

Wilhelm Family, April 20, 2007

Interviewer: Susan Futrell

DRAFT

SF: So we're at the home of Myrna Elliott, Myrna Wilhelm Elliott, in Ames, Iowa, on April 20th, 2007. And let's just start by having each of you say who you are.

MW: I'm Max Wilhelm, son of Harley Wilhelm that worked at the University.

LWL: I'm Lorna Wilhelm Livingston, daughter of Harley Wilhelm.

GW: I'm Gretchen Wilhelm, the youngest daughter of Harley Wilhelm.

MWE: I'm Myrna Wilhelm Elliott, the middle daughter of Harley Wilhelm. [End of Disc 1, Track 1].

SF: I don't blame you, but I'd love to look through there, if we have time.

MWE: You can make copies of the things that you might be interested in.

SF: Mm-hmm.

MWE: Between 1991 and 1995, Dad dictated to me his story of how this all came about, and I'm sure there are copies of that at the University.

SF: That's wonderful.

MWE: But it's great detail, from the very beginning to when he was through with it.

SF: And he did that, he taped that so...

MWE: No, he dictated to me, and I wrote it.

LWL: He dictated to anybody who was there. We just continued on with the next paragraph or whatever.

MW: Do you have some basic knowledge of what he did?

SF: I do, a little bit. I've read the history of the Lab and the work here. I've just started to talk to a few other people, so I know a little bit of the history, but, let's, just to have it on the tape, why don't we start by each of you, or maybe someone give a little overview, I'll let you decide who.

GW: Not I, I was too young to know much about it.

LWL: I probably know the most, because I was

SF: And then I'll ask each of you to start by just telling some of your memories.

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LWL: Well, I was in high school when this all began, and then I was in college when it ended. So I was there most of the time. Whereas they were out flitting around the world, Myrna in nurses training, Max in Korea, and Gretchen a little squirt. Always the little squirt.

MW: Is that thing running now?

SF: It is.

LWL: I was just going to say, when I was in high school, having lived out at the college, the kids who were my classmates realized that Dad worked over there where everything was a military secret and, "What are they doing over there anyway?" Well, I asked Dad, "What am I supposed to tell them?" "Well, just tell them that we're making Japanese fingernail polish. They wouldn't want to be doing that."

MWE: Now see, I don't remember that. I remember Max saying that to Dad.

MW: Can I interrupt?

MWE: And Dad says, "Do not say that outside of this family." That I remember.

MW: Well there were stories going around, this was called "Little Ankeny," because Ankeny was the big munitions plant. Stories were going around like, "They're making holes. They put these holes in the ocean, and when a Japanese ship runs into it, it makes a hole in the ship and it sinks." And there was another story, that "They're making something that will make a whole town disappear." Now that, nobody in their right mind believed that, but after it happened...

LWL: Well, actually I was sitting in the breakfast nook with Dad one time, I was in college at the time, and this was after he'd said the Japanese fingernail polish thing, and I said, "Dad, what really are you doing there?" And he said, "Well, let's just say there's a ship going across the ocean and all of a sudden it disappears." He gave me three options. And another one was "Well, let's say that New York City is there today, but it isn't there tomorrow." And then he was going to do the third one, and I said "You're making a bomb." And he just stopped. "Why do you think that?" I said, "Because I know you go back and forth to Ankeny." Ankeny was a munitions plant. I said, "But I know you go back and forth to Ankeny and that's the only thing that makes sense to me." "Don't you ever say that again." So I knew that I hit it on the button, but that was all that was ever said about it, until the day that that bomb was dropped, and I was working at the University at that time, and we heard about it, and I called Mother right away, "I said, Mom, turn the radio on." She said, "What's going on, Dad just told me to turn the radio on too." "Then just turn the radio on." And all they told us was, well, it was when the bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. So I knew immediately that that's what it was.

SF: But you weren't able to tell anybody else.

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LWL: No, we couldn't tell anybody it had come from Iowa State. This was a military secret for fifty years. Dad couldn't talk about it for fifty years.

MW: Well, as soon as the bomb was dropped, we all knew. It came out.

LWL: We knew, we instinctively knew what had happened.

MW: They were all being interviewed, and all sorts of...

LWL: Right, right. The whole story didn't come out. In Dad's book he tells exactly his story. He tells exactly when they started working on it and why, and how.

SF: What are some of the things you remember?

LWL: He simply said to me, when he was dictating the story to me. Back when the Jewish people, when Hitler started this thing against the Jews, three Germans that were working in their laboratory, Strassman, Hahn and Lise Meitner, Lisa Meitner was Jewish, the other two were not. So she fled Germany and went to Denmark. And of course the scientific world is different from the rest of the world, and so they shared their knowledge and she told them that they were trying to split the atom. Well this went around like wildfire. So Princeton and Westinghouse both came up with processes for the purification of uranium, which was a necessity for splitting the atom. Their processes both cost thousands of dollars per gram. And so Arthur Compton, who was in charge of the whole project at this time, this was preceding the name "Manhattan Project," it was just the Atomic Energy Program at that time. So he thought it was too impossible financially to come up with pure uranium, so they were going to set up a laboratory in Chicago, a metallurgy laboratory to try to discover a substitute for uranium. They were told that there was this professor at Iowa State that had his own metallurgy lab, this happened to be Dad, of course, so he was going to be put in charge of finding a substitute for uranium. And he said to me, "I just decided, why should I get a substitute? Why not get the real thing?" He was sworn into the program February 21st, I believe, of 1942, and on August 5th of 1942, which was just a few months later, he had come up with a process and had his first pure uranium. August 5th of '42 was his 42nd birthday. Now that's a pretty good deal. Right now that sounds pretty young to us. And it was a month later he went in with a ten pound ingot of pure uranium to Compton. And he said, "When I showed this to Compton, his jaw dropped and his eyes bugged out." But then he was pretty sure that it must have had a deviant core, it couldn't be ten pounds of pure uranium. So he had it cut into quadrants, and sent to four various laboratories for analysis and it came back pure uranium. So at that point they cancelled the laboratory at the University of Chicago. The equipment had not yet arrived, so they just sent it instead to Iowa State. And that's how Iowa State became involved in it directly, and Dad in charge.

SF: Mm-hmm. And do any of you, or do you remember your Dad's work at that time...

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LWL: Eighteen hours a day, constantly. And when there was a fire over there. He was on a trip one time and I was in school, and I talked to him and said that there had been a fire at the Lab, he said, "Call the fire department, they are never supposed to put this in the paper. Don't ever let it be known." So any time there was any kind of an accident there, any kind of an accident, it was to never be published.

MWE: And they couldn't keep secretaries, because of the fires.

LWL: The one time one of the walls fell out, I mean an explosion, that the wall blew out, and they never saw those secretaries again.

MW: One of the things that we grew up with, back when we were really young kids, we had one car in the family, and the Chem Building became our babysitting area. When my mother needed time off, he got us in the car, and we'd go to the Chem Building. So we were given chalk, to write on the chalkboards and we'd run around the halls. And the Chemistry Building had a long corridor in a big square, and drinking fountains. That was the corners, and we'd get our mouth full of water and then chase each other around and squirt water. This is prior to this, but it's kind of, we spent hours waiting for our father. In his office, in the classrooms, our whole life, even all the way through high school [End of Disk 1, Track 2]. And one thing, Myrna can tell her story about the time we were in his...

MWE: Door 100 came along, so we were not allowed into the halls. Remember. Door 100.

MW: At some point, yeah. But we were in his office, it was in the Chemistry Building, and we were in there and he had this big cabinet with a, this is during the war.

Combination safe.

MW: And he had a combination lock. Now Myrna can tell what she did.

MWE: Well, Max and Lorna were playing with it. They couldn't get it open. They got bored, so they went over to Dad's desk, and was doing something over there.

MW: Yeah.

MWE: I went over and

MW: He wasn't there, he was off somewhere

MWE: This was down the hall. And I went over and used my school locker combination on it and I started to open it and he walked in. Oh was he mad.

MW: We were opening a secret...

MWE: So I am known as the safecracker. Even at his funeral, I was reminded of that.

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SF: But you never actually got inside.

MWE: Oh, I opened it, and I saw things that were in there, and that's where all the military secrets were.

LWL: You know, I think what I didn't add at the very end when Dad came up with his pure uranium. His process cost only pennies per pound.

MW: They needed tons of it, but they could only produce ounces.

LWL: Two million pounds came from Iowa State, were shipped out of here, but it's the process that is used to this day.

MWE: And he had a patent on it. He got a patent on it, but that's what bought WOI for Iowa State.

LWL: Well, money that bought WOI was the reward that came with the Army-Navy E Award.

MWE: ...the patent too.

LWL: It wasn't from the patent.

GW: I heard it was from the salaries and the rental for the project being there at Iowa State.

MWE: Hmm.

