

WALT AND BARB PIERCE

Wayne: This is Thursday October 14th, 2021. I'm Wayne Summers with Rowlan Smith and we are interviewing Walt and Barb Pierce. Why don't we start out with you, Barb, by telling us when and where you were born?

Barb: I was born in St. Johns out on M-21, 1936, Jan. 3rd.

Wayne: So this was a home birth?

Barb: Yes. I was born at home and lived there all my life until I married Walter.

Wayne: Did you go to a one-room school?

Barb: One room, Cramer School out there. Then we came up to St. Joe School and then gas was rationed, so we walked back to Cramer School and then we came back up to St. Joe School. Then I graduated from St. Joe in the eighth grade.

Wayne: Do you have any particular memories of either Cramer's or St. Joe?

Barb: Oh, yes. Cramer, we were all eight grades in there and Mr. [Russell] Ringle was our teacher and we had made curtains for the school, appliquéd them, and it was snowing. We thought, we could get him stuck, then we could go home. So when he pulled ahead, we pulled back. I'll never forget it. I went to work for the state and Mr. Ringle came in as a customer and I said, "Are you the Mr. Ringel that taught at Cramer school?" He says, "Yes, and you're Margaret Carroll." Now, I wasn't Margaret Carroll but Margaret was my sister. So I thought that was really something and that number of years because that had to be--well, it was 20 years ago--so it had to be 40 years. So that was that.

St. Joe, I have lots of memories of that. It was a nice school, strict but nice. We graduated from the eighth grade from there and we sang *Alice Blue Gown* and wore blue formals. That was a big thing back then so that was fun. It was a good school. I sent my kids there and liked it.

Wayne: So Walt, same question for you. When and where were you born?

Walt: I was born in Flint, Michigan, in 1935. My dad worked for a bakery there, Leitson's Bakery in Flint. 1939 he moved to St. Johns and started a bakery here. I remember the years. I was four years old when we came here and it was a booming town at that time. There was three other bakeries on Main Street [Clinton Ave.]. The first one was Mr. and Mrs. Murray [William & Augusta] right across the street from where my dad started his. Where he started his bakery on Main St., it was a grocery store that went out of business. He rented a building and did quite a bit of business there. Got a lot of memories of it, lot of memories of downtown St. Johns.

Wayne: I read that it was originally called Pierce's Pastry Kitchen, I believe, and it had a train in the front window or something. How did that happen?

Walt: We were decorating for Christmas and it had Christmas cookies and everything on the train that run around there. That was one of the first things I remembered about it.

Wayne: How long did the train run it in the window?

Walt: All day.

Wayne: For every year it was open?

Walt: I don't know what year they stopped it but it was there a quite a few years. I remember it was a Lionel Train that was there. It was a lot of good years downtown. It's a shame what I see down there now.

Wayne: I was reading that your father then sold the business after about five years.

Walt: No, a lot longer than that. My father sold it to people named Leonteries(?) from Ypsilanti and they didn't make a go of it. My dad got it back and then he kept it till I got out of service. I went to school up in Minnesota, bakers' school, when I graduated. When I graduated from there, I was home about five days and had my draft notice so I went and put my two years in, enjoyed that and then I came home. My wife and I bought the business from my folks. This was my folk's home and we bought this. We didn't think we'd ever get it paid for, the house, and the business, and everything that was there but it was a very good business.

Going back to the other bakeries here. There was that Murray's Bakery. They were really nice people. Their main thing was donuts. Now there's two kinds: There's a fried cake and there's a doughnut. A fried cake is made with baking powder; a donut is made with yeast. People get them mixed up. [Harold & Mary] Week's had a bakery here in their home down on Church Street, right to the very end. There was a bakery in their house. Then they came downtown. There was one already there too. Ferd Grassley(?) was his name. They had a bakery down there. There was another one on Walker Street but just for a very short time. I remember that one next to Antes Cleaners. It was on the side street, Walker.

