

EARL T. “BING” BARKS

Wayne: Today is Monday, September 19th, 2022. I'm Wayne Summers and today I'm interviewing Earl "Bing" Barks at his home in Olive Township. Also present is his wife, Mary. I believe you have the nickname of Bing. Why don't you tell how you got that?

Earl: I don't know. My mother [Elsa] said that when I was small, I used to hit the crib and I'd say, “bing, bing, bing!”

Mary: Well see, that's not what she told me.

Earl: What'd she tell you?

Mary: She said you had a little toy gun and you'd go around with a little toy gun and point it and say “bing, bing, bing!”

Earl: Well, okay. You say what you want.

Mary: Make up your own.

Wayne: One of those stories. Apparently from a young child, you were always --.

Earl: The mail man come back. It's been a lot of years ago now and he come up to the house. “Who, the devil is Earl Barks?” My wife said, “That's my son.” And he said, “I never heard him called that. It's always been Bing.”

Wayne: When did your ancestors first come to Clinton County?

Earl: Dad [Lyle] bought over there in 1929. He come to Lansing ahead of that a little bit, probably back in the teen's, but Dad bought the farm over there in 1929.

Wayne: Where was this at?

Earl: That was over on old US-27 and it'd be a DeWitt address. You've gone by it a million times.

Wayne: So is it in DeWitt Twp.?

Earl: Olive Twp.

Mary: South of Alward Lake Road.

Earl: We lived there. Well, that's where I went to school all the years and that's where I met Mary.

Wayne: Which school did you go to?

Earl: Little Olive. It was a rural school and it was there on Pratt Road and I went there and then I went to St. Johns to high school. I went to MSU for a year of college, which probably didn't do me any good at all.

Wayne: Were you in the service at all?

Earl: I got rejected at the service and I think it's because I lost a finger and I think that's probably why they rejected me. I don't know.

Wayne: How did you lose the finger?

Earl: In a combine. I thought the belt was off the pulley. I reached up and jiggled the belt a little bit and it wasn't off in the pulley. It picked my finger up and took my finger through the V belt right through the pulley.

Wayne: Why did your parents come here? Where did they come from?

Earl: Mother was from New York and Dad was from southern Michigan. I suspect it was probably because of Dad's job that he come here. Dad was a construction person and he worked on the Sanford Dam and the Edenville Dam up there. That's when they come into this area. They lived in Lansing, I guess, when he was working on the dams. Nevertheless, they bought the farm there in '29, which was a very poor timing because of the depression. They had a pretty hard struggle trying to keep the whole thing together but the people that they was buying from was very gracious and Dad went to 'em and said, "I can't make the payments," and they said, "Well, are you eating?" Dad said, "Yeah," and they said, "Well, you're better off than most."

I took the farm over in about 1948, I guess, and started cropping it. As a kid, I'd go up to the stock yards and I'd buy a few cattle and stuff and drag them back to the farm. Dad always thought I probably got an advantage 'cause when I'd start bidding on it as a kid, the other people would kind of back away, and Dad figured I got a few cattle a little cheaper than I probably should have got 'em. I didn't know that at the time and I'm still not sure about it but seemed like I paid enough.

Wayne: Were these beef or milking?

Earl: No, beef. Dad milked a few cows but he quit in 1939 and we never milked no cows after that. I used to milk one cow so we'd have milk there in the house. I'd go down and milk it morning and night and, of course naturally, bring it up to the house. Back then we had a--I'd have to call it a separator--but we dumped the milk in the top of it and the cream would rise to the top and Mother would skim that cream off and then we'd churn it for butter. During the World War II there, we always had butter and milk and all that stuff because we had our own. Same with beef. We always killed one of the cattle that I'd buy when they get big enough. So we done pretty well through the war where a lot of people was dealing with rationing and one thing and another and having to get their coupon stamps out. We had most of what we needed right there on the farm without having to go outside and try to deal with the rationing end of it.

Wayne: As a farmer, did you get extra rations for fuel, for example?

