. The guys carried the berries off the marsh in boxes. They would put them in the boxes and then they would carry them off. And then we went to the boats after that. So there's the evolution of how we harvested cranberries. It is just amazing from the first time I started. From hand raking, to walk behind picking machines, and now nobody hardly walks in the bed any more. The machines do everything. You have the people who get in the bed now to put the suction in for the pump. Things like that, but nobody's out there hand raking or working hard at anything. It's all pretty easy now. It's altogether different, but it's very interesting though.

**Janelle: So your children... was it mostly Dan that enjoyed the cranberries?**

Don: Yes, that was...

Jan: Scott worked in the cranberries, too for several years.

Don: Yeah, Scott worked for us quite a bit, yeah. But Dan, I think he was at Stout at that time. After a couple of years, he came and said he wanted to come on the cranberry marsh. I encouraged the kids to go to college. We did. Go to college and don't lean on the cranberry marsh. So after two years he came to me and he said he wanted to come to the cranberry marsh. And I said, "Well..." So he moved to Madison, went to Madison and I said, "Take up all the business courses you can. Take horticulture but you have to have a business education to run any business." And that was one of the things that I always thought. It's a business. You better learn how to run a business because it was getting complicated at that time, but nothing like it is today, of course. And so, fortunately, he graduated from Madison with a degree in Business and Horticulture. So now he's basically managing the marsh now, of course.

Jan: He is a partner in our cranberry marsh.

Don: He's a partner. We made him a partner many years ago. So he's the one that committed himself to the cranberry industry. He's kind of taken over everything. I go to work every day, but we each kind of decide what we're going to do, too! (laughter)

Jan: Don does work 5 days a week.

**Janelle: You still...???**

Don: Yeah. In fact, I was working just before I got here.

**Janelle: I imagine it's very busy right now!**

Don: Yeah, a lot of stuff to do. It's fun in that I built it. What I feel bad about is that I don't have a grandson coming in that would take it over, or something. Dan doesn't have any... his son didn't want it... didn't want to work on the marsh at all. So, we don't know what's going to happen down the line.

**Janelle: And none of the other children have grandsons or sons?**

Don: None that would be interested in that. There doesn't seem to be, anyway. No. I thought maybe one of Dan's daughters might be. I think some of them had the moxie to do it, but they just didn't want to do it. A lot of ladies own cranberry marshes around Wisconsin, so that's not uncommon.

Jan: And our oldest daughter Cathy has boys, but they have their other interests and their education in different fields. So, that's what it is.

**Janelle: Yep, you can't pick for them, can you?**

Don: No, no. Let them do what they want. That's why I said get the best education you can and decide what you want to do.

Jan: And Scott is a ...

Don: He's a safety consultant and an environmental person for Charter.

Jan: Right now he's working for Charter. He has worked for some big companies. He's traveled to Dubai and all the...

Don: Germany and France and Italy and all those.

Jan: He's been all over doing this. But it's just too much for him. He had a stroke at one time. They told him he shouldn't be flying so much. And he's 56 or 57 right now. 56 I think.

Janelle: Yeah, he's close to my age.

Jan: And he had it two years ago. He had a stroke. It was slight, but it still was a stroke, so he's not traveling as much. He's trying to stay more in the states, anyway.

Janelle: I remember him. Right when I started working here. We're about the same age. I was born in '64.

Don: Everyone remembers Scott. (laughter) Good or bad!

Janelle: Good guy!

Don: Yeah, he's very kind hearted.

Janelle: I really enjoyed seeing him here. And Cathy...what is Cathy doing?

Jan: Cathy had her degree. She was an attorney in Washington D.C. In fact, her client was... she worked for an insurance company. They insured government workers. I can't remember what the name was. Then her husband died, passed away at 49. Her boys were 5 and 7. So she worked for 6 months after that and then she decided that she would be home. She had enough savings that she could stay home with them. After a few years she met someone and got married. They moved to Phoenix, Arizona. The boys were raised there. She did not go back into law. She did mentoring and she did...

Don: I'm not sure what all, but she did pass the bar in Arizona, but she never went into law over there, though.

Jan: But now she is working for T-Mobile, and she trains a lot of the help in different areas throughout the country in the United States. So she's doing a lot of training for them. And Trish, our youngest one, in an education specialist. She isn't working right now, but she just moved. She lived up here for 11 years and they moved back to Maryland. In fact, she was interviewing for a job this week. We'll see what happens. Just part time because she's had cardiac arrest and she can't work full time. Twice and so she would be just part time. She has a defibrillator and pacemaker and that keeps her alright.

**Janelle: Yeah, that's scary and a worry! Does Trish have any children?**

Jan: No, she never had any children.

**Janelle: Okay. And Cathy has 2.**

Jan: She has 2 boys. Her oldest boy is a counselor in high school in Nashville, Tennessee. Her younger boy has a college education, and he works with at-risk youth that have had problems either with being in jail or parents are divorced and they're at-risk children. So he does counseling with these kids.

**Janelle: And Scott. Does he have a ...**

Jan: He's a safety consultant in Madison. He lives in Oregon, Wisconsin. He travels in the United States, though, but mostly in the central states.

Don: Central states, yes.

**Janelle: How many children?**

Jan: 3.

**Janelle: 3 kids.**

Jan: 1 boy and 2 girls.

**Janelle: And Dan...**

Jan: ... is on the marsh.

**Janelle: He's on the marsh. And how many children does Dan have?**

Jan: He has 4 children, a boy and 3 girls. And then he has 2 step-children. Dan married Amy Balas.

**Janelle: Oh yes. Amy's children. They have a busy house!**

Jan: Yes! (laughter)

**Janelle: They are all doing quite well!**

Jan: They are!

**Janelle: You got yourself a lot of grandchildren to keep you busy!**

Jan: Yes, we have 6 great-grandchildren.

**Janelle:** You look way too young for that! (laughter)

Jan: And we enjoy them a lot! We really do.

**Janelle:** Do they get to visit in the Northwoods here?

Don: Quite often, yes. I think that from New Jersey or Maryland... where is it?

Jan: Maryland. Annapolis, Maryland there's three of them. They come up every summer for a week. They stay at Dan's house, but they're at our house every day because we're on the lake. So they swim and come for all that time. And we've gone out there to see them too. Then the other ones do come visit quite a bit.

Don: Yeah, they all come up. We have family gatherings and reunions and stuff.

Jan: Almost everyone was here for our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Don: That was this year.

Jan: We had family pictures taken at that time.

**Janelle:** Oh, how nice! When you think back to the cranberry marsh, do you have some memories that are really positive memories, something that you just loved about the marshes?