I had two sisters, Betty [Pierce] and Jane [Pierce]. They worked in the bakery. I worked in the bakery. We all did, put a lot of hours in and our kids did. I think of all the years that I walked from here to the bakery at two in the morning. The clock on the courthouse don't work. I went at two every morning. Now when I looked back, the courthouse was built by the county but the clock was bought from the city. The city bought the big clock that's on the courthouse. I've complained to everybody about it, that courthouse clock. Every morning I knew I was on time for work because I had to be there at two o'clock.

Wayne: So you went in at two o'clock. What time did you typically get home?

Walt: You never knew. My wife run the front of the bakery. She took care of all the women that waited on customers. I run the back. I did the baking. She'd leave me a note what they needed for tomorrow. When I went in to work, I picked that up and then we started.

Wayne: How many days a week were you working?

Walt: Six days and then on Sunday you went in and got reorganized for the next week, cleaned the cases, and cleaned the windows.

Wayne: So you really were working seven days a week.

Walt: Seven days a week.

Wayne: When you first started, how much did, say donuts or bread cost?

Barb: Nineteen cents a loaf for bread. We got fifty cents a dozen for donuts.

Walt: Another thing I'll add to that while she's thinking of things. I can remember when we would open up at six in the morning and there would be a lineup for a city block to get their two loaves of bread. This was during the war and you had to bring your own bag and we couldn't slice it. The government took our slicer for the war, took everybody's. Not only that, they took one of our mixers.

Barb: Today I went out to Beck's and got a dozen donuts, ten dollars a dozen.

Wayne: Price has gone up a bit.

Barb: We were in business the wrong year. We used to have moneymakers for the band and the school and we'd sell the doughnuts two dozen for a dollar. Even when our kids were in school which would have been in 19--. Marcia [Pierce] graduated in '76 and Eugene [Pierce] in '79, we were still letting the school and things have donuts, two dozen for a dollar. We had to have Lions Club helped us bag them because we sold so many of them.

Walt: Them were good years.

Wayne: How did you two meet each other?

Walt: High school. We graduated together.

Barb: Actually, we met at one of the Bingham Grange dances but we were in school together.

Wayne: When you went to the dance, did you know each other before you got to the dance?

Walt: Yes, we knew each other in school.

Wayne: Was it a date?

Walt: We just went and had a good time. All the granges were good times.

Barb: I went with another guy, actually, and he got drunk and so I went home with him, but us girls all met at out there.

Wayne: So I guess there's advantages to not being drunk.

Walt: You couldn't find a place on Friday and Saturday night to park downtown. It was that busy. They had parking down the center of the street. Them we're good times. We worked hard. Everybody in all the businesses did.

Wayne: Could you maybe talk about some of the other businesses besides bakeries that were in downtown?

Walt: Well, next to the bakery was a hat shop. Two old maids run a hat shop [Durkee Hat Shop] in here. In this hat shop, you could not believe the people that lined up to get a Easter bonnet. These two old maids would come over in the bakery. Say, "Hey fellas, there's a freight truck out here. Could you unload these hats for us?" Big boxes of them and we always did. We'd go over and unload them hats. Well, back then everybody wore a hat to church. You had to. But boy, they sure did. Mabel and Sue Durkee was their name.

Barb: Up from that was Walker Cafe.

Walt: From the very head of Main Street, was Baker's Restaurant. Baker was his name and open 24 hours a day. Right straight across the street there was another restaurant, Bruno's Restaurant. The local bar down here [Bruno's Wonder Bar], it was his grandparents, 24 hours. You ought to see the cars haulers line up down [M-]21. You know, stop to eat, up and down 21. Then Bruno's moved out of there, the head of Main Street. They went down where they're at today down two blocks. Now Bakers, the people that had it, their son, Herb Baker, lived over here in Cass Street. He and his wife had it and they sold it to Ernie Teal from Ionia and Ernie Teal sold it to Al Walker [Walker's Café]. That's who got that then. It was a going business. I mean, every store was, from Mr. Walker on the corner, the hat shop, the bakery, John Harley's Second Hand Store.

Barb: Then Harley sold to Lester Lake.

