

Charles "Chuck" Ferguson Interview

- Wayne: [00:00:01](#) This is Wayne Summers and I'm interviewing Chuck Ferguson at his home in DeWitt. Today is November 18, 2018. Chuck, could you start out by telling us a little bit about when and where you were born?
- Chuck: [00:00:16](#) I was born on October 20, 1929, in a little house that still stands next to Schoonover's parking lot. That was 10 days before the start of the Great Depression and then I lived there until 1935. My grandmother owned the property at which time my mother died giving childbirth to my brother. So Dad had myself when I was five years old and a newborn, Keith, my brother; really didn't know what to do with us. So Grandma took me--my mother's mother, Grace Keck--out to a farm on Alward Lake Road. [Grace Cole 1882-1943 married first Charles S. Hammond. After his death in 1939 she married Jacob Keck.] And my uncle, my mother's brother, took the newborn. He was childless and took Keith in and basically raised him. I'm sure Dad's purpose when he let us go was a very temporary thing but, as it happened, time went on. I bonded with Grandma. My uncle Gerald [Hammond], which had Keith, bonded with Keith and Gerald raised Keith. He never came home. I went to the farm and stayed on the farm until Grandma died in 1943.
- I went all through my elementary years in Rheubottom School, which was a one-room school; lived on the farm which was a wonderful way for me to grow up. I had a lot of love and a lot of experiences back in those days. We didn't have tractors. We had horses and plowed and everything was done manually. That was back in the days where we had the separators come around and thresh the wheat, farm by farm. Anyway, I had a good, good life on the farm.
- In 1943 when Grandma died, I moved back to Dewitt because I graduated from the elementary school, Rheubottom, the eighth grade. There was me and another girl, two of us, in the class. I came to DeWitt and started my freshman year at DeWitt and graduated in 1947.
- Wayne: [00:03:46](#) When you came to Dewitt, who did you live with?
- Chuck: [00:03:48](#) I lived with Dad. Dad was remarried at that time. Had Grandma lived, I would have probably gone to St. Johns High School, stayed on the farm and, and be bused to St. Johns. As it

happened, Grandma died and I needed to start high school someplace so I come back to live with Dad and started my school here.

Wayne: [00:04:20](#) So you said you went to the Rheubottom school. Could you tell us a little bit of what it was like to attend that school?

Chuck: [00:04:28](#) Oh dear. I think there was between 20 and 25 students from the first grade to the eighth grade, one teacher, one-room. The teacher would take each class and teach them a subject and then go to the next class, the next class, the next class. It's surprising how well of an education I received because when I came to high school, I was well-rounded. I fit in high school good and got good grades. What I'm saying is, it always amazed me how these teachers that taught at in one-room school had the ability to teach eight grades each day. Wonderful! It was a good experience.

Wayne: [00:05:44](#) What was bathrooms and water fountains and things like that like?

Chuck: [00:05:51](#) Water fountains were an outside well pump. Bathrooms was divided, of boys'--, cloak room, and a bathroom. The bathroom were mechanical bathrooms; no running water in the school. There's not much to say about the bathrooms.

Wayne: [00:06:22](#) You didn't have an outhouse then you had to go to?

Chuck: [00:06:24](#) No, no. We had inside toilets but they were chemical toilets and I don't know how that was maintained or anything but yeah, they were inside toilets.

Wayne: [00:06:39](#) So they had to pump them out once in a while, apparently.

Chuck: [00:06:42](#) Apparently. That I never got knowledge of. I don't know.

Wayne: [00:06:51](#) Do you remember some of the games that you would play?

Chuck: [00:06:53](#) Oh my. We had a shed out back, a woodshed of the school. We'd play Anti-I-Over and then there was games. There was a big lot or lawn in the back of the school and at recess and at noon hour we'd go out and choose up sides and play. I don't remember the names of the games, but yes, we had a lot of games and, like I say, you had kids in the first grade and you had kids in the eighth grade so you had a variety of sizes and children.

Wayne: [00:07:43](#) Do you have any particular memories of maybe an interesting thing that happened while you were at school there?

Chuck: [00:07:49](#) I think the most interesting things that happened was during the holidays. We used to have school plays. Up in front of the school they would bring in platforms which would raise us up maybe a foot off the floor and we would have our Christmas presentation, whatever it might be. All the parents come into the schools and they couldn't fit in the seats so it was people sitting on desks and sitting in chairs. Christmas was always a special time of the year for us kids.

Wayne: [00:08:42](#) What were the Christmas plays like?