Earl: Yes, we didn't lack never for fuel. We had a Ford tractor. We bought it in '39 and that's when Ford started making that tractor. We bought the tractor in '39 and then in '48 I bought my own tractor. It was a Case Vac. We had our own gas pump on the farm. We didn't lack for fuel or anything to farm with. I had a 116-bottom plow and it would take me four days to plow a 20-acre field with that. I don't know how many times I plowed that farm but Dad had 80 acres there then. Dad really didn't care about farming at all so basically, it got turned over to me at a very early age and Mother and I kind of run the farm and Dad worked in town.

Wayne: When did you kind of take over the farm then? How old were you?

Earl: Well, I'd a been kind of a sophomore in high school and I was probably 16 or 17. My desire always was to farm. I loved farming and I would imagine probably back in about 1946.

Wayne: Was it difficult, particularly this time of year in the fall, when you were trying to do school and take care of the farm at the same time?

Earl: The farm was always first; schooling was second. The principal up to the high school--he'd see me skip out of school about 1:30 and he knew I was going home and he never give me any hassle. He just left me alone and I'd go out to the highway and I'd put my thumb in the air and hitchhike way back home. A lot of times it was the same person that would pick me up. They were going to Lansing or something on a routine schedule. They'd see me out there hitchhiking and so they'd pick me up. Same with going in in the morning. I got so that I never rode the bus. I always liked to hitchhike.

Wayne: Did you have any bad experiences hitchhiking?

Earl: No.

Wayne: People have kind of horror stories of people who picked them.

Earl: Back then it was quite common. Yeah, hitchhiking was quite common. There were a lot of good people back then. Let's put it that way. Today hitchhiking's kind of an undesired art, so to speak 'cause who's gonna pick you up? Dad went out west and would buy horses and Dad talked about he picked up a hitchhiker. Dad was tired and he asked the guy--he said, "Do you want to drive?" And the fella said, "yeah," and Dad got over and went to sleep and let the fella drive. So I'm sure you wouldn't do that today.

Wayne: I can't imagine during that today.

Earl: But no, back then was kind of common.

Wayne: Were you born in a hospital or at the farm?

Earl: On the farm. That was common back then also. I was born [1934] in the home and I had a sister [Edna] that was 12 years older than I was. She was around there for a few more years and then she got married and left, but that's kind of a little bit of my history.

Wayne: It was just the two of you as far as children?

Earl: Yes.

Wayne: So you were the spoiled youngster?

Earl: That's what we always said. I was this little brat! My sister used to get real irritated with me.

Wayne: How many cattle did you have?

Earl: Probably 25 or so I suspect, and then as years went on, we kept getting more and more. In '54 we got married and a year later we bought an 80-acre farm and then I put in about 150 head a cattle and I really got heavy into hogs. We run about 2,000 head of hogs a year. That was over on the farm, the 80 acres that I bought. I guess times was just about right for me because I bought the 80 across the road from me at that time and then I bought the 80 on down the road from me at that time and then there was another 40 there that I bought. The Federal Land Bank--that's what they called the loaning thing—they were very good to me. I tried to carry a debt load of about a half a million.

In 1956, I was trucking grain to Battle Creek, and the gentleman that run the elevator down there--the elevator in DeWitt had burnt down and so that's why we were direct trucking it—and he come to me the one morning when I brought a load in and he says, “Bing, why don't you build an elevator?” And I said, “I ain't got no money.” And he said, “Well, if I get you the money, will you build the elevator?” I said, “Well, I'd think about it.” “ Well,” he said, “think about what you want to build,” and he said, “Come tomorrow morning, just a little bit better dressed than you are now” and he said, “I'll take you to Fort Wayne, Indiana. He says, “I think we can get money down there.” So we did. I rode down. The fella's name was Max and they had a big chain of elevators down there in the Battle Creek area at that time. We went to Fort Wayne and I talked to the fellow down there and he said, “I'll give you \$35,000 to build the elevator, and I said, “I think I can do that.” So we come back home and we built what was Dewitt Grain over there now. It's still there and it's went through two owners since.

Wayne: Is that on Round Lake Road?

Earl: Yes. We built that and started to run it and then I had a gentleman come along about three years later and he said, “Would you sell the elevator to me?” I said, “Well, I guess I would.” So I told him what I wanted for it, and he said, “Well, I don't have no money.” So he said, “If you'd work with me, I'll take it.” So he run it for 20 some years and he was making payments to me along. So that's a little bit of my history.