Walt: He tore it down. The [Lake's] Jewelry Store; next was a little building and it was the office for the [Clinton] Theater; the next building was the Theater; then there was a little barbershop on the other side of the theater; then there was a J. C. Penney store. That was a big doings. Man, the woman would sell you stuff. She put the money in a little bucket, had a screen on it, put it up here and shot it up to the upstairs to have it send the change back. The next one was Hafner's dime Store, five and ten dime store; then we had Byerly's Grocery Store. Paul Buehler run that. Then we went down to the shoe store. That was a shoe store there. Up above there was Boron's Floor Covering store. They had an office up there. I forgot. Above the bakery there was a patent office up there and a doctor named Corbin. We found an old sign that he had downstairs there years ago. Old Doc Corbin! That was [Dean] Laurence that was the patent office. He lived up on Lansing Street. The only swimming pool in town, he had.

Wayne: Did you own the building or did lease the space?

Walt: We leased the space. My dad did and we did.

Barb: We had office space upstairs and had a basement that we stored all the flour. We'd get carloads of flour on a train car, and we'd get that twice a year.

Wayne: Was there any problem storing things in a basement either with mice or dampness?

Barb: We had rodent control come in. We never had a problem.

Walt: I remember Truman the Tramp. This guy was a hobo. He rode the rails. He followed the fruit belt, picking fruit all the way up through Michigan cherries. He'd come every year and he was a wonderful baker. When he came, he had a fiddle, a regular fiddle, and he'd play it out back of the bakery when we weren't busy. He always claimed that he played in Carnegie Hall. The guy was, I mean he was just fabulous. I believe him to this day. He would come and he slept in the basement. My dad give him whites to wear. He was a good baker.

Barb: Back then, we always wore white. The bakers did and our waitresses did.

Walt: All whites, hat and all, you did. We didn't need the government to tell us to wear a hat.

Barb: We wore uniforms, white uniforms.

Walt: He would leave and you never knew when. Tomorrow morning he might not be there. It don't matter if he had a paycheck coming or not. He was gone. You wouldn't see him for a year.

Wayne: How long did he work for you when he was in town?

Walt: Usually a month but you never knew when. Truman the tramp. A person that was a bum, he wanted a free handout but them type like Truman come and ask for work and they meant it. I mean, they would work. A bum wouldn't. He'd mark your building for other bums to know if he got a free handout.

Wayne: Did you ever give free handouts?

Walt: Nope, if you started it, you were more busy keeping them out.

Barb: We gave lots of free stuff out though. We always donated the dinner rolls to all funeral dinners.

Wayne: Those were people that you knew in town, I assume.

Barb: Whether we knew them or not, if they had a funeral dinner, we donated the dinner rolls.

Walt: All the churches. It's a shame we've lost all our churches here, gone by the wayside just like the bakery's. They came to her and I, this Bobinal? Investment Co., and they wanted us to put a

branch bakery out here in that little mall right there. Well, if I took half my business from downtown out there, I couldn't make it. I'd ruin both places. They couldn't see that, but it wouldn't have worked.

Walt: I never done any business in that DeWitt area in all the years we were there. Fowler, all the rural areas here. Lansing, we did tremendous. Where's our book, all the wedding cakes that were pictures? I thought you had that book. Go and see if you can find it. We did a lot of big shows in Lansing at the malls and we did a great business. There was a lot of good bakeries in Lansing. Old Rudy Kwast down there on Washington [Ave.]. I remember all them old guys. Art John. We were all together. If I was out of something and needed it, I could get it from one of the other bakeries. Mr. and Mrs. Murray, God bless her soul, they lived there. They made donuts. My dad would put a hundred-pound bag in my wagon and I'd take it over there to them. He couldn't do any of that. Weeks were good people but people wanted to work. I had an old woman, Mrs. Burnham. She was our dishwasher. She was as good as gold.

Barb: Back then you didn't have a hard time getting help. People came and they stayed.

Walt: They stayed, all of them. Them were good times. You wouldn't have that good a time today.

Wayne: When did you retire from the bakery business?

Barb: We sold the business in '79 because our children were both grown and on their way and neither one of them wanted the bakery at that point. So we put it up for sale and I applied for a job for the state, took my state test. I thought, well, I could work both places, which I did. I worked for the state and I went down to the bakery and done my decorating and stuff. Then we sold the bakery in '79 and he went to work for the state in '82 but I had worked there since '78 for the state. We sold it and both went to work for the state.