Don: Well, first I've always said, "If you go into farming, go into cranberries." Being that I helped my uncles' dairy farms in upper Michigan. I used to go up in the summer and stay with them and help on the farm. You know how it is on dairy farms. You've got to be up in the morning and take care of the cows. You've got to be there in the evening to take care of the cows and do all the other chores. There's no end to it. Where in the cranberry industry, you may have a few nights of frost protection, but there's always a break in there somewhere. You don't have to be there. But to answer your question, there was a lot of milestones in the cranberry industry as far as I'm concerned. When I started with Folsom, and we started the partnership marsh, and then went on to owning the marsh and building the whole thing, actually in my lifetime I guess I've planted over 100 acres of cranberry vines which is a lot for me. Bigger companies have done more, of course. So it's been one milestone after another, and I've enjoyed the whole lifestyle because I had time in the wintertime to go skiing and snowmobiling and all the stuff I like to do. We ski up at Indianhead and White Pine and all the ski hills up there. Me and Ralph Hanson and all the other guys from around here. We always had time to go on vacation, Jan and I, started our vacation a couple of weeks at a time. Pretty soon it was a month at a time. Now it's almost 5 months at a time! So it's been an evolution there. The cranberry industry had its ups and downs. We had struggled through a lot of times with it, but all in all, it turned out pretty well and so we made a pretty comfortable living. There's no doubt about that from where I started to where we are. And also owning another home in Phoenix where we go for the winter. So we get away from that, but through the years it was fun. We did a lot of stuff. Jan didn't like to ski much. She didn't like looking down at the steep hill.

Jan: I pictured myself breaking a leg and who would take care of my kids so I gave up skiing downhill.

**Janelle: That's very reasonable! (laughter) What about something that was really hard to deal with on the cranberry marsh or hard to do? Do you have any recollections?**

Don: Everything seemed to be hard to do; building stuff from the time we started. But as far as impossible, I don't know. Like you always said, "You do the hard things right away, the impossible takes a little longer." That's sort of how the cranberry industry went. I didn't have any serious problems. I did have one time when I really had a little doubt. I was lifting a heavy steel beam and I hurt my back. I had struggled all summer with that. In fact, I bought a truck that rode the best it would so that it wouldn't jar my back around. Then in the fall, after my wife's nagging, I went to a chiropractor, and he took one look at the x-rays, and he knew what was wrong. I went through therapy at the hospital over here and nothing worked. He adjusted my back and put it back into shape. So just from lifting something extremely heavy, a big steel beam I was trying to move, my back went out.

Jan: He crawled on the floor to get around.

Don: Yeah, I could hardly move. But when Dr. Schmidt, who was already retired, and I went to him. He said, "Bring the x-rays" when Jan talked to him. So he looked at the x-rays, right through a bulb. He didn't have an x-ray machine or anything. He says, "I can see what the problem is." He snapped my back. It hurt for a bit and it was off the nerve or whatever the problem. Solved it. That simple. That's how it went. Dr. Anast was my doctor at Howard Young. He had me in tubs and lasers and all this kind of stuff and nothing worked.

Jan: 20 weeks and nothing.

Don: Just painful. In fact, one day I was going to the hospital and my son Scott was taking me. My back was so bad I had to get out of the car and crawl on the pavement just to get the pain off my back it was so bad. Extremely painful. That was the only traumatic thing that I had through the whole cranberry industry. I thought I was done for my life. I wouldn't be able to work anymore. But just one good chiropractor that knew what he was looking at fixed it. He said, "This is what the problem is," and he put me on the table and he said, "It's the opposite of what it looks like on the x-ray." He jolted me and it hurt for a minute and I knew right away that the pain was gone.

Jan: Three adjustments and he was fine.

Don: Yep! And here I do all kinds of lifting and everything else.

Jan: He did give you exercises to do to strengthen the back.

Don: Oh, yeah. He gave me the exercises and I still do those faithfully today, all the time.

**Janelle: That's probably what saves you.**

Don: It keeps my torso muscles in shape. To answer, I guess that was the most traumatic that happened through the whole career that may have been a life changer. That was it. But anyway, it was a good life. Hard work. I told you I left another job because I had to put so many hours in. Well, that didn't change much on the cranberry marsh! (laughter) But it was stuff I liked to do, more so what I liked to do.

Jan: In fact, the first years when he was doing frost protection, he would bring an alarm clock in his pickup with him because, at that time, they didn't have the sprinkler system that they had to run the pumps. He would set the alarm in the truck and sleep for a half hour at a time.

Don: We had to flood the marshes and so you'd put so much water in. If it got colder you'd pump a little more water. But you couldn't put too much water in because before the berries get their wax coating on, if you get too much water in, the berries will absorb the water and they'll rot. So you had to keep the water just below the berries all the time. During harvest we could pump them up. They wax up like an apple. Then they float. In July, you often get a frost often times in July, at that time you couldn't flood the berries. You had to just float enough water in, so what you're doing all night long is... there is horizontal thermometers all over the place, and you'd just watch the thermometers. If one started to get too cold, you started moving some water again. Opening the gate and start a pump and keep the water moving. Just the moving of water to keep it warm. So that was how we protected the cranberries in the first place. That was taken care of at Folsom's marsh completely at that time. Tom supposed to be working a lot, but he wasn't interested at that time in the cranberry industry. He's kind of a little wild guy. (laughter) But he's running the marsh now. He settled down, we'll put it that way. Anyway, that's what it was. That's how we started. That was the longest and hardest part was frost protecting because it was cold at that time. It was quite cool that we had a lot of nights, for several years, it froze every year on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

**Kay: You can remember hearing, you knew it was really serious, when you started hearing, you could hear the pumps going. You'd say, "Oh boy!"**

Jan: We were at a ski show on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

**Kay: Water ski show?**

Jan: Yes, and it was in the 80's. As it started getting darker, he says, "I got to get home." You made it home just in time. It was freezing.

Don: Freezing, it was. We were by boat. We were with somebody by boat so we had to come up through the channel and get back here. We got to the marsh and it was 32 degrees already.

**Kay: Is that because it's such a low land? Is that what causes the cold to settle?**

Don: Yeah, that's right. You see the fog in the marsh areas in the mornings. Another interesting time, we were at a family gathering in Green Bay, Jan's family. We were sitting on the shores of Lake Michigan. A northeast wind came up. You always want to watch a northeast wind. I told Jan, I said, "It

looks like it's going to get cold." It wasn't supposed to get cold, so we piled the kids in the car and I got back here. I think it was around 10:00 or 11:00 o'clock or whatever it was. It was just kind of leaning on 32 degrees again. That's how close that night was. But we drove back. We got the kids in the car and just raced back here.

**Kay: Would the entire crop be ruined?**

Don: Yes. If you froze the whole thing, the whole crop would be ruined.