It was a kind of a lucky thing we got out of the elevator when we did because it wasn't too long after that your bigger elevators started coming in and calling them terminals, one thing another,

and the little elevators kind of got crowded out. The DeWitt elevator stayed open for quite a few more years but it got down to the point where they were grinding feed and selling dog food and stuff like that and taking in of grain got to be pretty limited. So consequently, I was lucky to get out when I did. I sold the place to Boughton and then Boughton sold it to Seyfried. Seyfrieds still own it today and they use it for their own private use. I don't think they buy any grain and I don't think they grind any feed or anything anymore there. I think they use it so solely for their own use. I believe so. Anyway, that was kind of a history on that.

A few years later, the area around me there on Pratt Road in Olive Twp. started getting kind of built up, so we moved six miles to the north up here and bought 215 acres and then there was another 80 down the road and I bought that. Again, Federal Land Bank was involved and they loaned us the money. Mary and I had three boys that come along and I guess we started in farming and the boys started in buying ground as they got a little bit older and we got to be a fair size farm over here. We're still farming yet today. I've kind of pretty much quit. About a year ago, I would've been 88. That was pretty much the last of my farmin. They're pretty much doing it all now but they picked up quite a lot of ground and I picked up quite a lot of ground along down through the years. I never bought a piece of ground that my wife didn't say, "We don't need it. We're not gonna buy it. We're not gonna go in debt!" Did you hear me, Hon?

Wayne: How many acres does your family own now altogether?

Earl: I think around 5,000.

Wayne: It's a nice size.

Earl: In in this area, I think we own about 5,000. The boys own a lot more than I do.

Wayne: Is it in four different townships that it's extended to now 'cause you know, you're in the corner of Olive right now?

Earl: Yeah. If I look across the road, that's Bingham and then if I look to the east and maybe we got Victor and Ovid, so we're right here with all four townships and we own ground on all four of these corners down here but we've expanded quite a little bit. We've rented quite a lot of ground down through the years and we still rent a little. We probably rent 1,000 acres, I suppose.

Wayne: Did you give up animals then when you moved here? I don't think you have them today, do you?

Earl: When I moved over here, I figured on building a feed lot for steers and the market didn't look good to me so I didn't do it that year. I thought, well, next year maybe it'll look better and it didn't look any better to me the next year. So after two or three years, we forgot about the animals. Now I got a grandson that come along and he's got a beef feeding operation and he's had as many as 700 head. I think presently, he's got around 300 head over there on the farm. It was another one of them farms that the boys bought and it was an old dairy operation. I guess that he kind of moved in, the grandson did, and the next thing we knew he was getting some cattle and the next thing we knew that seemed to be his desire. As I say, he feeds quite a few over there and that's kind of another story.

Wayne: How did you get involved in politics?

Earl: We had a supervisor in our township that, I guess maybe I'd have to say he kind of played favorites and one thing another. Somebody come to me, I suppose, maybe Neil Harte and said, "Bing, would you run for supervisor?" I said, "No, I'm not a bit interested." I had been on Board or Review so I wasn't totally ignorant to what the supervisor's job was because of being on Board of Review. But at any rate, I run and everybody said that running against an opponent, I wouldn't win. Well, I won by a landslide and I was supervisor for 54 years and I'm back on Board of Review again now. So I got demoted down to that but we've always tried to be fair with the people in the township. I know that when I first took over as supervisor, we would have 25-30 come into Board of Review. The Board of Review's job was to look at their taxes and see if they was being fairly treated. Towards the tail end of my being supervisor, it got down so we'd have two or three come into Board of Review. In the last two, three years, we hired a new assessor and last year we didn't have anybody come into Board of Review and the year before, we had one person come into Board of Review. I think they're being treated fairly. Consequently, that's kind of where we're at. Eric Voisinet took over as supervisor and I think that he's doing a fine job. Back when I took over, he was supervisor and assessor. If you want to go way back when I took over, we used to have to go around to the farms and assess the farm equipment too because that was personal property and that was on the tax roll. Well, that got eliminated back quite a lot of years ago, the farm personal, so we didn't have to assess that. I always tried to be as fair as I could with everybody.