Chuck: [00:08:46](#) Oh my! It was mainly reciting poems and that type of-- It wasn't a play, as such, as each grade would present their Christmas song or whatever and then you'd go on to the next grade and the next grade. With me and only one other gal in the 8th grade, we'd recite poems or sing or do something like that.

Wayne: [00:09:29](#) Did you ever feel a little bit maybe out of place being the only guy in your grade?

Chuck: [00:09:34](#) No, no, no, no, no, no. It was a good experience, good experience.

Wayne: [00:09:44](#) When you came to DeWitt, you came to high school here. What kinds of activities were you involved in in high school? I know you were in sports but was there anything else?

Chuck: [00:09:58](#) We didn't have football back then. Basically, we had baseball and basketball. That was the only two sports that we had to participate in. It was during the war period there, 1943, when I first came. Really, we had in the high school three rooms. We had a study hall and a science room and a English room and that was it. We only had a class of, say 20 people, so it wasn't anything big. I took a typing class and the typewriters were located outside of the superintendent's office. I think there was three typewriters and that's what we used for our typing class. We had a business class down on the gym floor but it was good. You knew everybody and made a lot of friends.

Wayne: [00:11:29](#) I know you did baseball. Did you do basketball also then?

Chuck: [00:11:32](#) Yes. We did basketball.

Wayne: [00:11:35](#) What position did you do in each of those?

Chuck: [00:11:38](#) I played the outfield in baseball and I don't know what I played in basketball, a guard probably. I don't remember but back in those days we were classified as "D" and so we played Bath, Laingsburg, and Fowler, and the little towns around the area. It's not like it is today where you play the big cities.

Wayne: [00:12:15](#) Where was the baseball field at that time?

Chuck: [00:12:18](#) Baseball field was down by the river which is now the park, the back part of the park by the interurban bank there and that was our baseball field.

Wayne: [00:12:33](#) It wasn't a very big field, was it?

Chuck: [00:12:36](#) It was a standard. It was good.

Wayne: [00:12:39](#) Maybe that area is bigger than I'm thinking.

Chuck: [00:12:41](#) Yes. It's a big area. The backstop was back in the southeast corner. It was a regular, full-size-- It was a good park.

Wayne: [00:12:58](#) Did you get involved in any plays or anything else?

Chuck: [00:13:02](#) Oh, gosh yes! We had plays all the way through high school. We had the old gym which was a basketball floor. On the north side was a stage with a curtain and on the south side was the bleachers and it was all in one room.

Wayne: [00:13:28](#) Did your class take a senior trip?

Chuck: [00:13:31](#) Yes. Senior trip we went to Detroit and went to Boblo, I think it was called. It was an island on the river down there. Yes. We did. That was our senior trip.

Wayne: [00:13:53](#) So you bused to Detroit?

Chuck: [00:13:54](#) We bused to Detroit.

Wayne: [00:13:55](#) Then did you take the boat down to Boblo?

Chuck: [00:13:57](#) Yes.

Wayne: [00:14:02](#) I know you were involved in scouting.

Chuck: [00:14:05](#) I was an Eagle Scout.

Wayne: [00:14:06](#) Could you tell us a little bit about how you got involved in scouting and--

Chuck: [00:14:11](#) How I got in scouting, I don't know. I come to Dewitt and joined the scouts. It was an activity I wanted to get into. We went to Camp Kiroliex [Now closed, it was located on Clear Lake in Jackson County], I think it was called, in the summer time, spent a week down there, scout camp. I spent my whole four years. I got my Eagle in '47. In fact, I'm the only person that year that got the Eagle but it was a wonderful experience, a wonderful organization.

Wayne: [00:14:56](#) So how was scouting maybe different then than it is today?

Chuck: [00:15:01](#) Well gosh, that's a hard question because I really don't know how it is today. I remember spending so much time earning my merit badges because each merit badge was a different subject and there was a lot of-- Today I think you have to do a community service type project. Back in those days we didn't. We had like 21 merit badges we had to earn and they were all on different subjects. The hardest subject I had was lifesaving at Camp Kiroliex. I had an instructor, "Slave-Driver Casey" was his name. That's what we called him, nickname. He dang near drowned me before I earned that merit badge. He just liked to take us into deep water and wrestle with us out in the water. Like I say, I think he damn near drowned me a few times before I finally got the merit badge.

Wayne: [00:16:30](#) So in those days you only needed 21 merit badges on any topic or were some required?

Chuck: [00:16:38](#) No required. They had a whole list of different subjects that you could take and so you'd pick and choose which ones you wanted to take and accomplish. You got a little booklet for each subject and it told you what you had to do.

