

FRANK TODOSCIUK

Wayne: This is June 8th, 2023. I'm Wayne Summers, along with Cindy Kindel, and today we are interviewing Frank Todosciuk. Also here, is his daughter, Annette Snyder. Why don't you start out, Frank, by telling us a little bit about how you came to Clinton County?

Frank: I was in the Army and I'd come home different times. This one time, a buddy of mine in the Army—he was from St. Johns--and he says, "Why don't you come to St. Johns? You're not doing anything special on the weekend, are you?" "No." He says, "Then we'll go to the Bingham Grange Hall. They had dances there once a month. He fixed me up with a blind date and so everything worked out fine. Few more times, I proposed. That's how I came to St. Johns on the blind date. She's Janice Rosekrans and her dad was Harry and Jeanette [(Stevens)] Rosekrans, north of St. Johns.

After I got out the Army, I went to school and got a degree in engineering and got married in the meantime, at almost through school. I sent out letters all over Michigan to get a job after school. I wrote out to California and I had a good offer out in California. I was working for Allis Chalmers at that time and the chief says, "Don't do that." "Well, it's good, big money." He says, "Forget the money. Listen to me. You go out there, there's nobody out there. Go to Michigan and get a job. Your family's there and everybody's there. Take half the money in Michigan and you'll happier." "Okay." So I sent five letters here in Michigan and Federal Mogul, St. Johns, hired me. I made big money when I started in there, 105 bucks a week, but you could go to the grocery store, for \$10 and couldn't carry all the groceries out.

Annette: That was 1958.

Frank: Then we bought the place where I'm at now. One of the first unusual things that happened: North of St. Johns, my father-in-law took me out to where Beck's Market is and Ben Beck was just starting out in a tar paper shack with corn bundles all around in it. Went in there to get some cider and apples. "Geez, it's cold in here!" He had a DuoTherm oil heater in there and just puffing away. "I'm just trying to keep it above freezing so the apples don't freeze." Well, he sold quite a bit and then sometime in December, this thing caught fire, burnt down. The next spring, Ben started to build and build the empire he had there.

One of the things, coming from their place here, I was coming through Eureka and I got stopped by the constable. They had a constable in Eureka at that time, Wendell Wagner. He pulled me over. "You know, you're speeding through town?" I said, "There's hardly any town here to speed through," but he says, "We have a limit. We have some small kids." He says, "What are you doing in this area?" I said, "I bought a place over here on Marshall Road." "Oh, welcome to Eureka!" Let me go. We became good friends over the years, Wendell and all them guys.

Gower's Hardware was there. That was quite an enterprise. Gower's Hardware, Gower's Elevator, Lewis Appliance Store in Eureka, Miller's Grocery. At that time the church was growing and they added on to it. One time the minister says he wanted to grow the congregation bigger. "When he gets to 200," he says, "I'll preach from the roof." About four or five months he done that. He preached from the roof.

Cindy: Are you talking about the Greenbush Church?

Frank: No, Eureka Church. Doug Jones was the minister at that time.

Annette: That was in the early '70s.

Frank: The Eureka School was quite small when we came here. I had the guy's name in my mind that drove the bus.

Annette: Chester Walton.

Frank: He was the bus driver, and he was janitor, and he was the maintenance man, and everything at the little school. Then they expanded. Of course, everything got divided up.

We had a medical center in Eureka that gathered money, had the medical center there, and there was a doctor in there for a year or two. Then, for some circumstances, the doctor moved out to the house on the edge of Eureka there. He was there for three or four years. Good doctor. I think what it was that they raised the rent on the medical center for him to pay and he can't afford that. It's something else now but the doctor was good out there.

At the Eureka School over the years, we had a large Boy Scout troop. I was leader of the Scouts. We'd have 300 people come to the Blue and Gold Banquet.

Annette: He was cub master.

Wayne: What troop number was that?

Frank: I don't remember.

Annette: You'd have to look at pictures.

Frank: It's non-existent now. One of the things I remember was that we had a blind magician come and he says, "I've never seen any of my tricks so if you catch 'em, tell me how I do it." He was real good. My wife was a Cub Scout leader and she had like, 40 kids, grew from 10 or 12 to 40. Then we had a big Webelos group. That's in between Cubs and Boy Scouts. We had at least six Eagle Scouts come through there. Our kids went all the way through that. I stayed as scout leader about four years after that and I says, "That's enough. Somebody out there, take it over." It went. Pfft!

Wayne: About what year did it end?

Annette: Late 70s. My brothers were in it. I graduated in '77 so Andy must have become an Eagle Scout in '74 or '75. He was the last one.

Frank: John ?—was one, Harry [Todosciuk], Bryan Lintemuth--

Annette: One of the Whitford boys.

Frank: I left the Scouts and it fell apart about three years and they disbanded.

This is going back a little ways. Eureka Cemetery, when Ben Beck died, he was the first one on the north side of the road there. I said, "Gee, he's all alone there," but look at it today.