Wayne: Did you need any special training to assess?

Earl: No, it was more common sense than anything else. Now, today it's got so that you've gotta have the license and one thing and another. The last two years that I was assessor, I had to go to school every year for a period of time but we just tried to always be fair. I remember one fellow on the Board of Review and he made a remark the one time, something about, "Well, we'll see the same person next year." And I said, "Well, not if I can help it." I said, "I'll try to get it all worked out ahead of time." We didn't put him back on Board of Review because we figured that if he had that kind of an attitude that you was gonna have to come to Board of Review, we didn't need him. We wanted it fair to start with.

I could tell you a lot of stories about Board of Review, way back. It got better and better as we went on and really today Board of Review's there and that's for the person that's feeling that they're being taxed unfairly can come in and talk to the three members on the Board of Review and see if they can get their reasoning in so that they should be lowered. We've tried to always treat the people in the township fairly and I think most townships are that way today. I think that they are a lot more listening and one thing or another. We might get a new house once in a while built. We've had quite a few houses built in the township while I was supervisor. We might get somebody that comes in with a new house that don't understand anything or that we've got him into the wrong tax bracket. I know a year ago at Board of Review, we had a gentleman come in and he felt his house was a little bit high and in reviewing it, we thought that he was a grade too high, so we lowered him and the best of my knowledge, I think he went home happy. That's kind of where we're at.

Wayne: What do you think are some of the biggest accomplishments that you saw for Olive Twp. over the 50 years?

Earl: I think probably roads. When I took over, it was not uncommon in the spring of the year for a car to get stuck in the middle of the road and it had to be drug out. With my board's approval, we put in 30 some miles of blacktop road while I was supervisor. I know a couple times I would bring roads to the township board and say, "I want to blacktop that." And they said, "Well, that's not our road. That's the county's road." You've got two levels of road here. Well, we actually got three levels, putting the highway into it. You got your secondary' then we got the township roads. The secondary roads, the county's supposed to take care of them. I don't know if they didn't have money enough but for a while, we had a couple roads that was quite heavily traveled, Alward Lake Road being one of them. We had cars getting stuck in it and everything else. I went ahead and talked to the County Road Commission, said, "If we give you a little bit of money, will you blacktop it?" They said, "Yeah, if you give us a little bit of money." So we did and that's how Alward Lake Road got blacktopped going to the east was because the township put money into it. We had Pratt Road in the township, and again that was a primary road, but we put some money into that and got that blacktopped. We ended up with 30 some miles of the road blacktopped while I was supervisor and the roads here are a lot better. Our road commission is a lot better and they seem to keep the roads graded a little bit better than they used to. We seem to maintain them quite a lot better than we used to so. We've had a lot of help. Also we put a lot of roads in because the township was willing to put some money into 'em.

Now the town hall, that was another accomplishment we had. We used to be out on the corner of Pratt and 27 and we had an old town hall like most of the townships did back then. We built a room onto it shortly after I was supervisor. Then a few years later, the school half a mile to the west come up for sale. I said, "Let's buy that for a township hall." It was a modern building. It was built in 1956 and so we put a bid in on it and we were very fortunate. We got the building along with 10 acres there that's under the building. We didn't have to do any remodeling or anything at that time and we moved. It was 1988 we moved into that for our town hall and it's presently the town hall yet that the township's using.

It had a flat roof on it when it was built as a school and that roof, about every three years you'd have to go in and retile the roof because it would leak. We had a contractor in the area that I knew quite well and we--I think we put it up for bids. I think we had to in order to do that but we asked him to come over and bid on it and we put a roof onto it. We didn't necessarily have any blueprints or anything, but when he got to work onto it, he said, "I don't like the looks of this." He said, "Let's do a little bit more work on the front of it so it's got a little bit of style to it." So he changed the design up on the front of the town hall to give it a little bit more style. I'm awful glad he did because it made it look a whole lot better than what it would've looked if we'd had done what we were trying to do. It's the town hall that we're using today. It's where we vote. It's on Pratt Road and there's ample room there for expansion. So that's kind of the history of that.

