

CECIL AND CATHERINE WINFREE

Interview by Connie Schmelzle
October 4, 1994

TOPICS:

Automobiles
Family Life
Education
Home Building
Land Development
Personal Injury

Transcription by John W. Weigel
May 11 – June 10, 2000

[Transcriber's note: "M" signifies Bill Miles, who gives an introduction at the beginning of this recording, "Q" is for the interviewer, "H" is for the husband Cecil Winfree, "W" for the wife Catherine Winfree.

M: This interview is part of our Fortieth Anniversary Interview Series. My name is Bill Miles. The interviewer is Connie Schmelzle, part of the Historical Commission. The persons being interviewed are the Winfree family, Cecil Winfree, a longtime resident of Madison Heights. Along with Cecil you'll be hearing his wife Catherine Winfree. This interview was made on October 7, 1994.

H: ...this and that lot and the lot next to that one, you paid fifty dollars for it. And we built our home there forty-five years ago and we've been there ever since.

Q: And wh...where was this?

H: This was on Dartmouth...

W: Mhmm.

H: ...between John R and Stephenson, just a half a block south of Eleven Mile.

Q: Mhmm. And what...what year. About what year was this?

H: Let's see. That was forty...fifty-eight years ago, fifty-nine years ago, so what would that be?

Q: Five.

W: Forty-five?

Q: No, no, no.

H: Oh way before that.

W: Way before that.

Q: No, okay.

H: 'Cause we were married in '46.

W: Well, he was born in '27, so put eighty-eight.

H: Yeah, '27. '35. 1935.

Q: '35. Yeah.

H: Approximately 1935.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. So Madison Heights, what...what was...this wasn't Madison Heights then?

H: No, it was Royal Oak Township.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: Yeah.

Q: And then how did...how did people get out here then? What roads did you take in from Detroit?

H: There was a bus...Martin Line bus line.

Q: Mmhmm.

H: And you...they went down Eleven Mile Road to John R and then John R to...down to Six Mile Road, and then over to Woodward, down to Sears, and that's where they stopped.

Q: Wow.

H: And it cost a nickel to ride the bus that long distance. Or you could take it to Royal Oak and catch the streetcar, and go down to [Highland part?] of Detroit. Because there was nothing south of Twelve Mile Road, I mean south of Eleven Mile Road. There was nothing. Just a...John R was just a...a little two-lane highway that went out to Bloomer State Park. Stephenson Highway quit at Eleven Mile Road.

W: But it went to Gardenia, 'cause you could go across.

H: Well, there was...there was a little gravel road...

W: Yes.

H: ...that went to Gardenia, that went to Twelve Mile Road. 'Cause I used to walk...I used to walk from home to Twelve Mile and Stephenson where that trailer park is now. What's the name of that? But anyhow, I hoed potatoes out there for fifty cents a day. And I used to pick strawberries at Diesing's at Twelve Mile and John R for two cents a quart. And I dug potatoes at Horkey's after we were married for a dollar a bushel.

Q: Now where was Horkey's?

H: Horke's is where K-mart's is now. All that was Hor...Horkey's farm. And the Diesing farm was across the road south of Twelve Mile Road where that subdivision is now.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: Yeah.

Q: So where did you go to school?

H: I went to Edison. There was a little...

Q: Who was the principal there? Do you remember?

H: Mr. Nott

Q: Mmhmm.

H: He was a crippled man. And he..he was the principal, and also the fifth and sixth grade teacher.

Q: Oh. Uh-huh.

H: And then there was a little white building half a block from Edison. That was Blanche Villa, and I went to school there. That was just two rooms, a big coal furnace in the hallway that the janitor would have to come early to make a fire to warm the rooms up. I went there for about a year, I guess. I think...I think the third and fourth grade was in there.

Q: Uh-huh. And what year was that?

H: That I...I don't remember. The Blanche Villa in 19...193...33. I think it was '33, '32. They used to have a...a soup kitchen there because it was right after the Depression...

Q: Mmhmm.

H: ...during the Depression. And people would line up for three blocks with a little bucket, to get a bucket of soup. And my Dad worked at Borden's at the time, but he worked from sunup 'til sundown for maybe twenty dollars a week. And we didn't need the soup, but I used to cry and beg, and Mother would give me a little bucket, and I'd go down and eat my soup. 'Cause everybody else did, so I wanted to do it too.

Q: [Laughter].

H: And the old Borden's had the horse and wagon that delivered the milk.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: And we'd draw up, we'd...when we'd see the horse and wagon come, draw up and ask if we could have a little piece of ice. "Cause that was really a treat. 'Cause we didn't have refrigerators back then.