LWL: I have a classmate...

GW: Paid doubly from the, by the state for their position at Iowa State, and then they were being paid by the government for the positions at Iowa State.

Well, one thing I remember, going back to this ingot that he carried. He'd go out, he'd have to go take a train, 'cause he didn't like flying, but they didn't have airplanes... We'd go down to the depot down here at Ames, about ten o'clock at night, and go under the tunnel, and there'd be a car parked, a railroad car parked off on the siding. There'd be a guard at the doors. And he'd go in and it was a regular little—a bed and a desk and all, and a bathroom. He'd get his pajamas on and we'd leave and come home. Going to the tunnel, dark at night, I hated that. It's not there any more. And Mother kept wondering why his pockets were always torn. She always had to keep replacing his pockets. Well, this ingot he carried in his pocket, and it had a chain on it, and the chain went through the hole that he made in his pocket and went around his waist, because of the pickpockets around, and the spies, supposedly. And so he had that chained to his waist, and that's why the holes were in his pocket. He couldn't tell Mother why the holes were there. They were just worn out.

Holes for the chains to go through.

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SF: Oh sure. And I suppose he couldn't really...

He couldn't tell Mother what he was doing.

What I remember about putting him on the train was he had us get up there and look around too, and I was always so worried the train was going to take off with us still on it.

Well, the train would come by in the middle of the night and hook up to it and then take off.

MW: So we were around the Chem Building, we were always on the outside of the guards at Little Ankeny, which we went to wait for him. Although we did occasionally get around where they were doing the production and casting in those barns north of where Wilhelm Hall now is. I remember seeing the fire and the flames back there.

LWL: Well, I have to say, I was behind those doors in Room 100 many times, the locked doors. Only because, I was in college and I was only there waiting for a ride home with my Dad, so I would have a chat with the guard, who knew nothing more about what was going on there than I did. Most of the employees didn't know what they were doing either other than following directions. But the guard had a very good sense of humor.

His name was Robbins.

LWL: Mr. Robbins. His sense of humor, he was an elderly gentleman, I'm sure retired from what his former vocation had been. But to make his life interesting, he was playing tricks on the guys. They would have to leave any shopping that they purchased, had to leave it with the guard. Including their lunches. And one person had brought a dozen eggs in, and he'd write on the eggs that this one hadn't been fertilized, and this one was old at a certain date. That was one. Another trick, one other thing I remember that I thought was so jovial. He called some wife of one of the employees about a quarter till six at night and apologized profusely, that he was so sorry, he wasn't going to be able to come for dinner after all, would you please tell your husband that you're sorry that he couldn't continue with the invitation. But she was absolutely furious, that supposedly he had invited somebody for dinner without her knowledge. But those were the types of things that he loved to share with me, and everybody else there, too. It was part of the fun of his job to do something lighthearted.

SF: Let me establish the time frame for the tape, here. What years are you talking about mostly, that he would have been...

MW: '42.

LWL: 1942 was when he started the program, and the bomb was dropped in '45, but he had his pure uranium already, by September of '42.

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SF: Mm-hmm.

LWL: And at that point, Iowa State started full-time production of pure uranium.

SF: And how old would you have been?

LWL: I was in high school at that time.

SF: O.K.

MW: I was in junior high.

LWL: I graduated from high school in '44. Before the bomb was dropped. I was in college when the bomb was dropped.

SF: And you were in junior high.

MW: I was in junior high when the thing was going on. And one of the things that I remember, well go ahead.

SF: O.K. I'll come right back to that. You would have been how old?

MWE: I was twelve.

SF: O.K., and you would have been?

GW: I was born in '38, so you figure it out.

SF: All right, I'll do the math later.

MW: I was in junior high when it started and then I was in high school when the bomb was dropped, I think.

SF: O.K.

MW: One of things that I can remember, was two of my friends and I decided to raise rabbits. Bob Loomis and David Fitch. We were going to raise rabbits. So we had to build some hutches. And we were scrounging around trying to find some wood. There was a gentleman that had a whole pile of wood for sale over by Welch School, near where we lived. And I bought a bunch of this real cheap, boy did I get a deal. And I hauled it home and my dad said, "Where'd you get that wood?" I told him, "Well there's a guy over there by Welch School that sold it to us." He said, now I don't remember how much he told me at that time, but I later learned that this was the guy that was making the crates that they were shipping these big ingots in, and this was the scrap wood, the leftovers from what he made. And I think my dad was a little irritated that he was taking the

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leftovers. They were buying the wood for him, and he was selling it to his son for making rabbit hutches.

LWL: Speaking of the ingots, the ingots were very, I don't know the dimension of them, but I know that one railroad car could only hold three. They were that heavy.

MW: I don't know about that. There's a picture of Lorna, after the

No that was

That was me

MW: thing was open to the public, they had an open house over there, and there's a picture of Lorna holding one of these.

LWL: No, no, that was when I was a senior and I was in college and Dad wanted me to, he called me one day at lunchtime, and he said, "Could you come over to the lab," this was at Little Ankeny, and it was thorium, not uranium.

MW: O.K., well...

LWL: It was an ingot that was about this big around, and about this tall, and then it went to a peak. So all together it was about maybe ten inches high, by maybe six inches in diameter. And they had me, they posed me. Now this is when I was in college, and we're wearing dresses and hose and heels, so it wasn't like I was in jeans. But they had me stand there with my feet apart and put my hands together right in front, right underneath my tummy. And they said, "Just stand there." And they had this little ingot—it didn't look like anything more than just an oversize bullet. [End of Disc 1, Track 3]. And they pulled it on this flatbed wagon over in front of me, and then two men picked it up, and he said, "Now as soon as you," and they were holding it, and he said they were going to put it in my two hands, and flash a picture and just open your hands and drop it on the ground. That's why my hands were apart. It was so heavy that it took that to hold it. This other guy was quick to pull the flatbed wagon out so that when I dropped it, it just made a hole in the ground.

SF: Oh, my gosh.

LWL: But that was thorium.

MW: Well, I've got a picture of that someplace.

LWL: The picture, it was in the Des Moines paper that was all over...

SF: Huh.

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LWL: So that would have been in probably, '45, well probably '47, '48. I graduated in '48, so it probably was '47. Well, that time of the century, anyway.

MW: But they did have an open house over there. We went through that Little Ankeny, after the war. I mean after the bomb had been dropped.

LWL: Dad told a story one time about, they had these uranium bars that were ready to put on the railroad trucks, to ship elsewhere, to Hanford, Washington, probably. And they had these fellows, several fellows, to come and lift these bars and put them on the railroad truck, railroad car. Just a flatbed. And, "Oh no, they don't need all these fellows, we can do that, that's not big." As I say, I don't know the dimensions, they had them crosswise, three crosswise, on one railroad car. They went to lift, they couldn't lift them, they says, "What is this, anyway?" Of course it was something that hadn't been ? before. Then Dad said that they used to, so many people said, "How come so many of these trains come into town, they come in empty and they leave empty." You don't see these bars lying there, they didn't think anything was on them.

MWE: They used to use whiskey bars to put things in.

LWL: Whiskey barrels.

MWE: Yeah, whiskey barrels, so they wouldn't know what was in them.

GW: Wasn't that for the waste? To ship away the waste.

MW: Yeah, he used to tell about the whiskey barrels, I suppose you've heard that story. It's in some of the literature.

SF: I have heard that.

LWL: The guys liked to use what was left over in the bottom.

Squeeze it out of the bottom. But Dad never drank.

SF: Can you describe a little what Little Ankeny looked like? Because that building's long gone.

No, that was just a munitions...oh, Little Ankeny.

MW: There's a picture in here.

It was originally the women's gym.

MW: It was originally the women's gym.

LWL: It was originally the women's gymnasium, and it was just like a little...

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...behind the Dairy Building

LWL: It was just little...

MWE: One story...

LWL: A little, wooden building, straight, small...

Kind of a dump.

MW: I'm sure there's a picture of it in here someplace

LWL: ...had to have been to at one time have been the women's gymnasium but it wasn't big at all, very small. There's probably a picture of it.

GW: There's a picture of it on the internet that we were looking at just the other day.

LWL: You'll find a picture of it, somewhere.

MW: Someplace in here there's pictures, but I haven't been through this in

LWL: ...found it on the internet, if you go on the internet, look up Harley Wilhelm, atomic energy, uranium, those things, you'll see a lot in there.

SF: Sure. But I'm thinking you, when you went over to look at it, when your dad was working there...

LWL: Just a little gray building.

SF: What did it look like to you...

MW: A little wooden frame building behind the Dairy...

LWL: A little gray wooden building, rectangle

MWE: Dad used to get a lot of parking tickets

MW: It was a temporary building left over from World War I

That's what I was trying to say awhile ago.