Walt: Fellow from Owosso, Mike White, his folks had a very successful bakery in Owosso. He wasn't a very successful here.

Barb: Well, he didn't want the bakery. His folks bought it for him. He was a graduate of Michigan State. He did not want the bakery. He sold it to a foreign person and evidently they didn't do well. I'll tell you, the only reason we done well was we worked for one thing and we catered food. We catered, like Federal-Mogul, Sealed Power, Saylor Beale, Merle Green Farms. We catered big dinners to these places and you make money doing that and they didn't do wedding cakes and I'd do as high as eleven wedding cakes a weekend. It's a lot of work but that's where your money come in at.

Wayne: You did all the decorating then?

Barb: I done all the decorating.

Walt: I made the cakes and the icing and then she did her job.

Barb: I'll tell you a little story about that. I had surgery and wasn't able to work. This lady ordered a birthday cake and everything was fine. She come to pick it up and he had made the flowers for it and she looked at and she says she ordered roses, not cabbages. So we always teased him.

Walt: I helped her out. I made her birthday cake!

Barb: He was in college for it and I learned the hard way but mine were roses and his was cabbages. In recent years, why then our daughter wished that we'd have kept the bakery but it was too late. We have a granddaughter that worked in a bakery for a year and it about killed her. It was a small bakery. She lifted the hundred-pound bags of flour and she weighed probably a hundred pounds. Got too much for her. She was working sixty, seventy hours a week so she quit a year ago and is doing cakes and cookies in her home. She called the other day and she's made just about as much as she did working, just in her home but she's charging three dollars for a cookie that I charged a nickel for you. You know, that's how times have changed but she's doing very well in her home.

Walt: I remember when we used to have our fire department here, which we still have, but every Thanksgiving they had a big bingo game at the fire hall. You won chickens and turkeys, ducks, living animals. The [St Johns Egg Station] hatchery was down on Higham Street right behind Dean's Hardware. Amstutz was on Clinton Avenue. That's where they raised the baby chicks. Anyway, they furnished the turkeys. We furnished rolls. I mean, the crowd that they had was tremendous.

Barb: That was another thing we done at holiday time. Thanksgiving and Christmas we roasted turkeys for people.

Walt: Chickens, ducks.

Barb: We'd have as high as fifty turkeys in our oven. I'd make dressing and stuff them and roast them, charge ten cents a pound, and they'd come and pick them up between twelve and one on the holiday time. We done everything for money back then, which people did back then. We worked for our money.

Walt: I could make four hundred and sixty loaves of bread at one run in the oven.

Barb: We baked pigs. We had hog roasts because our oven was big enough. --- won't eat a piece of pork to this day. He came down to the bakery and opened the oven door and there was a pig. Oh my gosh. He's never forgotten that. We put an apple in the pig's mouth.

Walt: We used to get ten cents a pound for roasting a twenty-pound turkey. You know, these housewives, they bought a turkey at the grocery store and it said, "oven ready." It was oven ready. Yeah!

Barb: We'd tell them they had to be oven ready and they'd bring them down in the plastic so you knew they hadn't cleaned them out or anything.

Walt: Then we sold stuffing. If you wanted a bird stuffed or whatever and then went down the day they wanted them, but what time? At noon, twelve to one, and they went out of there, but them were good times. I can remember going to that bingo game with my folks. Everybody went in town to the fireman's bingo. There were things that today they would no more think of doing that to make a little money.

Barb: We made salt rising bread and I don't know if you're familiar with salt rising bread or not, but it stinks just terrible. On Thursday, we'd make salt rising bread. The post office, our vent went right over to them. Oh, the poor postmen would come in. "You're making that bread again!" They didn't like the smell of that.

Wayne: What was the reason? If it smelled so bad, why would you make it?

Barb: People on the street today, they wish they could get salt rising bread like we used to make.

Walt: It's a very firm bread.

Barb: You can buy salt rising bread but it don't stink today. That was the good part of it.

Wayne: Denser texture?