Q: Uh-huh. So they usually give you the ice? [Laughter].

H: Oh yes. He...he...he'd take his ice pick and chip a little piece of ice off and give it to all of us.

Q: Well that was nice of him.

H: And...well, like...like I said, only a nickel to ride the bus to Highland Park. I think it was a nickel to ride to Royal Oak too, but Mother and I used to walk to Royal Oak to save the nickel, buy groceries and we carried them home.

Q: Oh you carried...so where would you...what store would...did you...?

H: There was a store at Eleven Mile and Campbell Road called "H & L". Ham and Lily is what it was.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: And we used to go up there. But then I started to working at Kroger's. They were on Eleven Mile Road between Hampton and Britten Woods. And there was five of us, I think, worked there. And they had a long counter. We had to wait on the people. All the shelves were in back, and we had to get all the stuff down, add everything up with pencil and paper. And they were there for a long time.

Q: Oh.

H: I...I was fourteen when I started working there. Fifteen at full-time, fifty-two hours a week for eighteen dollars.

Q: Fifty-two hours a week.

H: Yeah. For eighteen dollars.

Q: Wow. Huh. Do you ever keep up with any of the people in your childhood, or...

H: Well no, most of the...there wasn't too many around there. The one that I chummed around with an awful lot, he moved to Texas, and I haven't heard from him for a long time.

Q: Mmhhh. So how far did you have to go to school?

H: We only had to go about four blocks.

Q: Oh.

H: And we had to come home for lunch.

Q: And who was your teacher, do you remember?

H: I have a Mrs. Welt. And there was one we met over at the convalescent home, but I can't remember her name. I don't remem...but I remember Mrs. Welt.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: She was a...my seventh grade science teacher. And then Mr. Beatiker, he was a nice teacher in the seventh grade. He was very strict. If you done something you wasn't supposed to, you would have to stoop over, touch your toes, and then he had what we called, "The board of education." And you got so many wallops, which they should have nowadays.

Q: [Laughter].

H: And...or you'd have to stand at the corner with your hands up above your head for half hour.

Q: And can you remember any development or any things that happened...?

H: Oh I remember when they built the first city hall. I remember when they...the fire department at the north end, you know.

W: The south end.

H: Huh?

W: The south end.

H: I mean the south end.

W: Yeah. We're at the north end.

Q: Yeah.

H: The biggest development though was when they put the sewer and water through.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: I remember that because we had just a little gravel road out in front, and ditches on both sides. And then when they dug the sewer, I think it was ten foot deep, or the water. One of them. I think it was ten foot deep. And that was right in front of our house, you know, and you had to walk across the little point to get into the driveway.

Q: How long did it take them?

H: It took 'em about...well on our one street I think it took them about eight weeks. Took a long time.

Q: Do you remember what year that was?

H: No.

Q: Uh-huh. And then when did people start moving in some more, do you remember? [Inaudible].

H: Well that was...that was really after we were married.

W: I would say...

H: We were married in '46. I built my...we built our home there in '47. We moved in in '48.

W: No, you moved...

H: Yeah, Edith was born in '48, and she was six months old.

W: No, she was born in '49, yeah. '49 she was born. But we still married before she was born.

H: Yeah. It was '4...48, I guess, when we started building. And then over at Lincoln between Lincoln and Andover, that's when they built all those homes over in there, after we [started to build?] our home.

W: Yeah. [Inaudible].

H: 'Cause when we built...when we built, it was still Royal Oak Township. Because I used to raise chickens and ducks and turkeys...

Q: Mmhmm.

H: ...and everything right there.

Q: Oh you did?

H: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Uh-huh. And then where would you sell 'em?

H: I...I usually put ad in paper and sell...I'd buy a hundred baby chicks, and then I'd raise them up in the fryers...with the roosters we would sell for fryers and then...

Q: Uh-huh.

H: I always kept fifteen or twenty hens, and that kept us in eggs, and all the neighbors in eggs all winter long.

Q: [Inaudible] Yeah.

W: He's always doing something.

H: But the...the homes over there, they sold for four thousand five-hundred brand new...

Q: That was a lot of money then.

H: Yeah. And we...when we built our home it only cost us five thousand dollars to build it.

Q: Oh.

H: And we had a real good city inspector then.

W: Don't tell that.

H: Well I don't even remember who he was. But I'd call up and I'd say...I called up and I say, "My basement's ready for inspection." "Well I'm pretty busy today. Bring the permit over here and I'll sign it." He never once looked at our house.