Wayne: [00:17:01](#) After high school, I believe you joined the army.

Chuck: [00:17:04](#) I joined. I graduated from high school in June of '47 and in June of '47 enlisted in the Air Force. If you could imagine a farm boy from Dewitt, Michigan, that's never gone any further than maybe Houghton Lake, getting on a train and going to San Antonio, Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, and starting a whole new adventure. Home sickness was-- Wow! I was a pretty homesick boy for a long time, you know. I took my basic training in Lackland and then I was shipped up to Rapid City, South Dakota, which was then called Rapid City Air Force Base.

It was B-29's, bombers. Because I was such a skinny little runt, I got the job of being tail gunner on a B-29, basically, I think because it wasn't too many people that could crawl back and fit in the space that you're allowed back there in the gunner's compartment on the tail of a B-29. I was a crew member of a B-29 and spent the next three years as a crew member as my primary MOS and a supply sergeant as my secondary MOS. Otherwise, when we weren't flying, I worked in the supply side of the squadron and traveled all over the United States. I seen the United States from 20,000 feet up in the air as opposed to ground level but all over the United States, England, France, Alaska. I was very lucky, very fortunate to get the assignment that I did and had a wonderful, wonderful three years. Really, it was wonderful!

- Wayne: [00:19:41](#) Was it Army Air Force or Air Force at that time?
- Chuck: [00:19:44](#) It was Army Air Force.
- Wayne: [00:19:46](#) So you're in the Army Air Force from, what was it, '47 to '50?
- Chuck: [00:19:49](#) '50.
- Wayne: [00:19:50](#) So you left just about the time the Korean war started?
- Chuck: [00:19:54](#) Korean war started the third of July of '50 and I got out, believe it or not, on the 1st of July. Had my enlistment lasted another week, I would have been frozen in the Air Force for another year but, as it happened, I got out two days before, three days, four days before the freeze came on board, and got my discharge.
- Wayne: [00:20:32](#) After you left the Army Air Force, you came back to Dewitt?
- Chuck: [00:20:37](#) Yes.
- Wayne: [00:20:38](#) What did you do here?
- Chuck: [00:20:39](#) That was July of 1950. And I didn't know what I was going to do. Really, I was kind of floundering. I got a job at Oldsmobile working on the line. I decided that really wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. That fall I started Michigan State and I thought, well, maybe I'd like to be a policeman so I went into criminal justice, started down that road. I spent the winter out there and then had a friend say--this is early 1951. They said, "Why don't you come to work for United States Property and Fiscal Office?" which was the supply depot for the whole

state of Michigan Army National Guard. I said, "Well, okay. I guess maybe that might be something I might be interested--" They said, "If you come in, we'll give you your rank you just come out of the air force as and give you a job." They were building a new building on West St. Joe, big supply depot and maintenance building. I say "depot," a couple of buildings out there. I started working for them and that was the start of my career for the government, supplied the whole Michigan Army National Guard with all their equipment and all their clothing and everything that goes along with maintaining troops.

- Wayne: [00:22:49](#) Were you considered a civilian or were you a military member?
- Chuck: [00:22:52](#) I was both. I was started out the bottom pay as a bottom grade in the federal civil service. One weekend a month I put on a uniform and did my military duty. That went on until 1955 when I joined the Guard. I also started a officer candidate course and was, in 1955, promoted to 2nd Lt. That started my career up the ladder in the Guard.
- Wayne: [00:24:03](#) What rank did you finish as?
- Chuck: [00:24:05](#) I finished as a full colonel. I was the director of supply and services for the state, had the responsibility of not only furnishing all the state—at that time we had 13,500 men when I retired--not only with their equipment, but with their clothing. I was responsible for billeting, their transportation, their food service. It was quite a job.
- Wayne: [00:24:41](#) Were you involved also in Graying at all?
- Chuck: [00:24:45](#) Graying? Yes. I say, "yes." I spent a lot of time at Grayling. Being the logistics officer, I supported them with all their supplies, equipment, food, etc., that they needed up there.
- Wayne: [00:25:11](#) So for the summer trainings they did, you would have arranged for the convoys?
- Chuck: [00:25:16](#) the convoys, the food--
- Wayne: [00:25:18](#) everything they needed there.
- Chuck: [00:25:19](#) billeting, everything logistically that they needed to complete their summer training.
- Wayne: [00:25:29](#) How many years altogether did you do that?