MWE: Dad would get parking tickets for doing it, and Lorna wasn't going to graduate from college 'cause Dad had too many parking tickets.

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LWL: Oh, for sure. See what happened, he was having to go back and forth between the Chemistry Building and Little Ankeny on a constant basis. And they didn't supply him with a parking place. So he would just park in front of the Chemistry Building and that was supposed to be against the rules. So they'd give him all these parking tickets. And he said, "Give me a parking place." And they didn't do that. Well, then when it came time for me to graduate...

MW: There it is—Little Ankeny.

LWL: And they couldn't collect it from him, because the University paid his salary and then the government reimbursed the University for his salary. Well, if they withheld, the University withheld it from his salary, they didn't get it from the government, so he couldn't get it that way, so they just, when it was time for me to graduate, you can't graduate without all fees being paid, and so they said, O.K., they put that on as one of my fees, were these many parking tickets. And I just went to Dad...

MWE: Well, didn't Fran Friley's father, Fran Friley wasn't going to graduate because her father had a lot of parking tickets at the same time.

MW: He was President.

LWL: So I went, Fran Friley was two years older than I was.

MWE: But she was in the same position.

LWL: I went to Dad, and I says, "Dad, do something about this." Well, of course, all he had to do was go to President Friley and it was taken care of, but I didn't know if I was going to graduate, and as it turned out, we were all lined up alphabetically. They had every college, and Home Ec was last. And of the Home Ec, Textiles and Clothing was the last. And Textiles and Clothing, Wilhelm was the last. And I was so sure that there was going to be one joker in there that wasn't supposed to be there, they'd run out when they got to me. But while I'm sitting there, all the rest are filing up and that's when they come back—this was happening at the stadium, the old stadium—and they all came back to their seats, "I've got yours," and they're all trading back and forth and I thought, "Oh my gosh, for sure I won't get one." And I was even afraid to look at it, when I peeked, and it said Lorna Wilhelm, what a relief. I made it, but I was, you know it was fifteen years before I could walk on that campus. I was so sick of it all. But that's another story.

SF: Let me go, one by one, for just a few minutes, and have you each tell a little bit of what you most remember about your dad in relation to his work. And also what you thought about the work that he did when you knew enough about it, once it wasn't secret any more.

MW: Well, it was always a big secret, what was going on, and we had no idea. We've told you some of the theories that were being passed around. We knew it had to do with the war effort, but we certainly never dreamed in our wildest imagination, that it could be

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anything as significant as it was. And of course, he worked, like Lorna said, many, many hours till the day—although we did still have a family life. It wasn't like—you know, he and I'd play catch. He'd been an athlete in college, and all-state basketball player, and

LWL? And baseball.

MW: And baseball, so he was interested in my athletic endeavors, which never amounted to what his did. So particularly, we'd play catch a lot. He'd been a pitcher and he wanted me to be a pitcher, too. But I could throw a curve ball and a fast ball, but I couldn't throw it where I wanted to. It was always a big disappointment. He'd play catch with me and he'd say, "ball one, ball two." I think once we got up to ball fourteen, then I got a strike. He used to kid me about ball fourteen. So we had togetherness. He was a disciplinarian, we got spanked if we had it coming, because that was the method at that time. Nothing too bad, but eventually we got the message, so we pretty well were well-behaved.

LWL: We were spanked. Gretchen got the butter pal?

MW: Yeah. [general laughter]

GW: But he never hit us where it would harm us, just enough to give us a sting. So we knew we didn't want it again.

MW: But, at any rate, that's got nothing to do with the atomic project. That was growing up with Harley. You know he had certain things that he liked to eat, [more laughter] and so we always had, you know, bean soup, he'd fix his own bean soup.

Mush and milk.

GW? Without ham.

MW: No ham, he didn't believe in ham.

LWL: Mush and milk.

MW: He grew up on a farm and he didn't like what the hogs ate.

? and the chickens

MW: At any rate, we were very proud, when we heard of his involvement in the activities. Of course I went away to Korea for a couple years, right after high school [End of Disc 1, Track 4]. Lorna was still around and the other two, they can tell a little more about that.

DW: May I comment?

SF: Sure. Say who you are.

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DW: I'm Dale Wilhelm, I'm the only daughter-in-law. When I first knew Max, the other people that were in our group that we met in, at the church, wanted to know what Max's dad did out at the college. The reason they were asking, was because he told them that he was a janitor. So he was very proud of what his dad did, but he didn't particularly want anybody to know that, because he didn't want to be liked for the fact that his dad was a big man on campus. Anyway, I was not allowed to tell that he was something other than the janitor. And my other comment is about Orpha, his wife, told me, 'cause I wasn't around when all this stuff was happening, that Harley did not sleep during the war. She said that he was so afraid that he would talk in his sleep.

MW: (Whisper) As wives can tell.

LWL: So many times, when I would, early in the evening, or maybe even late afternoon, and I'd come home from the campus and, or even home from high school, and he'd be in his pajamas, on his bed. And I said, we used to razz each other all the time anyway. We grew up with a lot of sarcasm. I would comment about him sleeping, being lazy, going to sleep all the time. His answer was always, "I'm thinking." And that's exactly what he was doing. Lots of hours he spent in that bed, thinking about what he was trying to accomplish, but that's where he could do it undisturbed. I'd have to walk through his bedroom to get to mine, or to get upstairs, and I'd say, "Oh, thinking again, huh?" He was always thinking.

SF: And do you, what do you remember, when you learned about the work that he was really doing, how that seemed to you.

LWL: Well, I don't think we really learned what he was doing for many years. We just knew what they

MW: Oh we knew.

LWL: ...we knew what they had been working with when the bomb was dropped, we knew it came from there, but I don't think we knew what Dad's role in it had been.

MW: The newspapers were full of it, the newspapers were full of it.

LWL: Right, but as far as what went on in our home, it wasn't discussed.

MW: Oh, yeah.

LWL: I told you, I figured out that they were doing a bomb, right. But I didn't know anything about uranium, per se.

SF: Mm-hmm.

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LWL: (may be Myrna) I didn't know the story at that time. And then when he came up with this thorium, which is another, or plutonium is another one, those are all things that they were all working with in this same general scientific world, at that time.

SF: Gretchen, do you have memories? You were pretty young.

GW: Well, I used to be, I was babysat the same way they were, but . I remember Dad would have an office, just, as you go in the Chemistry Building, it would be just to the left of the entrance, so you come around into that long room. And he'd have a furnace over by the window, where something was happening, but the chalkboard was up by the door, and he would give me a new piece of chalk, just like they got to write and draw pictures, but he also gave me a new piece of clay. You know a cylinder of clay, and oh, that was fun, new. But it smelled. This whole place smelled awful.

Whole place smelled like a chemistry building.

GW: At some point, I don't know if it was the same time period or not, I knew, when I was having to sit behind these doors, as they said, the Chemistry Building was kind of in a square, with the halls going around. As you came in the front entrance, to the left there were doors put across the corridor, so you couldn't go in. That's where Robbins, the guard stood. Is that Room 100, because I don't know what you're talking about.

MW: That was Room 100.

GW: I didn't know what 100 was. I would sit in there. That's about all I knew about that place. And then Little Ankeny was built over behind the Dairy Building afterwards. Little Ankeny was there by the Dairy Industry, but then there was another building in, was there a quadrangle, or something to the northeast of there. There was a building inside of this quadrangle of other buildings, where some secret things were going on, and that's all I remember in there.

I don't know anything about that.

GW: When the news broke, I was oblivious, I guess. I don't remember hearing about Hiroshima, I mean I don't remember the incident. I'm sure I heard about it. When I was in ninth grade, we went to, the class took a trip down to the high school, orientation. And we got to the library, and our neighbor next door was the librarian, Mrs. Dickenson. And she's showing the different books around the library. And she pulls out a **Who's Who in America**, and she's looking up some of the people from my class, their fathers. Well, Jim Hixon's father was in there, and Dean Gaskill, what's his name, Harold Gaskill was in there and a few others and I came home and I told Mother. And she said, "Well, your father's in there too." "He is?" I didn't know. But Dad didn't broadcast things like that, he always kept things low profile.

LWL: I used to tell my husband that's what he married me for was to get his name in **Who's Who**. There was Lorna Wilhelm, Mrs. Stuart Livingston.

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GW: And of course after the war, after the, well, I suppose after the World War, it didn't last much longer than Hiroshima, then Dad was having to go to, all over the state with lectures to high schools. And he'd come home, the night before with an ingot, a little big of uranium with him, and a Geiger counter. And he would bring them in and he would put them just inside the door and he would say, "Stay away from there." Because it was radioactive. And another thing I remember, he had a lot of sinus drainage going down his throat, he was always spitting. But he said that was to protect himself, because of all the things he was inhaling, that was in the air in the Chemistry Building. It was to prevent that from going down into his system.

