

Wilbur and Norine Berryman

Int: Hello, it is 1989, I'm a year slow here. I'm in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Berryman, are currently living at 862 N. Center Street... and I'm Francis Durham, a volunteer of the Northville's Oral History project, and I'm here to interview Mr. and Mrs. Berryman this afternoon.

Int: Now let's see, Mrs. Berryman, where were you born?

I was born in Leroy, Michigan, a small town near Cadillac, in the northern part of the state.

Int: And Mr. Berryman, where were you born?

I was born in Detroit.

Int: East or west side?

West side, Avondale.

Int: I was born in the east side of Detroit. Let's turn this off.

Int: Okay, we've checked the tape and volume seems to be okay, so we're going to go ahead.

Int: One of the things I realized by talking to Mr. and Mrs. Berryman before we turned on the tape, is that they moved around a great deal. Some in Northville, some outside of Northville, but they have come back to Northville, and uurrgh, why don't you, just very briefly, Mrs. Berryman, go over some of your different moves and tell us anything interesting about these various places that you have lived.

Well, the first place we lived when we first came back to the area from New York was on Tower Rd. and Five Mile Rd. It was a farm house that belonged to, before us, Thompson. He lived kitty corner to us, and this farm that we rented was one that he had been born and raised in, and it was a real old farm house and he farmed the property while we lived there.

Int: Now, you said you came from New York, how did you happen to be in New York?

We went to New York during the war time, my husband got a job there at a war plant and we were there eleven years, and then after the War was over, work slacked off there, and in 1951, we came back to Michigan.

Int: Okay, now let me back up again, you were born in the west side of Detroit and you were born up around Cadillac area, up in northern Michigan. How did you come to live in the Northville area?

Well, how did we ever get to Northville? Well, we met, my mother worked at Eloise Hospital, and we lived in Wayne at the time, and my husband lived in Wayne. We both went to Wayne

Memorial High School. We didn't know each other at the time, but we went there to school. But, uuuhhh, the way, way we came to the Northville area was when we first came back from New York in 1951, we had some friends that lived in Walled Lake. We stayed with them for awhile, while we were looking for a house, and we happened upon this place on Tower Rd. in Northville. Well, the way we happened on that was we started attending the First Baptist Church, here in Northville. Some people there were relatives, we told them we were looking for a house, and they were relatives of the Thompsons, and they said he had a house for rent. So we rented this house.

Int: Okay, so you did have some acquaintances here, or friends, here in Northville before you actually moved here?

Well, yes, from the church.

Int: That's good, so then you rented the place on Tower Rd., now tell us about your next move.

Well I thought it was Nieces St., but my husband thinks it was Taft Rd. We lived in both places. We lived in Mark Larson's house on Taft and Eight Mile for quite awhile, and then I guess we did live there, and then we went to Nieces St. from there I think. We bought the little house on Nieces St. and then... I think from there we moved to Carpenter St., we rented a house there. Then from Carpenter St., we bought the house by the race track on Church St. The address was 222 Church St. It was adjacent to the track.

Int: Now, at that, you told me previously that it was called the Northville Driving Club.

This is what Mr. Carlo told us, John Carlo was the general manager of the race track, told me that the Northville Driving Club was buying the house for the race track. So I don't know what the connection was with the track and the Driving Club.

Int: Okay, so the track itself wasn't called the Northville Driving Club?

Separate entities.

Int: Separate entities, okay. I just wondered why it was called the Northville Driving Club. I mean, driving what, sulkies?

I don't know, harnesses?

Int: I mean harnesses... okay, and... his purpose in buying the house from you?

Well, he told us it was to expand the parking facilities. And he bought quite a lot of the property around us, and finally we..., he was trying to buy it for several years. He approached us at least once a year. And we kept saying no, because of price, we didn't feel we were being offered a fair price. And so each year, he would offer us a little more. And so finally, he told us that if we

didn't sell, it would be surrounded by parking facilities... so we finally got our price. We got the price we wanted, and we sold it.

Int: Now, there was something very special about that house, you related to me before we put the tape on. You want to tell us why that house on Carpenter St. was so special?

Well, I think it was special to us because the people that lived in that house had lived in it from the early 1900's, I believe it was 1901 when they moved into it. It was a bride and groom. (excerpt lost on original) And he made all of the woodwork in the house. It was all carved in solid oak. He made the furniture, we still have the side board he made. He made an isle and a screen, a folding screen out of oak, I gave those to one of my daughters. And he made the bedroom furniture, and he carved the wood around the old fashioned fireplace and it was beautifully done. They had never, they had no children, so the place was like new inside, it was just very well taken care of. We bought the ... we were only the second family to live in that house and it was quite old at the time.