**Kay: So if it went below 32...**

Don: Well, 32 is a kind of a baseline. If they're green yet, they can take a little chill. Like now, they could take a pretty good...you could let it get down to 27 right now, they're waxed up pretty well. At that time, you don't want to chill them because they won't develop good. You try not to let them get to 32 during the early part of the season. You would protect them at 34, at least by 34. So start thinking about it at 36 and start doing something at 34 so that you plan ahead. You shouldn't chill them at that time. Even the early spring, like May, late May, the buds are moving then pretty well. There isn't any berries yet, but the buds are moving, and those should not be chilled a lot either. It slows them down. It just sets the plant back. So that's the only reason.

**Kay: So the responsibility of the person who is managing that farm is really big, critical.**

Don: Yeah, you mess up once and you're done. And it's happened. I can name growers that have had problems like that. I've never had a frost loss in all the years I've been doing it, but I know several of them that had. They call it a warm frost, or something like that. There's no such thing as a warm frost! (laughter)

**Janelle: Now when the cranberries wax up, is that a natural process or do you spray?**

Don: Yes, it's a natural process. They're just green in August, here. They're just green, but they still have to wax up, late August, and like right now they're waxed up pretty well. You could float them and everything. That's just the way they are. I think apples would be the same thing. They probably start out without any wax on them, just green. Then they wax up too, and they ripen up; the same thing. Some plants do that.

Kay: John McFarlan was here earlier. He looked at the cranberries in the jar, and those are from your farm. He said, "Those are the most beautiful cranberries!" He said, "They are awesome!" He just went on and on! Of course, I don't have the professional eye, but he was just like, "Wow!"

Don: We have big berries this year. Last year we had small berries. We had a good crop last year, but the berries were smaller. It would have been a bumper crop if they would've been the size that they are this year. Now we have a good crop sitting this year with large berries. Let's see what happens. We don't know, you never know how large a crop's going to be. You can make estimates, but you don't know what it is until the last berry's counted, because it varies. You can look at a bed and say, "Wow!"



This looks like 300 bales an acre!" And you never know. It might be 200, or it might be 350. So this year it looks good, again. We have a lot of berries out there, a lot of large berries as you saw right there which is a plus.

**Kay: How far are you into the harvesting right now?**

Don: We'll start the 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Kay: You start the 10<sup>th</sup>? So you haven't started?**

Don: No, we haven't started yet. I'm not sure if you want to go into all of this, but we don't harvest our own berries anymore. Last year we started, Bartling's harvesting our berries. They have a cleaning facility. The berries are hauled. We haul them out with dump trucks from our marsh. They asked us if we would do this with them, because they get an incentive for cleaning and processing. So we haul our berries over there, dump them in their pool that goes through their processing, and then they put them in pallet boxes that go straight to the freezer. Before, we bulk shipped them into trucks, and they went to Ocean Spray receiving stations to be processed. Bartling's, the reason they started this was they can handle another marsh our size with the equipment they've got. They have a full time crew. Their marsh is larger so they have year around people there. So he wanted to spread the harvest out to take advantage of his full time help. Also, as I said, when they process them, they get an incentive, so they're making an extra buck on the berries that they harvest from our marsh. We pay them to harvest our marsh. So it turned out pretty well for us because up until now, I didn't have any trouble getting any help. When I started harvesting, I would have people standing out the door. More than I could use sometimes. Most of the time I would hire 18 to 25 people. I tried to do a lot of the work with mechanical stuff, but you can't get part time help that can do mechanical stuff, so we used a lot of people. It was 2 weeks or 10 days. They liked to come work for that short period of time. But now it's very difficult. As you see, they've got ads in the paper for somebody to work in the marsh. It's hard to get anybody to work, young people to get to work at all.

**Kay: And you've had a lot of Native Americans that work, but they don't work now.**

Don: No, they don't work anymore.

**Kay: They've all gotten... He had them so that they would take their vacations where they were working and they'd take their vacations at the time to come and work for Don. But now, they're older, they don't work, and the younger generation is not working.**

Don: I've built the whole marsh with probably all Indians. Right now, in the past few years, we've hired retired guys to do the tractor driving and a few things like that. But I've had good Indian equipment operators through the years.

**Kay: What were some of the names of your really good people?**

Don: Well, Divers, Waymans, Peterson, and Allens, and Chosas. Chosas were the violent ones. They were hard workers, but they got into a lot of trouble all the time. I can't remember all the names. Some of them I should remember, but a lot of them I don't remember because Jan used to write the checks out, help me write checks out so everything was hand written at that time. When you have that many people, it's a lot of checks to write. Interesting thing, if you pick up, maybe I shouldn't be saying this, but pick up the paper and look in the Vilas County Court Reports, and some of those names there are real familiar, unfortunately. (laughter) They got in trouble. They worked hard. I respect all the Indians. They were really good hard working people for me. I never had any problem with it. As much as they drank and got into trouble, they never gave me any trouble.

**Kay: They worked when they were working.**

Don: Yeah, and I always paid them right. That was part of my job.

Jan: Some of them still come back. They want cranberries and they bring us wild rice, just a tradeoff.

Don: There's a whole different..., just like our children. You'd be hard to find any young people that want to work. Especially manual labor, I'll put it that way. Even contractors that need somebody to work, carpenters, or cement people, and all that stuff. They can't get people to work. So that's why this system with Bartling's turned out pretty well for us, we think. This is our second year doing it. There's been kind of a change over in how it's handled. Improvements all along, just like anything. First year we did pretty well. We didn't have any glitches and the crop went down the road in a hurry like it should have. It looks like it's pretty well.... See, they're harvesting right now. They'll do part of their marsh, and they'll come to our marsh on the 10<sup>th</sup>. They'll do our marsh which will take them a little over a week with how they do it. Then they go back and finish off their marsh. It all goes through their cleaning facility. Ocean Spray is glad to have some of the growers do this, those that are grandfathered in, because receiving stations are so jammed up. We used to ship our berries to Babcock or to Tomah. Trucks were lined up. Receiving stations just can't handle it, that volume of berries. So Ocean Spray is glad to have some of this farmed out somewhere else.

**Kay: So then do your berries all go to juice?**

Don: No. Most of our berries will probably go to craisins. See the brand we have, the Stevens variety, is one of the ideal berries for making craisins because it's larger and firmer.

**Kay: Stevens, that's an older variety, isn't it?**

Don: Yeah. There's a lot of newer ones out. Stevens was a good variety to put in earlier. We had Sarels originally. Then we changed, renovated all to Stevens. But there are new hybrids out now. In fact, we're thinking renovating one of our beds to one of the new hybrids again that produce half again or more than Stevens do. Stevens was a high producing one and still is, but there are new varieties out there producing quite well, too. We're researching that right now. So we're gradually getting into renovating some more beds. Get more production off the same amount of land. That's what most of the growers are doing. In fact, all the growers are doing it.