Chuck: [00:25:31](#) I went in the Air Force in '47; got in the Guard in '51; retired in '84, so I had about 36, 37 years' total service.

Wayne: [00:25:45](#) Did you do anything after you retired from there?

Chuck: [00:25:48](#) Nope. Come back to DeWitt. In '84 I retired Halloween Day and Norma [Decker] and I spent our retirement years traveling, had a wonderful time.

Wayne: [00:26:09](#) How has DeWitt changed since the 1940's? What are some of the ways that you've noticed?

Chuck: [00:26:24](#) Okay. I thought you'd probably ask this question and if I get going too much and you think it's too mundane, tell me. Basically, going on the four corners of DeWitt, starting on West Main, coming up from Scott; going east on the north side of the road: The barber shop used to be the telephone office. Next to the barber shop was a 2-story building which Motz's now have a building in there. It used to be, the bottom floor was a post office; the upper floor was a hall of some kind. Next to that and that was torn down, that building no longer there. Next to that was Moon's grocery store. We're going east now. Next to that was a vacant lot but Lankfords put in a variety store on that lot. Now it's part of the insurance company. On the corner was Lietzke's Grocery Store which is still there, part of the insurance company. Going north there was nothing changed. We have the church which is still there and now a brewery. We had the ice cream place which was a grange, which now the ice cream place; house on the corner. Going across the street we had the Community Church which is gone now. Next to that we had the Masonic Temple which is gone now and a big brick building in there. Then we had the bank which is now the coffee shop. Next to that was a vacant lot and was filled with--Lankford's built a store in there for their daughter--opened a woman's clothing shop. Now it's the pie shop. On the corner there was Cook's Grocery Store which is now the women's hair place. Going east on East Main, used to be a township hall. It was a big building with a bell on the top. I remember that. That's down. Next going east was a bar and it was a crappy looking little building back in those days with an outside toilet out back. Next to that was the original Chevy garage. Perry brothers left that one, went across the street and built a new Chevy garage but anyway, that was later used by Cliff Loesch as an appliance building. He sold wash machines, refrigerators. On the corner was Corey's Bar which burnt down. So that is where the parking lot is now. That building burned down. Across the street is the building that's always been there. Kecks Appliance came in and used it. Going west now

and we had the Chevy garage. Next to that going west, used to be a barn-type building which the hardware used for storage and they tore that down and put in this brick building. For a while you could buy auto parts there. Now it's an insurance company. On the corner was Dalman's Hardware. Going south was Dalman's old hardware which is now the restaurant. Going south from that was a drug store. Going south from that was Reed's Grocery Store and next to that was a building which housed Halterman's Barbershop and the fire station. A second floor was the city library. I got a picture of it. This is Reeds; this is the library, second floor. This is Halterman's, the fire barn. On top during the war, we had this structure which people used to go up and back then they didn't have radar. So you manned this 24 hours a day and if you've seen a plane fly over--this is during the war--you would tell which way it was going and what type, what direction, and what time it was. Then we had the Ford Garage and this is where Terranova's is now. This is on the corner, This is the entrance into back end of it. Across the street going on the west side of Bridge is probably the most traumatic area that's had all the buildings-- back during the war used to be Church's Body Shop in the middle of the block and during the war they painted mortar shells in that building. That was torn down. About the same area, the city built a fire station which also had, in the back room of it, the city hall buildings where city hall people worked. To the south of that was a building and I don't know what it was built for. It was a brick building but later became a laundromat. North of that was--I remember back when I was a small child--they used to have movie Friday nights. They had picture shows. They put a screen on the side of Church's Auto Body and they had wooden benches and people could come into town and watch a outside movie on that building. Where the fire station was, that was torn down and now we have the drug store in there. On the corner was the gas station which has been torn down and is a vacant lot now. Going west was a bar and now is a barbershop. The next building to the west of that, way back when before Percy Carris built a new drug store, used to be a drugstore. There's still a two-story building sitting there. Going west from that was a women's apparel shop. Then there was a vacant lot where the telephone office is now and then there was Digg's house was on the corner which was torn down. So that was basically the uptown portion, the changes that's been made since the 40's.

Wayne:

[00:35:24](#)

You mentioned during the war they did something with mortar shells.

Chuck: [00:35:29](#) Yeah. They painted the mortar shells in Church's Body Shop. It was a war effort.

Wayne: [00:35:34](#) Why did they paint them?

Chuck: [00:35:35](#) The shells came unpainted and they painted them, "OD." All shells were painted.