There was two ministers in Eureka named Jones. There was a Jones and then a Jones replaced the Jones.

Annette: No relations.

Frank: It was ironic. Both were quite involved helping with the scouts and stuff. We had meetings at the church and the school.

Cindy: Can I ask what year you were married?

Frank: I don't know.

Annette: He knows what year was I born. He knows it was the year before.

Annette: They met Labor Day weekend of '57 and got married in March of 59, [March 29, 1958] and then I came a full year later.

Cindy: That was the one. Well, she was quite a lady, wasn't she?

Frank: Well, I was getting desperate 'cause. I was getting old.

Cindy: And you've gone to Eureka Church all that time?

Annette: No, you started in Eureka. We were married in '83. So you must have started in '80.

Frank: We was going to Greenbush.

Annette: That's where they were married.

Frank: My wife was on the youth over there at Greenbush. We collected crushed glass and sold it, and we put safety coverings over the stained windows and stuff.

Annette: Plexiglass.

Frank: They had a real good lay minister for--oh my God--5, 6, 7 years, and they says, "You can't do that. You gotta have a regular minister." They brought a young guy in from right outta college and he was a disaster. He didn't want to call on sick people. He didn't want to call on anybody. I was in the meeting with him at the basement of Salem Church and he said, "I want Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday off every week so I can go up north and whatever." One of the guys says, "Listen, Mac, do you realize that half the congregation in the churches--he was handling Greenbush, Salem, and Lowe--that half the people in the churches hold two jobs? They work all day at GM and then they come home and farm and they're paying your salary and you don't want to work!" He says, "You should be in social work." At the end of his term, he resigned and he went in social work. He was a dud preacher anyhow.

Annette: How long were you at Federal Mogul? Let's go back to that 'cause then that's the rest of your story.

Frank: About two or three years.

Annette: Why did you leave?

Frank: Well, they had about six guys in the engineering department. I was the only one that came in with a degree and I questioned a lot of things on their designs. I'd always get, "We've done that for 10

years. Don't mess with it." Anyhow, I got acquainted with the operation and the plant and I saw this one operation that everything was by hand. I went to the chief engineer, and I says, "There's a job out there could be automated and run more parts and be safer," because they had cuffs on their hands when they put a part in the press and the press hit, they'd jerk them back. He says, "Oh, it can't be done." I sit down and sketch something up. I had a friend that worked in the tool room at that time and I showed it to him. He said, "Yeah, that looks good." So I went up to chief engineer. I says, "Here's a sketch of what I think could be done." "I don't know if that'll work or not. Well, it don't look like it costs much. We'll go ahead. I'll just show you it won't work." By hand, they're running 30 pieces a minute.

I got this machine and I don't know if you're familiar with any equipment, but they have a vibrator that orients parts down the chute. I used one that went down the chute, went into the press, and when the part hit a light beam, the press come down and then it kicked the part out. So, had it built, got it going there, and I was running 50 parts a minute on it. Chief engineer came home. "Well, it won't last." About three weeks later, I was out there watching it go, and the plant manager came by. Been running 50 pieces a minute. He said, "Oh, that looks good. It's real safe." All the guy had to do is dump a tub of things in the vibrator. The machine also stacked. It would take a stack of rings, put 'em in the box, humming right along. The plant manager says, "Will it go any faster?" "I don't know." So he said, "How do you do it?" "Just turn this little valve slowly--55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, went all the way up to 70, things just a-humming along. The operator said, "That's kind of going fast. I can hardly get 'em off and get new parts in it." So the plant manager says, "Let's see how fast it will go." I turned it up real quick. We got 90 pieces a minute before it jammed. I thought, "That's good." So my manager says, "Stay here. I'll be right back." A few minutes, he come back. "That's a real good job. I want to reward you. Here's a pen."

Then I saw another operation that was the same thing and little more difficult. There again, chief engineer says, "Boy, that's too complicated." Well, I got it going and it was about the time the Russians sent the Sputnik up. When I got the thing going, they called it the Sputnik because that was going the same time the Russian thing went up. It run automatically. On the bearing, there's a locking lip and the oil hole into it. This machine--it was flange bearings, which was more difficult to handle. It would go down, punch the hole, put the lip on, and kick it out. That was running pretty good. It was just before Christmas, like first of December or something like that, a little bit after. The chief engineer called me in the office. I thought, "Boy, I'll get a big raise." So he says, "Frank, tell you what. You got two weeks to get outta here or I'll fire you." Whew! I was just shocked with that.

There was a little shop, Ken Penix. Massey Ferguson, St. Johns Tool and Die was behind there. I went in there to see if they could hire me. "Glad to have you." Put me on. I'd get new jobs on the road and help with design and stuff. Short story, about two years there--there was two partners. They had a disagreement and the bank foreclosed on them. The banker called me in. Maybe you know Bob Thompson. He was with Central National. He says, "We're foreclosing on it. We want you to run it." I says, "I don't have any money." He says, "We do." If it wasn't for Bob Thompson, I'd never been in business. So that run that for, I think, almost two years and somebody said Ovid was looking for businesses over there. So I checked that out. Yep they wanted a new business. They'd put up a building for me and get me situated, no expenses for a year, no taxes, no nothing. "Okay, I'll go for that."