Wayne: Do they still own the 10 acres around it?

Earl: Yes.

Wayne: Have they developed any of those 10 acres?

Earl: It was a long, narrow 10 acres and the back 5 of it was kind of swampy and it just come with it.

Wayne: So only about half of it is actually usable.

Earl: About half of it. Well then a few years ago, they come out there and built a fire station on the other corner of the property. So that's how that fire station got there is because we had the property and we turned it over to the fire department out of Dewitt. Olive Township's a member of that fire department. They take care of our fire needs here in the township and so we've been real fortunate there. They've been a very good group to work with. You don't know how long it'll last but hopefully it'll last for a long time.

Wayne: Weren't you involved with some county offices too?

Earl: Yes, I was on zoning shortly after I took over as supervisor. I was on the Zoning Board up there and then, a little bit later on, I also got put on the county's Appeal Board up here at the county level. Well, then we had an association for all the supervisors and we kind of traded that around a little bit but I was head of that for a couple, three different terms. So I was involved with that. I still am. They still invite me in and two weeks ago I was to a meeting and I see that we're scheduled for another one in early October. Our supervisor, if he don't go, I'll go in his place.

So it's kind of changed a little bit. It used to be for the supervisors and there's only one or two left in Clinton County that the supervisor actually does the assessing. The rest of 'em is all hired assessors and a lot of that reason being the state has got so demanding on what you gotta do to be a supervisor that most of us finally give up on the hours that we had to go to school. I don't know that it makes you any better supervisor than you'd have been but that's what the state's demanding of you. That's really the only township office that you have to have schooling and you gotta pay a license to be and so on to the State of Michigan. The rest of 'em are still voted in by the people as well as the supervisor is voted in by the people, but you have to have a license from the state in order to be supervisor and it got to be quite demanding as to what they demanded of you. So most of us give it up and hired an assessor for the townships.

Wayne: Did you ever go swimming on Alward Lake then?

Earl: Yeah, when I was a youngster, I used to do a lot of swimming in Alward Lake. Billy [William L. St. Clair, 1902-1958], over there, he run it. I think that was his only income and it cost me a nickel to go swimming in Alward Lake every time and I'd go over there at least two, three nights a week. There'd always be a group of us that would go over there and go swimming and we had a lot of good times.

Wayne: Did he sell anything besides just the nickel to swim?

Earl: No, he would rent a picnic area over there. Way back, and this was almost ahead of me, they used to cut ice off from Alward Lake in chunks or blocks and they had what they called an icehouse over there. They'd try to cut it into 50-pound blocks of ice and they would put sawdust

between the ice so that they didn't freeze together and on top of that it would insulate them. The people around, because back then I know we used to go and get a block ice every once in a while, make ice cream with it. There was a lot of people had ice boxes back then. That's how they kept their food cold. Billy would pack that house full of ice. I don't remember how long it would hold during a summertime but I suspect probably there was still ice in there pretty much through the whole summer or early fall. There's been a lot of changes.

Then Billy passed away and it got sold to Mrs.--- oh, I can't think of what her name was. She run it for a few years and that was kind of the history of Alward Lake. Then it got sold and it's got houses built around part of it. On the east side you'd have trouble getting down to the lake because of the muck area that laid in there. We had a lot of good times as kids there. When we used to go to the rural schools, we'd go over there for our picnic in the spring and that would be about the first time that we jumped in the water. That would be in latter part of April and the water was still pretty cold but most of us kids didn't seem to mind it.

Wayne: Were there changing houses there, rooms or something? Were there places there to change into swimming or out of swimming suits?

Earl: Yeah, they let it go back to being a lake.

Wayne: What was the beach like there? Was it more of a muck?

Earl: No, Billy used to haul in a few loads of sand in the wintertime and they dumped it out on the ice and then of course, when the ice would go out, the sand would go down and it'd be there and make a halfway decent beach. On Alward Lake where we'd swim, if you went out about 30 foot you was in over your head anyway, so you only had to keep sanded about the first 30 foot of it. He had a diving board there and one thing and another built up. There was the old bathhouse. He used to rent boats and people fished there. As a community, we kind of enjoyed the lake because it was kind of a recreational place.