Wayne: [00:35:48](#) This house that you're living in now, it's a historic house and so could you--

Chuck: [00:35:53](#) Built in 1911. Mrs. Scott bought it in 1919. Mrs. Scott was somehow a descendant of the Scotts which formed DeWitt. Lily Scott lived here. I remember Lily. I don't remember Mrs. Scott. I don't remember Mr. Scott. They lived here until 1955. That's when Norma and I bought it. It was built in 1911. We bought it in '55.

Wayne: [00:36:33](#) So you're only the second person ever to live in the house?

Chuck: [00:36:36](#) Yes. How about that?

Wayne: [00:36:41](#) I noticed--it's almost Christmas time--and you definitely have decorated, the outside at least, a lot. Have you been doing that since the 50's or is that fairly--

Chuck: [00:36:52](#) Oh my. Anybody that knew Norma, my wife, I've got a whole shed full of Christmas decorations that I don't use. We used to take a week and take everything out of the house. I mean the lower bedroom, which I use now as a bedroom, the front room, this room, the kitchen, and put it on tables on the back porch and then she would bring in Christmas and I've got pictures of it. This house was transformed on the inside into just beautiful Christmas. Just beautiful Christmas. When she got sick, oh probably 1990 at least, it was about the last of that. Yes, Norma was a big fanatic on Christmas.

Wayne: [00:38:13](#) It sounds like you still are kind of carrying some of that on.

Chuck: [00:38:15](#) Oh gosh. I do the outside but I live alone and very seldom does anybody come in. It's just me so I do the outside because I know other people can see it but for me to do the inside, I don't.

Wayne: [00:38:40](#) How long does it take you to do the outside?

Chuck: [00:38:42](#) It takes me three days.

Wayne: [00:38:46](#) It's quite elaborate.

Chuck: [00:38:49](#) Yeah. There's quite a bit out there. Yeah.

Wayne: [00:38:52](#) How did you and Norma meet?

Chuck: [00:38:55](#) Oh my. I come out of the Air Force in 1950 and basically, all my friends were married off when I came back home. There wasn't very many people left--I mean single gals anymore--and Norma lived a block away. We started dating and we dated through all the winter of '50. It was kind of a deal where we didn't want other people to know so it was kind of a secret thing between us. June of '51, it was a sudden thing. We decided we're going to get married and this is the 1st and we picked a date 16th of June, two weeks, and gosh, we had to make all the arrangements of a hall for a reception. We used the DeWitt Community Building. We got married in her folks' living room with a best man and a best gal and her parents. Maybe there was eight people there and we got married and 63 years we had together, good marriage, wonderful marriage.

Wayne: [00:40:50](#) Talk about a fast wedding though!

Chuck: [00:40:53](#) Fast wedding.

Wayne: [00:40:55](#) I can't imagine trying to arrange something in two weeks.

Chuck: [00:40:58](#) You know, whatever floats your boat! Now kids spend thousands of dollars on all the trappings and we had a good marriage. We did.

Wayne: [00:41:24](#) Everything I could see, It certainly looked that way.

Chuck: [00:41:26](#) We had a wonderful marriage. She's been gone four years and I miss her every day. Yeah.

Wayne: [00:41:34](#) How many children did you have?

Chuck: [00:41:36](#) We had four of which I lost one year and a half ago, pancreatic cancer.

Wayne: [00:41:51](#) How many grandchildren?

Chuck: [00:41:54](#) Kathy had three; Connie had two; David had one; Rick had two and then I got "greats." I got something like twelve greats now. It's all good, all good. Yep. Good town to raise a family. I know there's things that went on that I never heard about and

rightfully so. I shouldn't have, but it's been a good, good town to raise a family.

- Wayne: [00:42:36](#) Did you go to the theater when you were dating?
- Chuck: [00:42:40](#) Oh gosh, yes! Dad owned a house right across the road from the theater. It was called the Rouse house. It had a wraparound porch next to the sidewalk and a barn out in back. He owned the property all the way through. He built the house on the corner here. He sold the house to Schoonover, the old house, and moved back here and built this new house. The theater coming to town was quite a deal, you know, little town like DeWitt to get a theater. Wow! It was cheap back in those days. A quarter or 35¢, you know. Cheap, yeah.
- Wayne: [00:43:39](#) Popcorn wasn't outrageously expensive like it is today?
- Chuck: [00:43:44](#) No, no, no. You're right. Dad worked--I don't know if you knew--Rosevale packing company.
- Wayne: [00:43:53](#) I've heard about that, yes.
- Chuck: [00:43:54](#) At that time it employed practically the whole town, because they had a lot of jobs up there. They slaughtered beef and pigs. I had a job up there through high school of cleaning the room that they made meat, packing meat, baloney, and hot dogs, and that type of thing, washed trucks. It was a good, part-time job.
- Wayne: [00:44:36](#) You talked about there was an elevator fire? Where was the elevator at first?
- Chuck: [00:44:44](#) It was right at the end of this next street, right up here. It was a big, a big elevator and Baldersons owned it. When it caught, all the dust and everything over the years, it just practically exploded. I mean it went! It was a big building and it went fast.
- Wayne: [00:45:16](#) When was this?
- Chuck: [00:45:19](#) I'm thinking probably end of the 50's early 60's.
- Wayne: [00:45:27](#) So you were living here at the time?
- Chuck: [00:45:28](#) I was living next door here on the corner. It must have been below '55 then. It's hard to remember when it went. The other big fire we had in town was a bar. Then we had the hotel, and the school. We've had some good fires.