Annette: St. Johns wouldn't do anything.

Frank: I tried. Oh, I had a nightmare. It'd take an hour and a half to tell you about the deal with St. Johns trying to get through with the business. Anyhow, they says, "We'll have everything set, the building for you to move in in 90 days." I said, "What? You're gonna clear the land and build it in 90 days?" They did it in 65 days. About that time, St. Johns was going to introduce an income tax because

Lansing employees were getting half of their tax because they didn't live in Lansing. St. Johns wanted the other half of the tax. The people that living in St. Johns area, they were gonna get that tax. I was interviewed by the radio station. "Why are you leaving St. Johns?" I said, "Well, one of the reasons, because of this tax." "That's a small amount." I said, "I can remember when the government says, ""We're gonna put in a 1% sales tax."" That's gonna be it." What do we have today? Promises don't work." So that killed the income tax for St. Johns and moved to Ovid and everything then flourished.

Wayne: What was the name of your company In Ovid?

Frank: Research Tool Corporation. The third year, I think, we had built the expansion onto the original. They had an industrial board there in Ovid that was handling this. They says, "You're doing so good, we are going to turn over the property, building, and everything for \$1 because you are supplementing the lumber yard, the hardware store, the grocery store, the doctors, and everything. A lot of that business isn't there anymore. I went over there with three employees. We grew to five, and then through the years before COVID hit, we had 40 employees, around 50,000 square feet of floor space, all automated equipment, and all completely air conditioned, the whole plant. I've got one guy that's always constantly cleaning there. We've got a real clean shop.

Wayne: What kind of products did you make and did it change over the years?

Frank: It changed over the years.

Annette: He's gone all over the world, seriously.

Frank: I built equipment for NASA, Marshall Space [Flight] Center. This is one of a kind. I started that with Wright-Patterson Air Force Base after the Desert Storm. They bombed out a lot of power plants in Iran and Kuwait and General Electric had big turbine generators there. To replace 'em, you have to have a 12' ring and a 10' ring. I bought two machines to run those. You could put a ring on there that would say, weigh 1,000 pounds. There was so much intricate machining that you could lift it off with your two hands and we ran that day and night, 7 days a week, 12-hour shifts for 2 ½ years before that ran out.

Done a lot of space stuff. I built a wiring harness for one of the spacecrafts that went up.

Annette: The shuttle.

Frank. We built knee replacements and hip replacements for 2 ½ years. I got two knees replaced and they were built in my shop.

Annette: That didn't that go directly from point A to point B.

Frank: I asked the doctor, "Can I get the serial number off those knees?" He says, "I can't give it to you. Why?" "I wanna see if they were built in my shop." He said, "I can't do it." So after I had the second knee done, he said, "Here's the prescription." Got a piece of paper, put in my pocket and went out. I got in the car, looked, and there was a serial number. So I checked the computers at the shop and tracked it down--Matt built it--to the guy that built it. Everything had to be super recorded.

Then we had fixtures that made multiples and the mistake was they showed one of the companies how we done that. They took pictures and we lost the job.

Annette: All because of a stupid cell phone because they could take pictures. They could bring a camera in.

Frank: I had a big job with Motor Wheel. They rolled these two rims and stuff, massive pressure, and the rolls had to be reworked. I belonged to the engineers' group. One of the guys said, "Hey, come on over. I want to talk to you, see if you can rework these." He says, "We're spending from 50 to a 100 hours on a set of rolls." I looked at it and I went over and said, "Yeah, send me three or four samples." We worked off a template. Steel is in a range of hardness and when you get to 60 and 62 Rockwell, that is about almost as hard as that glass. They had to refurbish that. I had found a company in Japan that made a ceramic tool and we could cut that. I done all four pieces. The third day I had 'em back to 'em. "Wow, how did you do that?" I was so proud that I could do it. "I want to go over and see that." So he come out. I put the roll in the machine and run it. It cuts the material. It comes off as a liquid. It doesn't come off as a chip. It comes off as a liquid. They were so fascinated down there.

A couple weeks later-- They sent me some more stuff all along. I was turning them. "We got three or four guys don't believe how you doing that." So they came out and there again, they took some pictures and all of a sudden it stopped. The guy that was selling the ceramic, he says, "Do you realize they went out and bought exactly the same machine you got and all the attachments? They're doing it themselves" Oh, great! But they're outta business now. I'm still in business.

Annette: You've sold machines all over Europe.

