Hazel Spencer Interview
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Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
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DC: . . . We'll sneak up on that part, anyway. But let me start the way I generally always do. This is what I was looking for here. [shuffling papers] There we go. Generally I just start out asking where were you born?

HS: Oh, OK. I was born in Port Huron, Michigan, as was my husband, who worked at Pontiac Motors.

DC: OK. So if you don't mind me asking, when were you born?

HS: I was born in 1929 and he was born in 1931.

DC: OK. Did you know each other in Port Huron when you were growing up?

HS: Yes, we did. We went to grade school together.

DC: Mm-hmm. Backing up a bit—were your parents from Port Huron?

HS: Yep. Born and raised there. Not my—my Mother was. My Dad was born over this way.

DC: Where over this way?

HS: Well, Shiawassee County.

DC: OK. Is that by Flint? Over that way?

HS: No, it's more towards Howell.

DC: Oh, Howell. OK. All right. So what did your parents do in Port Huron?

HS: My Dad was self-employed. He was sort of a jack of all trades. He could do carpenter work, he had a business where he sprayed and trimmed trees, he whitewashed barns so that the people could sell milk. You have to have your barn whitewashed every so many years. And he was a great Dad. We didn't have a heck of a lot of money, but we always had food and love, so. And . . .

DC: It sounds like he had many skills.

HS: Yes. Had very little education. He probably had a third-grade education, but when I was

in high school he helped me with my algebra. We could get the answer, but we didn't know how to put it in algebra. If you showed him a barn and he knew the measurement of the barn, he could tell you within one bale how many bales of hay would go in that barn. He was a smart man.

DC: Yeah, definitely. What did your Mother do?

HS: She was a homemaker.

DC: Did you have—or how many siblings did you have?

HS: I got a brother—an older brother, and a younger sister.

DC: OK. So what was it like growing up in Port Huron?

HS: We lived out in the country, and at one time my Dad had planted several acres of strawberries. And we had a problem—it was before they had the pick-your-own strawberries. And it's hard to get somebody that will come in and pick. Because they pick one berry here and jump over and pick another one, and they're stepping on a dozen while they're jumping around. And so mostly it was our family that picked the berries. And then my [clears throat]—excuse me—my Dad and I would load the berries in the car and go into Marysville and sell them door to door. Two quarts for a quarter. Delivered to their door. And they were lovely berries. And I loved it. My Dad and I were very close, and my brother didn't like selling and my sister, she was younger and she didn't like to do much of anything. She was the baby and took advantage of that.

DC: What was the age range?

HS: Five years in between each one.

DC: Oh really. OK, that's pretty big.

HS: Yeah. And my Dad and I both liked selling. At one time he had been a Fuller Brush man. And he couldn't get a job in the factories, because he had a rupture, a hernia of some kind. And I don't ever know why he didn't have it operated on, you know? Or maybe it wasn't operable, I don't know. But anyway . . .

DC: It sounds like he was able to do some physical labor.

HS: Yeah. He did stuff. I mean, when my brother went to the war, World War II, I helped my Dad. And of course we lived out in the country. We had horses and cows and pigs and chickens. And we had horses. We did have a tractor later on, but in the '40s I think we didn't have one. And I drove the team and on hay wagons and then when we got it back to the barn, I rode the horse back and forth to hoist the hay up into the barn. And he mounded away.

DC: How old were you when you started doing that kind of work?

HS: Maybe ten.

DC: OK, yeah.

HS: And, you know, I love horses. I respect them. But a horse will give you a hundred percent, if you're kind to them.

DC: So how many horses did you have?

HS: We had sometimes three, but usually two.

DC: And then you said you had other livestock, as well?

HS: Yeah. I—my brother and my Dad milked. I did not milk, except once in awhile on the cat's dish. But I—I really didn't learn how to milk. We had a separator, separated the milk from the cream, and my Mom made butter. And she was a good cook. And we sold cream to the creamery, and we always had milk and butter and all that.

DC: Did you keep most of the milk on hand, then, or did you sell that, too?

HS: Well, no. The milk—we usually had a calf or something. And what we didn't need, the calf got. Or the pigs, you know. I am not a milk drinker. I *love* cream. I could have straight cream, but you know that's not good for you, either.

DC: That's the thing about it.

HS: Yeah.

DC: So how about the pigs? Were you involved with raising them?

HS: No, not really. But once a year my Dad would butcher a pig and my Grandma would come—my Dad's Mother—and she would—she had very bad knees, and she couldn't walk very well. And the day that we had the butchering going on, she would sit at the kitchen table and they would bring things to her. Like the—they would bring the liver in and she would clean it and wash it and do all what had to be done on it. And she made homemade pork sausage that was the best you ever had.

DC: Mm, OK. So as long as you brought the stuff to her, she could do her thing.

HS: Yep. And she taught herself how to knit. Made beautiful sweaters. And she made quilts—I have no idea how many quilts she made. Each grandchild had a quilt made for them, and she had nine children. Three of them did not have children. One died when he was four and the other two were—well, the one had children, but they always died at birth or shortly after. And the other one had spinal meningitis when he was little, and he only

grew to be about—I don't even know if he was quite five foot tall. And—but he lived to be quite an old man, and all of us kids here stood—because he was little, we measured our growth by whenever we got tall enough to be as tall as Uncle Richard. That was a big milestone because he was little, you know? But he supported himself. He worked for farmers and he, a lot of times, would take care of the farmers' children, so the farmer's wife and him could be out in the field. And one talent that he had that I have not run across anybody else who could do that: you give him a bale, or a ball of binder twine, and he could make the best rope you ever saw in your life.

DC: Really? Just by hand.

HS: Yeah. And he made ropes for different farms—farmers in the area that knew he could do this. Now where he learned this, I have no idea.

DC: Did that whole extended family stay in the area around Port Huron?

HS: Well, see they mostly lived out by Oakwood. You know where Oakwood is?

DC: I've seen it on a map, but I've never been there.

HS: It's north of Oxford. About three or four miles. And so they kind of—there was eight boys and only one girl, and she was next to the youngest. The youngest is the one that died at four years old. So in the cemetery in Oakwood, there was my grandfather and grandmother, two of my uncles—the two that didn't have children, the little one that died at four years old, my aunt, her husband and son, and then one of my Dad's other brothers is buried there. He and his wife, and three of his children and the one's husbands was buried there. My husband is buried there and I will be buried there. So, you know, even though they lived in Port Huron, we went to Oakwood many times. Met my aunt there.

DC: So you got together fairly often.

HS: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: I wasn't sure how long it would take to make that trip in those days.

HS: Um, long—good—you know, it was like my aunt lived in Lapeer and we lived in Port Huron. Of course, they had cows—we had cows. So you got to get up at the—before the break of dawn, milk the cows, and then drive. And I was talking with my cousin the other day, and she said that she remembers her Dad saying, "You know, at thirty-five miles an hour, you can really go quite a ways in a day." So, you know.

DC: All things are relative.

HS: Right.

DC: Yeah. Did you grow crops, as well?

HS: Oh yeah. We had . . .

DC: OK, what did you grow?

HS: Wheat and corn and always had a garden. My Mother canned—you wouldn't believe.

DC: So that was one of her jobs, then?

HS: Yep. And she sewed. She didn't drive. I think she started to drive and I don't know if there was an incident where—she never was in an accident or anything, but she got nervous. And she said, "I'm not driving anymore." So it was just never a issue.

DC: Who worked in the garden during the growing season?

HS: All of us.

DC: All of you, OK. How did you like that?

HS: I like it. I still garden.

DC: Do you?

HS: I have a really tiny little lot, but I have—I have blackberries and tomatoes and—I used to have a bigger yard and I grew lots of stuff.

DC: Mm-hmm. I've talked to some people who grew up on farms and now they can't stand the gardening.

HS: Oh, no, I liked it.

DC: OK, yeah. And then did you sell things besides your strawberries? You sold cream to the creamery.

HS: Yeah.

DC: You sold strawberries door to door.

HS: We sold—well, sometimes my Mother would sell butter to a few of the neighbors. My Dad's one brother lived next door to us. And he was a blacksmith, and so I always liked to go over there and watch him shoe horses and do that kind of stuff. It was—it was interesting growing up.

DC: Did you help with the canning, as well?

HS: Yeah. Yeah. My Mother could work rings around most people. I mean, it was nothing for

her to can sixty jars of green beans or something in a day, which meant more picking them, washing them, nibbing them, cutting them, you know, packing them in the jars, the whole nine yards.

DC: So would that be a staple in your kitchen then throughout the winter?

HS: Oh sure. We had corn, we had beets, and we had our root cellar that my Dad made. It was really nice. And always had our own potatoes. We had grapes, fruit trees. Pretty much self-sufficient other than, you know, flour and stuff like that.

DC: Mm-hmm. But you grew wheat.

HS: Yeah, but we didn't grind it. And I was born a couple of days from when the Depression started. So I grew up—we were poor, money-wise. But I didn't know it, you know, till after I got older. And it was, you know—my Mother was very frugal. Because like in the summer, my Dad would be working, you know, spraying trees and doing these barns, and she would save the money. She was not a throwaway person.

DC: Did your family own the farm?

HS: Yep. Actually, it was only two acres. But out behind us was state land and my Dad had permission to farm that and use it as pasture and so forth. And he sometimes went to, like neighbors, maybe a mile or so away, and would cut hay and we would haul it home. Of course, it wasn't the traffic that there is now. The road we lived on had cinders, and grass growing in the middle when I was a little kid. Well now it's blacktopped, you know, and the whole nine yards.

DC: Cars going seventy-five miles an hour, probably.

HS: Well, hopefully not that fast. Because it's still out in the country. But my sister lives on the property and my brother lives next door. And my husband lived just a quarter of a mile down the road.

DC: When you were growing up?

HS: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK.

HS: He moved there when he was twelve. And the strange part was—he came from a really horrible family, if you want to put it that way. His Dad was a horrible man. And his—he comes from a family of seven kids. And the Mother died the day after the seventh baby was born. And my husband was the middle child. And the reason I say he was a horrible man—when my husband's Mother was pregnant to have the last baby, he tried to throw her off the bridge. He—they didn't live by us then. They lived in Port Huron. And his—her brother saved her from being thrown off the bridge. And when she died, he and his wife

adopted that baby and she was raised as their child. She did not know she was adopted until she was sixteen. And I haven't heard from her in over a year. Her husband died about a year ago, and she called me New Year's Day. And I'm friends with all of them—and of course I am prejudiced, but I think my husband turned out the best of any of them. But there's a lot of hangups in the family because of possibly—well, it all kind of stems from what went on with their Father. He was a womanizer and didn't make bones about it. His Mother was trying to find homes for these kids and she—the little one, the younger brother of my husband, he was adopted when he was four years old.

DC: Adopted out of the family?