Wayne: [00:46:01](#) Was the elevator on the old interurban track?

Chuck: [00:46:04](#) Right next to the interurban on the west side of the interurban track.

Wayne: [00:46:08](#) I'm trying to think of why they would have built it there unless it was next to interurban where maybe you could transport goods.

Chuck: [00:46:16](#) The interurban went just on the east side of the building. It was a big building.

Wayne: [00:46:25](#) The tracks would have all been gone by the time you came here.

Chuck: [00:46:28](#) The tracks, the building. I still [remember] the stopping building, the terminal building. Blind Pete used to sell bulk beer out of it and it was kind of across where the parking lot is now. I remember Blind Pete and the bulk beer. It always amazed me how the man could make change. Yeah, I remember the building.

Wayne: [00:47:08](#) So the depot building was there, but--

Chuck: [00:47:11](#) The tracks were gone.

Wayne: [00:47:12](#) Tracks, the trestle was gone?

Chuck: [00:47:13](#) Yeah. Back at the end of the street where the trestle was at the end of this street here, next to the lumber yard, we used to have the city dump. Anybody had stuff to throw away used to ride to the end of the road, throw it over the dump next to the river. If you were to dig that up now you--probably is all rotted-- but you would find all kinds of trash. It was the city dump at one time. Crazy!

Wayne: [00:47:49](#) You wouldn't think it would be that close to town. Right?

Chuck: [00:47:52](#) It was right at the end of the street.

Wayne: [00:47:55](#) Did you go swimming in the river at all or anything like that or did you go to Alward Lake or one of the other lakes?

Chuck: [00:48:02](#) Oh gosh, Alward Lake and Round Lake, both of them. Alward Lake especially because it was actually kind of a resort. They had tables, a bath house. They rented boats. They had a dock and yes, Alward Lake. But in the river-- Yes. I've gone to the river but by going into the river, get bloodsuckers on us. I think they

were so plentiful because the slaughterhouse dumped all their sewage from the slaughterhouse into the river which promulgated the bloodsuckers. Basically, what I'm saying is if you went up the river, you could come out and start pulling the blood suckers off your legs so it wasn't a favorite place of fishing. I remember though--in fact, I got a spear--the men in town would, in wintertime when the river was frozen--and back in those days there was a lot of winters--they would cut a trench across the river. Then they would have drivers go upstream a ways and pound on the river and it would cause the fish--and then people would stand along this open trench with spears--I've got one in the garage--spear the fish as they come through.

- Wayne: [00:49:44](#) Did they have any ice skating here in the winter?
- Chuck: [00:49:47](#) The only ice skating we had--the fire department used to form a ice skating rink down here where the pavilion and stuff is now in the park, the other side of the river. For a few years they'd take the fire engines down there and blow water, make an ice skating rink.
- Wayne: [00:50:18](#) That was the same place where the baseball field was, right?
- Chuck: [00:50:20](#) Basically the same area.
- Wayne: [00:50:21](#) It didn't damage the field?
- Chuck: [00:50:23](#) Or no, no. In fact it was west. It was not on the field, it was to the west of the field, but yeah, they had ice skating. There was another ice skating place. If you go past the cemetery on the interurban, there's a pond back there and us kids used to go back on the pond, which is still there, and ice skate.
- Wayne: [00:50:53](#) Must be near where that subdivision is.
- Chuck: [00:50:56](#) Yes. The subdivision is kind of wrapped around it now.
- Wayne: [00:51:00](#) That's not a man-made lake up there?
- Chuck: [00:51:03](#) No. It's a pond.
- Wayne: [00:51:06](#) Did you go sledding anywhere around here?
- Chuck: [00:51:11](#) Two places: Up here on the Retreat [St. Francis Retreat Center], they used to allow us to go up there. Then, we'd call it Bone

Hill. It's out where the [Prairie Creek] golf course is. I was sledding out there. Yeah, and now it's the golf course.