Frank: The Netherlands, England, a lot of companies in the United States, Japan, and Korea. The thing was, they said, "We will order a machine but you can't tell anybody that we bought one." It was quite a unique machine, got it patented, and it cost almost \$100,000 to build the first one and about 80 for the second one. Then I analyzed a few things, made some shortcuts, and we were able to get the price down. If we built them in sixes, six at a time, we could build them for about \$18,000. Then we cut the price down. We were selling them for \$90,000. So it was a good bread and butter account.

There was a war going on at that time and this was a graphitic thing. I went down to the Wright-Patterson Air Force with a sample, and they shot it, and the bullet went through like that. They said, "We can't have that. We gotta have it bounce off." So a couple weeks later, I ran some samples, went down to Wright-Patterson. They shot the bullet and it bounced off. They bought three machines right off the bat. Then it developed into a production job with a German company, BASF. We built the machine that was automatic and they came out to see me about it. They says, "What would it take to have a machine built in 10 months?" I says, "You would have to flood it with money because the electronics and stuff that I buy would all have to be air-flowing and stuff like that." I made a proposal on it, had a price on it, and they says, "Well, if you build it less than the 10 months, we will give you \$10,000 a month deduction. So we built the whole thing in six months.

It was such a secretive deal I couldn't let any salesman in the shop anymore and the employees didn't really know the full fact of the thing, but it made this graphite material continuous. They loaded it in the truck and they had an official at the front of the truck, security, and at the back of the truck in cars. When the guy stopped at a truck stop to go to the bathroom, one of the guys would go in with him and one guy stayed with the truck. When they went in to eat, they done the same thing. One guy stayed with the truck. The other guy stayed with the guy. The guy was never alone from the time he left the shop till the time they unloaded that machine. He had to sign a paper says, "I don't know nothing." So they ran that machine production-wise, I think two or three years. Then they developed something else and there it went.

Over the years I've done a lot of roll-form machines for campers and mobile homes, siding, drip edge. There's still a lot of it bouncing around but everything's gone vinyl now. One item, every piece of aluminum needed an S-lock. We used to turn six sets of S-locks at a time. We would sell six in two weeks. Clinton Machine across the road, they built the machines and just put the rolls on there and they ship 'em. We had a good relationship. We'd sell them. They would ship about three machines a week. We had a guy just chucking them rolls out. All of a sudden, I start getting older and here I am.

Wayne: You're still working, right? Well, somewhat, part-time?

Annette: He owns the business. He's the president of the business.

Wayne: So you show up once in a while.

Frank: I go in once a week.

Cindy, You help your son, right, Andy?

Frank: Harry runs that over there and Andy's got Andy T's Market.

Cindy: I see you over there all the time. You're helping Andy.

Annette: He's there a lot more.

Frank: The thing right now, they only got about 15 employees. COVID just ruined the whole employee market.

Wayne: Is it because they can't find enough employees or is it that they don't have enough business?

Frank: Somewhat, there's not enough business but what started it all, the government give free money out. We had three guys. They've been workin' anywhere for up to 15 years and one of the guys, his neighbor said he was getting free money. He said, "Got all the time in the world. I'm about 20% ahead of the game 'cause I don't have to travel, buy gas, or anything like that." Matt, he quit. He said, "I'm going on the free money," and that's what he done after 20 some years. He was a real good worker. Another guy, he quit and he was only there about 8 or 9 years. He quit first of June. In the middle of August, I happened to be at the shop and he came back and I said, "Hey, come back for your job?" "No." He said, "Won't do that. I've been married now nine years. We've never been able to save any money. Since I quit, we're getting the free money." He was ambitious. He was a jack of all trades. He could do plumbing, electric, fix it. He was a Mr. Fix-it, if you want to call it that. He says, "I've already got \$5,000 in the bank. I'm not gonna change unless they quit the free money. Then I may have to get a job." That's ruined a lot of people. Just too bad.

Wayne: Did you also then start part-time farming or was that just something that Andy did?

Frank: I tried part-time farming.

Annette: He'd work. He'd go over to the shop like at six, seven o'clock in the morning. He'd get home at eight o'clock, nine o'clock at night and then think he's gonna go out and plow, figured that out real quick.

Frank: Ron Betz lives across the road. He worked for General Motors. One Sunday I'm out in the yard doing something and he come over and he says, "Man, I don't know how you keep going." "What do you mean?" He says, "You go over to shop early in the morning and come back late at night and you're working around here. What do you do over there?" I says, "I work at GM." And he says he hates every minute of it. I said, "Well, I like it or I wouldn't be able to put that many hours in." If I had a complicated job to quote, I'd stay at night a couple nights, build it, see how long it took before I quoted it, make sure everything got done. Didn't make it an hour. They said, "It can't be done." I said, "I made the first one that's here. I made it in less time than you guys and you are supposed to be more skilled than I am."

Annette: His place is not repetitious. You're not doing the same job every day.

Wayne: It's like every project's different.

Annette: That was part of why, after Federal Mogul, you started your own because he could do what he wanted. There wasn't gonna be that same old, same old.