HS: Mm-hmm. And people that lived on my street adopted him. So I knew him, and they didn't have any children, and so they adopted him and I saw him when he was just four.

DC: So you knew him before you met . . .

HS: Yeah, before I met my husband. And so anyway, I saw him and I thought, "Gee, he's a cute little boy." And of course, he went to school, and he was about four years younger than me. And in country school where you've only got maybe five to eight kids in the class, the bigger kids take care of the little kids. And he kind of was my charge, you know? I was the one that if we had band or something, I helped him. And so then when my husband moved out there—his Father finally got out of jail and married this woman that he had been running around with when my husband was a newborn baby. And she let on to be a very nice lady, and I really can't say that she ever did anything bad to me, but knowing her history she was not a lily-white person. But anyway, they moved out there, and they had my husband come and live with them. In the meantime, after his Mother died and he was—and the Dad was in jail . . .

DC: What did they do?

HS: Well, there was—there was family members. They each came from fairly good-sized families. And my husband's father's brother worked at Addison. They had one kid! And they allowed these little kids to be put in detention homes and just farmed out wherever, you know? And the oldest brother was eventually sent to Lapeer State Hospital, because they had no place to put him. The brother that was two years older than my husband, he was adopted by a family in Marysville that had a store. And the Mother begged these people to take my husband, and they said, "No, we only want one kid." So—but the uncle that had the one kid, that could have taken like my husband or the other brother, they didn't. So they put my husband and his brother that's four years older than him in the detention home. Now can you imagine as a, say, eight-year-old kid—you got to go to school, you come walking out of the detention home to walk to school. Can you imagine the embarrassment and razzing that he got? And then he got put into a foster home and those people, I guess, were—they weren't mean, evidently, as far as hitting or anything like that, but mentally—at Christmastime, they bought gifts for their kids and they all set there opening presents and my husband didn't even get a pair of socks. How could you do that to a young kid? And being paid by the State. So you see . . .

DC: How old was he at that point?

HS: Probably ten.

DC: Ten, yeah.

HS: You know, to him it was better than being in the detention home. Because he *was* in a person's *home*. But, you know, it's a wonder these kids turned out good at all, because of that. Now, some of them married women—I'm talking mostly about the boys—married women. Now the oldest one, he had two good wives and he is quite a bit like his Father. And I'm still friends—he divorced both of them—and I am close, close friends with both of them. The one that got adopted where the Mother wanted to take my husband, his wife is really odd and she doesn't want him to be considered a Spencer at all. No way. And I said, you know, no matter what his adoption paper says, he was born a Spencer, he's Spencer blood. Oh no, no. He's not that.

DC: So did she not want him to associate with his siblings?

HS: Not really. But he did anyway, you know. I mean, I went to high school with him and he and my husband looked—well, they all kind of resembled. You'd know they were brothers.

DC: They knew they were.

HS: Oh sure, sure. And anyway, the younger one that got adopted and came to live with the people on our street, when he was a year and a half old, he had mastoids on both ears and was in the hospital. And my husband said he can remember the Mother being at the hospital, coming home, getting all the kids, walking them to the hospital—because they lived close—and then she'd have them stand out on the sidewalk. And she'd go up and hold the little guy up to the window and they'd all wave and everything. Well, when this little one got out of the hospital, he came home and, of course, he was crying and fussing. And the Dad came home, most likely drunk or whatever. And he said—yelled at the kid and said, "Shut up!" And, of course, when you yell at a baby "shut up," they don't shut up. So he picked the kid up and throwed him out the front door into a snow bank. And then he went out and kicked him. Now this is a year and a half old baby. So she got—she found these people that would adopt him, so he had a good bringing up, as far as that goes. He is probably the—he's not mean, but his mouth is nasty, like his Father. But most of them, I don't think had women that loved them real deeply. As it turned out, my husband and I had a wonderful relationship. I loved him and he loved me. And it was no question about it, and when we married we said, "We are not—we got to stay together. We are not going back to Pickard Road." And that's where we lived. So you know, but we didn't really fight. I mean, I can't say we didn't ever have an argument, but . . .

DC: Sure. That wouldn't be human.

HS: No. But he was such a giving person. And he just was a sweetheart.

DC: That's an amazing background.

HS: It's amazing that they turned out good at all. You know, from what they came from. I understand their Mother was a loving person, but she was—you know, back in the '30s, women didn't work out of the house that much, especially when you got six little kids. And they moved a lot. He went to every school but one in Port Huron, before he was twelve years old.

DC: That's before they moved out . . .

HS: Mm-hmm. And see, I had known his younger brother. So then when he moved out—the road I lived on was a mile long, and we lived right dab in the middle. OK, the younger brother lived down towards this end. Well, when my husband moved in, he moved halfway between the corner and my house. And so I knew that these—this house was empty. And I used to walk to the corner to get a loaf of bread for my Mom. And so I walked by and I saw this kid and I took a double take because he looked like his brother. And I came home and I said to my Mom, "You know that house down there?" I said, "New people have moved in." And I said, "You wouldn't believe it—the kid that's there looks just like Jimmy." And she said, "Well, you know, Jimmy was adopted. Maybe . . ." And I don't think we knew at the time who he was before he was adopted.

DC: So she just . . .

HS: You know. So—and my Mother had vaguely known of my husband's Father. Because she grew up in Port Huron and he was notorious for being a womanizer and a drunk and nasty. So anyway, we found out that that's who that was. And anyway, for a long time we didn't have school buses. After I got to go to high school in Marysville, either my Dad would take me—sometimes I would walk through the field. It was probably two and a half miles or so. Two miles at least. And then—well see, my Dad didn't work that much in the winter, and so he would take me. Well then this girl that lived, oh, maybe a mile from us, she got a car. So my folks paid her to swing by and pick me up. Well then we got the buses. And when the bus came, the bus came this end of the street and picked up Jimmy and then they would pick up me. And he'd always shove over and he'd say, "I saved you a seat!" So I'd set there. And then the next stop was where my husband got on.

DC: What was his name?

HS: Shirley.

DC: Shirley.

HS: Shirley Thomas Spencer. And so after a couple of days of this, he would get on the bus and he'd come and stand right at the seat where I was sitting with Jim. And he didn't say, "Get up" or anything, he'd just stand there. And Jimmy would get up and then Shirl would

sit down with me. And I thought, "Isn't this cute?" You know, I just thought it was funny. And of course, we talked on the bus, and then he started coming down to my house and we'd play cards. And—mostly my Mother and sister and Shirl and I.

DC: How did your husband spell his name?

HS: S-H-I-R-L-E-Y.

DC: OK.

HS: And that is a—an old English name. And around Port Huron there was a lot of men named Shirley. I knew of a Shirley Conger who lived across the road at one time from me. There was a Shirley Duane Spencer that lived in Port Huron. I did not know him, but I knew of him. And then my husband's stepmother, her sister married a man and his last name was Spencer. But he was not the same family. So anyway, he had been married to two different women and both his daughters were named Shirley Spencer. Now this—we went to this little country school where there was, you know, a few kids, and that one Shirley Spencer, the girl, went to our school the same time Shirley Spencer, the boy, went there. Now how much of a coincidence is that?!

DC: Yeah, it must've been confusing for all at first.

HS: Well, you know, it wound up Shirley Spencer the girl and Shirley Spencer the boy. And there was never any question that my husband was boyish or mannish, even if he had a name of Shirley. I personally love that name. I have a cousin, a first cousin—the one that I said I had lunch with the other day—her name is Shirley. And so as we—he—came into the family and we were close with him, we decided to call her Shirley and call my husband Shirl, so that we didn't have to designate which one. And I called him "Shirl" out in public, but at home I mostly called him "Honey."

DC: Mm-hmm. But it sounds like he came down, gravitated toward your house shortly after he moved into the neighborhood.

HS: Well, he came down and everybody in the neighborhood liked my Dad. And he called my Dad Uncle Harvey until he started calling him Dad. And everybody—all the kids called my uncle next door Uncle Dave. My girlfriend's uncle lived in the area. We called him Uncle Bert. I mean, I wasn't friends with him. I knew who he was. Never went to his house because his kids were not my age group or anything. Some of the people were called, like, Ma. Something Ma—Marlette. Or Aunt Fran or something like that. It was a few that was called Mr. and Mrs., but you know, back then you didn't call neighbor people by their first name.

DC: Yeah. But it sounds like the aunt and uncle—a familiar sort of . . .

HS: Yeah. All these kids that went to my school, I knew them probably as well as I would know some of my cousins.

DC: Now it sounds like during your teen years, when you would've been in middle school, high school . . .

HS: High school.

DC: You were working hard at home.

HS: Well, I—I guess maybe by today's standards, maybe I was. But I didn't think I worked hard. I mean, like I said, I helped with the haying. But I enjoyed it because, you know, my Dad and I would be out haying and he would say, "Well, I'm getting hot," he said. And he'd say, "Stop the horses." We'd get off the hay wagon, crawl under the hay wagon in the shade, and cool off. He was my good buddy.

DC: Did your husband ever—or what did he do when he was a teen?

HS: He worked at, like, the corner—there was a guy that took in junk cars and redid them. And he kind of hung around there. I don't know if he really got paid or if it was just something to get him out of the house. And my husband did not finish high school. He was two years behind me and in tenth grade he came down and he said, "I'm going in the service." And I said, "Oh no, don't!" Because, see, my brother had been in the service and he was wounded twice. And so I—and my one close cousin was killed. And I said, "Oh, I don't want you to go in the service." And he said, "I have to get away." When he would come down to my house in the evening and play cards or listen to records or whatever we did, he'd get home and his Dad would beat him. He went to his grave with marks on his butt, where he was beat. And he said, "I got to get away." And for some unknown reason I said, "Please don't go in the Navy." I don't like the water. He was a good swimmer. But I said, "Please don't go in the Navy." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Because I don't like the water." And he said, "OK." So he joined the Army. And he went to Okinawa. They did not send him to Korea, because all of the four brothers—all the four brothers was all in that area. So they would not send him there because of the Sullivan brothers that got killed. So he was sent to Okinawa. He was supposed to go for eighteen months. It wound up being about twenty-six months. And before he left, I wanted to get married.

DC: OK, so you were pretty close.