Wayne: I've talked to people who would come up there from Dewitt also.

Earl: That's correct.

Wayne: Some, I think, they would take the interurban up and then walk over.

Earl: That train that this gentleman's talking about quit running in 1929. It went almost right down the edge of Alward Lake. Loomis Road is part of where the train track was back then and that train that he's talking about used to run between St. Johns and Lansing. I don't know how many trips it made. I don't know that my folks ever rode on that at all because it closed about the time that they bought the farm out there. There was a time that we used to--and we didn't as a farm--but a lot of the farmers in the area would carry their milk down to a place and put it on a dock down there and the train would stop and pick that milk up and take it into Lansing. That was back through the 20's and I don't know how much further back it went. That I don't know. The old interurban used to run between St. Johns and Lansing and I don't think it ever went north of St.

Johns that I can remember. I don't know of anything up there at least. I suspect there was a lot of people that that's how they got to Lansing from St. Johns.

Wayne: Now, did you ever go to Muskrat Lake at all or not?

Earl: Well, it was over there but it was kind of mucky and we never used it for much swimming. I probably swam in at a time or two. "Mushrat" Lake is what it was called in the neighborhood and that was kind of a pretty good name for it, I guess. It was kind of a swampy area over there. There used to be a dance hall back then on Mushrat Lake that was very, very popular. It kind of went out about the time when I was still in my teen's. The dance hall over there on Mushrat Lake kind of went to the end and then you had the Olive Grange. That was another one and that was on DeWitt Road. I can remember as a kid being in that a time or two, and again, that was kind of a community gathering place back there in the 20's and 30's. It still might have been open about as long as about 1950. The building still stands there but the roof's all caved in on it now. I think that it was still there in the middle 50's as a usable building but that was about the end of it.

Wayne: I was surprised when I go by there that it's still standing. As far as churches in Olive Twp., I know there was a North and a South Olive Methodist Church at one time. Were there any others?

Earl: Well, the Wilsey Church in the Wilsey Cemetery, which the church itself is still there, but it has been converted over into a house a few years ago. For a few years back there, we used it for a 4-H building and we'd meet over there and do 4-H crafts, woodwork and stuff. That would've probably been back in about the very late 40's, very early 50's is when that would've been. Then it set empty there for a few years and then it got sold and the gentleman that's as got it now converted it to a house and he built a garage beside of it. The Wilsey Cemetery, it's our biggest cemetery in Olive Twp. We've got three cemeteries. The Wilsey's by far the bigger, and then we got the one up on Price Road [Merrihew], and then we got little Olive and that's over on DeWitt Road and Alward Lake Road. I think there was one burial in it in the last 50 years that I can remember and I don't remember what the circumstances of that was but I think there was one burial there.

Wayne: Do you remember the old church building that--I believe it was demolished when they put 27 through that used to be-- I think was up by around Price Road and 27. I'm not sure when that was.

Earl: You're going way back.

Wayne: That may have been way, way back.

Earl: I've only heard about it.

Wayne: Because there was a school, I know, across the road.

Earl: Yeah. Merrihew. Yeah, that's over there.

Wayne: I think it was like kitty corner. I think I read somewhere that it may have gotten moved and been used for something else or something but that's where the highway went through.

Earl: Well, Louie Brya had a house there on the corner and they tore that down for the highway. Then on the other side would've been a Brya and they moved that house back. No, the only other church I know of in Olive Twp. is Price Church over here and that's on Price Road. That's in Olive.

Wayne: Okay. I was thinking it might be in Victor, right?

Earl: No, It's in Olive and the other thing is for that church, it got struck by lightning and then they rebuilt it back but I can't tell you when it got struck by lightning. Then on the other corner, and that would've been in Victor, there was a grocery store over there on that corner. I can't tell you much about that. I got stuff in my office on that.

Wayne: Were there any other grocery store corners in Olive Township then?

Earl: Well, the tavern on Alward Lake Road and 27 and that's still up there now but that got moved back in 1950 when they went through with the road and they rebuilt it back. Of course, you had the gas station across the road there from it.