Walt: Dense! I'd have to go down day before. I had a round barrel about this high and in the bottom I had a five-gallon pail and on top of that, I set a big crock. I had cornmeal and milk. That heater I had in there would sour the milk and the cornmeal. Boy, she'd just a-bubble and that was your yeast. You never used a pound of yeast in it. That was your yeast. That was a nice loaf of bread. Like I say, it was solid. It wasn't this stuff that sticks to your hand. We sold a lot of it. When I went down there to see if it was ready, lots of times you'd throw it out. It's not bubbling enough. We're not going to have it this week because it takes time and heat and the milk sours with the cornmeal. Cornbread, that was a big seller. Cornbread, you don't hear much about cornbread today. It just isn't there.

Wayne: So you made cakes?

Walt: Hundreds of them.

Wayne: How many different kinds of bread?

Barb: I don't know. We made dutchy crust; we made sourdough; we made potato bread, French bread, garlic bread, whole wheat bread, a good half a dozen. We had a full bakery. It was not just three kinds of donuts. We had bismarcks, Long Johns, at least eight kinds of rolls, and probably twelve kinds of cookies. We had a big varieties, everything.

Wayne: These were made every day?

Barb: No, some rolls were made every day. Cookies, we froze them, the dough. Pies, he'd make pies ahead, freeze them, and bake them.

Walt: Thursday was pie day. I wish I had a penny for every bushel of apples I peeled. I have a machine. It's up in the top of my garage. Us kids used to come home from school and there'd be six bushel of apples there to peel and core and slice. I got the machine. That's the one thing I took from the bakery. That machine: grab an apple with your left; slap it on these three tines and turn the crank once and it's peeled and cored and it kicks it out. My sister'd stand here and she had a ring put on, snap them. You could do go through them quick but what you had to buy was first-class apples.

Barb: Like rhubarb, we'd buy from the farmers and cut it up and freeze it to make rhubarb pies.

Walt: We'd put our ad in the paper, "Pay you ten cents a pound for rhubarb." The farm women would flock in there. We chopped that up, put it in thirty-pound pails in the freezer.

Barb: Andy's IGA was down there. If he got a lot of ripe bananas, he'd call us and we'd buy the ripe bananas from him, put those in the freezer for banana bread. A lot of stuff local as much as we could from people.

Walt: I was always proud of what it did in the bakery. I really enjoyed it. When we sold, I went to work for the state. I run the bakery up at Ionia in the prison. I really enjoyed it. Them inmates just ate that up doing it. Every Friday was my day in the bakery. I would take eight inmates and we'd make the desserts for the weekend and top-notch stuff. I mean, I didn't skimp. Let them do it. I just directed them and they really liked it. The bakery made all the bread, all the rolls. I had a lot of compassion for prisoners because nobody cared about them. Back home, nobody cared about them. We had open house at the prison once a year for employees to bring their family to see where Dad worked and that. I'd take twelve of the best and we really went out right. We had twenty feet of tables with nothing but the finest baked goods. I'd call the laundromat and tell them what I had to have in whites. I wanted the best, brand new, and I dressed them inmates. They served it and you're going to see people proud. Them inmates, man, they thought they'd moved to heaven, I think. You know, somebody cared for that. That was a big thing. They really enjoyed doing that.

Wayne: Did any of them work for a bakery after they got out?

Walt: You never had contact with any of them. I had a policy. I went in at five in the morning. I'd go into the control center. Any my twenty-two employees, if they lost a family member or sister or something, they had a list for me and I would call him out and get a pass to come see me. I would tell them that "I know your parents, mother died. Would you like to talk to your mother?" "I can't talk to her. I haven't got no money for a phone." "I'll tell you what. You got a phone number?" "Back in my unit." "I'll give you a pass. Go get it." I would take him in my office and I had a red phone and a black phone. I said, "I'm going to call this number and you're going to take the phone." I said, "You're going to talk to your family. I'm going out of the office." I'll never forget. Johnny Carrera was his name. He told them other inmates, "That Mr. Pierce has got more power than anybody. He can call anywheres in the world." Things like that, it went back to the unit. I mean, there ain't a soul would have touched me in there. I didn't

allow any swearing in the kitchen. That's a fool talking. That warden said it'd never stick, but it did.

Wayne: Clearly, they wanted to be there.