**Kay:** I don't know if you guys talked about this, but I wanted to ask you about, when you grew up out on the marsh, what that was like? Did you talk about that?

**Don:** Oh no, I didn't grow up on the marsh at all.

**Kay:** You weren't in the... I remember your parents were out on the marsh. You were too old?

**Don:** I was much, much too old. The second family was there.

**Kay:** I see!

**Don:** When my folks moved to the marsh, I was in Green Bay going to school at that time. In fact, they rerouted Highway 51 at that time. I remember coming back from Green Bay one night and couldn't find the house. The road had been moved behind and I drove by a couple times and couldn't find the house because the highway went behind our house.

**Kay:** So this was the house you grew up in?

**Don:** Yeah, that's the one.

**Kay:** And is that up on 51?

**Don:** It's the last house in Vilas County on old 51. The building is still there, but it's all been covered over.

**Kay:** Sided over?

**Don:** Yeah. If you were to tear those other parts off, the logs are still in that structure. There wasn't any electricity for several years in that house.

**Kay:** And what did you go to school to study?

**Don:** After high school I went to Green Bay to business college. I really wanted to go, as I told earlier, that I wanted to go to an engineering school, but we couldn't afford that. My dad thought high school was higher education. I went to a business college because I saved enough money that I could afford to do it myself. So that's how I got to Green Bay. I went to two years of business college. Actually, I was telling Jan earlier, I probably would never have been somebody to sit in an office anyway. That would have changed! (laughter) And the same thing when I worked in the grocery store, which I went through all this already.

**Kay:** Did you talk about your Finnish heritage and what kind of things that...

**Don:** Yeah.

**Kay: You did talk all about what that meant being Finnish and customs and culture?**

Don: I think the customs; we didn't talk about that much. Finns like their saunas, you know. So I went through a lot of saunas. I don't like saunas! (laughter)

**Kay: But your parents had a sauna?**

Don: No. All my grandparents had a sauna. Yep, in fact my aunt and uncle that lived on Rest Lake and Long's place, that had a sauna downstairs. So we went to that sauna several times. And my grandparents all had saunas and my uncles had saunas.

**Kay: What was the name?**

Don: Sepula. Yeah. That was Sepula that owned...

Jan: Arvid and Vienna

Don: Arvid and Vienna Sepula. They were actually...she was a step-sister to my mother. My grandparents from my mother's side were in Mercer. They had built and had a tavern there for a while, and he came to Manitowish Waters and built the house that Shotts live in now.

**Kay: But they were on Donahue Bay, Rest Lake.**

Don: You know where the new apartments are? What was that called? They lived over there during the Depression. He had a place over there. They used to take in people that were unemployed. They would feed them and stuff, and maybe they had those folks helping pull stumps, made a winch, pull stumps out of the bay and stuff at that time. You could get away with that stuff. My grandfather, from my mother's side, he was in all kinds of different businesses. They moved on to concrete from...

**Kay: Now his name was...**

Don: Andrew Nissila

**Kay: Nissila. I thought I heard Nissila.**

**Janelle: That's your mom's maiden name.**

Don: Yeah, he moved all over the place, but he always made a living where ever he was.

Jan: He had a lot of land here on Spider Lake.

Don: Yeah, he had quite a bit of land.

Jan: But he never hung on to it! (laughter)

Don: He just moved around logging and trapping. That was what they did.

Jan: But he did have a green thumb and he had big gardens all the time. During the time of the depression, as Don was saying, they took people in and they fed them because, between fish and venison and the gardens, he was able to do this.

**Kay: Did your mom and dad speak Finnish?**

Don: Yes, very well.

**Kay: Did they pass that on to you guys?**

Don: Yeah, we used to speak Finnish a lot when I was a kid. In fact, Charlie had to learn English before he started grade school, but I learned with him. Our grandparents and uncles and aunts all spoke Finnish all the time.

**Kay: Charlie learned English in school. He spoke Finnish when he went to school.**

Don: I learned with him, of course. It wasn't a problem for me in school. But to answer your question, yes, everybody spoke Finnish. My grandmother, my mother's mother, never learned English. So everything was Finnish when we went there. My dad's parents, I knew his father, but he was an invalid from the time I knew him so I never knew much about him. His wife passed away before that. We never got friendly with him. I did with my uncles and aunts, of course. We were really close to mother's parents and her brothers and sisters, because we used to stay with Sepula's on Rest Lake a lot with her. We were just kids. In fact, we'd go skating on Rest Lake and all that kind of stuff. We helped rake leaves around there for Corsen's. Dick Murphy has it now. We used to rake leaves over there and all those places.

**Kay: Your paternal grandfather came over from Finland and he sent back to Finland for a wife. And she came and bore 6 children and passed away at 29. But Don never met her?**

Don: No. My uncles and aunts from that side had small dairy farms up in upper Michigan. 3 of them.

**Kay: So for someone like your dad, he had that farming background.**

Don: My dad did not have a farming background, basically, no. He maybe had a little at the farm. I guess maybe as a child growing up. They were farming, yeah, but he never wanted to be a farmer. He never did go into farming except when he got on the cranberry marsh.

Jan: He left home to do logging.

Don: Yeah, he left home to do logging instead.

**Kay: To be a logger.**

Don: Yeah.

**Kay: But you think about the people that came to the cranberry country, they did have some background in agriculture.**

Don: Some did, some didn't. I'm not sure. Leisure Koller, I don't know if they were in farming at all. Howard Folsom certainly wasn't. His dad was a doctor, or something. Harold Gross worked for the government. He wasn't in farming.

**Kay: I mean the people that worked for the people that started.**

Don: Yeah, oh yes.

**Kay: They had skills that they came with, otherwise this whole operation wasn't going to work.**

Don: Well, it's surprising that some of them did. The property that we bought was owned by Doman and that was supposed to be started, and his wife came up here with him. She would have no part of this business, so that's why it was abandoned. That's why we bought it after. It sat there for several years because the seven growers had 10 acres scalped off so each could start with their operation.

**Kay: Do you remember Harold Gross well?**

Don: A little bit, yes I do, yep. What I remember most about him, he loved Keshena dolls. He used to go out west and he'd have these Keshena dolls on his... remember that?

Jan: Yes.

Don: Okay. He was a nice enough guy. We used to go over there. He was a little different guy. He'd put his name on all the cranberry boxes we used to have. He'd have CCC on there. You know, different. He was the first grower that had his name on the side of the pickup even. Yeah, he was different. He certainly was not a grower. He was just an investor, but he wanted to do it right. But I remember him, sure. I was pretty young when he was there a lot. My dad was doing a lot of work on the cranberry marsh at that time so knew him.