Int: And did you tell me you bought the house furnished?

We bought the house with all the furniture in it. They took a few personal pieces of hers, but we bought most of the furniture. It was... wasn't that made with 4 by 4's instead of 2 by 4's? (You mean the framing of the house?) Yeah, the framing of the house. (It was made by 4 by 4's, and it was sided inside and out.) It was sided inside and out, filled with saw dust. It was just solid. So solid, you could've put level anyplace in the house, and it was just a well built place.

Int: It would be quite a house.

Yes.

Int: Now, tell us for the tape, he was going to buy the house and subsequently bought the house for the purpose of tearing it down, and putting a parking lot there. What about all this beautiful woodwork and the things that you couldn't duplicate today, what happened there? Tell us that story.

Int: Well, we had a verbal agreement with him that we could take anything out of the house that we wanted. He told us that we could even move the house if we wanted to. He didn't care. All he wanted was the property. We didn't have a place to put the house, we didn't know much about, about moving the place, we didn't have the money to do it anyway. So we did ask him if we could take out the chandeliers and the wood work and the ... anything we wanted. And we had this verbal agreement with him that we could take everything we wanted. We did get, before we sold it, we did get a hand rung doorbell from the front door. And it had stained glass windows, and we asked for those and he said yes, we could have anything we wanted. Well, when it came time to tear the house down, he called us up and told us to come and get those stained glass windows. And I said, what about the chandeliers and the woodwork and the oak door and

whatnot, he said I have no authority to give you anything except what is in the contract. And we had apparently never seen the contract, or we just took his word for it, that we could have anything on the verbal agreement, so we got nothing but the stained glass windows. I really didn't mind too much as long as someone got that out of there, and it wasn't destroyed and I think that is probably is what happened, I would imagine.

Int: That was going to be my next question to you, do you have any idea what happened to those...?

I don't, but I hope somebody got it, because it would be a shame to have it...

Int: Torn down. Well, now you've moved off Carpenter St. because they wanted the house, or the property to put parking on...

Church St.

Int: I mean Church St. I'm sorry, okay, and where to next?

Then we moved to Plymouth for a few years, and we bought a place there.

Int: Was this because of a change of jobs that you moved to Plymouth?

No, we needed a bigger house because my wife's parents came to live with us because they were unable to live alone, so we made a place for them to live with us. We bought a house with a separate apartment, so they could live with us.

Int: Okay, and how long were you over in Plymouth?

4 or 5 years. Yeah, about five years. But when we sold that house on Church St. ... see we still owned that house on Church St. didn't we, when we lived in Plymouth. Right, we didn't sell that until after we moved to Plymouth, that's when my step father died and my mother came to live with us. And then when my mother died, we bought a house on Carrington St. here in Northville. Because we didn't need that big house anymore. And then we bought this house the same time we bought the Carrington St. house, didn't we? No, we bought this house before. Well, this was a nice little house, and it was for sale, and it was right next door to my daughter, and we thought this would be a real nice retirement home.

Int: Okay, so your daughter had already married and as long as we mentioned that at this point, she married Huey Gardener, who still lives next door. Huey Gardener, who owns the Four Seasons Florist, was also a member of the City Council and was the Mayor pro tem.

He was on City Council for twelve years.

Int: Very, very good, so at one time, you owned at least two houses. You had, you had the house on Carrington, and this house on N. Main, uhh, N. Center and you rented this house out until you were ready to move in, ready to retire.

Yes, we were ready to retire, we moved in here and sold the Carrington St. house... to a nice couple.

Int: Good. Well you moved around a lot!

Yes, we did. Even before we were married, I moved around a lot. When I was a child, I moved around a lot, I went to five different high schools.

Int: Was it because of your father's occupation?

My father and mother were divorced. And so my brother and I just stayed with different people... my mother had to work, and so then I was back and forth between my father and my mother.

Int: Well all right, let's see, we talked, oh, one of these places, let's see, the house on N. Center, was owned by the man who owned Bagget roofing and siding.

Right, he built it.

Int: Okay, he built this house.

And built it well.

Int: And that company still exists.

Yes, we just set them up to fix our roof.

Int: Down on Seven Mile, oh you did? Very good! And was he a long time resident of Northville?

I believe he must have been, I don't remember. When he was here to fix the roof recently, he told us he built the house, I believe he said '59. But I don't remember where they lived at that time.

Int: And his last name is Bagget?

Yes, Bagget.

Int: This gentleman, okay, all right, now four children. Tell us a little bit about your children, why don't we start with talking about your son, a teacher here in Northville.