MWE: We always knew when he was close to home for lunch, we'd hear him coming down the street spitting. Mother says, "Oh, here comes Dad."

GW: Hawk and spit.

LWL: And sneeze. We used to sit and count his sneezes.

MWE: Yeah, he used to chain sneeze.

SF: Chain sneeze?

MW: I inherited that from Dad.

I did too.

I inherited it, too.

MWE: Mother used to count and it was nine times.

LWL: Fifteen.

MW: Fifteen to twenty.

LWL: I have the same thing now, and I didn't even work there. My chain sneezes are eleven.

GW: Oh, mine are more than that.

I go on for five minutes.

Is it my turn?

SF: How about you.

What I remember..

SF: Do you have one more?

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GW: I worked there in 1969.

SF: At the Lab?

GW: At the Ames Lab. In the Computer Garage. From January through the beginning of August.

MW: Where was the Computer Garage?

GW: It was right behind Wilhelm Hall. It used to be a garage. Then they changed over for the computer.

I thought the Physics Building was behind Wilhelm Hall.

Robert was his first name and his last name started with L. He was from the Math Department. He's buried only a few away from Dad.

LWL: What are you trying to think of?

GW: Oh, my boss.

LWL: A math guy, in other words.

GW: Lambert.

LWL: Lambert.

SF: Did the people at the Lab know that you were Harley Wilhelm's daughter when you worked there?

GW: They figured it out. Someone saw my name on the, because we had to have our names on the front of the office. And this one fellow came up, "Are you any relation to Wilhelm?" I mean it wasn't Wilhelm Hall at the time, was it?

No, it was Metallurgy.

GW: Well, yeah.

LWL: Well, when they were dedicating the building to, making the Metallurgy Building Wilhelm Hall, if I remember this correctly, David, Myrna's oldest son, whose middle name is Wilhelm was asking if he could get off work to come to this, showing his name, and "This man's my grandpa." Oh, absolutely, they thought for sure he could come. [End of Disc 1, Track 5]. Sounded related.

SF: Sounded.

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I had to come. I had to get off work.

MWE: Is it my turn?

SF: What are some of your main memories?

MWE: Well, I can remember that I was always told to come straight home from school because there were spies. And there were spies. And there was a spy, come to find out, after the war, this family from Germany had moved over and had rented an apartment over on Welch Street, just kind of catty-corner from our house, a block over. And when they found out that, you know, supposedly they were from Hitler's, I mean they were out of Germany because Hitler was persecuting them.

LWL: They were Jewish, in other words.

MWE: I don't know if they were Jewish or not.

LWL: Supposedly.

MWE: But they moved in there and supposedly they found out later, after the war, that this guy had a telescope, out his window, I mean at his window, to see when Dad came and went.

SF: Wow.

MWE: And they were checking him out. So I was always told that I was supposed to come right straight home from school, and I remember, over at Welch, there was these yo-yo guys, do you remember those?

MW: Yeah, they were selling yo-yos.

MWE: Well, come to find out, the police arrested them, and they were spies.

MW: Japanese spies.

MWE: Well, I don't know if they were Japanese spies, or German, they were spies, supposedly, and they had...

MW: This is the story, whether it was...

MWE: This is what we were told.

MW: They were selling yo-yos, and the kids were just, oh, and they'd carve your initials on 'em and a big deal, but guys came through town and we all bought yo-yos and the next thing we heard, they'd arrested as spies. Now whether some kid made up that, we don't know...

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MWE: Well, supposedly, they were spies around because they, and that's...remember when we went up to the Thomason's grandparent's farm? Remember that?

Very, very, very well.

MWE: And supposedly he came to kidnap one of us kids or something and there were too many kids and so...

MW: Laughing.

I think you got those from dreams, I don't remember any of that.

MWE: Well I remember you sitting behind the chair, shaking.

Well, that was because we had window peekers.

MWE: That's right, and they arrested them.

LWL: Oh, scared the, I have never been so frightened, I've only been frightened like that once, since.

MW: Is that true?

LWL: We really did have window peekers, she and another girl...

SF: This was someone you were visiting?

LWL: Friends of ours, we had family friends, the whole family was friends of their whole family. The son was his age, a girl my age, and a girl close to Myrna's age. The kids could take a friend up to their grandparents' farm at Eagle Grove in the summertime, always during fair week. So Myrna and I happened to be there the same week.

MWE: Well, so was Max. We were all there, all three of us.

LWL: Max wasn't.

MWE: Yes, he was.

MW: I went there once.

MWE: He was there.

LWL: You were there, but he wasn't there this time, 'cause Daryl and I had gone down to the

SF: ...because everybody's memory is different.

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MWE: ...pitchforks and went out to the barn and found the guy. Footprints and everything. And the police arrested him the next day.

LWL: Well, you knew more about it than I did, 'cause I never knew, I knew the footprints were in the mud beside the window, but I never knew...

GW: I have another memory from those days that had to do with air raids.

Oh, yes, I do too.

GW: We had air raids here.

LWL: I don't think we want that one in the, well I don't know what you have, but

GW: Oh, Myrna knows what I have.

MWE: Oh, no, not that.

GW: Well, I thought they were just air raid practices...

Warnings.

GW: Drills. But Dad took it seriously, now we know why of course, but anyway, we had a radio that had this little light on the front of it, that was for volume, it would get brighter with the larger volume and whatever, anyhow, he would want to turn on the radio to find out what the news was. Of course, you know, you don't light a cigarette or anything because it could be seen up in the air. He had that on, and Mother said, "No, you've got to turn that off, 'cause they can see any light." And one of these air raids, my, I slept in a day cot, or day bed in front of the three windows of my parents' bedroom. And the air raid sirens went off and you could see the beacon, the searchlights. I was looking out, Mother and Dad were both over me, looking out through the window, and one of them says, "I think I see one." Now I'm a little kid, I don't know what they're talking about. I'm a little worried, but they see one, something. I don't know whether it was Mother or Dad that thought they saw an airplane.

MW: Well, we were all, always afraid of spies or something. I mean we're deviating off the subject, but if you want to deviate, I'll tell you, nothing to do with the atomic thing.

LWL: Everything was a military secret, all the time.

SF: Uh-huh.

LWL: Couldn't talk about anything, 'cause it was a military secret. Anytime you'd ask a question, it was a military secret.

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GW: When somebody asked who she's going out on a date with, she says, "It's a military secret."

MW: Now this has got nothing to do with anything, but it kind of is a sense of the time. In high school they would, when I was in high school they were emptying out the Physics Department. And they had all these old radios and telephone switchboards and junk they were going to throw out, well, a buddy of mine and I, we took all that stuff to my basement. I had this lab down there, I'm making stuff. So I made these telephone things with relays on 'em and switches, so that I could go to Bob Loomis's house, it was about three blocks away. And we got this real fine wire and strung it through the trees. We'd get up in the middle of the night and we'd throw these weights up in through the trees and bring a rope and finally a wire. And we ran a wire from my room, which was in the attic of my house, to his room, that was upstairs in his house, three blocks away, in the trees. Well, we could call each other on this phone, you know, it's throw the switch in my battery would throw a relay over there that would turn on his battery to ring his phone and we could communicate. Big deal, see. These were our secret missions. Well, every time the wind blew, that little wire would break. So we devised a land route for the wire, we went out our house, down, up a fencerow behind our house, across, under a culvert at the poultry farm, over the Interurban, the railroad tracks, down the railroad tracks, and we were taping this little dinky wire, about like a string, to this railroad track...

DW: Underneath the track

MW: ...in the middle of the night. We'd get up out of bed, our parents didn't know we were out. See, we were doing this. Well, somebody saw, you know, three o'clock in the morning, somebody saw us out there putting stuff on the railroad track, called the police. You know we had it run up to his house and I was home in bed. The police came and drug him out of bed, they thought they were going to blow up the railroad, or something. And they're going down the railroad, looking to see where the other end of this thing went, which, you know, they never found me.

SF: Oh, they didn't.

MW: And he never told where the other end went.

DW: And his friend didn't tell on him.

MW: No, he didn't, where the other end went. So I never heard anything about it till the next day. But, that was, you know, spies were everywhere.

SF: Uh-huh. What do you remember about your mother during that time. How she handled the...

LWL: She was just Mom. Just did Mom things.

GW: Always home to take care of us.

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MW: Always a sense of humor, we could make her laugh, easy. She was always interested in what we did.

GW: Always supported everything we need.

SF: And she, of course didn't know much about what...

LWL: She didn't know what was happening until the didn't even ask, probably. I mean he did his thing, and she did her thing.

MWE: ?Pretty much. They weren't social butterflies.

SF: Did you live over on Welch Avenue?

LWL: Hayward. 513 Hayward.

SF: So over close to the campus.

MW: There was a cornfield behind us at that time.

SF: [Laughing.] There was?