Jan: He was still there when we were there because I remember him.

Don: Yeah. He had a place on Star Lake for a while.

Kay: He was a good friend of Floyd Christensen and Ross Daulby, my relatives. That's why I remember him.

Don: Yep, all those folks.

**Kay:** But back to that Finnish... what were some of the things, the cooking and things that you remembered?

**Don:** Well, I remembered, if you talk about my grandmother on my mother's side, all they had was a wood cooking stove, okay? We had the wood fire going all the time. That's how she cooked as long as I could remember, that's how she cooked. And she'd make always the best cinnamon bread and all this stuff. When you have a cook stove like that, you have to keep the fire going all day long. It keeps the hot water tank on the other side warm. But she always was a great cook. Whenever we went over there, she always catered to the kids, of course, so we always had something. She did not speak English. She always had her, just like my mother did, whenever anybody came over there was something to eat. They always came over and there was always a meal. That was sort of the things that you did at that time.

**Kay:** Put out a spread. Were there any special Finnish meals?

**Don:** Not that I remember, no. I guess, well at that time, they made a Finnish soup out of fish and potatoes. I remember that. But not any particular meal. Well, I guess I remember the pancake. My grandma made good pancakes all the time. Things like that, but nothing ethnic that would be a Finnish meal, that I know of anyway. It was all just good old home cooking. And she cooked for everybody because they were doing the logging. There were always loggers around so my grandmother did a lot of cooking for logging, people that were in the logging.

**Kay:** One of my fondest memories is my dad would take us over to your parent's place on the marsh and it seemed like forever they had baby deer in pens.

**Don:** Yeah, yep.

**Kay:** And we'd get to go over and pet them.

**Don:** Yep.

**Jan:** The peacocks, were they there when...?

**Kay:** They might have been, but for some reason the deer were my focus.

**Don:** Pet deer in a fence. That was Weber's idea.

**Kay:** Was it?

**Don:** Yeah, he wanted to have a deer fence. Weber owned that veneer factory in Shawano. Of course, you probably have all of that history.

**Kay:** I don't know that we do have that.

Don: Oh, well anyway, he owned the marsh and he never worked on the marsh himself. He had Ab Alexander managing it first.

**Kay: I remember Ab Alexander, too.**

Don: Okay, and I worked one summer with Ab. I worked on the marsh doing all the culture works that you do.

**Kay: He was his manager?**

Don: Yeah, he was the manager. Then when he left my parents moved out there. We lived out there all that while.

**Kay: So what do you remember about Ab Alexander?**

Don: I remember a lot about him. I worked for him and he worked hard. He and his wife were there.

**Kay: Do you remember her name?**

Don: Doneta. After Ab left the cranberry marsh and I was building my marsh, I had him do a lot of the drag line work. I hired him. I had different operators at different times, but he did a lot of work on our cranberry marsh scalping beds and putting in canals. After that he was doing a lot of work on the Powell Marsh. The state hired him. He did most of those canals that are on the Powell Marsh, Ab Alexander did. He used to come to our property to get there because you couldn't get out the other way. So he had his drag line out there and he'd come to our place after work sometimes and talk for a while.

Jan: A long time.

Don: A long time, yeah. (laughter) But I remember a lot about Ab. He and my dad were good friends too. My dad built, at that time when Ab was there, in fact I worked on the big warehouse that's there, the big barn that's there. So me and Charlie were doing the nailing so there was a lot of work being done at that time. Then I worked for Ab for one whole summer. In fact, the summer that I left in '54. He was very upset when I left to go to school because harvest was starting. But I left in September, I suppose. He was pretty mad that. Here he had me on all summer, which is right, but for whatever reason I just decided to go to school. But then we still got to be good friends with him and that's when I hired him to do all this work on the cranberry marsh.

**Kay: Was he from Necedah originally?**

Don: Yep.

**Kay: Because I know that he would be at Alderwood and I remembered him because he was always kind of friendly to kids. You know, kind of kidded around with you.**



Don: Yeah, he was a nice guy, a very kind hearted guy.

**Kay: But he did a lot of work on the Powell Marsh. That's interesting.**

Don: Yeah. He did a lot of the drag line work.

**Kay: And so when your dad took his place, he became the manager of the Weber.**

Don: Yeah, my dad did, yes.

**Kay: And then the Folsom connection was that... you probably talked about that.**

Don: Yeah, we did. Well, the Folsom connection was I started working for Howard. I was hired as a foreman. What was the date again? I forgot.

Jan: 1960. August of 1960.

Don: Yeah, I started work. We had a regular contract. I was getting paid so much and I would get paid so much a barrel as the harvest went on, as the years went on. That's how I started, just as a foreman. Just after three years is when Howard asked me if I wouldn't want to be a partner in starting this other property. So we went to the bank and borrowed \$50,000. \$10,000 to buy the property and the rest to get started developing it. At that time, he was pretty much an absentee owner, so I was doing all the work. He wasn't even there when we planted the first bed. I remember when Howard and his wife came back from Florida, she was so excited I already had one bed planted. She was a nice lady, really a nice, kind hearted lady.

**Kay: What an opportunity though that obviously you proved yourself. What a great opportunity!**

Don: Yes, that's what it was. Hard work and he knew that I was dedicated to what I was going to do. I worked hard and he became a very absentee owner after a while. I didn't see him. He'd come in. He'd come in from the Green Lake area where they lived. He was a gentleman. He always called ahead. He never came in at a drop of a hat. He'd call ahead and say, "I'm coming up." Then we'd have our meeting. We'd sit around the table and had coffee with cloth napkins and all this! (laughter) We'd talk about the business, what we'd end up doing, if there was anything that needed to be taken care of. I had both checkbooks for his marsh and for our partnership marsh and he checked all of those. He never said a word about what I spent or anything else as long as it was going. Never said a word.

**Kay: He just totally trusted you and you had such a good relationship.**

Don: It's like his son Bob told me a couple of times. He said, "You must have added 10 years to my dad's life," because he didn't have to do anything.

Jan: I don't know if they wanted you to get into that community service, or not.

**Kay: Sure!**

Don: Oh, okay. Where are we at here?

Janelle: Yeah, you have your notes I saw there.

Don: Well, Jan helped me with this. We thought we'd review this stuff and we're glad to get the questions ahead of time. I didn't know what this all involved and I don't have the best memory. Like I said, I'm not a story teller. Some people are. Anyway, if you want to take... The first community service, I was on the school board years ago and I was on the school board when we started North Lakeland School. Now that was quite a challenge. Manitowish Waters and Boulder were initiating it. We tried to convince Winchester and Presque Isle which was a little bit of a hassle for a while. But when the vote came through they supported it. And so that's when we started the school. And then I was on building committee with Palmer Hanson when we build the school. After that I was on the fire department. I worked with the volunteer firemen for a long time. I was a charter member of the Lions Club and also I was on the zoning board of adjustment for Manitowish Waters for, I don't know, 10 years or something until it got to be you needed a legal attorney to do anything so I got off at that time. Jan and I were both 4-H leaders for 15 years or more.