Frank: Bob was such a good friend, all along. I don't want to get in his name into that but he done some wonders for me. He was an open banker. You could go in there and get a cup of coffee, go sit down, talk to him. You don't do that now.

Annette: He'd go to different tool shows around the country: "Bob, I'm buying this machine. It's this much money. Cover it." He'd write the check out and then get home and they'd do the paperwork after the fact.

Frank: Write a \$75,000 check and put Bob Thompson's name in the corner, come up there and they'd handle it.

Wayne: Obviously, a lot of mutual trust there. He was gonna get his money back.

Annette: Well, and that's how banks used to--.

Frank: Then they merged with Fifth Third now. I went and bought a machine, check come in. He called me, come in and he shut the door. He says, "Well, good times have ended ." He says, "Frank, you are no longer Frank Todosciuk. You are a number." He says, "We're not Bob Thompson. We're a number." Everything started to be happening in Grand Rapids. He says, "Grand Rapids don't like our number, you're out." Believe it or not, it was about eight years later, they called me and says, "Don't want your account no more." I says, "Why? I've never beat you out of a nickel or anything like that. What's the reason?" Just out!

So I went to FirstBank. They were running two or three years. Dan Redman, went and asked him. I said, "They're kicking me out of the bank. You want to take care of our account?" Took a look at them. "Absolutely." So we took over that. It's Mercantile now.

Annette: Walk in there, you don't know anybody.

Frank: They still know me a little bit there. Banking, it used to be customer friendly. Now it's money friendly.

Wayne: You would think you would want a company like that.

Annette: And he had run millions of dollars through the bank. You would think you would want—
Ridiculous! From Hicksville Ovid!

Frank: After this, they changed the name. Went to Ovid Bank, always went in there, and I had a little check from General Motors. It was \$10 and a half, General Motors check. Went in and little teeny bopper was there and she looked at it. She said, "I can't cash it." "Why? Cashed GM check for years in this bank." "We have a new policy starting today. Can't do it." "Well, why?" She says, "You don't have an account here." I says, "What? We got a big account in here." "Frank Todosciuk don't have one here." "I have it at the other bank." "But you don't do it here. We can't cash your checks." So I went down to--used to be the IGA store in Ovid--cashed the check. Two or three weeks later, a couple guys from Lansing come out and, "Oh, Mr. Todosciuk, we made a tragic mistake. You can go down and cash your check anytime you want." I says, "I'm real satisfied with the IGA." I told him I'd never come back in that bank and I never did.

Annette: That's when everything went to Firstbank.

Cindy: I know you're the oldest. How many children did you have? You-

Frank: Three.

Annette: Harry and Andy.

Wayne: Did Harry go on and get an engineering degree too?

Frank: No, just learned from me and away he went. Andy, he went to Michigan State a couple years and--

Annette: Got a degree. Ag--something.

Cindy: He's using it then.

Annette: That's what he did the whole time he was going to school. That's what paid for it.

Frank: He worked a couple summers for the agricultural farming organization. Anyhow, farmers would call and have Andy come out and help 'em spray, analyze what kind of spray they need for certain weeds, certain bugs. He would take soil samples to MSU and test them and then tell 'em what kind of fertilizer or whatever he needed. George McQueen was the ag guy [Clinton Co. Extension Director]. He put in Andy's name to take his job when he retired. By then Andy was going pretty good. Anyhow, he didn't want to do that.

Wayne: So how many acres do you own here?

Frank: There's about 30. I tried farming two or three years and the last year, I had to take \$300 or \$400 out of the bank to harvest it. I quit.

Annette: It didn't calculate out right.

Frank: Pete Miller, he was going to George's and farming over there, stopped. He's going to church. I said, "Hey, you interested in farming my land?" "Yeah, what you gotta have for it?" I said, "You can have everything. I just want keep the weeds down, nice looking crop like you raise." He started farming

it." "Every fall he'd come up, "I gotta give you some money. My conscience of bothering me." He farmed it for quite a few years.

Annette: Until Andy started. Dad also, when he was born, he was a preemie, in 1931 at home.

Wayne: How much did you weigh you when you were born?

Frank: I don't know, a couple pounds.

Annette: You were a pound and a half, I think it was.

Wayne: That's really small.

Annette: His mom kept him in a shoebox on the stove door. She'd opened the wood stove and--

Frank: Back then they didn't have facilities like they do now.

Wayne: How were you fed? I'm assuming you're not gonna be fed the normal way.

Frank: They had no incubators and stuff like that. I was real weak, and I'd be on the oven door, and they kept the wood fire going. They say my mother would get a piece of wool, dip it in milk and let me suck on that and she done that several times through the day and maybe the night, I don't know. They watched the stove so it didn't get too hot or too cold. I survived. It's amazing.

Annette: You know those sticks they give them at the hospital they suck water on?

Cindy: Were you born at home or in the hospital?

Annette: At home.

Frank: I think at home, but back then you didn't go to the hospital like you do now.

Annette: Was that down in Plymouth, Michigan?