Walt: I had eight hundred that were going to die there. They were natural lifers, eight hundred. Some of them been there thirty, forty years in other prisons in Michigan. It was a shame but I really enjoyed it. A lot of it, the parents ought to have been there, not the kid. They were good experiences all the way through.

Wayne: Barb, you said, you worked for the state also. Who did you work for?

Barb: I was one of those nasty clerks. I worked for Secretary of State and we were not liked by very many people because we--. They tell us we took your driver's license away from you because you were drunk and we charged them money last time and why should you charge it again. "Wasn't our fault that you got drunk twice." It was always our fault. It was a hard office to work for. We done road tests for people back then, took all the kids on road tests. Some didn't know how to start a car even. Took old people on road tests.

Walt: Tell them about the woman who wanted you to start her car.

Barb: I said, "Start your car and show me that your blinker lights work on both sides." She says, "You'll have to start it for me," and I said, "No." She says, "Well, my daughter always starts it for me, and then I can drive." "If you can't start your car, we're not going very far." It was a hard job but it was a good job.

Wayne: Did you have any other interesting stories giving driving tests?

Barb: We had a young boy. He was a foreign boy. I'd say, "Start your car and show me that the blinker lights work." "America. America." I thought we're not getting too far. So I said, "Well, start your car and we'll back up and we'll go to the corner. "America, America, okay America." They have to show me the brake lights work. "America." So I went back in the office and I said to my boss, "I don't know. We're not doing real well. Anything I say to him, he just says back America. So what do I do?" Of course, he laughed and had the boy come in and he didn't get much further with him but we didn't go on a road test. From then on, I was always known as America down to work because that's as far as we got.

We had a sad case too. You know, as time goes on things changed. We had a garbage man that had drove a garbage truck for twenty years. He had five kids, nice gentleman, but he couldn't read. When the CDL licenses came out, they had to read and had to pass the test. Well, this poor guy couldn't read so my boss said, "If you'll read it to him and just let him answer." So I took an hour and a half of my time and read it to him and that way he could answer and he passed the test but he would have never passed the test if I hadn't had a good boss, not because he couldn't do his job but because he couldn't read to do the job. He'd already been doing it for twenty years. In order for him to save his job, my boss let us do that and I always looked up to our boss for that because it wasn't that he couldn't do the job.

It was a good job. It was hard. We were not liked by many people. You pay us so we were to do what you wanted us to do. "My dad gave me this car so put it in my name." Well, we couldn't do that. Back then, when I started work even, that's why I chose to work in Owosso rather than St. John's. We had to be notaries. We had to notarize everything. Well, here in St. John's, they'd have been knocking on my door because I knew everybody from being in business for twenty-five years. They would have asked favors of me, where down there they didn't know me. You've got to take it, get it notarized. It has to be notarized.

Wayne: When you started working there, were you requiring birth certificates to prove age?

Barb: Always, yes.

Wayne: I know at an earlier time they didn't necessarily do that. I've talked to people, they took a few years off their age when they went to get a driver's licenses but that was in an earlier date.

Barb: We didn't only take a birth certificate. We wouldn't take the footie prints from the hospital. We had to have the stamped birth certificate. The school always would send them down with those footie prints and we couldn't do it. It was very strict when I started. It got a little better because schools done road tests in later times. It got a little better for us but it's a hard job, very hard job, but it pays.

Wayne: Rowlan, any stories you remember that they haven't said from high school.

Barb: No, not from high school.

Walt: I'll tell you one. Right across the street here, where the school stands, this lower part used to be a house. Mr. Fowler lived there. They needed a coal bin for the school. They didn't have no room back here. He donated that property to the school for a coal bin and they moved the house down McConnell Street here across from East Ward School. You remember where East Ward was there on '21. That's where the house went. He was a man six foot six if he was a foot. He was big, nicest fellow I ever met. Him and his brother had a hardware downtown, Fowler and Ball.

Barb: This was our high school back when we all graduated. I said we bought this to be here for our kids to go to school so we thought they'd go to St. Joe till eighth grade and then go to the high school. Well, when they got fifth grade, they closed St. Joe down at fifth grade. They had to go over here. They got up to high school, they had to go out there so that didn't work too well for us either. Downtown has changed and nothing you can do about it,

Walt: The people at Uncle John's-- Have you ever been out there went by it? I taught him how to make donuts and his brother, Ben.