Kay: What was your major with 4-H?

Jan: You were wood working.

Kay: Wood working?

Don: Yeah, in high school I was. And I took all the math courses. I always thought I wanted to be a civil engineer. Like building roads and stuff. I could never afford that education. But I did have classmates that went on to be engineers. There were several of us that took all the advanced math courses in high school. Then I was a boy school leader for several years. Then I was on the building committee to the addition to the town hall, that big room. I was on that committee doing that. I actually conducted the first organizational meeting for the snowmobile club. Me and Ralph Hanson and Al Nelson were kind of active. So we decided to start it because we know the trails had to be groomed. People were going all over the place getting hurt with snowmobiles, so we knew we needed trails. So that's how that started. I don't know who the first president was. And then I was on the Alliance Board for many years. Then I've been parish counsel president for many, many years.

Don: Yeah. And I was on the building committee for the addition of the church.

Janelle: You've been on a lot of stuff!

Don: A lot of stuff behind the scenes.

Kay: But really important stuff.

Don: Yeah, like my brother Charlie. He's been president on probably every organization you can think of. And I was behind the scenes on most of it, a lot of this stuff.

**Janelle: All very important! What are some fun things you did in town? The business? Anything that was a lot of fun that you could get away and do?**

**Kay: As in part of the community?**

Don: Well, I'll tell you one thing we did a lot of. We built a lot of floats years ago for the parades.

**Kay: Harry and Alveena talked about that.**

Don: Yeah. The other thing, the firemen's dances that we had. Jan would make our costumes and I think we won first place many years from different costumes, all different ones. She would sew up all these costumes.

Jan: He would tell me what to do, you know, and I would sew them.

**Kay: Give an example.**

Jan: We were keystone cops. We were frogs.

Don: We were bunnies too.

Jan: Yeah, we were bunnies.

Don: The best one was, by far, was the frog costume. We fooled a lot of people with that costume. Nobody knew.

Jan: In fact, Ladigs had a party and they had frogs as their theme when they owned the property over on Rest Lake.

**Kay: (inaudible)**

Jan: ...and so they had a lot of frog things all over in their yard and in their house. So they invited us to this party and we knew there's a lot of people going to be there. I asked Bill, I said, "Would you mind if we came in costume?" I said, "We have the frog costumes." And I said, "We'd like to come as that." He said, "Sure! Go ahead!" So we did that. We drove over there and we put on the things that we had to by the car and walked over there.

Don: That costume was spats and all.

Jan: I had made the outfit. We wore green leotards. We had white gloves and I made spats and we wore with tennis shoes.

Don: And we had green hats.

Jan: We had the face masks which were frogs... I bought that.

Don: We had the face mask to cover the face.

Jan: And then we had the green hat and black canes. We painted the canes black. And so we walked into the party.

Don: We walked with the cane, like a frog.

Jan: And the people just couldn't get over this! They couldn't figure out who this was! We just walked around and mingled with the people and talked to them and everything. Then Dick and Trish Indermuehle did recognize who we were. They remembered. They didn't say anything and so we just left the party then and went back to the car and changed clothes. When we came back George Petrusha said, "You missed it!" (laughter) "You should have seen these frogs that came!" We said, "Really?" (laughter) We finally told them that it was us. They couldn't get over that! (laughter)

Don: But to get back, Jan made all these costumes for many years. We went to the firemen's dance, I can't remember all the costumes, different ones.

Jan: A lot of people borrowed them, too. I can remember Beth Kebl borrowed our frogs, and she borrowed I think the keystone cops, and used to go over to the casino when they had judging for costumes and things.

Don: Those were fun dances that the firemen's dances, the costume dances. Everybody came up with something different.

Jan: There were some terrific costumes over there.

**Kay: And that was usually done in the winter?**

Don and Jan: Yep.

Don: So you don't remember those at all.

**Kay: No, I wasn't around in the winter.**

Don: Okay. That was our fun times. It really was fun.

**Kay: I bet!**

Don: But aside from that, I did a lot of skiing and snowmobiling and snowshoeing.

Jan: Do you remember the parties after the election at the old town hall, that little building that the floor would just shake. They were dancing. I think Dolly, the Andrews, and them were over there. I think was Dolly Turpy playing the piano there too?

Don: Yep.

Jan: We'd all dance after the election.

Don: I don't know if you remember the old town hall. It was by the cemetery, the old town hall. It was just a long, big building.

**Kay: Just a little tall building.**

Don: Well, it wasn't so small. It was quite large.

Jan: Well, it wasn't too big.

**Kay: Well, more long.**

Don: Long in build, yes. There was a parties going on there. That's where, when I was in the boy scouts, that's where we always met was at the town hall there. That's where we started. Cal LaPort and Billy Mehl were scout leaders at the time. Tell you something interesting about Cal LaPort. I was passing my merit badge for cooking. We were on a canoe trip down the river going up to Manitowish. I passed my merit badge. I cooked spaghetti. So when I was all done I brought it to Cal. He took one look at and he said, "If you can eat it, you'll pass." (laughter)

**Kay: What are some of your memories about the school?**

Don: The school itself?

**Kay: The two room school, yeah.**

Don: I have good memories from it. We had good classes. The first 4 grades were in one room school. We had ice skating every recess and lunch hour, go out ice skating. We had Hayes was a lady that did the cooking. We had lunches downstairs. The only thing I didn't like about the whole thing, and they must have got a lot of surplus food, was sauerkraut. To this day I will not touch sauerkraut. Anyway, we always had a bottle of milk in a glass bottle. We had good meals all the time.

**Kay: Did she bake like real rolls?**

Don: I think she did too, yeah. Everything was good. Then when we got the two room school, Wally Engel was the teacher then. He was great with the kids. We always went out in the summer, especially, and played baseball. He would try to make a team out of us little guys. Winchester and I think Boulder

Junction they usually beat us all the time. I don't know if we ever won a game. They had bigger kids. I don't know if they stayed in school longer than we did. (laughter)

**Kay: They weren't as smart! (laughter)**

Don: We were all little guys it seemed like and we'd go there and these kids were so much bigger. They could hit the ball much further. Wally Engel worked hard to try to make a baseball team out of us. He'd go out skating with us every lunch hour all the time.