Wayne: [00:51:25](#) When did the golf course come in? You remember that?

Chuck: [00:51:28](#) Oh boy. I don't know. I. Hey, it's fairly recent. 70's? I can't remember. Used to be a farm, Rosevale farm. The brick house used to be the main house--not the brick house, the stone house--and they used to have barns to the east of that. That all used to be cultivated.

Wayne: [00:51:59](#) When did Rosevale go out of business or why did it go out of business?

Chuck: [00:52:03](#) I don't know why. Dick Kiebler, which was a classmate of mine, Kiebler family bought it and I don't know why it went out of business. Dad worked for him for long-- They had trucks and they used to have a regular route. Back in the 30's, 40's they used to have what they called CCC camps up north and they were conservation camps which the government would establish. Dad used to—I went on a few trips with him--deliver to these CC camps up in the woods around Houghton Lake, that whole area and the towns.

Wayne: [00:53:09](#) So they basically sold to northern Michigan and the Lansing area?

Chuck: [00:53:14](#) Oh yeah. They sold to a lot of stores. They had quite a fleet of trucks there. They used to go out. That's five days a week, you know.

Wayne: [00:53:23](#) Was it just beef or was it beef and pork?

Chuck: [00:53:25](#) Beef and pork. In fact, I had a job one time in high school of running (terrible!) water through pork guts. You'd get a whole tub of--they were big vats--and used to have to run water through them. Then they used them the next day to pack meat in them. They had a regular machine. It forced the sausages and that type of thing. I had that as a job of running water through the opening of the pig guts. Then I had another job of making head cheese, taking hog heads--they would be cooked and everything. The skin was off of them. I had the job of picking the meat off the skull, making head cheese out of it.

Wayne: [00:54:31](#) This is all during high school?

Chuck: [00:54:33](#) Yes.

Wayne: [00:54:33](#) How many hours a week did you work then?

Chuck: [00:54:36](#) I worked in the evenings. I'd go up there probably at six and work until nine cleaning down the sausage room. There was occasions where maybe they didn't run out, before the people left, all the stuff in the vats. So I'd take and make a baloney or whatever, you know. It was [a job] for a kid, you know. Back in those days, jobs were fairly easier for kids because everybody was in the war or in the service. I worked for Walker Lumber Co. many summers. We used to get the lumber on rail cars over by where Boichot's pit is. There's a siding over there, a rail siding, and we used to get our lumber in there and haul it to DeWitt and stack it and so I had jobs like that.

Wayne: [00:55:53](#) You did quite a few jobs besides being an Eagle Scout and involved in school.

Chuck: [00:55:59](#) Kept me out of trouble! I didn't have time. Worked at Reed's Store for a while, stocking shelves and putting up potatoes and that type of thing. Yeah, I always had a job.

Wayne: [00:56:19](#) What kinds of things did you do on the farm back before you came to DeWitt then?

Chuck: [00:56:22](#) Oh really, I was pretty young, 13 when I came to DeWitt, so I was pretty young. About the only chores that I had to do was a gather the eggs, feed the chickens. Simple.

Wayne: [00:56:46](#) What kind of things did you have on the farm? You said you had chickens.

Chuck: [00:56:51](#) Oh gosh! We had the whole gamut. We had cows which we milked; we had horses; we had a team of three horses; we had pigs; we had sheep; we had geese, chickens. One of my favorite memories on the farm was we had a ram sheep. We used to tease him. We'd get out into the pasture area where he was and tease him and he would chase us and if he'd catch us, he'd knock us down. I mean he'd hit us. The game was to tease him, get him to chase you, and then jump over the fence. That was the game. It was stuff farm boys do. Yeah.

Wayne: [00:57:51](#) You said you lived with your grandmother. Who else was living there at the time then besides the two of you?

Chuck: [00:57:58](#) Grandpa. Jake was her second marriage. He lived to be real old but that was hard work back in those days. He, Jake, owned 80 acres of which probably 70 were tillable, but to plow all that

with a one-bottom plow and a team of three horses and to get it ready for planting. He had to roll it and he had to drag it and then you had to seed it. That was hard work. In the winter time, you know, we didn't have combines. They had binders and that would take the grains, the oats and wheat, it would make bundles out of them. Then you shocked them, put them in shocks. Same on corn. A corn picker would bind the corn and then you shock it and then in the winter time you go out, load it on a wagon and bring into the barn floor and husk it all by hand. Then the grain was all done by a machine or tractor and you've seen them. Some of them were the old type that run on fire and boilers but the old tractor brought the separator down the road and went from farm to farm. The farmers--we'd get together and go to the field and bring in the shocks of oats and then carried them to the granary and dump it in bins. That was a hard work. It was hard work.