Wayne: When did the golf course come in? I know it's not there anymore.

Earl: No, we own it but Archie Magsig's the one that built that. I combined them fields back for Archie. Archie come out of the military in '48; maybe '50 is when he come out of the military. He went to work for Motor Wheel, Archie did. Then he started building that golf course. I hauled him a load of fertilizer, I remember, from Saginaw down and we unloaded it there in his barn and he used that on some of the greens, but him and Donna--. Donna moved out of there. Archie died quite a long time ago but Donna lived there until probably 15 years ago, I suppose. The house is still there that Donna had. Well, the buildings are still there. He built that golf course. Do you remember, Hon?

Mary: What, the golf course?

Earl: It had to be in the middle 50's because I hauled fertilizer out of Saginaw down to him.

Mary: We were married, I know.

Earl: We got married in 54, you and I did. There, boy, I had that down!

Mary: It's the date that you should be concerned about, not the year, the date.

Earl: We've been married 68 years. We've been married a day or two.

Wayne: It sounds like it's gonna last then.

Mary: I don't know!

Earl: Her aunt said it probably wouldn't last but we're still here.

Mary: Just to spite them.

Earl: We're too dang ugly to get out. Let's put it that way. No, it's been a good ride.

Mary: Yeah. He tells me he just don't want split property, that's all.

Wayne: He probably should buy a little bit more property.

Mary: No, I don't think so.

Earl: Yeah, I think I would for the right price at the right day. Yeah, sure.

Earl: Yeah, I would. Yeah.

Mary: Well, I'll tell you, we have two checking and savings accounts and his name isn't on mine.

Wayne: So what do you do with your money?

Mary: I bank it.

Wayne: And he spends it?

Mary: Yeah!

Earl: My banking account's usually pretty low; her's, pretty good shape.

Mary: Once in a while he'll buy a new pickup and want borrow money from me, but he doesn't have the habit of ever paying it back.

Earl: We don't have too many regrets. We got two daughters-in-law that are both in the nursing profession and we got a granddaughter in-law that's studying for the nursing, anesthesiologist.

Mary: She's an anesthesiologist.

Earl: Anesthesiologist is what she's studying for. I married them just about a year ago right now, October. Yeah, it was October the second or third when I married them.

Wayne: You married them, you said?

Earl: Yeah.

Wayne: So do you also have a minister's credentials then?

Earl: Yeah.

Wayne: Oh, okay. I didn't hear about that. How did that come about?

Earl: Mary and her mother used to go to the church over to Rose Lake and I used to go to DeWitt. I got disgusted with DeWitt because the pastor moved out, Reverend Bretz. You've probably heard that name, I would think. Now Reverend Bretz was there and I always figured he could walk on water. I knew I was wrong but anyway he moved to a church down on Valley Farms so Mary and I went down there with him. We went a couple Sundays and it just wasn't the same. That was a Baptist church down there, wasn't the same. My mother-in-law, she went over to Rose Lake and so we started going over there and that wasn't too long and I joined a church over there.

Then I wanted a church in St. Johns of the same faith so I got busy and I finally got the hierarchy to consent to us being able to start a church in St. Johns right there on the corner of old US-27 and Railroad Street. We run that, I think, for about three years, I believe.

Then I wanted to build a new church and the new church is there now. I asked the hierarchies to be if we could build a new church. "Oh no, no, no, you can't do that. You ain't got money enough." One thing led to another and I asked them for \$40,000. "Oh my, you can't build a church for \$40,000 for crying out loud." I said, "Well, that's all I need." It went along, not very long, I asked them, "As long as you won't give me \$40,00, would you give me \$60,000?" "Yeah, we'll do that." So we never took the \$60,000. We never took more than \$40,000 but we built the new church up there. It's brick and it's there today. At any rate, we built the church. Now I can give you a testimony on that. We started in April building it. We got the farm here; we got the boys; we would work all day long on that church and you know, our crops never suffered one bit that year. We got everything in on time. We were six weeks building the church. My Dad was a contractor. Dad didn't want nothing to do with the church as far as building it but Dad gave me an awful lot of pointers and different people that I could use. We built that church. We held services in it before we got the windows in it because I'd ordered the windows and they didn't come quick enough and we had the church open. I went the city of St. Johns first and asked if I could get a building permit for that church. There was an old church there. We tore that down, hauled it down here to the farm and burned it. The gal up there--her and I always got along real good in the building department there in St. Johns. She says, "Bing, you got any blueprints?" "No, that costs money." She said, "You gotta bring me something for crying out loud." I don't remember how it happened, but we got it built.