HS: Oh yeah. And well, after I got out of high school and everything. And at one point my folks told me they didn't want me to see him anymore. And I said, "Why?" Because I knew they liked him. And they said, "Well, we don't like what his Dad does." And I said, "But he doesn't—he isn't like that." And they said, "Well, you know, the old story like father, like son." And I said, "But he definitely does not want to be like his Dad." And they said, "Well, we think it's better if you don't see him." And I never, ever sassed my parents. And that one time, I spoke up to them. And I said, "I love him. And whether you like me seeing him or not, I'm going to see him. If you won't let me see him in front of you, I'll see him when you don't know." And I went off to bed crying, cried all night. The next morning my Mother said, "If you feel that strongly, you can see him." And they loved

him. Called him son. But anyway, he was ready to go to Okinawa and we wasn't engaged or anything. So I said, "Why don't we go and get married? Like Angola [Indiana?] or Kentucky or someplace." And he said, "I'm too young." He was seventeen. And he said, "I'm too young." And I said, "Well, are you planning to marry me when you get back?" I said, "I don't mind waiting for you if you're going to marry me. But if you're not, say so because I don't want to spin my wheels for a year and a half." And he said, "As soon as I get back, we'll get married." So we wrote and I sent him cookies and all this stuff back and forth. Never—he never called once on the phone. Back then you didn't call long distance unless it was really special, you know? Of course he didn't make very much money in the Army, either. So anyway, he got back . . .

DC: Did he go through boot camp in the summer before?

HS: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

DC: Where was he stationed?

HS: He was in Fort Riley, Kansas. And then he came home in October, and that's when we decided—or I asked him to marry me and he turned me down. And he used to kid me about that, but anyway . . .

DC: That would have been before the year and a half, right?

HS: Yeah. Yeah. And so he said, "When I get home we'll get married." So he got back to California in, I think it was the 4th of December in 1951. And he called me and he said, "Hello, honey, I'm back!" And I said, "Well, good!" And he said, "When are we getting married?" And there was a calendar—you know, the phone and the calendar goes right there—and I looked at it and in December the number that popped out was the 23rd. That's his birthday. And I said, "Well, you got a birthday coming up." I said, "What about that?" He said, "That's good." So he got home. He was home about maybe two and a half weeks, and he was still nineteen. He turned twenty on the day we got married. And so he had to get permission from his father to get married at twenty, even though he was in the service and away from home. But he didn't make any big fuss about it because he didn't care one way or another.

DC: He just had to sign it from home or something.

HS: Yeah, yeah. And I think he also had to get permission from the service. But anyway, we got married on the 23rd.

DC: Was he discharged then or in Reserves?

HS: No. No. He was still in regular Army and had a little over a year yet to do on his four-year enlistment. Or three-year enlistment. And so we got married and it was a small wedding in the parlor of the Lutheran church. And he had to go back in January, and he went to Battle Creek. I went over there on the weekend a couple of times and then he came home

on weekends. And then he came home in the middle of the week one time. And he said—I was surprised he came home, you know—and he said, "I got orders to go to Fort Chaffee in Arkansas." And I said, "Oh, great." And he said—he didn't think I would leave, you know. He thought I would stay with my parents. And he said, "I just came home to get the car." And I said, "If the car goes, I go." And he said, "But I have to leave in the morning." And I said, "I can be ready in five minutes." And we left the next morning.

DC: You did. Let me back up just a minute.

HS: OK.

DC: Because I don't want to lose track of a few things that have crossed my mind. First of all, jumping a little bit further back—did the war affect your family? Your brother went to war and that's a huge impact.

HS: Yes, it was.

DC: And it obviously meant different work for you, as well, around the house.

HS: Yeah.

DC: But how about in terms of your Father's work and how your family operated . . .

HS: Well, my Dad—my brother being, you know, older, he was helping my Dad with the spraying and stuff like that around the farm. So I kind of helped my Dad. I did not learn to milk, as I told you. But other than that, I did. And the war years were very different. The closest I've seen to that is after 9-11. Everybody was patriotic. Everybody cared back then. And you may have seen the pictures, like where somebody would have a flag with a star on it. Well, everybody had one that had a kid in the service. And my brother got shot once.

DC: Where was he stationed?

HS: He was in Germany. And he got shot and the first time he got shot, the bullet somehow hit his helmet. And it went right up and around. It followed, and it just kind of creased his head, you know. I'm not sure if it even really made a scar but it, you know, impacted on him. And he was out of the war there for a couple of days, I guess. And then he went back in and he was shot by a woman sniper and the bullet hit him right by the temple there, going this way. It broke that bone, broke his jaw, took the tip off his ear, and hit his shoulder. Well, he lost that eye. And of course, about that same time, my cousin was killed in Okinawa. Or not Okinawa—Leyte island. And so we were all devastated about that. And my Grandma just, she could not handle it.

DC: Which cousin was this again? Can you remind me?

HS: It's my Dad's only sister's oldest son. And they were farmers and they did not take the

other boy into the service because he was needed on the farm. They had a big farm. But that was very devastating. I was only about fourteen, I guess, and it was a horrible, horrible thing. So war is not good. And we've got—I have service people all the way down the line from great-grandfathers that was in Civil War, my uncle—my aunt's husband—he was in World War I and was gassed with that mustard gas. He lived to be about fifty-something. A big man, and a wonderful man. But he got throat cancer and it was terrible. And in the '50s they didn't know what to do for it. Anyway, and their son was killed and he's buried out there where I'm going to be buried.

DC: What did you do with—did you graduate from high school?

HS: You bet.

DC: OK. And what did you do when you graduated from high school?

HS: When I graduated I got a job working at the Credit Bureau in Port Huron. And then I quit because it was not a great place to work.

DC: Why was that?

HS: Well, the guy that was the manager at the time was a dirty old man. And he had a desk, and right by his desk he had a hole in the floor about, you know, a couple inches. And that hole looked down into the women's bathroom. And when I found that out, of course I didn't go to the bathroom there anymore. And he thought it was funny. So I quit that job. I was supposed to get a raise after six months and I did not get it. And I asked him about it and he started telling me how things were really bad and all that, you know. I was posting the collections. I knew it wasn't that bad.

DC: How did you end up working there in the first place?

HS: Well I just got a job there.

DC: OK. You just applied there.

HS: Yeah. And so anyway, as for the job—and we got paid every two weeks, and I got a thirty-seven cent for two weeks raise. So that was like seventeen [pause] . . .

DC: Cents a week.

HS: A week. So I thought, no. So I left. And a short while later my cousin Shirley, who worked in Richmond, at an insurance company—one of the girls she had gone to school with worked at the Diamond Crystal in St. Clair. And she was . . .

DC: What is the Diamond Crystal?

HS: It's a salt company.

DC: OK, it is, yeah. All right.

HS: And this girl, this friend of hers, worked in the office, and she was quitting because she was getting married and they were going to live on a farm and she needed to be home. So anyway, my cousin said, "Hey, there's going to be an opening at the Diamond Crystal." So I went down there and I applied and I got the job, and it was a wonderful place to work. I worked there until just before I got married. And I quit because I wanted to go with my husband.

DC: That's when you went down to . . .

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

HS: At the Diamond Crystal I worked in the mail room, and I worked there just a short while. And the woman that was in charge of the duplicating department—who made out forms and ran off letters and did all that kind of stuff—she was quitting, and so they asked me if I would like that job. And I said, "Yes." So this woman always gave everybody a hard time. Like if they brought a form down, said, "I'd like five copies of this," she'd say, "Well, I don't know if I can get it till next week." And so when I got there, there was a few things stacked up and I did them and pretty soon when they'd bring something down, they'd say, "I need five copies of this." And I'd say, "Well hold on a minute," and I'd run them off. And they, you know, the higher-ups upstairs couldn't believe it, you know? My gosh!

DC: They weren't used to service.

HS: Yeah. So anyway, I worked there a little over a year and I got five raises, without asking. And the first time I got called up to the office, my supervisor in the mail room—he was only about twenty-five at the time—and he was kidding and he said, "Oh, you have to go up to Mr. Rankin's office." And I said, "What does he want?" And he said, "I don't know, but boy, you get called to Rankin's office, you're in trouble," you know. I went up there—I was scared to death. I didn't know what I had done! So he told me I had been doing a wonderful job and he said, "You will see our appreciation in your check on Friday." And I said, "Oh, how wonderful!" you know.

DC: So that guy was just having you on.

HS: Oh yeah. Yeah, he was a fun kid. So anyway, I—and the duplicating room was adjacent to the mail room. I also ran off blueprints on this big blueprint machine, ran duplicating machine, I made booklets for the salesmen, and on a Varityper [classic typewriter], which was kind of a strange typewriter. And then I didn't work. I got married and had some kids. I've got three kids.

DC: OK. That's a big development.

HS: Yeah!

DC: You got married. Now let me see if I got this straight. I'm trying to sort it all out. You got married, but after you were married your husband went to Battle Creek, right?

HS: Yeah.

DC: And then you were still in Port Huron?

HS: Yeah. At my Dad—folks'.

DC: At your folks'. Were you working at Diamond Crystal at that point, or . . .

HS: No. I quit before I got married.

DC: Just before?

HS: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK, all right. So what were you doing then while your husband was in Battle Creek finishing up his stint there?

HS: Not much. Well, it was only—we got married on the 23rd and I think we left to go down there probably about the 14th or something of January.

DC: To go down to Arkansas? Oh OK, so there wasn't much time.

HS: It was like a two-week time, and we had gone back and forth a couple of times.

DC: But you wouldn't have known when you got married that he was going to be transferred down to Arkansas.

HS: No. Well, Battle Creek at that time was kind of a transition place where they would put you till they got your orders to the next spot. Or he could have gotten mustered out from there if he was—had his time in. But that was the closest base to home. And that's why they sent him there.

DC: Why did you decide to quit at Diamond Crystal?

HS: Because I wanted to go with him.

DC: OK. Because you figured that he was going to be transferred somewhere.

HS: Oh yeah. Well, even if he was in Battle Creek, I'd a gone there. So I'm a strong believer in wherever your husband goes, you go with him. And if he comes in and says, "Honey, I'm going to go get some gas for the tractor. Do you want to go?" You turn off the stove or whatever, and you go. My Grandma used to say, "If he asks you and you don't go, he will quit asking you." And that's happened to other people that I've seen. Well they—"Oh I'm cooking," or "Oh, I'm doing this." Who's important? So that's what we did. Well then he got a—he got the orders, you know, and we went down there. And I did not get a job when I was down there, because by early February I was pregnant. And our oldest son was born at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

DC: OK, so you went from Arkansas down to . . .

HS: Yeah. We was in Arkansas for eight days.

DC: Oh, not long at all.

HS: And we lived in a motel and the motel people brought in a two-burner plate and we washed the dishes in the sink and had fun. It was like playing house. And so anyway, then we went to Louisiana and we lived two different places there. The first place we lived was not good. The man and woman—we moved into their house. And we had our bedroom and shared the rest of the house, supposedly. These people were odd, in my book. If they had company come they entertained in their bedroom. And we weren't used to that. And my husband said—in the living room, they have a record player—so he said to her, "Would you mind if we went in and played the record player?" And she looked at him like he was out of his mind. And then finally he said, "Well I thought we had the run of the house, but I would ask." And she said, "OK." Well, we did that, and that night after we got in bed, there was a knock at our door. And it was her, and she said, "Y'all are going to have to move." And I said, "Tonight?" And she said, "No, you can wait till morning." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "Well, northerners and southerners just can't live together." Well, so we moved out the next day.