**Kay: Did you guys play a little hockey when you were skating?**

Don: No, we didn't play hockey much. I think we just skated. I'm not sure what all. We played hockey that I remember once. But we didn't have much time to be starting a sport. But then they had a lot of parties. Evening parties at the ice rink. Grown-ups would come so there'd be a lot of social stuff going out because there wasn't a whole lot to do. There wasn't any TV or anything else so you were looking for outside activities. The other thing we did a lot when we were in school, we use to ski behind a car down the road, on the back roads like Papoose Road and all these roads. There wasn't much traffic so somebody would be driving the car we'd ski behind.

**Kay: So you knew you could like let go if they were going too fast. (laughter)**

Don: But things like that.

Jan: But we did that also, not a lot, but we did do that with our kids when they were in the grade school. That we'd go over there skating in the evening, and they had the warming shack there.

Don: Yeah, there was a warming shack. They kept the wood fire going. We played a lot by playing snowballs and all that kind of stuff when we were kids. One time in grade school we were playing snowballs and it was one of the kids from the upper grades. I can't remember his name, but he was a nice guy, a big guy. He didn't wear gloves. He made snowballs and he hit me square in the nose. He came over and he picked me up and carried me into the school so the teacher could take care of my nose. (laughter)

Jan: You guys were little.

**Kay: So he felt bad.**

Don: Yeah, oh yeah. I knew he felt bad. He didn't wear gloves. Everybody else would wear gloves and that would make a soft snowball. When you make them with bare hands you make a hard snowball. And he was a big kid. He could throw hard. Anyway, I remember that. That was a traumatic thing. But he did come over and haul me into school so I could get patched up again.

**Kay: Do you remember any other teachers besides Engels?**

Don: Engel and yes, Mrs. Bart was our teacher for the one room school.

**Kay: Bart?**

Don: Yeah. I don't remember her first name. Mrs. Bart. Jim Bart was one of the sons. He was I think the same age as Charlie. I'm not sure. Jim LaPort and those guys were ahead of me. Mrs. Bart was a nice teacher, a very nice lady, but she couldn't control the kids. Those guys were kind of wild and climb out the window and do all kinds of stuff. But she did teach us and I always liked her. She did her best. That was the only teachers I really remember. There was one lady teacher. I don't recall. She wasn't there that long.

Jan: Wasn't there Mrs. Elles?

Don: Oh, Mrs. Elles was there. That's right. She was there for many years, Mrs. Elles. They owned Dietz's Station at that time. It used to be Elles. Yes, that's right. I forgot about her. In fact, she rode in the bus when my dad was driving bus for the carry-all like Suburban. He would pick her up on the way to school. I think he made 2 or 3 loads of children, bringing them in from this end. She was one of the passengers. She always road on the bus.

**Kay: So when you were in that one room for the first 4 grades, how did the teaching go? You're little. You got the next age groups. How did that work?**

Don: That's a good mystery. She had to teach every grade, every subject, and 8 grades in one room. All small classes. I think ours was one of the largest classes that I was in. I think it might have been 7 or 8. I'm not sure. I still don't know how she did it all. While she was teaching one, the class would go up there and be using the chalkboard. How she handed every subject. Kids had to learn everything they did and all the kids in one room.

**Kay: Do you remember older kids helping you with things?**

Don: Not so much. I remember a lot of homework. I always asked Charlie a lot of questions because he was older and went through it all. We brought a lot of homework home.

**Kay: How many years difference is there between you and Charlie?**

Don: About 13 months.

**Kay: Not much!**

Don: He was born in December and I was born in January. It seemed like me and Charlie did most things together because the next child was my sister. So we were kind of the older ones so it was all dumped on us. We did all the hard chores that had to be done and stuff like that.

Jan: But Audrey did the stuff in the house.

Don: Oh yeah. She had to work hard. Don't get me wrong. We all had to do dishes and clean up and do whatever else and all that kind of stuff. There was no doubt about that. Nobody sat around. Nobody was able to sit around without getting their rear end kicked! (laughter)

**Kay: How many total children?**

Don: There was 9 total that my mother had.

**Janelle: I got them all in age order.**

**Kay: Wow! That's a big family.**

Don: Yeah, and it's spread out.

**Kay: Well, I met your sister who was married to Bob Kovar, and she's just a young lady!**

Don: Yeah.

Jan: She was 3 when we got married. She was our flower girl.

Don: So it's quite a spread. I never really got to know those children very well. I was gone. My mother's still having babies! (laughter) I was gone during that period and didn't get home much after. I did for a while. What I tell people was when I was in college in Green Bay, I couldn't afford much. How I did my laundry, they had a mailing box. It had a card in the top. You'd flip it over and it'd be "return" one way and come back the other way. I would mail my laundry home. My mother would do it, put it in a box and mail it back. That went on for several years. The first couple years of my schooling because I couldn't afford to have it done over there. Somehow she got this box. It had two straps on it. You buckle them up. There's nothing else to it. Mailing must have been fairly reasonable. So I'd mail my stuff up. She'd do the laundry and it'd come back again, back and forth. Isn't that something?

**Kay: That's neat though.**

Don: To save money, my roommate and myself, for our lunch, in the winter time we would go to the grocery store and buy bread and lunch meat and put it between the window sill and the screen to keep it cool. Because I ran out of money usually by the end of week. But it was tough going for a while. As I worked more with the grocery store they started paying me more. I started out at 65¢ an hour. That didn't go very far.

**Kay: But you're a perfect example of a self-made man. I mean, you had that grit and you were determined. You wanted your schooling.**

Don: It still surprises me why I decided to just take off. But I guess I wanted to get out of Dodge. I still don't know what possessed me because I was kind of a home body kid. I never went out to the bars or went out with the guys cruising around. I didn't do any of that. The only thing I would do is once in a



while I'd go to a movie in Woodruff here or something. But I never went out. You wonder why things happen. It's like an evolution of some kind.

Jan: But you did it yourself though. You worked very hard.

Don: I saved. I didn't spend my money. When we were kids even growing up we had to buy our own clothes. Even when we worked yard work and everything else like that.

**Kay: You had to earn everything you...**

Don: Yeah. I never went to the dentist until I could afford to do it and that was in high school. By then I had some cavities that needed attention. So we never got any help, ever. All of our clothes we had to buy our self. When we were young there was always Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Wards and JCPenney, these great big thick catalogues. You probably remember those.

**Kay: Yes.**

Don: So that's the only way we got our clothes was just ordering them.

Jan: But like you said, everybody else was in the same boat in this area here.

Don: Pretty much, yeah. Well, most of them had electricity and plumbing in their home long before we did.

Jan: But they didn't have a lot of money.

Don: No. They didn't have a lot of money and everybody worked hard. In fact, I worked on the building when the airport was first started. My dad was kind of involved in building that first hanger here, so I worked on that with him because I used to tag along a lot when he went to work. They were starting their airport here and making the runways and all that stuff. That was a long time ago.