- Wayne: [01:00:08](#) So you didn't have tractors?
- Chuck: [01:00:10](#) Oh no, no, no tractors? No, no, no. We never had a tractor. Tractors came later on. My gracious, you know!
- Wayne: [01:00:22](#) I guess I'm thinking that my great grandfather had a tractor during the 30's, but it was steel-wheeled and--
- Chuck: [01:00:31](#) Those were the type that I'm talking about used to come down the road hauling the separator, steel wheels with the cleats on the wheels.
- Wayne: [01:00:41](#) Yeah. That kind of a--because he would still get it out once in a while even like in the 1970's and--
- Chuck: [01:00:47](#) Yeah, it was hard work. Jake worked hard and I'm talking the depression days, right at the high end of the depression. About the only money we had was from the milk. We milked 10, 9 or 10 cows; and eggs--take eggs in every week to Laingsburg to a store and they'd buy the eggs. Then with that money you would buy the stuff that you needed like the salt and the sugar and that type of thing. The depression years were very hard. I mean, I can remember having holes in my tennis shoes because we couldn't afford new ones. Used to put paper or cardboard in the bottom and wear them. Those generations born after the 40's, when the war come along and give everybody a job and money became plentiful but the depression years were hard. Hard, hard, hard. They always had plenty to eat because in the fall we would slaughter pigs and didn't have refrigeration, didn't have inside water in the farmhouse, didn't even have refrigeration for. So Grandma, she had a big range, wood-

burning range in the kitchen. They would boil fat, lard until it was a liquid, run it through—I've got a press, a lard press--these presses that pressed all the fat, liquid fat, out of the fat and put meat in big crocks and then pour the lard over them. Those were in the basement and so during the winter you'd go down and get your meat out of the lard.

- Wayne: [01:03:42](#) Do you know anything about the history of your family and when they originally came to this area then?
- Chuck: [01:03:49](#) Going back a little bit. Dad came from Weidman [Michigan] and my grandpa on my dad's side owned property up there but they were poor. They had a house that they raised one, two, three, four boys and a girl in a house that later become a deer shack. I don't know how they did it Really, I don't know how they managed. Dad came from Weidman and then after school - in fact all the boys, come down to DeWitt or this area for employment. My grandma come from Canada. I don't know where my grandpa come from. No, I really don't know my history. I think I'm English but I don't know. They're buried up to Weidman. I go sometimes. I've went up to see their graves.
- Wayne: [01:05:18](#) Where's that near?
- Chuck: [01:05:21](#) Weidman is northwest of Mt. Pleasant, Coldwater Lake, up in that area. I really don't think Dad went to high school. About a quarter of a mile from him, they had a one-room school. I wouldn't be surprised--I never asked Dad--but I wouldn't be surprised that they went through eight grades and probably that was it.
- Wayne: [01:06:04](#) Is there anything else, anything special about your life that I haven't asked about that, any unusual accomplishments or adventures?
- Chuck: [01:06:18](#) Oh well, you know, adventures--Our whole life's been an adventure of one kind of another. We joined the Methodist Church in 1980. We spent a lot of wonderful years at church camp, a church family, had a trailer, pulled it up. After we retired, we spent a lot of our winters in Florida; went to Hawaii; went to Alaska; went to England; went to Germany; took some cruises. It's all been a wonderful adventure and very full life, very full. I had a wonderful partner. It's wonderful. It's all been good and now at 90--you know, like your folks--we're getting near the end of the road and life is hard now. Maybe when you lose your spouse, you just lose part of your soul.

Wayne: Yes, I know my father-in-law is in kind of the same situation. He's 95 now. He's adjusted, but it's not the same.

Chuck: Oh gosh. It'll never be the same and so many times I say to people, "You take so much for granted, you don't realize how wonderful your life, how wonderful your marriage, your partner. Every day you take it for granted and you shouldn't. Live it! You just take so much for granted. You don't realize how good things are until you lose it."

Wayne: I want to thank you very much for sharing your memories with us.

Chuck: I hope I haven't been too mundane. It's all good. It's all good. It's all good.