DC: Presumably she knew you were from the north when she rented to you.

HS: Well, yeah, we didn't talk like that and we made no bones about where we were from or anything. Well, I think she thought, when my husband called to see about renting this room, he said it was Mr. Spencer. And she thought he was a warrant officer. So she raised the rent on us before we ever moved in, because she thought he had rank, you know? Well then we arrived and my husband was a PFC. So, you know, this wasn't good. Well, she was trying to come on to my husband. Well we were freshly married, you know, and my husband paid no mind to her.

DC: This is your landlady?

HS: Yeah! And she lived in the house, you know, with her husband and little girl. And she said—I said, "Well I have my own dishes and everything." She said, "Oh, no, use these. They're right here." So every night when I'd go to fix supper, here's all the dirty dishes in

the sink. So I'd have to wash the dishes, cook, and then after we got done eating, we would do the dishes back up. Well that worked out great for her! But it didn't fly with me, because I don't let people take advantage of me. And there was nothing wrong with her that she couldn't have done her dishes. So I got out my own dishes and I had a couple little pans and stuff. And so we cooked with our stuff and we washed our stuff, and her dishes setting there dirty. She didn't like it. And so anyway, we moved out of there and we moved in another house that we had the bedroom and a little kitchen that was six foot by eleven foot. Had no sink. And we lived there ten months.

DC: No sink.

HS: No sink. We had a dish pan. Throw the water out the back door. Of course, it's warm in Louisiana. And these people were lovely people. And there was another Army couple, lived in one of the other rooms. And we had a common back porch that was screened in. And they had a big refrigerator. By those—in the '50s, this was considered a *huge* refrigerator. And we shared the refrigerator with this other couple.

DC: Was it out on the porch?

HS: Mm-hmm. And the tap for to get hot and cold water was just outside our door—the water heater was there. And they had a sink and stuff in their apartment, but we didn't. And so anyway, the guy in the other apartment was a cook at the camp. And sometimes he would bring home food, you know, if they had extra. And so we had this agreement, if it's on this side, it's theirs—if it's on this side, it's ours. Anything in the middle is up for grabs. And it was wonderful because, you know, he could bring home sausage or sometimes ground beef or something, and once in awhile we'd have stuff to put in the middle. But anyway, we remained friends with them for many years. And anyway, we stayed there, and I don't know why—my husband was supposed to get out of the service in November, I think it was. And the baby was due on the 3rd of November. And so anyway, he came home and said to me, "I'm going to Germany." And I said, "Why?" You know, because he was supposed to get out. And he said, "Well, this other guy was supposed to go and he didn't want to go. And I volunteered." Well here I am, pregnant, and I was hurt. More than anything, I was really hurt. I thought, "Why would he do this?" Because, you know, we talked about everything, and he didn't talk to me about this before he did it. And finally he said, "I figured it was the only chance I'd ever get to go to Europe." He had never gone on trips, you know, before with his family. They would leave him home if they went anyplace. And so anyway, [flat affect] I got over it. And he went for a year.

DC: He did. And where were you during that year?

HS: Well, they allowed us to stay in Louisiana until the baby was born. He was born exactly on the due date. And eight days later we drove to Michigan. And we rented this little cottage up north of Port Huron, and it wasn't winterized. It was right on the lake, and the curtains were all flapping in the wind and everything. We burnt five gallons of fuel oil overnight and the water froze in the toilet. And I said, "We can't stay here. The baby will freeze." So we didn't stay there after that.

DC: Now was your husband with you at that point?

HS: Yeah.

DC: OK. Yeah, he hadn't left for Germany.

HS: No, they gave him a few days. He was supposed to leave as soon as I could find a place to live. Nobody would rent to me with a newborn baby, because, you know, they might write on the wall with crayons. And I said, "Well, he'll be back by the time the baby's a year old, and we'll move." Nope, they wouldn't rent. So finally, in our travels looking at apartments and stuff, we went by a place that sold house trailers. So we pulled in there and decided to buy a house trailer. And it was twenty-seven foot and it was—that was from the draw bar to the tail light. So the inside was not big. It was brand new. And I think the payments were fifty dollars a month. And we couldn't afford to live in a park. So we parked it in my Dad's back yard. And I got—my brother eventually bought the property next door to my Dad. And he wasn't married, but he had built a house. He still lived over at my folks', which seems strange but, anyway. He had the electric on over there. So he ran a wire to my house—trailer. And they hooked up a sewer thing for me. And I lived there with the baby for—until he got home in October. And then he got out. And he came home about the end of October and I think it was the 20th of November he hired in at Pontiac Motors.

DC: OK. Now that year when your husband was in Germany, did you blend back into your family?

HS: Well, they were right there and, of course, the new grandbaby in the backyard. Yes. And I didn't have a television or anything, and my folks had TV. And so I went in there and I watched TV with my folks.

DC: OK. So you had your own space but also were a part of a common space.

HS: Right—which was good.

DC: Yeah. But then your husband did come back in the . . .

HS: Yep. And he didn't get a job in Port Huron. He applied at many places. Of course, he had no work experience other than the service. And he tried to get a job truck driving and they said, "You need five years." He would have been driving when he was fourteen, for crying out loud! So anyway, my Dad came out one afternoon and he said, "Do you really want a job?" And my husband said, "Of course I do!" And he said, "Well, it says in the paper they're hiring at Pontiac Motors." And so my husband said, "Oh, that sounds great." So my Dad said, "Now if you're going to go and apply for a job, don't drag in there eight, nine o'clock in the morning. Be there before six." So our car was on the fritz, so he borrowed a car from his brother, who at that time lived down the street, another brother. So we came over. I bundled the baby up and we left five o'clock in the morning. And he got here,

found Pontiac Motors, and went in. And pretty soon he came out and he said, "I got hired and I'm working today." And I said, "Great!" And I didn't know Pontiac that well. I had a couple of cousins on my mother's side that lived here, but I didn't—I didn't know how to get around Pontiac. So I knew where this one lived and I was able to find out—find my way to her house. And I said—well, when my husband went in, he said he'd get off at, I think it was 3:30. And so I said, "I'll try and find a place to park the trailer." So I went to this cousin's and she took me to a couple—well, she went in my car, but—and she had three kids. And so we trucked all of them and went to a couple of trailer parks. Well, I found a place out on Telegraph. And we was able to get a spot there and tried to make arrangements to move the thing over here, because I did not want him driving fifty miles each way.

DC: Now was this 1952, 1953?

HS: 1953. November. So he . . .

DC: That would've been a long, tough commute in those days.

HS: Oh, well, and not only that, but you know, I worked at St. Clair at the Diamond Crystal, which was maybe seven miles from my folks' house. And you know, a couple of times I had gotten a sick headache at work, and just to drive that seven miles, it seemed like it was an eternity. And I thought, 'You know, if he works all day long and he's got a headache and he's got to come home, you know, that's not good.' And what's to hold me in Port Huron? We got a trailer. So we arranged to have it moved over and he worked . . .

DC: What was that job that your husband got?

HS: He got to be a fireman. And he loved it.

DC: Oh, OK. What exactly did a fireman do?

HS: A fireman did lots of stuff. Well, if there *was* a fire, he helped fight it. But his biggest job was maintenance of the fire equipment, the—every month there was several guys on the Fire Department and they had, like, a boss. And the fire department was very big back in the '50s and the '60s.

DC: This is the actual Pontiac Motors Fire Department.

HS: Right. Industrial firemen. And they—they went—every month they had to check all the fire extinguishers in the whole plant, and the sprinkler systems, and all of that kind of stuff. *And*, say you were a welder and you wanted to weld. You have to call a fireman to okay the job before you can weld. And if they came and they looked over the area and they said, "We won't give you a permit until you clean up." Maybe there was grease on the floor, shavings, whatever. And then they would write it out. Well, he loved it.

DC: Did he have to have any special training?

HS: There was sort of on-the-job training, and then at one point—and I don't know what year this was, but they decided that all the firemen and the supervisors should go to Oakland University and take this course.

DC: This would have been several years after he started.

HS: Yeah. Uh, I think it probably maybe was in the '60s, late '60s maybe. Anyway, he, you know—like I said, he had not finished high school, but here he is now, going to college. He aced it. He did better than the supervisors. And part of it is knowing what you can't mix. Like naphtha and something else, or carbon whatever, you know. I don't know, you know, he would come home and he would tell me this stuff and not being there and seeing it—I always listened to him, but I didn't always understand it. Sometimes I would ask and he'd explain it.

DC: It sounds like he was in the Fire Department for quite some time.

HS: All of his—most all of his thirty years. He—they used to get laid off a lot.

DC: Tell me about that.

HS: He would get laid off and of course there was no SUB [Supplemental Unemployment] pay back then. This was in the '50s. There was no SUB pay. And he could get unemployment maybe for—I don't know how that worked, but it went by how much time you had in the company. Well, of course, he didn't have a great buildup because he had just hired in, you know. And maybe he'd get three weeks of unemployment and I think it was like $23.00.

DC: A week?

HS: Yeah. [sarcastically] Wonderful, you know, for two people and a kid. And we had bought a house . . .

DC: Oh, so you had moved out of your trailer?

HS: Yeah.

DC: When was that?

HS: We lived in the trailer here for a year. And then we bought a VA house over on Strathmore. It's near Fisher Body. And it was a brand-new little house. There was a hundred and fifty or something of these houses. And they were all the same—little two-bedroom, basement, house. Forty foot lots, you know. And we gardened there, also. And whenever he would get laid off and we had no money coming in, he would do *anything* to make money to support his family.

DC: What were some of the things that he did?

HS: He—well, when we lived in the trailer park, he washed and waxed house trailers for ten bucks. Take him all day.

DC: To do a single one, or . . .

HS: Yes.

DC: Oh really. Ten dollars for a day.

HS: Yeah. And happy to get it, you know, because it kept us with food—and we never missed a payment.

DC: What are some of the other things that he did? You said that he would do anything.

HS: Well, he did that—he worked sometimes at a gas station. [short pause] If somebody wanted something done around the trailer park, you know, maybe somebody said, "Well, I need somebody to help me do this." Maybe move furniture or something. He was there.

DC: So all kinds of odd jobs like that.

HS: Right. Anything and everything. Well, one of our neighbors had a garage where he worked on cars and stuff. And he—they had a lot of little kids. And through him, my husband got a chance to go and run these searchlights. You know, the ones like when the new cars come out, they have the things in the sky? Well, that paid tremendously. I mean, for one evening he'd maybe get fifty dollars.

DC: To run the searchlights.

HS: Yeah!