**Kay: In a way, when you grow up that way, you realize at a young age that you're not entitled. What you get is what you do.**

Don: Everybody is worried about entitlements, you're right.

Jan: He's still working 5 days a week.

Don: Yeah, I like going to work. It's something to do.

**Kay: It's kind of an example of the American dream.**

Don: Yeah, that's exactly what it is. When I think about it, that's exactly what it was. It started out here and now we have a home in Arizona and things like that which I never dreamed I'd ever have. Really a

milestone was when we could pay cash for a car without making payments for it. Things like that. But I did buy a lot of property. That helped a lot. Jan always said, "If you buy any more I'm going to divorce you!"

**Kay: But it's good investment. My husband buys property too.**

Jan: Bob Dickerson was very good to you.

Don: I bought property from him. He had a lot of property, Bob Dickerson did. He said, "Just pay me when you can." He'd charge me interest, but said, "Pay me when you can." He wanted me to buy all that property on Old Manitowish Lake. So I bought 2 lots from him I think it was. He said, "You should buy it all." And I should of.

**Kay: Yeah, should of, would of, could of.**

Don: We were already buying it up. Then I was able to buy all that property around Bolon Lake and that big block of land from Weber. He was a nice guy. He thought I could probably start my own cranberry marsh. That was the thought. My dad was working for him at that time, so I was able to buy all that property around Bolon Lake which is probably 3 - 400 acres or more. I can't remember. Right now I own about 500 acres with the cranberry marsh and all that land. I guess we were developing the new marsh and it was just more than we could chew. So we kept going with that. It's unfortunate that I didn't grandfather it in. All I would have had to do was dig a canal around it. It would have been grandfathered in. But now they can't plant any more acres. Ocean spray won't accept any more. You could plant them but where are you going to sell them.

Jan: It depends on the property because you can't plant them on that property.

Don: No, not any more. And in order to get into wetlands now you have to mitigate. For every acre you take if I was to develop it, I'd have to mitigate two acres someplace else and that's about \$40,000 an acre. So the wetlands I got are basically useless as far as just for hunting and some timber on it, quite a bit of timber on it. As far as development, you can't touch it. And the state really wants it. If you look at their Powell Marsh plan, it draws it all the property all around Bolon Lake and all of that. When you get right down to it, they're going to own it someday. My son's going to get it. If he doesn't have a family, he's going to sell it to somebody else. And pretty soon the state's going to own this whole block of land. That's how it goes. Nobody is going to want it. Now somebody might. There is some people buying a lot of land, that's what I'm saying, in certain areas.

Don: What else do we have to discuss?

**Janelle: Do you think you covered everything in your notes? I'm looking at the questions.**

**Kay: What about high school? Can I ask you that? I mean, being a kid in Manitowish Waters and having to commute back and forth, was that a hardship at all?**

Don: No, it really wasn't a hardship. We enjoyed the bus rides a lot. It was a rough ride because that highway was terribly rough. We played cards on the bus a lot. I got to be a pretty good Smear player. We had a good time on the bus. The kids always behaved. We never had a rowdy bunch in there for all that time. And as I told Janelle earlier, Ken Perkins was the bus driver for all those years. He took us to all our games to Superior and Hurley games. At that time Hurley had a fantastic basketball team. They went to state a couple of times when I was there, and so it was exciting to go to all the basketball games. The ride up there wasn't bad. We were probably more fortunate because we were the last ones on the ride. The other kids were picked up all over town here. It was a small bus like you might call it 3 quarter size bus. It wasn't a big bus. It wasn't a big one like you see on the roads now.

**Kay: So did you go to high school in Hurley?**

Don: Yeah.

Jan: But you were never able to join in any activities or sports.

Don: No sports there. That was the only thing. Vernon Roe tried. I remembered him. And he'd come back on the train to Manitowish and somebody would have to pick him up. But no, as far as afterschool activities, or sports or anything else, I never got into that at all. That was unfortunate because I never did get into any sports of any kind. The only sport I did that I loved a lot was skiing and then we bowled. I belonged to a bowling league when I was in Green Bay. Then Hanson's had a bowling league here. After we skied in the winter time sometimes we'd have to hurry back and start bowling in Woodruff at the lanes.

**Kay: Did you bowl too?**

Jan: Yes.

Don: She used to bowl a lot too, yeah. We all bowled a lot, yeah.

Jan: I used to bowl with the Monday Morning League with the women. I never bowled steady all the time. I was a substitute, but I bowled a lot. I had one 282 game! (laughter)

**Kay: Pretty good! Awesome!**

Don: I never got that far! But we did win the championship in Green Bay one time, our team did. I bowled with a team from the store.

**Kay: So if you had to wrap it up about choosing to live in rural northern Wisconsin your whole lives, would you ever have regretted that?**

Don: No, never.

Jan: Never.

Don: I had to think, Jan maybe was a little reluctant at first, but after we lived here for a while and had kids, I think she was happy that we were here. I always worried about that, whether she would adjust. But I know what she came from a hard working family too. But that used to enter my mind a little bit. Is that going to work or not?

Jan: It worked.

Kay: It worked! (laughter)

**Janelle: It did! 60 years!**

Don: Yeah. It was team work.

**Kay: You've been married 60 years?**

Jan: Yeah.

**Kay: Wow! Congratulations!**

Jan: 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Thank you!

**Janelle: Thank you very much!**

Jan: Oh, you're welcome!

**Kay: What a great life to hear about.**

Don: Yes, it was a good life. There's no doubt about that.

**Kay: That's what so neat about this is all these pieces of people's lives, and then they connect with other people.**

Don: Being born and raised in that cabin and going to where we are now is a milestone.

Jan: We keep that on our big picture wall so that he always remembers that where he came from.

**Kay: But there must have been something in that cabin that gave you the oomph!**

Don: Yeah. Well it...

**Kay: You know, you think about people can live without a lot of things.**

Don: Yeah, we didn't miss it. We played cards a lot in the evening, and we played cards by kerosene lamps. We didn't have electricity. And I do remember my mother always had me clean these stacks or whatever you call it.

**Kay: Chimneys.**

Don: Chimneys on the kerosene lamp. They always got sooted up and black. I had to clean those. It was a way of life. That's all there was too it. You enjoyed it. Like I said, I had a happy childhood.

Jan: I didn't know if you wanted that family picture, or not?

**Janelle: Yeah!**

Don: Sometime you may want to get a look at this.

**(End of Recording)**



**Donald and Janice Rayala Family:** Front row; Scott Rayala, Deb Rayala, Don Rayala, Jan Rayala.  
Back row; John Ellis, Trish Ellis, Cathy Howard French, Amy Balas, Dan Rayala.