Barb: No, that wasn't his brother. That was not John's brother. They're cousins.

Walt: Anyway, he's got Beck's other place over there where they make trailers. I taught him how to make donuts and he put a restaurant in that grocery store. Ben and I went to school together. All my times here in town have been good times in St. Johns. I can't say anything bad but you know just little things. I remember when winter came, right here on McConnell they shut Lansing Street off all the way down to State Street, '21. That was for sliding. They blocked it right off. That was years ago, I mean, heck, when I was six, seven years old. American Hill, that was on Walker Street. Right there where Dr. Russell's office was, from there down to Railroad Street was blocked off. I watched the government take the cannon off the courthouse lawn, WWII.

Wayne: To melt it down?

Walt: Yes. They took our slicing machine and one mixer from us.

Wayne: Were they used in the armed forces or did they melt them down?

Walt: No, they melted them down. I remember when we bought that big mixer. Man, that was a monster. That'd mix six hundred pounds of dough, one whack. Big!

Barb: Our mixers were eighteen-wheeler motors. They shifted just like a truck motor.

Walt: Different speeds, for different things.

Barb: I never use the mixer. I unloaded stuff out of the oven but anything that you done once was your job. I never learned to mix anything. I did take things out of the oven but I learned right away that--. I'd never made a decorated cake until we bought the bakery and there was a wedding cake on order that weekend and I did it.

Walt: Bought that brand new oven and it was made in Saginaw, Michigan, Baker-Perkins. It had four revolving shelves that revolved in there. Boy, that was nice. Oh, huge, big as this room.

Barb: It must have been eight foot wide.

Walt: Oh, anyway. It was a beautiful-- The one we had before was called a peel oven. There were two shelves. You had a long stick with a hunk of board like a pizza oven would use. Put that sheet on there. Them old-timers could shoot that in the back corner, put a row of them across there. Yeah, I remember that old thing. We took it out of there.

Barb: We made a cake for Lansing Catholic School. They were having a hundredth celebration and they wanted a cake like a bingo card. Of course, he said we could do it. Well, we did it in the bakery. We had a great big bench in the bakery. So we did it. I got on a ladder and I iced it and decorated it all. Well, what they forgot was to get it out of the door to take it out. Come time to get it out, it was like, oh, yeah. So we tipped it and prayed to God that it didn't slide off the board. It was six foot by eight. Anyway, we figured that one out after the fact and I was so mad at him because he said, "Oh, we can do it. We can do it." Well, it came close to not doing it.

Walt: Then we did the one for Federal-Mogul, four by eight. That was that easy.

Barb: That tipped cake, I'll never forget that. Couldn't get it through the door.

Walt: We had a wedding cake show in the Lansing Mall when it was brand-new and we decorated ten wedding cakes, big ones, little ones, everything. I made them out of styrofoam because they were dummies. Then I iced over them and decorated them with all the flowers. Anyway, I sent my son and one his friends with our delivery van. "Go over to the mall and get them and bring them back here." Well, they did. They got on Main Street and they got the smart idea they'd wait for a bunch of people to come by and they'd take a great big one. He come up on the sidewalk and pretended he dropped it, dropped that great big cake all over. That was so funny. Them guys got a big kick out of that. Ross Myer's son.

Barb: That was pretty funny. We had one wedding cake for town here. A gentleman thought we charged too much for them and so he was going to Lansing to get the wedding cake. That was fine. We had a price and that was it. We delivered the cakes, set them up and made sure everything was fine. Lansing, you came and picked them up. Anyway, he thought we were charging too much so he went to Lansing and got it. Well, his daughter got married in the Congregational Church. Whoever they sent to get the cake got back to St. Johns and dropped the cake. So he come in the back door of the bakery and said that he had a problem. I said, "What's that?" And he says, well, they needed a wedding cake. I said, "I thought the wedding was now." He says, "It is. We're over to the church." He says, "The cake got dropped from Lansing." I said, "Well, is it something I can fix?" "No, it smashed the cake! How much would you take if you done me another cake?" "The same price that I charged you before that was too much," but I said, "We will do it. We'll have it there by five o'clock and we will deliver it and set it up." He was very glad to pay us for the cake the second time.