DC: Was this when he was laid off or was this after?

HS: Yeah.

DC: Oh, OK. Yeah. Wow, that's huge!

HS: I mean it was—you know, it'd make the house payment or something, you know.

DC: In a night!

HS: Yeah! So anyway, while he was doing all this, if somebody—like my folks still had the farm, of course, and if they said, [stifled sneeze] excuse me, "We have corn," or "we got green beans," or whatever. "Come on up." Or they'd come over. They would bring big bags of groceries, like. I mean, the stuff from the farm. And I would can them. So we had food. And what money he made, we used to pay the bills. So, like I said, we were never

hungry and never missed a bill.

DC: How long were these layoffs?

HS: Well, sometimes they'd be a couple months. You know, when the contract would come up or something, there'd be, you know, they'd be off. But then they'd call and he'd go back. And we'd get built back up and everything, and then we always saved the money. Because we figured, you know, you got to save it when you make it so that when you're not working you still got a little something there.

DC: So you anticipated the layoffs.

HS: Yeah! After a couple of them, you think, "Hey, this is the pattern." And so anyway, then, one of the layoffs, one of these cousins that lived over there, bought a VA house behind us and down just a little. And he was a city fireman. And on his days off, he worked for a moving company. So when my husband was laid off, he said, "Hey, you want to make a few bucks? I can have you help with the moving." Well, that was great. But—and at one point the guy that owned the moving company got mad at his son over something, because he didn't want to work. And so he said to my husband, "How about you working full-time for me?" So my husband said OK.

DC: Was that during a layoff?

HS: Yeah. And at that point, he had said he would pay my husband at least a hundred dollars a week and more if they worked more. But he was like guaranteeing him that. So—and my husband went every day and if there wasn't a moving he worked around the warehouse and sweeping and doing whatever they needed, working on the trucks or whatever. And so all of a sudden, one week he come home, and he didn't get paid. And, you know, we were both really upset, and said, you know, "What's with this?!" And he said, "Well, he just said, you know, 'I can't pay you if we don't have any jobs.'" Even though he'd been going in every day. So he went to work, I think, at a gas station. He got a chance. And he was there working at the gas station for that day. They would only call him, like, if somebody didn't show up or, you know, it wasn't a permanent thing. And sometimes I would get jobs in between. But then when he'd go back to work, then I'd quit.

DC: What kind of jobs did you get?

HS: I worked for a realtor thing where they make those cards, you know, that shows a picture of the house and the description on the back.

DC: It sounds similar to what you were doing over at Diamond Crystal.

HS: Yeah. I—it was very similar. And I didn't work there very long. He got called back and, so—it didn't pay me to have a babysitter. So, and if he was home, he took care of the kids.

DC: So if he didn't *have* a job right at that moment, then you could . . .

HS: Right. And then the kids got a little bit older.

DC: When was your second child born?

HS: Second—first one was ’52. The next one was ‘56. I lost one in between those two, when we lived in the trailer.

DC: I’m sorry.

HS: And then the last one was born in ‘63. And we moved out of the house in Pontiac out to Drayton Plains. And I got a job out there working for Richardson’s Dairy.

DC: And when was that?

HS: Probably 1960, maybe.

DC: About ‘60. That’s when you moved and you got the job?

HS: Yeah.

DC: OK.

HS: And I only worked when my husband was at work. I mean, no. I only worked when my husband was *home* and the kids were in school. Not the youngest one, but the two bigger ones.

DC: Would that be when he was laid off or when he was just off shift?

HS: No. He was off shift. And . . .

DC: OK. All right. What shift did he work?

HS: Well, he worked days to start and then he had worked afternoons. He worked midnights—he worked all of them.

DC: Did he choose which shift he worked or was he getting bumped around?

HS: No. Right. And at one time he got bumped by my own cousin. [laughs]

DC: How’d that go over?

HS: Well, not very good, but we never held it against him, because if it wouldn’t have been him, it would have been somebody else. So—but my husband, when he was working for this moving company, right after they didn’t pay him, Pontiac Motors called. And I answered the phone and they said, “We have a message for your husband. Is he there?”

And I said, "No, but give me the message." And they said, "Well, we want him to show up for work on Monday morning if he wants to work." And I said, "He'll be there." And they said, "Well don't you have to check with him?" And I said, "No. He will be there." And so when he got home, I said, "Oh, my God. You got called by Pontiac Motors." And he was, like, tap dancing, you know? He was so thrilled.

DC: Oh, the timing couldn't have been better there!

HS: Yeah. So he went back and, you know, and it was good. Pontiac Motors has been good to us.

DC: It sounds like during the '50s it was kind of . . .

HS: The '50s and some of the '60s was off and on, you know? It was—but we made it, you know? And it was—it was fun.

DC: Can you tell me more about what it was like for him being a fireman in the plant?

HS: Well, of course I wasn't there.

DC: I know, but he must have talked about it some.

HS: Yeah. He came home and he was—he liked his bosses real well, and I think they all liked him pretty well. And I'm sure from all accounts he was a good worker. He got a new boss later in his career. It was Ken Diamond, was his boss. And he got along fine with my husband. But when he first came on—my husband always told me, he said, "I pace myself. I got thirty days to do this," whatever it was.

DC: Was that like an inspection or something.

HS: Yeah. Yeah. Whatever. And he said, "You know, I don't wait until the last three days and then try and work like a nailer to get caught up." He said, "Every day I do . . ."—you know, of course every day they had—just were okaying for burning permits and stuff like that. But the maintenance part, he knew what he had to do. And he would work along. And so one time, I guess he was setting there having a coffee. And Ken Diamond came along and he said, "What's this? You're on a break?" And he said, "Yes." And he said, "Aren't you supposed to be working?" And he said, "Yes." And he said, "I'm going to tell you. I will always have my work done on time. I will always be available." He said, "But I work at my pace. I'm not one that just goofs off for twenty-five days out of the month and then the last four days I bust my hump trying to get everything caught up." He said, "I don't work that way. I work every day, and I work steady. But when I feel like I need to sit down and have a coffee, or if I stop and I talk to somebody," he said, "that doesn't take away from what my job is." So Ken Diamond said, "OK." And I'm sure he looked, you know, kept watch to see what was done. And when my husband died, he told me he was a superb worker.

DC: So in other words, Ken Diamond respected what he did.

HS: Right.

DC: Maybe kept an eye on him, but also recognized . . .

HS: Right. For a little while I think he—I mean, wouldn't you if you were the supervisor?

DC: If he didn't know him.

HS: Yeah.

DC: Sure.

HS: And, you know, sometimes these supervisors would be put into this job for one reason or the other, and they didn't really know the job. And there was some people that would find a place and go off and take a nap. My husband didn't do that. I don't think he *ever* napped at work.

DC: Did he ever talk about any firefighting, actual firefighting?

HS: Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes he'd come home and he was black as coal, where he was in smoke and all that.

DC: That sounds like it could be very dangerous.

HS: Yes. It was. And a couple of times they called and there was a fire. And of course, if it was on the roof they had to climb these ladder things and go up there carrying, you know, fifty-pound extinguishers or whatever. He was in good shape.

DC: Were they responsible for the whole complex?

HS: The whole complex. And at one time, I would say there was maybe ten firemen, at least.

DC: Well you'd think so, if they had all those other maintenance responsibilities and everything.

HS: And—yeah. And my cousin stayed on, on the fire department. And there was another fellow that hired in just about the same time my husband did. And we're not real tight friends with him or anything—was always a friendly relationship and he had a motorcycle, and when it was cold days he rode with my husband. And it seemed like, you know, everybody seemed to get along pretty well.

DC: So your husband had good feelings about his department.

HS: Right. And he absolutely loved it. He was proud to do that. And he could tell you—if you said, "I work so and so," he could tell you the column number where the nearest

extinguisher was. He *knew* that plant. Up, down, backwards.

DC: Because he would be one of the few people that actually went *everywhere*.

HS: Yes.

DC: Yeah. I mean, some people would stay in their own departments.

HS: Yeah, they'd just stand there and do this. A couple of times when he was laid off—well, he did get called one time to work at Fisher Body. And I think he worked in the paint, spray paint thing.

DC: Do you remember when that was, by any chance?

HS: No.

DC: No, just during one of the layoff periods.

HS: I don't know. I'm not real good on remembering dates.

DC: Neither am I. Don't worry about that. But what did he think about that job?

HS: Well, it was a job. And it was interesting, and he'd come home and tell me all, you know, who he saw or who—somebody else that maybe was laid off and he saw them over there. And then later on—I don't know just—it must have been maybe in the late '70s, or maybe the first of the '80s. I don't know just how long this was—they got a woman in the Fire Department. The first woman. And she's a slight woman, no bigger than me. And the fellows, a lot of them, harassed her. And my husband did not. He kind of took her side. I ran into her here at one of the union luncheons before Christmas, and she said, "Your husband was always very helpful." You know, I mean, they had to lift some of this stuff, and the only concern that he had was that, like if he was down in a pit and there was a fire, could she lift him out? Because he weighed about a hundred and eighty.

DC: That's a serious concern.

HS: Yeah. That was the only concern. But, I mean, her willingness to try and help a fellow, you know, I think was great. I think she was—she seems to be a very sweet lady.

DC: I suspect your husband would have been sensitive to anyone being ridiculed.

HS: Right. Right. He didn't—he didn't like that. And I think some of the guys maybe turned it on him a little bit and said, you know, "What's this?" You know. Because the group of the guys—not all of them, but a few of them—were making remarks. And that was her job. She was asked to join this and that's what she wanted to do. And so . . .

DC: Well thinking back to the '50s and maybe the early '60s and all, what was it like running

the household? I mean, I know a little bit about it because of the layoffs, but . . .

HS: It was—it was tough. Because, well, right after our daughter was born—she was born in '56—he got laid off, and he was laid off for a whole year. And we did not have insurance for that year. We had two little kids—a baby and one that was three years old. No insurance. And thank God nobody got sick. And I was—I must have been terrible to live with, but he put up with me. I'm sure I got raving and ranting about different things because we had no money. But we made it.

DC: It sounds like you were concerned about health, for one thing.

HS: Right, you know, and I'm still very conscientious about bills. You know, if you've got something, you got to pay for it. We did not have credit cards. At one point we had a Pontiac car, and it was a beautiful car, and we were making payments on it. And here we are with two little kids, a house payment, car payment, you know, your insurances and so forth. And the car wouldn't start. You'd get the kids all bundled up, you'd go out, get in the car, and it wouldn't start. And he worked on it and had other—this friend of ours tried to work on it. And it would start once in awhile and other times it wouldn't even turn over. So he said, "We've got to have a car." And so I said, "Well, I agree with you, but you know, how are—what are we going to do?" So we went to Port Huron and I think we left the kids at my Mother's. And we went to a car dealership. And he told him, you know, that we needed to trade this car in and get for a—an older car. I think this was a '53. And he said, "I want to trade this in, and I want to get a car that I don't have to make payments on." So we wound up doing that. We got a '49 Plymouth, and that baby ran till the floorboards fell out. But it always started.