Well, George was a teacher for ten years in Northville and before that he taught in Britton, Michigan for three years, didn't he? Yeah. He was a graduate of Northville High School and it was his... he was a musician, in fact all four of our children are professional musicians, and he

wanted to... it was his dream to have an instrumental musical program in the lower grades. They didn't have at the time he attended, there was only a program for the high school, and Bob Williams was the music director at that time, for instrumental and Mr. Lee was the vocal director of music. Well, so George, I don't know how they decided to have this program, but George was hired by the school to start an instrumental music program for the junior high and elementary levels. And so he did that. And there are still people that remember him.

Int: And he taught in Northville for ten years?

I believe it was for about ten years.

Int: Unfortunately, he passed away.

Yes, he passed away two and a half years ago.

Int: How recently did he teach here in Northville?

He was retired for I think, let me see, he was an invalid for twelve years.

Int: Because of the diabetes?

Yes, right. He was a juvenile diabetic and he was an invalid. He lost his vision first, and then he had kidney failure, and of course with the two things, and having dialysis three times a week. Being blind, he just wasn't able to teach anymore. And I wanted to mention one thing about the teachers at Northville; gave up enough of their sick days to give him a year's salary.

Int: Well, that's great.

So they thought a lot of him and that was a big help. And the town, the City of Northville had many benefits for him and that helped tremendously because they had nothing. They had no income because his wife had to stop working to take care of him. And of course, being a kidney patient gave him the benefit of Medicare. So he was on Medicare, but that was their only income. Actually, the people of Northville were really great. There were many benefits and they raised a lot of money for him. Took care of him for that time when he was alive.

Int: Now his wife, did they go to high school together?

They did, but they didn't... his wife was a girlfriend of one of my daughters and it wasn't until after he graduated, in fact, he was teaching before he finally noticed her as a potential girlfriend. So, but they didn't...

Int: Okay, so they didn't go together in high school then, and you told me that she is still living here in Northville.

Yes, she lives in Northville.

Int: Children?

They have no children. No, they wanted children, but it just didn't work out that way.

Int: Okay, he was your second son, your oldest?

Our oldest son is Lewis. He lives in Florida. He is a professional musician. He plays with a trio in a private club in Florida.

Int: Okay, and then you have a daughter, Kay.

Her name is Kay Rowe. She lives in Plymouth, she is the first clarinetist for the Ann Arbor Symphony. She is also first now manager for the Ann Arbor Symphony.

Int: Okay, and her last name?

Rowe, R-O-W-E.

Int: Rowe, okay. And then your youngest daughter is Suzanne.

Our youngest daughter is Suzanne, and she married Hewy Gardener and she is a pianist. She plays with, she is our church pianist, and she teaches piano.

Int: Right here at the house?

She teaches here, and also the William Tyndale College.

Int: Oh, yeah. Well, where did all this musical talent come from?

We don't know.

Int: Are either of you musicians?

My dad was a musician. He was a violinist. But somehow, it skipped a generation. Well, I don't know about that... I fiddled around with the guitar, but I never got serious about it.

Int: Okay, but, at least you were a musician, did you play guitar when you were in high school?

A little bit. You used to play in the band. I used to play in a dance band for a little while.

Int: And how about you?

Well, I took piano and organ lessons, but I do this for my own pleasure only. And, I do sing, I sing in the church choir and down in Florida, I sing solos. I think I'm too old to sing, but down there, of course everyone's so old.

Int: Did you ever play? Were you ever a church organist?

No, no I played the piano sometimes in church when there was nobody else. (Laughter)

Int: A fill-in?

Yeah, if no one else could do it, I could do it.

Int: It is rather odd, to have four children, all of whom are musicians.

Yes it is, and we didn't force them to practice.

Int: That's great.

She is a soloist in our church in Florida.

Int: Yeah, that's great.

Int: Well, speaking of church, you were members of the First Baptist Church of Northville, 1951 to 1975, then you left here and went to the Calvary Baptist in Plymouth and continue to attend church there from 1975 to present time. Now, you indicated, Mrs. Berryman, that you belonged to the Northville Historical Society. How many years were you a member of that Society?

I don't remember, it just seemed like when they moved to this Mill Race Village, that is when I became interested in it, soon after that I think I joined. And of course, they had a senior citizen, I think it is a dollar a year for senior citizens, so I continue. But they call me once in awhile for something, and I could never do anything for them, because my husband hasn't been well for quite a few years. I just felt that I couldn't take on anything like baking or anything like that or the tri-valley fair.

Int: Now, aren't they very much involved in this upcoming Victorian Festival that they are going to try here?

Maybe so.

Int: In Northville as well.

Probably.

Int: Were you ever a docent over there?

No I wasn't.

Int: Never a docent.

I never really had the time to do that.