LWL: Sometimes hogs were there.

DW: I'd say she's very proud of her husband and very proud of her children. When we were together one time, she and I, watching our guys hit buckets of balls, and she says to me, "We got two of the good ones."

SF: Oh, I wanted to ask a little bit about what, did your dad wear special clothes to the Lab? To were to work or anything like that?

LWL: No, no. Just trousers, white shirt and tie, usually.

MW: Yeah. Even these pictures.

MWE: He usually wore a shirt, he didn't wear sport shirts very much.

GW: Didn't he have lab aprons...[End of Disc 1, Track 6] By the time we were in college they had lab aprons.

LWL: After he was over there, but not from home.

SF: What do you remember about other people that he worked with at the lab. Did you ever meet any of them.

LWL: They had a bowling team, but I think that was pretty much after the...

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LWL: Everything was so

Hush-hush.

LWL: Not only hush-hush, but they were under fire to get this project accomplished. And as I say, eighteen hours a day, he was working on it.

GW: He was on call twenty-four hours.

LWL: And it was just a constant push, because he had to be home every single news time. Morning, noon, and night, he had to be there when the news came on. Because as far as he knew, or anybody here knew, Kahn and Strassman continued with their project. They had been doing the V-2 rockets, and it turned out that, what Dad said was that they had asked Hitler for backing to do this project, and Hitler asked them how long it would take and they said, "Possibly four years." And so he wasn't interested in it because it would be a blitzkrieg, he wanted something that would happen right away. And so they ended up not continuing, but this country did not know that they had ceased working on it, and therefore it was a race against time, they thought. Whoever got that atom split first, and got pure uranium was going to win the war.

MW: Well, as far as knowing the people, we knew some of the people. Mostly the guards. I think Peyton, Mr. Peyton was a guard, right.

MWE: Oh, yes, he was.

MW: We knew Mr. Peyton from way back when. They had run a grocery store.

MWE: West Street Grocery Store.

LWL: On the corner of West and Campus.

MW: We used to live near there and we knew them.

MWE: Jack Sprat Grocery Store.

MW: She was a dear friend of my mother's. At any rate, I think their store finally closed, but he became one of the guards over there, so we knew him from way back.

LWL: But we didn't know them in relationship to Dad's project.

MW: But he was a guard at the project.

LWL: I know, but that isn't how we knew him, we knew them as family friends first.

MW: Yeah. We'd go over there and there he is.

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LWL: And Ray Fisher was one of my classmates at Iowa State who worked there before he graduated as a student, but he was just doing lab work that he, was doing experiments. But he ended up being there, made his whole vocation was there.

SF: And I, I'll talk with him in a few weeks.

MWE: And Norm Carlson was a very dear friend of the folks's.

GW: Mrs. Peyton and Mother were among those who started what they called the Darn Club, way back when they had kids with socks that needed darning. So once a month, they'd have a meeting, have a gathering, in the afternoon. The rule was that they had to darn at least one pair of socks.

SF: Just one?

GW: And Mrs. Taylor, the dentist's wife, didn't have socks to darn. Mother said, "I have plenty."

LWL: A little aside, about Dad, that is not associated with this, but Mother had, every once in a while she would entertain her lady friends at home, and every time she was doing that, Dad was in the kitchen, trying to invent a new kind of candy. He said, "If I come up with a new kind of candy, we can be rich." Because he was thinking in his mind how everybody loved Hershey's chocolate, and if he could come up with a new kind of candy, it would go over very, very big, and so he would try to get something finished before the ladies were done, and he would serve it to them before they would go home, and see how they liked it. Well, one time, he was making, and he always wrote down everything that he put in it at the time he was making it. And one time a large gnat, I don't know, he called it a gallnipper. It was just like a giant long-legged spider, except that it flew, and it landed in the candy he was making. And so he gave that one a name. That was gallnipper stew. So he served the gallnipper stew to them that night.

SF: And how successful were his candies?

MW: Didn't Brohard's dad work there?

LWL: What?

MW: As a guard or something?

LWL: I didn't think so.

MW: Well, maybe I'm mistaken.

LWL: I don't think so. No, he kept his dry cleaning establishment. He was still doing that when we were married.

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GW: The glassblower went to our church. Nowells? No, what was his name?

Yeah, I know who you're talking about, I can't think of his name.

GW: The one whose baby carriage was borrowed for me. Baby buggy. I told you on the way down, what was his name?

MWE: I can see him and his wife.

Nowells?

MW: So, at any rate, we didn't know too many people.

No, it wasn't Nowells.

But he was the glass blower. They his shop. He's the one whose shop they used, when they set up Little Ankeny. He had a metal shop.

Oh, yes. They bought his metal shop.

Yeah, and they had him come and

What was his name?

I've forgotten. Anyway, he made a lot of money on, he was very happy that they.

Knowles, K-N-O-W-L-E-S.

LWL: I can't remember his name, but he had this metal shop, and they needed some metal stuff so they just went in and offered him I think something like \$10,000, which was a humongous price at that time. And he was ecstatic that they bought it from him and then they just hired him to continue doing what he had always been doing. And another thing that's a side, Dad, had done all of this that belonged to the University, under the auspices of the University, I should say the United States government, by way of the University, and he bought many, what, metal lathes, big equipment, and put in our basement. He said that if there's another war, he said the patents will be in Mother's name.

SF: Oh, I see.

GW: 'Cause he didn't get anything for these patents. He had 75 patents, he never got. They gave him a dollar for each of the first two or three and then they forgot to give him a dollar for those after that.

SF: They paid him a dollar per...

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GW: Because he was working under the government, so he didn't get...meanwhile, in the same block was Mr. Sweeney. And he received money for his patents, I mean he received the patents himself.

But that was before that new law. That new law went into effect in 1940. Sweeney got all the royalties before, and after 1940,

MW: And he was still, oh, about the third highest paid person at the staff, at Iowa State.

LWL: Who was?

MW: Harley.

LWL: The highest salary he ever got was \$28,000 a year.

SF: Is that right?

LWL: Yep.

SF: And they didn't pay him for the patent after the third...

LWL: No. They don't pay you for the patents, really.

GW: There was this deal, that the government had to pay each person one dollar for the patent, and so for the first two or three, he got a dollar, but they ceased doing that.

SF: And what happened to all that equipment that he brought home? They might remember? I'll ask him when they

GW: Well, what did he do, buy it from the University?

LWL: No, Dad ordered it. He ordered it from the companies, and he had it delivered to our house, in the basement.

So it was his.

LWL: He purchased it.

DW: Oh, I didn't understand.

GW: I didn't understand what you said either.

LWL: No, he purchased that. So if there's another war, that's what he said, "All of those patents will be in Mom's name."

GW: Any patents he comes up with then.

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LWL: He assumed that there would be another rush for something. He was going to do the work, but he was going to do it at home, shall we say.

SF: I see, I see. And he worked, did he work directly for Dr. Spedding at the Lab? What do you remember about that.

GW: Well, we aren't going to comment on Spedding.

SF: O.K.

GW: Except that Dad said, the schedule was that Dr. Spedding went into Chicago, and was with Compton and those, during the five week, work weeks, five days of the week, for the work week. And then he would come home on weekends, and they would exchange knowledge as to what had been happening at Iowa State and what was happening in Chicago.

LWL: So Spedding was just sort of a go-between. A corresponding secretary, or whatever you want to call it. He wasn't actually doing the experiments, he was just observing and explaining, back and forth. Having it explained to him and then he in turn, explained it to the others. At one time they wanted to name the Metallurgy Building after our father and this was when Spedding was still [End of Disc 1, Track 7] living. Dad said, no, he didn't want that, because Spedding wouldn't like it. So after Spedding...

GW: ?Because he didn't have a building named for him yet.

LWL: He didn't have a building named after him yet, and he wouldn't like it to have one named after Dad without he being first. And so after Spedding died, then Dad said O.K.

SF: Huh. So there are two buildings now, over there named for them.

LWL: Yes, uh-huh. They named the Atomic Energy building after Spedding and the Metallurgy Building after Dad, which is appropriate.

SF: Mm-hmm.

LWL: Now another person, I don't know if, have you talked to Dianne Borgen at all?

SF: I don't recognize that name.

LWL: Well, she's still here, she works at the...

She's retired.

LWL: She's retired from the Atomic Energy Building, but she works at Scheman, Room 88, what is it that they do there, the Inside Iowa State edition, she's an editor or something

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like that, that writes for it. She was his secretary. She knows a lot more, she knows a lot. You could talk to her, she can tell you a lot more than we can.

SF: And she was your father's secretary?

Who was the lady that was his secretary...

GW: Verna Thompson was his secretary for many, many, many years.

SF: What was her name?

GW: Verna Thompson.

LWL: And when he was in his nineties, and he went over to the Lab, he had this laboratory that had been given to him to use for the rest of his life when he retired at age 70.