DC: Was there any problem driving a Plymouth to the Pontiac Motors plant?

HS: No. No. And almost our entire life, with him working at Pontiac Motors, we mostly had Chrysler cars. He did have a Chevy truck. We had a Buick when we first moved over here—we got this Buick. And we had that for a little while, and then we got this Pontiac, and the Pontiac was a lemon for sure. But anyway, we had—we wound up having two of these '49 Plymouths. One and then another one. And honest to God, they were such good cars. We had a Packard, and it was a good car. And then we started getting Dodges and Plymouths, it seemed like. And right now I'm driving an Oldsmobile. But I've had Plymouths or some kind of Chrysler product pretty much all our married life.

DC: Thinking back, you know, the car was obviously a big deal when—in the '50s you had to have a car that worked and all this.

HS: Right. Right. Well, if somebody called and said, "Hey, can you come over and work at the gas station?"—you had to get there!

DC: Had to get there, right. Yeah. But how about, like setting up the house and all? I mean . . .

HS: We didn't go in debt for furniture. We—the first house we had in Pontiac here . . .

DC: The VA house?

HS: Yeah. We had—we bought a table and chair set, very inexpensive. It was a chrome set, which you can't get them anymore. But we had that. We had a couch and a chair, and a bed. Now the bed did not have a headboard. It was just the box springs and mattress. We did not have a dresser for at least two years. We had boxes and that was the best we had and that was what—we did not go in debt.

DC: How about a television or a radio or anything?

HS: We did get a used television and we had that until some time in the '50s, later '50s, we got a new television. And it had a record player in the bottom of it.

DC: But that was later on in the '50s.

HS: Yeah.

DC: OK. How about a refrigerator?

HS: Oh yeah. That—well, you see, we got a deal on the refrigerator and stove when we moved into this VA house. We had this trailer and we still owed on that. And so we had to get a refrigerator and a stove for the new house. So we went shopping, and we bought—we put a down payment on it, because the house wasn't ready yet. And I don't remember what the down payment was. It was like a deposit. So anyway, then we wanted to sell the trailer. And one of the places that we had gone and looked at refrigerators, then they—I think there was an ad in the paper or something. So we went to this other place, and we went to look at the refrigerators there. It seems as though maybe we had a deposit on one of the appliances, but not both. So anyway, when we went there and was looking at the appliance, the guy said, "Why don't you buy a stove *and* refrigerator?" And I said, "Well, we've already got a deposit on it." And he talked to us, you know, about why we were doing this and everything. And I said—he said, "Well I'd really like to have you get them from me." And I said, "Well, you buy our trailer and I'll get them from you." And he did. And the—he took over the payments on the trailer. I think we got—it seems like we got a hundred dollars in cash and we got the top line, Hotpoint refrigerator and freezer. And . . .

DC: So your negotiating got you a good deal.

HS: Right. So he took the trailer off our hands, and we had, say a hundred dollars to work with. Plus we had—I don't recall if we got the deposit back or not. I think we maybe lost that. But it was like, probably ten dollars or something.

DC: But you were saving monthly payments on the trailer.

HS: Right! And we were paying fifty dollars a month on the trailer, and when we moved into

the house, I think our payments were something like fifty-six dollars a month. And the house cost $10,000. And then the VA loan was very inexpensive. And so, you know, then shortly after we moved in there, and they had all the houses filled, then they raised the rent. Or, you know, the house payment. And it came up to like sixty-three dollars. Well, a lot of people moved out, because, oh, they were just mad. Well we lived there for five years. And then we bought a house out in Drayton Plains.

DC: That's when you moved. OK.

HS: Yeah. And um, and it had a little rental house on the property, which we rented, and which was bad news. I mean . . .

DC: To keep up the renters, you mean?

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

HS: . . . rental house was not a money maker. So we lived there five years. And then we bought property out towards Lake Orion, and we had a house built.

DC: OK. And when would that have been? Around '63?

HS: Um—'65.

DC: '65, OK.

HS: And we moved out there. It was a brand-new house that we had built, and it was nice.

DC: Did you feel more financially secure by then?

HS: Yeah. And by that time the kids were—well, the youngest one was only a couple years old when we moved out there. And after he got big enough to go to school all day, then I started working and I worked for Ward's. And I worked there about four years, I think. And then I left . . .

DC: What did you do at Ward's?

HS: Selling. On the sales floor. And then I got a job over at Sears, shortly after they built the Sears store. It was probably—well, if I went there in [pause]—I don't know—'70, maybe. Anyway, I worked at Sears for—I worked at Ward's for four years, and then I worked at Sears for a little over ten. And I mostly sold shoes. I did a little selling of shoes at Ward's and I liked it, and it was commission sales. And then I went . . .

DC: Tell me more about these sales jobs.

HS: I liked selling. I liked it when I sold strawberries, two quarts for a quarter. [laughs] Anyway, they had me working for awhile in women's clothing and they would—part of that job was you go in the dressing room and help people get the dress zipped up or whatever. I did not like that.

DC: Why was that?

HS: Because some of these old gals didn't have much on underneath their clothes! And that wasn't for me. I didn't like that. I worked a little while in linens, which was fine. Didn't really like it that well. Worked down in hardware, and that was OK. Just a few days, I think, I worked in paints, and I wasn't crazy about that. And one day they came over and they said, "We want you to work in shoes tonight." And I said, "I don't know anything about selling shoes." And he says, "Well, they'll show you when you get over there." So I walked over there and the supervisor said, "You're going to be working here tonight." And he plopped down a shoehorn and he said, "Sell shoes." And I said, "I don't even know where they are." And so he gave me quick look in the back room and he said, "They go by numbers." Didn't say, you know, work boots are here, dress shoes, or whatever. And so anyway, I did very well. In fact, sometimes I made more in a week part-time selling shoes than my husband did at Pontiac Motor.

DC: Is that right?

HS: And my husband was never jealous or carried away about how much I made. He was happy that I did well.

DC: And how did you work that out with your kids and stuff?

HS: Um, the . . .

DC: One of them would have been older, I guess.

HS: Yeah. Yeah, my oldest son by that time was thirteen or fifteen. And so anyway, it worked out. And I supposedly worked twenty hours a week, but sometimes it was more than that.

DC: You could make that much money in twenty hours when things went well.

HS: Yeah. Well, you—and with shoes, it's not just bringing up shoes. It's—you know, if you haul it out and they don't buy it, you haul it back. And it's hard work. And I worked with a lot of young kids that was high school or whatever, maybe eighteen to twenty years old. I loved these kids! And I think they liked me. Anyway, and there was a couple of older gals that worked there. One I'm still friends with, the other one lives in North Carolina. I'm still friends with her but I don't see her that much. But anyway, she—it was good. I enjoyed it. And a funny thing happened when I worked there. This couple used to come out and they would always ask for me. I waited on them once and then whenever they'd

come back they'd always ask if I could wait on them. And they had this little boy. And very chatty people. I mean, just nice people. And of course, when I'd get home I'd say, "Well this couple came out," and I'd tell my husband about them. And then he'd come home from work and he'd tell me about who he talked to that day. He was friends with these people at work, and I was selling them shoes! And we didn't know the connection. So anyway, the woman got hurt at Pontiac Motor. She got—her clothing got caught on something and it pulled her in, and she lost a spleen and everything. She's still working for GM but she's down at Saturn. And anyway, it just happened he came in to go to lunch with me on a Saturday and here's this couple with the kid. And so I'm waiting on them and he says, "Well I don't believe this!" So then we found out we both knew the same people, you know? And he worked—this other fellow worked at Pontiac, and he did the maintenance on the grounds, you know, like mowing and plowing and all that. And she was some kind of a press operator or something. I don't know just what her job was. And so anyway, we got together. We used to go to their house or they'd come to ours. And so anyway, they moved down there to the—and got a job at the Saturn plant. He just recently retired and she's still working.

DC: OK. Thinking back to when you were just starting out, you know, in the VA home in the '50s and moving out to Drayton Plains and all—I know times were tight with the layoffs and all, but what kinds of things did you do for fun?

HS: Believe it or not, we went on some trips.

DC: Where did you go?

HS: All over.

DC: Really?

HS: We went—we used to go to Kentucky quite a bit. And like I said, I love horses and so—my husband wasn't into horses because he didn't—they didn't have any animals like that. His Dad worked for Chrysler. And so, you know, they didn't farm or anything. My husband did work on a farm before he went in the service one summer.

DC: So what would you do in Kentucky?

HS: So we'd go down there and just go by the horse farms or, you know—and we couldn't afford, you know, with three little kids you can't afford to go to the restaurants and, you know, live high on the hog. So we took—we had a little gas camp stove and we would pack a big box in the trunk and it would have like cans of stew and stuff like that. And we had a cooler and we had eggs and bacon, stuff in there. We most always ate breakfast out. And we would—we would go sometimes—like we went to My Old Kentucky Home [the home that inspired Stephen Foster's ballad] and saw that, and different things, you know, just enjoying the countryside and so forth. And when we would stop, say like for lunch, we would stop at a roadside rest thing and we would say to the kids, "OK, run!" You know, "Go burn it off!" And we would cook and we had like a dishpan thing and soap and so

forth. And so we'd eat—maybe heat up a can of chili or whatever. And we'd have crackers and so forth. And while the kids were running and burning up energy, we cooked lunch. Then we would wash the dishes and pack them all back in there and down the road we'd go! And then that night, usually about 5:00, we'd get a motel and we would eat close to the motel. Was—we enjoyed it. It wasn't anything spectacular, but—and we didn't always go there. We went other places. We went up into New York and visited some cousins up there. And, um . . .

DC: Yeah. Now if you had milk cows growing up, I can't imagine your family going on many trips. Did you go on many trips when you were a child?

HS: Oh, yeah. We—not a lot. We did a couple of times. And of course, they had very little money. And I remember going once up to—well, by that time, you see, my brother was home. It was after the war and *he* would do the milking and stuff and maybe my folks and I would go. And we went up into New York state and visited cousins up there, and of course we stayed with them. And it wasn't a long trip, maybe a couple days, you know, after we got done.

DC: Mm-hmm. Just to get away for a bit.

HS: Yeah. They didn't travel a lot. Our big trip when I was a kid was go to Lapeer and visit my aunt. And it was like—I mean nowadays people would plan, you know, like if they were going to Europe. Well this was a trip to Lapeer, and oh my God, we were so thrilled about it, you know. And if they came over it was like, oh my God, you know, and we'd be glued to the window watching down the road to see when they were coming. And so . . .