Wayne: So you grew up in Plymouth?

Frank: Partially. We moved from Plymouth to Howell in 1940 and we bought a 160-acre farm there. We were renting in Plymouth. Bought 160-acre farm for 6,000 bucks in 1940. That was big money then and we just built that one. Mother died in 1939. My dad died in 1945, just after the Second World War ended. We lived on the farm and back then I don't know if welfare existed then or not, but we didn't get any welfare. My sister done the cooking in the house. My oldest brother handled the financial, and we all worked. I knew nothing but work, worked all my life. I tell people now, "I'm 92 and I've never drawn an unemployment check." I find something to do.

Cindy: Where were you stationed in the Army then?

Frank: Fort Campbell, Kentucky, the Airborne.

Wayne: What years did you serve?

Frank: I served 1 year, 10 months, and 23 days.

Wayne: What year was that?

Frank: 1953-54. I was let out because the Korean War ended it. That was really a bad deal. We were trained to go in. We were going in to rescue some Marines and we got in the airplane. A whole bunch of planes started up. All of a sudden they stopped the plane, says, "We're not going today. We'll go tomorrow." We were gonna fly from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to Alaska and then into Korea. Half the guys, they didn't give any guns. They says, "If you hit the ground, there's gonna be a lot of guns down there." They told us we were gonna have 90% casualties. That was very enlightening. So you wrote letters to your family. They said, "If you don't come back, we'll mail the letters. If you come back, we'll give them come back to you." So the second time we're down on the runway, same thing happens. Shut down, go back. "We're going tomorrow. Pitch your pup tents on the edge of the runway and stay in there." We got slop out of the kitchen to eat and third day, same thing. Fourth day, we started to move and they stopped and everybody out, called them in a group and said, "The Korean War's ended."

Wayne: Do you still have the letter you wrote?

Frank: No. They had a fire going. We just burned them.

Wayne: Your celebration fire.

Annette: Walt Thompson is who set him up with the blind date, that was in the Army with him. George Black was a paratrooper with him. George was from St. Johns, Nancy Pitts's brother. George liked to jump. Dad didn't like to jump. He did the minimum and George just, when somebody else didn't wanna jump, he jumped for him.

Wayne: So you're a paratrooper who didn't like to jump.

Frank: No.

Cindy: He didn't get to pick!

Wayne: So it wasn't your choice.

Frank: They says "You're over—You're tank people. You're over—You're Airborne." "I ain't gonna jump." The Army says, "We can make you." I went through the training with reluctance. I said, "When I get in the plane, I'll just hang on for dear life." Well, unfortunately, they were ahead of the game because the inside of that airplane was like the inside of a thermos bottle. There wasn't a rivet to get ahold of or anything. What they done, one side of the plane you'd have 20 guys; on the other side of the plane, 20 guys; in the back end you'd have a great big guy, which is enthusiastic about jumping, and he'd push all these guys. When you'd get to the door, you hesitate. Well, they had a guy--there was a post there and he was strapped to that post and he would grab the guys like this. You remember a guy, Rosie Greer, a football player? Well, that's about the size of him. Just, like peas out of a pod, and there I went. Holy cow! I don't recommend it to nobody.

Annette: You were the 101st ?

Frank: 111th Airborne.

Wayne: How many times did you actually jump?

Frank: Nine. Night jump is bad and my chute didn't open once. "Why am I passing everybody?" I look up, the things going like that, and I reached to pull my reserve, and "poof." 250 feet off the ground it opened.

Wayne: Hit a little hard?

Frank: Hit a little hard, yep. In the night jump, two of the guys in my plane froze because they didn't know where they was gonna hit the ground. They drove their legs right up to their chest. There was about 150 jumped and probably about 10 or 12 that were killed in the jump. As they say, in the Army, you're cannon fodder.

Annette: Nowadays, they have a choice of what they wanna do when they go in.

Wayne: Usually, you sign up for a particular division.

Annette: You don't always get that.

Frank: They promise, but they don't deliver. One of the other side notes: Since my parents died when I was young, I never went to high school. About that time my dad died and needed to work on the farm. When I got in the Army in basic training, they said, "Anybody don't have a high school diploma, now's your chance. You can go to school two nights a week here and get a GED." I said, "That's something to do." So I went and got that and that saved me when I got out. "Go to school and got a high school--?" "No, got a GED" "Good."

Annette: That got you into college then.

Frank: After about one year of college, I about quit.

Wayne: What college did you go to?

Frank: It was in Chicago, a private college. I was working at my job with an old guy there and he says, "If you quit, I'm going to get a 2 X 4 and I'm gonna kill you." He says, "Go another month. Go another month," and he kept encouraging me. Then I got past halfway. He says, "You're past halfway. It's downhill now." I still remember him. He says, "Look at me." He was 60 years old then. He was working in the heat-treating department there. That's a real dirty job. He says, "You're young. You got a chance to have a nice job and everything."

Annette: Then you went to MSU.