Int: Any other organizations that you are a part of here in Northville, besides the church and the Historical Society at one time?

No.

Int: Okay, now let me see... maybe you have something in your notes there... oh, here is one thing, your hobbies. Now, you indicated to me that you are an avid reader and also that you write poetry. Why don't you tell us about that?

Well, my mother was a poet, and she left a lot of poetry unpublished. She had some published too, but she left a lot of unpublished, and she asked me to make it into a book and to publish it under my name, and I said that I couldn't do that. Because if I had it published, it would be under her name. She said I want you to try to write, she said, I know you can write. So I kind of made that promise to her that I would try to write. So I enrolled in some creative writing classes at Schoolcraft College, and I did write some poetry and submitted it and had some published by the little magazines and small presses, and then I just sort of lost interest once I knew I could be published, I lost interest. It felt like that was a goal that I had felt I had reached. But now, that was several years ago, now I've suddenly developed a interest in writing and I've written a few more that I'm going to submit as soon as I get to a type writer. I took my type writer down south.

Int: Did your mother write under the name McCourt?

No, my mother was divorced from my father and she took back her maiden name. And she wrote under a different name, she had several names that she used, Elvira was one of her names, Elvira McKinney. And then she married after that.

Int: Did she write rather extensively? Did she have a lot of her work published?

She wrote a lot, she wrote a lot of poetry, but she didn't, she only, there was only one time in her life when she submitted some for publication, and that was when she married my step father, Dr. Norton. And they lived in a little town called Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and she belonged to a literary club and that is when she had some poetry published, other than that, she didn't.

Int: Okay, and I think you said eventually your stepfather died and it was at that point that your mother came to live with you. That's when you moved to Plymouth, you needed a little larger place to live in, you had a separate apartment for her. Now, we didn't cover work experience. Mr. Berryman, you indicated that you work for Warren Products in quality control for ten years.

Yes, that was my last job.

Int: Okay, and you indicated to me that prior to that you worked at automotive prototype shops, particularly with sheet metal.

For about twenty years, prior to that I worked with aircrafts, I worked in aircrafts during WWII, and after that, and more recently at Heta Freighter, aircrafts division.

Int: And was Heta freighter at that time out of Willow Run?

Yes, I helped to build the C1-23, I don't know if you've heard of them or not.

Int: Oh yes, that's transport, the C1-23 transport. An interesting thing that I found out in some of the interviews, and probably it was after you came to Northville that Stinson Aircraft was here at one time.

That was my second job.

Int: Ah, you worked at Stinson Aircraft.

First job was at Grand Page Automotive Company.

Int: Okay, Grand Page, well that goes back a few years. And where was that?

That was in Wayne.

Int: In Wayne, okay, and how long were you there at Grand Page?

I was there about a year, and then I was offered the job at Stinson. So I left there to go to Stinson.

Int: Now, didn't Grand Page eventually become Studebaker? Or was that a separate company?

No, that was a separate company.

Int: But there was an automobile, if I recall, there was an automobile that had the name Grand Page car.

Yes, there was a Grand Page Car.

Int: Okay, then Stinson Aircraft, which as I understand it was well, just where was the plant located?

That was south of Wayne.

Int: South of Wayne, okay. One of the people that I interviewed told me that they used to build the parts in the plant and then truck them to a field somewhere the other side of Northville, probably just an old corn field or something, and assemble them and then just fly them away from there. Now are you familiar with that?

No, Eddie Stinson was killed in Northville in a crash. In the Northville area.

Int: Oh, he was? I talked with a woman who was a teacher here in Northville, her father was the minister at the Methodist Church. And she related an interesting story about her father officiated the first wedding in an airplane. This couple didn't want to want the necessary time requirement for their license, and they knew Eddie Stinson, and they asked if he would fly them down to Toledo and took the minister and the wedding party with them, and performed the wedding ceremony after they got their marriage license in Toledo, and came back so... in fact, she had a

clipping, and to her knowledge, it was the first wedding performed on an aircraft, and it was one of Eddie Stinson's planes. Did you know Eddie Stinson personally?

No.

Int: Did not know him personally. How big was the plant at the time you worked there?

It had a couple hundred employees. I don't know exactly, but it was a small plant.

Int: And what was your specific job at Stinson Aircraft?

Well, I worked in the toe crib at first. And then after that, I worked in the machine cap.

Int: Okay, and so then ah... Mrs. Berryman, you indicated you worked in a medical office for 20 years in Livonia?

That's right.

Int: What to tell us about that?

Well yes, I went there, I knew this doctor's wife socially and they were looking for a girl to work in the office. I wasn't exactly a girl, I think I was 45 at the time. It was one doctor and one girl, she was working for him at the time