Walt: We could have turned him down, but--

Rowlan: You remember the other businesses on down the blocks?

Walt: Oh, yeah, quite a few of them.

Barb: There was the dime store [D & C Store] on the corner.

Walt: On the first block we started down: the shoe store and then the big dime store, five and dime [D & C Store]. Then we cross the street to the north to Parr's [Pharmacy] was on the corner; the State Bank was next to that; the next one was Harold's Jewelry Store. Now that's where Lester Lake started his career as a jewelry store man. Then he went out of there. He bought up next to the bakery, John Harley's old [2nd hand] store, tore it all down, put that brand new store there. The next one was Hick's [department store]. Glaspie's was in the second block next to where Eisler's Superette is, this way of it. That superette was Wing's Market back in that day, Wing's. Then we had the [Steel] Hotel; we had the barbershop there; then we had the pool hall [St. Johns Recreation]; we had Heathman's [Paint & Wallpaper] there; then John Pearson [Shoe Repair] and then Woodbury's Flower Shop; and I can't remember what was in the next one.

Rowlan: Used to be a little meat store. I mean, that's where we used to buy our meat.

Barb: The second block on the corner was Eisler's. What's there now, I can't even think.

Rowlan: It's a hair shop in the back, used to be Lawrence.

Barb: That was Eisler's. Then there was IGA on the corner; on the opposite side of the street, Andy's IGA.

Walt: He moved out there where Sundance is eventually. Chatterbox was in that block in the third block, but Mr. Little's Barber Shop was next to Andy's and beauty shop. [Irene] Little was her last name and there was a beauty shop [Charm Beauty Shop] down in the basement. That was hers and there was Frechen's bar [Frechen's Tavern]

Rowlan: Was it a bar-restaurant or just a bar?

Walt: Bar-restaurant. All the farmers went there. They played some cards in the back room.

Barb: That was Chatterbox [Restaurant] next to Dean's.

Walt: That's up further because we had Little's, Amstutz Chicken Hatchery was where Swany's [restaurant] is now and then Chatterbox; then Dean's Hardware on the corner. Bruno's first on the corner; then Bozo's [party store] were next. Boron's moved from upstairs across the street there to the corner of Clinton Avenue, right there on the corner. In that middle block, Western Auto was there.

Barb: The PX Store was where you bought license plates. When we first bought license plates, you had to go down there.

Walt: Then Bradley's had a little grocery store-meat market in there. Then there was Rehmann's right next to the bank, just a little store; then the [Clinton National] Bank on the corner; and then Boron's moved across on the corner there where were Rehmann's is now. Then there was-- sold refrigerators and stuff. Al Gary had a GE--

Barb: Kurt worked for Dean's and then put the appliance store [Kurt's Appliance Center] across the street.

Walt: He sold refrigerators, Gary did, big guy, real heavysset.

Barb: I remember him.

Walt: Then there was a furniture store [St. Johns Furniture Store]; and then there was Julie Kay [women's clothing store]; and then there was Harr's Jewelry.

Barb: You missed McKinnon's [clothing store] there next to Hick's on the other side.

Walt: There was a lot us, good stores too. They were all good stores. Hunt's Drug Store was across from the bakery; Bruno's was on the corner; and Millman's [Drug Store]; and then Benson's Plumbing; and Hunt's Drugstore. DeWitt never got that big.

Wayne: It's because you stole the county seat from us.

Walt: Is that it? The only thing I remember about Dewitt was my doctor here, [Harry J] DeVore out here. Him and I used to ride motorcycle at night. We'd ride to DeWitt. In that little building there was an ice cream store and we'd get ice cream, sit there and eat it and then ride back here.

Barb: Finally, he had diabetes and the doctor took care of that.

Walt: Old Doc DeVore. He loved to ride that motorcycle. He was a doctor at Carson City and he would ride up there on Sundays to make his rounds. He was a great guy. Gosh, so many good memories of all of it, really.