DC: Another line of questions—I was thinking about your husband in the union. Was he involved much with the union?

HS: Not a great deal, no. But whenever they would go out for, you know, the contract or whatever, and a lot of the people in the factory that he would talk to—he would come home and he would say, "Oh, they want this amount of raise." You know? "They want a two dollar raise," or "they want this." And he would always say, "I tell them, 'don't worry about the dollar raise. It's the benefits that's the good stuff.'" And thank goodness for the benefits. I have an income, and I have my medical stuff, you know, which is wonderful. I think Pontiac Motors is great.

DC: So he focused on the benefits.

HS: Right.

DC: Did he focus like right from the start on those kinds of things?

HS: Right, right. Right. Because even though—I can remember early on, our income tax was like two thousand dollars for the year. You know, I mean it's . . .

DC: Your taxable income, you mean?

HS: Yeah. Of course, these little odd jobs working, getting ten bucks here or whatever, that wasn't included in that because it wasn't taxable. But he was happy with what he was getting paid. And he did not get the big bucks that they're getting now. He got sick in 1983. Had a complete physical and they said, "You are in great shape." And they had checked his lungs and everything—and he had smoked from the time he was a toddler, until about '67. And my youngest son, well they say suck your thumb. He did not actually put his thumb in his mouth. He just had the tip of it at his lips. But he kept doing this, you know, and not when he was sleeping. Just, if he'd get intense about something, or nervous, that thumb would go to his lips. Well then they started on the television about if you smoke, you get black lungs. So every time it'd come on he'd say, "Daddy, please don't smoke. You're going to get black lungs." So my husband says, "Well you're going to have thumbs in your lungs." So they made a deal—one wouldn't suck their thumb, the other one wouldn't smoke.

DC: It's a good trade.

HS: Yeah, and I thought, "Man, I like this!" you know? And so anyway, they quit. And in '83 they said, "Your lungs have no damage. They look pink and good," and everything. And I don't even think it was a week later and—he was quite a bowler. In fact, we both bowled.

DC: OK, so another thing you liked to do together.

HS: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Did you do that back in the '50s, as well, or was that mostly later?

HS: A little bit, but not as much. And he was a good bowler.

DC: But it sounds like very shortly they found some other problems?

HS: Well, he had a heart attack. We got home from bowling and he said, "God, I'm hot." And I [coughs], excuse me, I said, "Well sit on the couch." Because where he was sitting was right by a heat register. And at the time we had moved to Rochester in an apartment, because he was supposed—this was April and in November he was to retire. And we had bought some property in Kentucky. We were going to move down there. And so he went and sat in the living room and I proceeded to fix a sweet roll and coffee. And I said, "Are you cooling down?" He said, "No." And he had no pains or anything. So anyway, I took a hold of his hand and kind of his wrist, and he was clammy. And I said, "Maybe we ought to go to the hospital. Have this checked out." And he didn't argue about it. And then my concern was, 'I hope I can get him to the car.' And so I got the car keys, I drove, and I knew he wasn't in good shape. I knew he had a problem but I wasn't sure what. And so I drove him to the hospital. Went through the red light carefully. Got him there, and sure enough, he was having a heart attack. And he wound up having two heart attacks—one then and one about a week or so later. And then they took him to Ford Hospital in Detroit,

and they was going to do a balloon catheter, where they open the veins. And so we proceeded to do that. And at that time they said it works better on women than it does on men, but you know, the doctor recommended it, and it was less invasive that cutting him open. So anyway, they did this and they came out and they said, "Well, we did it and we opened his veins and you'll be able to go in and see him in about fifteen minutes." And I was just outside the door of this cath[eter] lab. All of a sudden, everybody was running in there, taking machines and everything. And he was the only one in there. So I wanted to know what was going on. So I went around kind of the corner there, and they're all standing there like this—my husband's on the table and they're all just staring at him, and I thought, "Oh my God!" You know, "What's going on?" So the one guy looked over my way and I motioned and he turned his head. And I thought, "Either you come out here or I'm going in there." So he looked again and I motioned and he did come out. And he said, "The doctor will be out to talk to you in a minute." And I said, "What's going on?" and he said, "The doctor will be out in a minute." So I said, "He better be." So anyway, he came out in a few minutes and the veins had collapsed and he had actually died. And they zapped him and he came back alive. And they zapped him over a hundred times. He had burn marks on him. And then the surgeon came and talked to us later that evening, about 5:30 or something, and my youngest son had gotten there by that time. So this surgeon said, "The only thing that we can do for him is possibly bypass surgery." And I said, "Well then do it!" And he said, "The only problem is that if we move him, I think he's going to die. He's already died over a hundred times, but every time we zap him he does come back, so that gives us the clue that," you know, "he's got a will to live." But I had to give the okay whether or not to do this. And they had to move him from one floor to another, and they said, "Well, they don't think he'll—if we move him, we think he's gone." And my youngest son was there and he said, "What would you say his chances are of making it to the surgeon?" And he said, "Well, if I had to give that, I would say one in ten million, and I'm giving him the edge with the one." So it was grim. So anyway, my son says, "Well, Dad's a fighter, and I think one chance in ten million is better than none." So he—they did it. And you never saw anybody that looked worse. They took us in to show us what they look like after they've had bypass. This guy looked like he could get up and tap dance. My husband looked terrible. And here, a few hours earlier, he was fine.

DC: Well, fine then . . .

HS: Yeah, you know? I mean, he wasn't having a heart attack or anything. He was, just had this catheterization. They had so many wires hooked to him, you know, those piggy back things that they have, those cross things that they hang. They were all like double, and they had three of them. And wires, just a snarl of wires and tubes. And they had a machine that they put a tube up through his groin into—right next to—his heart, and on the end of that tube was like a balloon. And every so many seconds this machine would kick on, blow the balloon up, so to nudge his heart. And, of course he was on the respirator and the whole nine yards, and out of it. And all I could think of was, "Keep breathing." And I kept saying to him, "Honey, keep breathing." And finally, I guess it was the next day, the nurse was in there and even though he was on this respirator, he was like taking this really big breath. And the nurse said, "I wish he would stop that." And I said, "What?" And she said, "He's on the respirator. We want him to rest, not keep trying to breathe." And I said,

"Well that's my fault." I said, "I kept telling him to breathe." So anyway, then I—you know, the nurse said to him, "Relax, Mr. Spencer," you know. And he kind of did, even though he was out of it. I'm sure that they can hear you.

DC: Yeah, I think so.

HS: And it was a couple days before he even stirred. And believe it or not, he came through that. And it took a long time after he—he was in the hospital over a month. He was in intensive care for like three weeks. And you know, now they do bypass and you're home in seven days and they don't even look bad. He looked terrible. And anyway, he came back and they said, "He needs to walk." And we lived in that apartment in Rochester, and he could get out the back door and down three steps and he was absolutely exhausted. And that went on for about three days. Then he got so he could walk a little bit further, a little further, and then we had to stop and he would rest. And he finally got so, God, we walked all over town.

DC: Really? Wow. That's incredible.

HS: And he really came back good. Now this was in April and May—excuse me—and in October we moved to Kentucky. We had a modular home put on down there and we moved down there. And we realized probably the first day we was down there we made a mistake. The weather down there was better, milder than it was here. But when you go to visit Kentucky the people are very friendly. 'Oh, y'all come back,' and all that good stuff. And when you live there, you are the Northerner.

DC: OK. You're an outsider.

HS: Yup. We went to church down there for over a year, to this little country church just around the corner from our farm, and after going there we pulled up one Sunday and this one guy says, "Well, here comes the Northerners." And I thought, you know, "What is this?"

DC: Where in Kentucky was this?

HS: Bowling Green. And it was nice. We liked it there, you know? I mean, other than . . .

DC: This was in the '80s, right?

HS: Yeah, '83 when we moved there. And so I guess it was maybe a year later we decided we'd sell the place and come back up here.

DC: You mentioned that you went to church down there. Had church been a part of your life all along?

HS: Yep. Not when I was a kid. When I knew Shirl was coming home and we were going to get married, I said to my folks, "You know, I'm planning to get married and I don't even

know a minister!" And I said, "I want to start going to church." And so I said, "I don't care what church. I just want to go to church." So my Dad had known this old couple for many years and they were very Christian people. And they had a church just a couple doors down from where they lived and it was started—that church was started by the Sturgis family. It was called Sturgis Church, and these people went to that. And he said, "Well," he said, "Mr. and Mrs. Sturgis are very nice people and very good people and that's their church. And so if I'm going to go, I'd just as soon go there." I said, "Fine." We started going there. And as it turned out, even after I married and left, my folks continued to go there until they died.

DC: They began to go to church then.

HS: Yep.

DC: Was there any reason why they hadn't gone to church when you were growing up?

HS: No. They just, I guess, didn't do it.

DC: OK. But then they began to after you did.

HS: Yep. And they—in fact, my Mother was working at a luncheon and had a—I don't know if it was a stroke or a heart attack or what, while working at this luncheon. She was eighty-one, and she was taken to the hospital and she had had a stroke. And she died the following morning at 7:00. And both of them were buried by that minister, but they're buried over at Oakwood in Port Huron there. And as it turned out, I did not get married by that minister.

DC: Oh, you didn't?

HS: No. Because my husband came—when he came home, and I said something about going. He said, "Well, I know Reverend Roof from the Lutheran church," and his Stepmother went there occasionally. And so he had gone, I guess, a couple times with her and he knew Reverend Roof. So he said, "Why don't we go and talk to him?" I said, "I don't care, just so we get married." So we got married there instead of—and I went there when my husband went to Germany for that year. I went to the Sturgis Church.

DC: OK, the one that . . .

HS: Yeah. And after we moved over here—when my husband would be working—a lot of times he worked midnights. And so I would take the kids and go—and we started going to a Lutheran church in Drayton Plains. And I always sat in either the front row or the second row. And so here I am with these squirming little kids sitting there, and after the fifth Sunday the minister says, "Oh, it's nice to have someone new in the church. If you're ever in this area, drop in. We'd like to have new families."

DC: You'd been there for how long?

HS: Five or six weeks. And I never went back. And then the people that lived across from us—this was when I was expecting my youngest one—they said, "Well we go to the Methodist church. Why don't you come and see if you like that?" So we went there and I've been a Methodist ever since. All three of the kids have been baptized Methodist. My oldest son and his wife both now are Methodist ministers. And all my six grand-children have been baptized in the church I go to. It's out on Silverbell Road. And both my boys were in the service—about twenty years for each one of them.

DC: Twenty years each?

HS: Yeah. The oldest one was in the Air Force and the youngest one in the Marines.

DC: So they made careers out of it.