He became Professor Emeritus.

LWL: He went over, he was in his nineties and by this time he had bad eyesight and he went to open his laboratory and couldn't make the key work. And he was sure he had the right key. He was positive he had it. So he went in to his secretary and said, "I can't imagine what's the matter, this is the right key." And she said, "Yes, the feds were in here yesterday and they found that your laboratory is radioactive and so they have locked it." He said, "O.K., I've been doing this for 50 years, I'm in my nineties, how long do I have to prove that I'm O.K., I can still work in my own laboratory." Eventually he got back in.

MW: ?Probably cleaned it up.

LWL: But it was heartbreak for him at the time.

SF: So he worked all the way up until his nineties?

LWL: At the time he died he was working on a project for NASA. They wanted, they carried liquid nitrogen in the rockets at that time, and they wanted something that would fit in a two foot cubicle. Two by two by two. That would generate its own oxygen for the astronauts to breath when they're in space. Rather than having to use the liquid nitrogen. And he thought he had almost the answer, and I said "Well, why don't you get that part patented?" "Oh, I can do better." And he just kept, he could always do better. "But why don't you get that patented, at least get it in your..." "They know who did this." I said, "But put it in your name at least. Get it registered." "They know who did it." I said, "Well, sure they know, but that doesn't mean that, somebody's going to" well, anyway, that's the deal. But that's, he did it in his own laboratory, even though he was no longer hired by the University, he was on pension from them.

SF: He must have loved his work.

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LWL: He did.

GW: He never wanted to quit.

LWL: When he graduated from Iowa State, this was when he retired at age 70, which was forced at that time, he knew he was going to get the gold watch, which they gave him the gold watch and his acceptance speech was "When you get old, sociologically speaking, when you get old you quit working. But physiologically speaking, when you quit working, you get old, and I'm not ready to quit working." And he sat down.

MW: Talking about his old age. Ever since I knew my father, you ask a question, and you don't get a simple answer, you start with a very basic of anything, and an hour later, you may get to the answer.

LWL: Or its with another question.

MW: You just couldn't ask him a simple question without getting a lecture. I can remember, he was probably 94 years old and near death, and there was a young grade school girl that was writing a report, wanted to write a report about my father. And she came out and asked him a question about what he did and he started, and he gave a lecture like he was talking to a graduate student. About the process and what he combined it in this and that, on and on. And I was sitting there, and I'd try to inject a little bit to clarify it for the poor little girl, who was by now just totally overwhelmed. And her mother was there with her. But it was the same old Harley that we knew as a kid.

SF: Were all of you really good in science in school?

MW: Well, I don't know.

I was a dummy.

MW: We never quite met his expectations, I'm sure.

LWL: Oh, no. None of us got a Ph.D. shall we say. None of us skipped the masters' degree to get a Ph.D. like he did.

SF: Uh-huh. They told me to ask you whatever happened to all that equipment that he had in the basement.

MW: Oh, you mean the lathe, for example? Well, his tools, I got most of his tools. The lathe we sold to one of his cohorts at the Lab.

SF: And this was, you said that he ordered all the equipment.

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MW: No. All that equipment went to the lab. It didn't go to our basement. The thing she was talking about, he bought this lathe. It was down in the basement, and he never used it hardly ever. Except that he was, supposedly if and when he came up with something...

He was thinking.

SF: I see.

MW: Some other great development, that he had a lathe that he could work on.

Prove he did it, that he could do here.

SF: I see.

MW: But that whole big machine shop that he bought was a separate deal. That went to the University.

Oh that was different. That was different from what he had at home. That never came home.

SF: That was clear. Great. Well, you've been very generous with your time. I don't want to take too long, but

It's fun.

SF: I've enjoyed it. I just wanted to make sure, are there other memories that you want to get recorded?

...go home

SF: I know, I wish I could send a tape with you in the car. Good stories. But I may not be asking, I may not remember to ask you about some things that you wanted to include, so...

MWE? I don't know, we have to think about it a little bit.

MW: You want to look at any of this stuff?

SF: I'd love to. And if you have time, I'd love to look at it.

MW: I tell you, I don't have anything to do between now and about 5:30. But I'm sure my sisters would like to go through this with you. Gretchen in particular, she hasn't seen any of it much.

LWL: That's pictures in there isn't it?

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MW: It might be.

LWL: It was when I took it to Iowa State.

MW: Gretchen, do you want to go through this with her? You're kind of the historian. She's deep into the history and genealogy and all that stuff.

GW: Genealogy. Since age 10.

MW: And she says, "Don't you ever throw that away." Well...

SF: I'm with you. I'm the packrat in my family.

MW: Well, I keep the stuff, but I just throw it in the box, and some day somebody's going to want to look at it.

LWL: Give it to somebody.

SF: But you said they did take some of it at the Library.

LWL: Oh, a lot of it.

SF: That's great, that's great.

LWL: Right, and they copied a lot that they wanted.

MW: And I think most of that is this, is in this folder.

LWL: Well, then, if that's there, then that photo That thorium picture's in there, if this is all that I took.

MW: Just go through it Lorna, let Gretchen or you, whoever wants to do it.

SF: And I was going to say, also, if you do think of some things later that you just wish somebody had said, on the recording, I'll be back and forth to Ames a lot, over the next few months. I just live in Iowa City.

LWL: Well, we won't be here.

SF: You won't be here, you can tell Myrna. It's very easy for me just to stop by and add a little bit to the tape or something.

MWE: ?Well, give us your address or something like that.

SF: I will. I'll give you my address and phone and my e-mail address, and you're welcome to add things or...

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MW: And don't feel guilty about deleting things that don't seem appropriate.

LWL: That's how old he was when it happened.

SF: Oh, look at that, what a great picture.

LWL: He was a very young man, 42 years old just gets younger every year.

SF: It does, doesn't it. [Laughter].

LWL: Old is always twenty years older than you are.

SF: Oh my gosh.

LWL: I remember when I thought thirty was old.

MW: See, this is February '46. So, I mean it was all in the paper at some point.

SF: Mm-hmm.

MW: I mean I just saved these things and threw them in the box.

SF: And your kids will be glad you did.

LWL: ?Mother saved the things over the years and so...

MW: Yeah. But I don't know...

GW: Dad's method of saving was just piling them in a pile here and there.

SF: Mm-hmm.

MW: Well, that's what I did.

LWL: The Army-Navy E Award was given to different industries primarily, that helped with the war effort, and Iowa State is the only educational institution to have received one, and Dad is the only individual to have received one.

SF: Wow.

LWL: And that Army-Navy E flag was something like a Perkins flag now, what are they now, about four by eight?

SF: Mm-hmm.

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LWL: And Dad had it folded up on the closet shelf. We displayed it at his funeral, and that was the only time. Well, I take that back. One time he had to give a talk at Welch School. This was after Mother had died and I was down here with him a lot, and so I took him over, I said, "Let's take that flag." And he was willing to show that flag. And that's the only time that I knew that he was ever willing to even admit he had one, really.

DW: So, where is it now?

LWL: I have it.

DW: You have it.

LWL: What I started to say about my friend Martha Coover, who went through grade school and college with me. Her father was head of the engineering building here. He was an engineer, electrical engineer. [Mervin S. Coover was head of Electrical Engineering from 1935 to 1954]. And when television became known, or was invented, he set up, he did all of the paperwork, he went to New York, got all of the paperwork for Iowa State to have a television station. They have had WOI Radio since the early twenties, but he thought we should have a television station as well. So he went to New York to get it, actually his wife and another couple went with them—this is a side story—his wife and the other lady friend were walking past the Empire State Building at the time a man jumped off to commit suicide and his heel hit her shoulder and then she was in a wheel chair the rest of her life.

SF: Oh my gosh.

LWL: And Martha

Who was hit? The friend that was walking?

LWL: No, Martha's mother. And Martha had to take care of her. Any way, so then, they couldn't have a TV station because they didn't have the money for it.

SF: Hmm.

LWL: So then when Dad got this Army-Navy E Award and the monetary award that accompanied it, he went to President Friley and said, "I don't want this money for myself, I want it for something that will benefit the students." Friley, bright light, that's where the money's coming from, so now we have a TV station. And Martha and I are friends...

MW: We did have.

SF: We did have.

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MW: It was sold.

We don't have it now.

LWL: Right, that's where we got it. The follow-up on that was that Iowa U got their undies in a bunch 'cause they couldn't have a TV station, and this is one thing we love about Iowa U, they didn't have a television station and all we could tell them, at that time we couldn't tell them where the money had come from, because it was a military secret what we'd been doing. And so all they said was, "It was not tax money," but Iowa U never accepted that. So when they got Terry Branstad, in the Governor, who was an Iowa U grad, Dad said the first thing he did was wanted to get rid of WOI-TV. Dad's words were, "The legislature set him back on his heels and said he could not do that, that was only through the Board of Regents." So you can guess what happened next. He replaced one by one the Board of Regents with Iowa U grads. They then had WOI-TV appraised for sale, and it was appraised for 86 million dollars. Well, he didn't want Iowa State to get all that money, so instead they awarded it to some place in Connecticut for \$16 million who—

They've sold it a couple of times..