After we got it built, our mother church at that time started accepting women in the priesthood and I've nothing against women. They're wonderful, but we didn't think they had any place in the priesthood so consequently, we walked out and we went up and met up to the hospital there for a while. They had a meeting room. We was about 65 people there at the church at that time when we walked out and not all of them went with us. In fact there's two couples still running the church up on the hill. I think there's only three families that's involved up there. Anyway, we moved out and we thought, to be truthful, with that group that was there, three couples would come out with us. One of them would've, but they said, "Bing, where are we going?" I said, "I don't have any idea. It's gonna be up to the Lord where we go." "Well," they said, "We'll stay

here for a little while,” and so they did. In fact, both of them passed away now. We was to their funerals but we was up there to the hospital for about 90 days.

There was a church on the north side of St. Johns that had a for sale sign out in front of it. So I went up and talked to 'em and I said, “What kind of a deal can we make?” They were asking \$100,000 and I said, “That's too much.” They said, “Well, what are you offering?” I said, “I'll offer you \$50,000.” They said, “cash?” And I said, “Yeah, we'll write you check.” Well that was the Jehovah Witness church on north side of town. Jehovah Witness had been in this building and they said, “We'll take your \$50,000.” What the other people wanted, it was a nursery is what I understood. They was gonna make payments to them and they wanted money, so that's why the \$50,000 done the trick. They moved out the one morning after they'd had services and we moved in and had services that same morning. They were very nice people to work with. Very nice. But anyway, we've been there ever since. We remodeled the church. We built onto the church. We put a steeple on the church. We went down to Tennessee and brought that steeple back.

Wayne: Which church is this now?

Earl: It's a church of Christ, a little “c” on church. We're still there and services yesterday and I think we'll be there tomorrow night again for men's church. Wednesday night we have church. This week's busy. We have church there tomorrow night. We got Wednesday night prayer service. We got Thursday night with the women there and Friday night we got a church down at Cleveland, Ohio, and there's several of us going down there to that church, but we will be back here for Sunday morning,

Mary: Well, we've got church there Friday and Saturday. Up here, we've got that guest minister.

Earl: Well, a guest minister that I knew nothing about is coming in and we won't be here.

Mary: We just had a fellow that was with us that's from Africa. He was here about four days with us. He stayed here in the house. He just left yesterday. We took him to his next stop but he was interesting.

Earl: I took him out visiting most of the homes. I spent the last week visiting homes and then he had the service yesterday. We've remodeled the building since we got it. We built 26 foot onto the west, put a baptismal font in. I went out to Iowa and got the baptismal font and I went down to Tennessee and got the steeple and put up on top of it. Any rate, the Lord's been good to us. I don't think there's any question about that.

Wayne: Sounds that way.

Earl: We wouldn't be where we're at if it wasn't for the Lord cause he's made a lot of decisions for me that I wouldn't have ever made.

Wayne: Were you pastor at the church at one time?

Earl: I still am right now, but I gotta quit. My mind's gone.

Mary: Don't say it like that.

Earl: Well, it is. I can't remember anything. I got a fella that's doing a lot of my thinking up there to the church and that's good. That's kinda the history of where we're at. Yeah, I was pastor up until two years ago from the start. Then we voted a different person in as pastor. He didn't do nothing. He just sat on his hands and I got so disgusted that I went back but since I've gone back, I just don't have the fire.

Mary: Don't have the energy.

Earl: Well, call it energy, call it fire. but I just can't get anything done.

Mary: Could be worse! You could be looking at roots rather than a little grass.

Earl: That's my wife!

Wayne: Well, thank you very much for sharing it with us. We appreciate it.

Earl: As I say, we've stumbled along down through the years and we've done a lot of things but the Lord's always been first in our lives, the wife's and mine.