HS: Yep. And my youngest son works at the airport now in Lansing, working on airplanes. And he's in the National Guard, and the place where he does the National Guard, they work on helicopters. He has credentials. He can work on the outside skins, the hydraulics, the engines. He can tear out the seats and replace them. He has all the credentials. And the place where he works now, places call and say, "We want him to come and work. We have a plane. We want *him*." And right now he's going to college two days a week, and he's acing it. He didn't do that well in high school. He goofed around. But now he's doing well.

DC: The time wasn't right then. It is now.

HS: Mm hmm.

DC: Way back when, when you were talking about how tough it was raising the kids and making a family work in the '50s and early '60s, you also said it was fun.

HS: It was.

DC: I wanted you to explain more about what made it fun.

HS: It was fun because, well for one thing, I loved being a wife and mother. My husband was very good. We backed each other up. If he said something to the kids, I backed him up. If I didn't agree with him, I waited till the kids were out of the room and then I'd say, "I think you were a little tough there," or something. Now he grew up where, when the Dad said something, you know, it was a hit in the head or a pound on the fanny or whatever. He wasn't—he wasn't mean. My husband was not mean. But he expected the kids to mind, and I did, too. We did not want to raise little hellions. We wanted them to be good people and mind, and be kind. And it got to the point where I was the one who really disciplined the kids, and he was my backup. And my daughter now tells me, she said, "I wish we had control of our kids like you and Dad did." And I said, "Well, you have to get it." And she has a husband who could care less, and he's more of a detriment than a help. He's an

alcoholic. And he didn't go through high school and now he says to the kids—he works for GM and so does she—but he makes the statement—you know, the kids are goofing around in school, not doing their homework and so forth, and she's trying to get them to do all this stuff—and he says, "Well," he says, "I got a good job, good-paying job," he said, "and I didn't even get through high school." What does that tell the kids? You know?

DC: In this day and age it's much harder to do that.

HS: Yeah! And like if I would say—if we're just sitting around in the evening and the kids are maybe sitting on the floor playing a game or whatever, and I'd look at the clock and I'd say, "You kids better pick up and get ready for bed." And if they didn't make a move after a couple of minutes, my husband would snap his fingers and point at them and they moved. He didn't have to do anything, but they knew he meant it. You know? And if they didn't move, he'd say, "Did your Mother speak?" And they were moving.

DC: So you guys were a team.

HS: Yeah. So that's why I say it was fun. And while he was working midnights and trying to sleep daytimes—you know, you got three kids in the house—we had a quiet house. And at one point we lived in a tri-level house and the stairs, you know, up to the bedroom. If you're in the kitchen, the hallway went right straight up to our bedroom. So when he'd go to bed—he'd come home in the morning and he would have breakfast and shortly after that, then he would go to bed. And when he would get ready to go to bed, if the kids were home, he'd say, "The quiet light is lit." That meant, you know, no screaming, no—we didn't have kids that screamed. I don't like kids that—you know, you see kids that are sitting on the floor and all of a sudden they give a scream out, and you think, "God, they must have got their hand in the door or something!" And they're just screaming. Our kids did not do that. We never allowed it. No screaming. If you're hurt, that's one thing. But just sitting there playing a game, you don't do that. And if I had to raise my voice to the kids and Dad came down the stairs, that was trouble, because you woke Dad and he needs his sleep. So they didn't want to do that. And a lot of times, you know, in the summer kids, get a little restless. So I took them, got them in the car—we'd go to Port Huron. We'd go to the museum. We went to the zoo, whatever. You know, I took them fishing, got them out of the house. And it seemed like even though he worked midnights, we never missed out on going to, like my aunt's for Thanksgiving. He would go and after we had dinner, maybe he would go in and lay on the bed and sleep for a couple of hours, you know? Which I don't find some—well, like my son-in-law or sometimes even my son—they don't want to put theirself out. They just say, "Well I worked and I can't do this." But he never did that. He wanted to go. And we had dinners at our house. I had Christmas at my house for the whole family—my brother, my sister, my brother's kids and everything. It was nothing to have twelve to fifteen people. And, you know, sometimes like my Mother and Dad would bring something. Mostly we did the meals, you know. We had food. But one time we had all these people invited and I woke up that morning and I had a sick headache. I was sick to my stomach. I had a blinger of a headache, and I said, "I guess we'll have to call and cancel." And he said, "Do you think if you go up and go to bed you might feel better later on?" I said, "I think I might." And he said, "Don't worry

about a thing." Said, "Go up," and every little while he'd come up and he'd say, "Do you want a cold cloth for your head?," or whatever. And he would keep the kids quiet. He fixed dinner for all these people. And they came, and by that time I was up and normal. And they started saying, "Oh, well Hazel, that's a really wonderful dinner." And I said, "Don't thank me. Shirl cooked the whole thing." He could do anything. I mean, when I worked at Sears, if he had Saturday off, I could come home—the house was cleaned as good or better than I could do it, and he maybe took the curtains down in the bedroom or the kitchen or whatever and washed them and put them back up.

DC: Had you always shared in the housework like that?

HS: Yeah. He pretty much kept house when he lived at his folks' house before we were married, before he went in the service. And they didn't appreciate it. I appreciated what he did. And when we first bought that house in Pontiac, one morning I got up and something was wrong with the drain or the water or something in the kitchen sink. And I said, "Honey!" I don't know if it was the drain doesn't work or whatever. And he said, "Well maybe you better call a plumber." And I said, "What do you mean, call a plumber? My Dad never called a plumber." And he said, "Well, my Dad never did anything!" And I said, "But how hard can it be? You take it apart, you remember how it came apart, you fix it, and you put it back." And I worked with him. So he tore it apart. Whatever it was, he fixed it. And I praised him. And he got so he could do electrical stuff, plumbing stuff—we always had the best yard in the neighborhood.

DC: So he did the yard work?

HS: Oh, he loved it. And sometimes he would work long hours. He'd come home and I knew he was tired. He'd take a shower and we'd have supper—this was after he got back on days—and then he'd go out and—our homes always had beautiful lawns and gardens—flower gardens and vegetable gardens. And he'd be out there digging in the dirt, and I'd say, "Honey, I know you're tired. You don't have to do that." He said, "This is my fun thing."

DC: OK. So it was relaxation for him.

HS: Yep. He made a retainer wall, laid bricks, at the one house we lived in. One—the other house we had in Lake Orion, he built a brick patio and I helped him with that. He said what he wanted to do and he said, "But I don't know how to do it." So that was when I was working at Sears, and they had all kinds of books, you know, home improvement books and stuff. I got one on patios and stuff, and it told about doing dry mortar and he did that. And it was gorgeous.

DC: So he learned to do a lot.

HS: He was handy. He could do everything. We wallpapered together, we had several houses we built, and we worked together. In fact, the one house in Lake Orion, I drew the plan. And we wanted—in Kentucky we saw this house in a home magazine, and I said, "That's

the kind of house I want." Now we never went in that house, but I knew what the—I had a little picture of what it looked like. And he said, "Well, draw it." So I did. And that house now sells for almost $200,000. It's a beautiful house. That house *was* me. It had closets, it had a lovely eating area, beautiful kitchen. It was gorgeous. And we took the drawing that I had made and took it to a architect, and he said, "Who drew this?" And I said, "I did." And he said, "How much training have you had?" And I said, "None." He said, "it's—other than, you know, squaring it up—really good," he said, "you've done a wonderful job."

DC: That's amazing.

HS: I *love* that kind of stuff. And so anyway . . .

DC: I didn't catch your maiden name.

HS: Hart.

DC: Hart. H-A-R-T?

HS: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK. All right.

HS: And back when I went to high school, girls could not take blueprint drawing. Now they can. I would have taken it. My Dad built two of the houses that—the two houses that I remember living in. And so he had carpenter skills. My brother's house, my Dad and my brother built that. I had an uncle that lived in Bad Axe that built houses. He was a carpenter.

DC: Did you pay careful attention to all this building?

HS: You bet. And you know, when they was building this house I even had marked where I wanted the light switches. And I knew what I wanted, and I talked to my husband and we went over everything, you know, and he said well—you know, sometimes he'd say, "Well maybe it would be better this," and we'd change it. Well we finally got this thing worked out, how we really wanted it, and the bedroom had like the door that went to the hall, like here, and then this wall was plain, and then that door went into the bathroom. Now you could go to the bathroom through the hallway or through the bedroom. So we had a light switch on this wall, so if we went in the bathroom from the bedroom we could turn the light switch on. Then if you came in from the hall there was another switch, a double switch. And so when the guy was wiring it, I went down—it was only two blocks from where our present house was. And so I went down every day and the guy is cutting the hole for the electrical box inside the bathroom. The mirror was going to be on that wall. And he said, "Well, we can cut a hole in the mirror." I said, "Don't even think about it! That is not what I want. I want . . ." "Oh, well code says you got to do this." I said, "Uh-uh. I know where that can be, and that's where it's going to be." "Oh, we'll see about that." I said, "Stop

right now. Don't go any further, because . . ."—and he started giving me a little lip about it. And so I went home, woke up my husband, and he went down there and he told the guy. He said, "We're paying for this house. My wife knows what she's talking about. If she says the light switch goes there, that's where it's going to be. Now either you do it or hit the road." So, you know, I know how to do almost everything in houses. But I don't have the strength, you know, and a lot of times I don't have the tools.

DC: But you picked up an awful lot along the way.

HS: Yeah. Well, we worked together. When he was laid off, sometimes we did home repair. We got—through this job that I had with the realtors, we met one of the realtors around Pontiac, and he had a lot of rental homes. And when somebody would move out, he would give us the job of cleaning up the place. Wallpapering, maybe, the bedroom or the bathroom or kitchen. And we had—he gave us free will to go to a certain wallpaper store, and he said, "Use your judgment, but don't get the most expensive paper, and don't get the cheapest." He said, "Get something that, if we need to, we can strip it off." So we did that, and in fact, after he was retired, we were going to do wallpapering. Just small jobs, like maybe bathrooms or kitchens. Not big, two-story, you know, hallways or anything like that—something little. And we never got a call to, you know—we put an ad in the union paper: small jobs wallpapering. And the day after he died I got a call, and it was somebody saying, "I want to talk to you about wallpapering." And I said, "We went out of business yesterday."

DC: I'm sorry. When did your husband finally die?

HS: He died in 1989.

DC: Well he made it a long time, then.

HS: A little over five years. And we had a *wonderful* five years. We said, "Let's enjoy it to the fullest." We went to Germany. Our son, the oldest one, was over there. We went there, and toured around Germany and Austria, and a little bit of Italy. Went to Holland. We didn't—the last time we went to Germany, I had talked to my son and we wanted to go to Ireland. My grandfather was born in Ireland. And I wanted to go there while we were over that close. And the Air Force had many tours that were very inexpensive. It was not deluxe, but they were adequate. And as it turned out, every time I'd write and tell my son, you know, did you get the stuff on Ireland . . .

End of Interview