LWL: It broke Dad's heart.

That killed him, is what I say.

LWL: Yeah.

SF: When they sold...

LWL: It went all the way to the Supreme Court. And the only thing that held it up in the Supreme Court was, the president had, when Jischke was interviewed to be a prospective president of Iowa State this Board of Regents said, "Oh, you know we have this television station, it's just a money-loser, just a bad thing, we want to get rid of it, would you help us do that?" "Well, yeah, that's ok. The fact that he had said that at this interview is what, they held him to it.

SF: Huh.

LWL: And that's why they had to get rid of it. It was a sad, sad, sad day for Dad.

MW: How do you know all this stuff?

She's an IU grad...

SF: I remember when they sold the station, that made me unhappy when they sold it too. My dad was in Ag Extension, he was an ag economist, and he used to do the market reports on TV, so, I think most of us had a fondness...

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I think most of the in Des Moines graduated from Iowa State in TV.

SF: Uh huh. Now you were up for a minute, I want to give you another chance before we finish up. I know—you've spent a lot of time, I really appreciate it, but want to make sure—was there anything else I didn't ask about that you wanted to remember, get on the tape? Well, it's easy to add things later, if you think of something.

I have my son here. Here's here from Jefferson City, Missouri for the day, and I have projects for him.

SF: Good for you.

David-do list. He's a graduate of Iowa State. He used to go out and see Grandpappy.

That's what they used to call grandfather.

He used to caddy for him.

That's what he called himself.

SF: He called himself ...

Because his grandfather was called Pappy.

Grandpappy.

SF: He grew up here in Iowa, is that right?

LWL: Ellston, Iowa. Population 63.

MW: There's a whole write-up of his youth here someplace.

MWE: One thing I'd like to add, I mean this has nothing to do with the Project, but my father loved to play the organ, and the fiddle, and the accordion. And he used to be in these parades after he retired. Going all around Iowa, in the parades, and he'd sit in the back of a pickup truck playing the accordion. Des Moines **Register** did an article.

MW: There.

MWE: And I, my husband and I used to take him to a lot of these parades. We'd go to three parades a week sometimes.

LWL: He insisted on being the last entry, though. Because he didn't want to deal with the guy at the end.

MW: There he is with his accordion.

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MWE: And the name of his float was "Turn of the Century Tunes." And he played all by ear, he never read any music.

LWL: And when he lost his eyesight, he said, "See, it's a good thing I didn't have to depend upon reading music to play the accordion."

MWE: And when he went over to Geneva conferences, he'd bring back an accordion for my sisters, and I asked him for a cuckoo clock.

GW: Sisters?

MWE: For my sisters. And when he came back...I asked him for a cuckoo clock and he got back and Mother met him in New York, and she said "Did you get Myrna a cuckoo clock?" "No." But he got them accordions.

GW: I have to tell you about the accordion.

SF: OK.

: I found out years later that each one of us was given a choice of instrument. She chose the piano, she had the piano lines? He chose the coronet, she chose the accordion. I didn't choose anything. She got married and took her accordion with her, and he didn't get to play it any longer. So he goes over to, what was the first trip? It wasn't the Geneva trip, first, he was over there once. He always came home from these trips with something for each member of the family. They became would you bring me or whatdja's.

MW: Whatdja's

What did you bring me? He came home from this trip to Europe and he had an extra suitcase. Well he puts it in the middle of the living room floor and starts opening it up, and taking out his underwear, dirty underwear. Then he closes it and says "Here Gretchen, this is for you." An accordion. Lorna had left the house. The accordion was gone, he wanted to play an accordion. So here I am, a decade younger, so he's got an accordion for another decade, right?

SF: He's got one for you.

GW: But, I kind of latched on to it. I took lessons, and I liked to play it, and he liked to play it. So when he went over for the Geneva conference, he came back with another extra suitcase, and he says, "Gretchen, this is for you." "I already have one!" "Well, yeah, but you can leave that one with me. This is a more deluxe model," he says.

LWL: But these were Hohners, which was a good make, from Germany. But he had to take the name off, in order to import them.

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GW: Duty free that way. Cause they weren't...

LWL: That was against the rules to import without paying

GW: The custom fellow said, "Do you know what you're doing here?" And he says, "Yes, I think so." By taking off the name it was no longer a Hohner. But the first one he bought in Stuttgart, Germany. And then the second one he bought in Geneva.

I have a story about his trips, and Whadjyas.

LWL: Mine was American made, it was a Wurlitzer.

SF: And do you both still play?

LWL: I think I could if I had to.

GW: I get it out once a year, maybe.

LWL: I play it upon occasion.

GW: It's getting heavier.

SF: Yes!

DW: Just that I was married into the family by the time he was taking some of his trips, and he came back from one with umbrellas for all of the ladies in the family, but he brought me some Chanel No. 5, and it caused a major [unclear, mixed with laughter].

MWE: Getting back to the instruments, I am not a musician at all. I mean Lorna could play 15 different instruments, I'm doing good...I do take free organ lessons every Tuesday, and I play the Lowrey organ. I play, the senior citizens down here have a program every August at the Senior Center, and Mark Forbis let me play the organ in the concert, so I play the organ in the concert.

MW: Talking about instruments, this is a story that Harley used to tell about his youth. He came from a musical family. His father played a fiddle in...

MWE: The dance band.

LWL: They had the Wilhelm Band.

MW: Yeah. It was a square dance...

LWL: Wilhelm Dance Band.

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MW: In Ellston, Iowa. A town in southern Iowa. They were all poor farmers. And he got a horn, and he played in the town band. And he and his brothers were in this band, in the town band, and he was playing this tune and after it was over, they announced what the next one would be, and he said to his brother, "Art, I just played that one." [laughter]

His grandfather used to play fiddle too.

That's how he met...

Grandfather Wilhelm also used to play the fiddle. And he had taken his children down to Oklahoma Indian Territory and they were getting too well acquainted. He played for the Indians and they loved it. But he brought his family back because his children were getting too well acquainted with the Indians and learning the Indian language and customs and he wanted to get them back so that they would, you know, fit in with the rest of society. So he played but I don't know how far back beyond that it went.

How Grandpa and Grandma met was that Grandpa was playing at this dance, his fiddle, in this band, and Grandma was there with another guy. And the other guy got drunk...

He refused to take her home.

MWE: and he told Grandma-to-be that he would take her home. So that's how they met.

LWL: And the difference between a fiddle and violin...they did not play violin, they played fiddle. Violin was here. Fiddle is here.

SF: I didn't know that.

It's the way they did it.

GW: Uncle Charlie played it up here.

LWL: I know, but he played violin and they played

Our other uncle played a banjo.

LWL: But Charlie mostly played the piano. He was the piano player.

He'd go to fiddler's conventions over there in Nebraska. He lived in Wyoming.

LWL: But they mostly\

MW: You weren't aware of his growing up or anything there. But he grew up in southern Iowa. He was a basketball player as a kid, you've read that.

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SF: Well, they have that up on the wall, in Wilhelm Hall, still.

MW: Oh, do they.

Where?

SF: In Wilhelm Hall, there's a little newclipping about that.

MW: The thing about his being, he got a scholarship to Drake, and that's where he kind of... there

And his scholarship included his room and his room was a room in the attic of one of the classrooms

LWL: All the athletes lived in this big dorm room over in Main.

MWE: In the attic. And how he got his meals was he worked as a busboy and did dishwashing at this restaurant there by Drake.

LWL: Bolton and Hay. It was a chain restaurant in Des Moines.

It wasn't Bolton and Hay.

I thought we went to Bolton and Hay.

It was a different one.

That wasn't Bolton and Hay. We went to Bolton and Hay to eat.

LWL: Anyway, there are so many fun stories about his youth, especially his Drake days.

He always enjoyed telling stories about himself.

LWL: He came to Drake from, well first of all when

How he met mother.

LWL: Before that. When he was in high school, his little team won the regional tournament, basketball. And they were like five boys, farm boys. And they went to Iowa City, where they had the tournaments at that time. They'd never been any further than the horse and buggy would take them, before. So he goes up there and he said, "Well, I knew you weren't supposed to play on the floor with your farm boots," so they played in their bare feet and their overalls. And he said, "You know those city kids, they played in their shiny underwear." [laughter] But that's where the scouts saw his ability. They didn't win the tournament, but they saw his ability as a basketball player and so that's how he got offers from more than one school, but he chose Drake.