Frank: Got certificated in the hydraulics and air hookup.

Annette: He wasn't home much when we were little because he was going to school too. You finished that in '60 something.

Frank: That was two nights a week.

Annette: Mid sixties.

Frank: I was at Federal Mogul when I was doing that, but after that I ain't going to school anymore. It was an education.

Cindy: When you first moved here, Eureka was still a town, right?

Frank: A lot of business in still town.

Wayne: It's still a town.

Frank: But there's nothing there.

Annette: There's the general store.

Wayne: The general store is still there.

Frank: That's new.

Wayne: The new general store there is.

Cindy: I remember across the road, the brick building, when that was a store. I remember walking down the steps into the store.

Annette: Miller's. Miller was down below and they lived upstairs. Mrs. Miller was one of teachers at Eureka.

Wayne: The new general store [Home Town General Store], what was that building originally?

Annette: That was Lewis Appliances.

Frank: It was Shade's Mall before he was there.

Annette: Jerry Shade owned it. We got married in '83, so probably '85, '86, Jerry bought the building. He had a bar in Fowlerville and somehow found this place. He had a going place. If you needed it, he'd make sure he had it. If he didn't sell something, nobody wanted it, he quit carrying that. He carried what the locals wanted. The kids that have it now, that's how they're running it. Jerry's mentoring them.

Wayne: It's a really a very nice place.

Annette: Kenny, one of the owners, grew up just across back. He was a Riley. The church playground was in his backyard, basically. They lived right there on Fremont, the little church, 'cause we lived the corner and they lived in back of us.

Cindy: When you were there, you remember the elevator being open?

Frank: Yeah.

Cindy: My grandfather worked there.

Frank: Gower's Hardware there was kinda like a museum. He had a lot of stuff. If you wanted a horse collar, he had it down in the basement, horse tongues, and stuff, whipple trees.

Annette: You could go in and buy one thing or a whole package.

Wayne: Was it the kind of hardware store you needed to ask because you probably couldn't find it on your own?

Frank: That's right. He was also the McCormick-Farmall dealer too at the hardware, and he got a gas pump in the front too.

Annette: With Grandma, we'd go to the cemetery and then we'd have to go down and get gas, and if everything had gone good, we went to Miller's. He and mom were married--Mom passed away in 2012, in January—53 years. That was her goal was to get to 50. They made that.

Frank: She got sick before the 50th and we went to Hawaii early. I said, "We'll celebrate our 50th because you may not make it." She did and then we went to Alaska. The year before she died, I signed up, got tickets to go to Alaska again and about the middle of the summer, she says, "You better get your money back on that 'cause you had a deposit. I'm not gonna be able to make Alaska. I'm sleeping too much and I'm not eating good." She was right. "I called them and told 'em the deal and they refunded my money. I went to Alaska five times.

Wayne: You must like it there.

Frank: It's beautiful.

Annette: How many times did you go out fishing? Five times was the cruises, or did that include the fishing?

Frank: It didn't include the fishing. Went twice fishing. First time I went, they caught salmon with the gills like this and the tails on the ground. I brought back 400 pounds of salmon frozen.

Annette: It was good stuff. I never had liked it before, but that, oh my God! I was addicted.

Frank: We'd pick it and the guy fileted it right on the boat that we're out there. He had a packing house. Before we went back to camp, he'd pull over there in the dock, pass it over. He said, "By midnight, it's froze solid." He put it in a great big wide cooler like that. We got on the airplane. They brought it to the airport and it was real nice.

Wayne: They flew it back.

Annette: Where did you travel? All over Europe. You went to Hawaii twice.

Frank: Went to Hawaii twice.

Annette: And then Europe.

Frank: Europe, the Netherlands. Went, in later years, to Greece and Turkey. That wasn't a very good trip. Turkey was so backward. Well, same thing, I went to China.

Annette: But the government--

Frank: They selected me to be an industrial person to represent Michigan to China. We went to Beijing and all over.

Annette: Out in the boonies.

Frank: Terrible. That was a year before Tian'anmen Square.

Wayne: Not a place you'd wanna live.

Frank: I call it, two trips in one--first and last.

Annette: He got off the plane. We picked him up down in Detroit and he was green because there was not water. They had no accessibility to clean water. You didn't drink water that you were served or anything 'cause it wasn't clean water.

Frank: They said, "If you don't take a cap off it, don't drink it." When I got off the plane, they didn't recognize me and Janice recognized the carry-on bag. I lost 20 pounds in almost three weeks in China.

Cindy: Well, I understand it's very polluted too. The air is very--

Annette: They were in back country. You quit asking what you were eating.

Frank: We had security officers, two of 'em, with us. We asked him, "What did we eat a lot of times?" He says, "You have eaten everything that has flown in the sky, swam in the sea, and walked on the earth." "Tell us what they are." He says, "No, I'm not gonna tell you."

Annette: He didn't wanna be sick.