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GW: In their retired years, I was with them when they went to Eagle Grove, isn't that where they lived?

Yeah, they lived in Eagle Grove.

GW: I was with them when they went to that parade, you know these parades that she said, others of us also but she's here so she got to go to most of them. But I was with them. So the Blues invited us over after the parade. And we were talking about the TV station and all. He was the governor at the time, and he had to sign it. And he said, "I wondered where that money came from."

SF: So he never knew.

He never knew, he was the governor and didn't know.

LWL: Well, it was a military secret where it had come from, they couldn't talk.

: But another fun story I always liked was when he got to Drake, and all of the athletes slept in this one big dorm room, and he said all the other fellows had something they called "pajamas."

Oh, yes.

: He didn't know what "pajamas" were, so he told his mother that he needed some "pajamas." And she didn't even, so she went out to the house in back and got the Sears Roebuck catalog and looked up pajamas, and they had men's, women's, and children's. Well, he was her child, so she looked it up. "Oh, I can make a pair of those," so she went and got her flour sacks and made him a pair of pajamas, with the feet and the trap door and all. I said, "Did you wear them?" He said, "Well, of course, my mother made them for me." I bet you the other athletes never quit telling about the pajamas that Harley Wilhelm wore in college.

Well, I don't know, when Dad was, I hate to say this, but older in life, they would have these reunions, the Double D club and stuff would have reunions and Dad would go down, and he would, he had macular degeneration, so he was legally blind. And they had him put on a referee shirt, and he was the referee for the alumni basketball game, 'cause he was blind.

LWL: He said, "What better referee than a blind man."

So much, it was so much fun.

MW: And he had, there was a story he used to tell about when he got some pants to go to Drake. These things had a crease down the front. Well, he never saw pants with creases, his mother got an iron and ironed the crease out. [laughter]

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MWE: Mother told about the green suit, it was really a green suit he had.

GW: Well, the Ellston colors were green and something. But his parents gave him a cow, or calf, or whatever, for his graduation present. So he sold that to buy his graduation suit, which was a green suit. Well, then he came to take those exams, he was in his green suit, so Mother remembered him. Just like he remembered her from the glasses.

DW: He was always a real fashion plate, he never really got over it.

MW: That's one of the things about Dad. The school that he graduated from was not accredited. But after he took the exams, and passed them, they accredited the school down there.

SF: Because he was so...

GW: He was to take certain three exams and then choose two others. And the professor who's telling him says, "Well, you can have this one, or this one, or this one." And he said, "Is that all Drake offers?" "Well no, we have physics and math, but you won't want those." "I'll take them both." And the professor was afraid that they lost their player already, before he even took the exam. But he did so well, that the school was then accredited. When he was in school in Ellston, if the teacher got stuck on a math problem or something, he'd go up and finish the problem for him. Well, at Drake, he was in,

MW: It was in Math.

GW: wasn't it Professor Morehouse...

MW: The president of the university was the substitute teacher that day.

I thought he became the president.

GW: He wasn't president then, at the time, later he became the president.

LWL: He became president.

GW: But at the time, I think it was a math class. He got stuck on a problem. The professor got stuck on a problem. So Dad raised his hand, and said, "I can help you with that," so he went up and he did it.

SF: Hmm.

Well, Dad didn't do too well in football. And they were going to have to cut back on some of these players that weren't doing so well. This professor stuck up for him and said, "We need to keep him."

MW: When he graduated, he went up to get his diploma,

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LWL: Just before that, Max, just before that. You can finish it but this is the same thing Gretchen was referring to. It was the Pythagorean Theorem, which is what, $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$. That's the right triangle, the hypotenuse of the right triangle. They were supposed to prove the theorem, and Morehouse showed them one way to do it and Dad says, "I can show you another way," and he showed them 37 different ways to prove that one theorem. And at graduation, then, by that time, Morehouse was the President of the University and you can finish...

MW: You can go ahead...

LWL: And he said to the audience, "You know, when this young man was a freshman, he knew more about my course than I did." [laughter] It was a very short time that Ellston, Iowa became an accredited high school.

SF: Hmm.

GW: But that Pythagorean Theorem business was a paper he wrote, with all those proofs.

LWL: Well, nevertheless, he proved it beyond...

MW: It was a different incident, he went up and did something else...

LWL: He did that on the board, he told me.

MWE: He was captain of his basketball team.

SF: And how did he get into physics, in the first place?

LWL: He liked it.

GW: Well, when he finished with his undergraduate major of mathematics...

LWL: In two years.

GW: He finished that, then he started taking a few other things, and he maybe had some physics, but he took some chemistry then, too. But then he went off to teach high school and coach ball.

He was a coach.

MW: Right.

MWE: When he came back, I think he had mathematics one summer maybe, and then he went on to chemistry.

SF: Huh.

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MW: But I think the thing that got him going on it was he had a high school teacher that really...or Math...

LWL: He was superintendent, Perisho. He was superintendent.

MW: ...inspired him and got him interested in it.

Brilliant man.

MWE: Well, I remember one time that Dad had to get over to Iowa City and give a speech. And it was right after the athletic department or somebody had given their coach over there a Cadillac. And Dad was driving this beat up old car over, and I went over with him. And he made this speech, he said, "Well, maybe I should have stayed in coaching, I'd be driving a better car." [laughter]

SF: I would say the coach is probably still driving a better car.

Absolutely, you're right.

MWE: He was playing against the ball that, what was it Merchants? Ames Merchants?

Ames Merchants, baseball.

You had the story...

Bob Feller. Bob Feller sat, on the sidelines.

Well, I gave him, I know they gave him a bat that we called a telephone pole because

No, no. She has told me that at some point one of the farm, what do they call them, scouts, came over to one of the fellows that worked at the Lab with Dad and said, or at the Chemistry Building, and said "Do you think Wilhelm would be interested in playing professional ball?" "Oh no, he's too interested in his research." So they didn't...

SF: So they never talked to him.

You're the one that told me the story.

No, I don't remember that story. I remember that...

Somebody told me.

I knew that he had beat Bob Feller and

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Yeah, Feller made the comment that he was the first one that, what was it, either he pitched to Bob Feller, or

He was a pitcher.

Pitched to Bob Feller and

Bob Feller couldn't hit it and he made the comment that he should be in. But he liked playing in the Merchants, here in town.

LWL: Ames Merchants was a semi-pro team here in Ames.

SF: Ah.

LWL: He was their pitcher,

Every 4th of July we'd go to ball games.

LWL: and he was constantly breaking their bats, he hit the ball so hard, so then they had a special bat made for him, which we...

We called it the telephone pole.

LWL: Yeah, it was huge, it was a big, really strong, it was a special it would have been illegal, really, otherwise, but it was the only thing that he could hit with that didn't break. And I don't know whatever became of it. Do you have any idea?

MWE: Probably rotted, I don't know. I remember it being in the basement.

GW: They have one of his bats down at Ellston.

DW: Did you know that they have a spot down at Ellston in the museum, of Harley's things.

SF: Oh, no, I didn't know that.

Big town.

DW: They'll unlock the barn doors and let you in.

GW: To see the museum.

Well, there have been a couple people from Ellston in the paper that have died, in the last week.

That brings the population down to...

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SF: We should take a quick look at what's in here, if you still have time.

MW: Myrna, or Gretchen, you're the historians.

LWL: You're the one who can see what's in there...

MW: Lorna, do you want to do it.

DW: see which ones to bring to her attention.

MWE: I have to go get my husband in a little while.

[End of disc 2, track 4]

LWL: He could talk to that little dirt farmer, because he had been one. And he could talk to the big shots overseas, 'cause he was there. And everything in between. Somebody would come up, and Dad would say oh, he would do more than just say hello, or shake his hand, he would talk to him about what he did or his interests.

SF: Mm-hmm.

LWL: He could talk to anybody.

MWE: One of his trips to Argentina, I think it was, for the state, I mean you know, for the country

MW: Myrna, move over there

MWE: airport and somebody ran into them, they were in an accident, and they hit Dad's side of the car, and Dad was hurt pretty bad. But now, we're not going to, I've got to get to the airport, I've got to get home. By the time he got home, he was so sick...

Broken ribs.

And I had to take him to the doctor, go out and get him, and he could hardly move. I got him down, McFarland Clinic was next to the Tribune down here, and I got him, I pulled into the alley—I called him and told him I was bringing him—pulled him into the alley there and unloaded him, and they got a wheelchair out, got him in the wheelchair, and he started vomiting, all over the walls, everything. What a mess.

She was a nurse, she was an R.N.

So when the doctor wanted to see him again, the doctor says, "I'll come out to the house and see you."

They don't do that anymore.

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MWE: So he came out and sat on the end of the bed, and the doctor that he was talking to had started out in chemistry. And so they just really had a good chat. But they went out there, they didn't want him back down at the clinic, they had to scrub up