Frank: It was an interesting trip in a way. We had a special badge and one time the guy I roomed with, we went for a walk. Got to the intersection--there's ten times more bicycles than cars in China--so instead of stoplights, they have police because they got too many people. They got have 'em working. They saw us come walking up towards the corner. He stops all traffic, comes over there and leads us across the road. Get to the next place, same thing, and that was unique. Very highly respected, the Chinese are. In the hotel, the guy at the bar, he wanted to come back to Michigan with me. He said, "I'll come back. I'll work for you." I says, "Well, what can you do? I got a machine shop." "I learn fast." I said, "Where would you stay?" "Oh, just let me have a corner in your shop. I'll sleep on the floor." Oh, that is one terrible country! No wonder they all wanna leave there.

Wayne: When students come over here, they don't want to go back.

Annette: They'll send money back. They'll get jobs.

Frank: When I was there, it was the first time China opened up the TV airways to the world. The bartender, he said, "I just couldn't believe how nice you have it over there in the United States. There are appliances and stuff." Went by an appliance place, it was like 20 years old. He says, "You have the most beautiful cars over there." He couldn't get over that.

We had this room where we stayed and the two secret service guys we had with us, they sat on the floor and slept against the wall, had this little Uzi gun. It was about 10:30 and I said, "I think I'll go down the

bar and have a beer.” That guy jumped up. “What's the matter?” I said, “Nothing. I'm going down and have a beer.” He come along with me. I said, “You want a beer?” “Oh no,” Have my beer and go back.

Also, it was interesting, the water you washed your hands in went into a container in the hotel and they used that to flush the toilets. Very conservative on water. They didn't waste nothing. Went by a restaurant they had. We took a double take on it. They said, “Did you see what I saw?” I said, “Let's go back and look.” What it was, a guy had a cage about this square on a cart, pushing it, and he had a cooking burner and a little fry pan on there and in the cage, he had snakes. You'd pick a snake and he'd take it out and go like that. Then he'd skin it out, cut it up, put it in the fry pan, and cook it for you.

Wayne: So did you try that?

Frank: Oh, no.

Annette: When he got home, he had a really good meal. The other thing is, every meal we had rice. We called it wok, in a wok, you know. When I got home, “We'll cook a nice dinner. You want chicken and rice?”

Frank: No, no, no! I said, “I want a whole steak and the whole baked potato. We went to the famous Beijing duck restaurant. They said, “We're gonna have duck tomorrow night.” Oh. I thought, boy! You just see a half a duck glazed. Oh, I just love duck. So we sit down around the table and guy comes out with a big platter. What they done was cut the bones and everything and you didn't have a choice of any kind of meat. It was all just hacked up. So you were picking the meat, spitting bones out like that. Oh, what a disaster.

Annette: They had just started doing bottled water when he came back. So I took like a six pack 'cause I figured he'd be thirsty. He drank most of that by the time we got from Detroit Metro to here. We had him back to normal color within a day or two. His kidney's got working. That's scary.

Frank: We're leaving Hong Kong to come back on the big guy. It's a two-story plane. Got halfway down the runway and stopped and says, “Had a light come on. We gotta have it checked out.” So we pulled back to the thing and we're there an hour, two hours, three hours. We asked the steward, “What's taking so long?” “Oh, they fixed it in 10 minutes but now we gotta refuel.” “Refuel?” “Do you realize that this airplane burns half the fuel to get up that they carry? When we get to Seattle, we will literally get there in fumes. We cannot circle. So when we come in, they stop all the lines. We got priority landing.” The thing was, I had to make connections in Chicago to get to Detroit. We were getting ready to land. They ask the people. “Going to Chicago? You guys, when we hit the runway and open the door, you're first off and you're gonna have a runner. You stay with that runner and you run with him. Don't worry about your baggage. It's gonna catch up with you. When we get to customs with your passports, we're not gonna stop. We're gonna get the high sign. Just hold your badge up and keep running.” And we ran. We got in the airplane. They shut the door. Boom! Then away we went to Chicago. Same thing in Chicago catch the plane for Detroit: run, catch the plane for Detroit running. You get there, shut the door.

Annette: They all had to be background scoped and everything before they could even take the trips.

Wayne: So there were no jetways at that time then? You got out on the tarmac.

Frank: You'd be good shape. You're in better shape when you left China 'cause everything was walk, walk, walk, walk. Oh yes, the bathrooms. We went one night to an opera house, a big treat. We were

up on the fourth floor looking down on the stage, a huge place and they had intermission. Go to the bathroom. Go in there. All it is, trench through the floor. Looked down and I said, "What a place to drop your passport!" Just walking around, that's all there was. This guy with me, he says, "Go in this restroom. See how it is." So I went in, checked it out. It was terrible, just trenches.

Annette: Like going in a barn?

Frank: It was like a cow barn. I come out and I told him, "Well, it's real bad."

Wayne: It depends on how bad you have to actually go.

Frank: Well, terribly bad.

Wayne: Thank you very much for everything.