Q: [Laughter].

W: That's the way they used to do things though. And then they wonder why these older homes are built like they are.

H: Well ours was built good.

W: Yeah, it was built good, but still you could do things and they'd never come to see what you was doing.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: And that's why a lot of 'em have to be brought up to code.

Q: [Laughter].

W: Oh dear.

Q: So how long did it take you to build? Tell us about building your house. How long did it...

H: Well, when we got married, I...I had been in a accident when I was fifteen years old, so I had nine hundred dollars, but I couldn't touch it until I was twenty-one. Boy that was a lot of money, you know. So my father-in-law said, "What are you going to do with that money?" 'cause I was about to turn twenty-one. I says, "I'm going to put it down on the house. We're going to buy a house." He says, "Well you got the lot out there. Let's build a house." I says, "I don't know anything about building." He says, "Well, I don't know much about it but we'll build it."

Q: Oh.

H: So we had the basement dug, and her...my wife's brother-in-law was a...a builder, a contractor up north, so he come down and he helped us lay the blocks. And...

W: Yeah, but remember when they dug the hole for the basement. They dug up a Model T car.

H: Oh yeah. They dug up an old Model T car. It used to be a dumping ground around there. We had nobody to pick up rubbish. So if you had something to...

Q: Uh-huh.

H: ...to get rid of, you just went to a empty lot and dug a hole and buried it.

Q: Oh.

H: But they dug up the old Model T car...

Q: What did they do with it?

H: Well it was all rusted...

Q: Yeah.

H: ...and everything so bad that it just went to the dump.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: But bottles, oh all kinds of bottles and just everything.

Q: Huh.

H: And then it took us about two years to get...to build our house. And we moved in...we did mean...it was just tar paper on the outside. Her mother had passed away so we moved into our house. And just had tar paper on the outside.

Q: [Laughter].

H: And the first night we were there we didn't even have a door on the back door...

Q: Oh.

H: ...so we had to prop the door up. But it was so nice, you could go away and leave the doors unlocked and everything, you know.

Q: Well tell 'em where we got our material to buy...to build the house with.

H: Yeah, well her...her dad, he was the painter and decorator. And he was born in Royal Oak, so....

Q: Oh.

H: ...everybody knew him.

Q: Oh.

H: And there was...where Oak Ridge Market is, up on Eleven Mile Road?

Q: Yeah.

H: There was a house that sat...there was a little hill there. And there was a thirteen-room house, a farm house that sat up...sat back there. So he bought the house for three hundred dollars, and we tore it down, and we had ninety days to tear it down. And that's what we built our house out of. We have oak roof boards on our house that are twenty-four inches wide.

Q: Wow.

H: And we got the old wood [inaudible] even in the kitchen that we tore out of the house. That's why it only cost us five thousand dollars.

Q: [Laughter].

H: It was everything used, you know. And then he bought another house for a hundred dollars. Well he bought the basement.

W: No, the bricks.

H: The bricks and the blocks.

W: Yeah.

H: For a hundred dollars. And that's where our basement...where our basement blocks come from.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: And our house...the bricks that are on our house...we only paid a hundred dollars for all the bricks and all the blocks.

Q: Wow! That's great!

H: So...

W: But that was a lot of work.

Q: It was. But that's your...that's one of your biggest expenses.

H: All winter long her...my...my wife and I, we would clean lumber, pull nails out of the lumber. And clean bricks, knock all the mortar off. She worked just like I did at it.

Q: Wow.

H: And we moved in that house when my oldest daughter was six months old. But we'd go out there and work on the house, and we'd lay her on the floor, on the blanket. She'd be sound asleep and we'd hammer and nail and saw. She never woke up.

Q: [Inaudible][Laughter]. I bet she still sleeps well today, huh?

W: Probably. She gets tired. She's always ready to go to bed.

Q: [Laughter].

H: But when I was fifteen years old, we went roller-skating one night. I got to tell you about this.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: There was about twenty of us kids in the neighborhood. We went up to the Clawson roller rink, and on the way back we...well we had to take a bus; they didn't have cars back then.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: So there was me...well we was standing on the one side of the building. It was real cold. So me and another boy and his girlfriend, we went around on the east side of the building. And a car come up over the curb, and knocked me through the drug store window...

Q: Oh wow.

H: ...and Lesley was standing between the two windows, and they cut his legs off, and he fell, and back wheels run over his chest

Q: Oh my.

H: And...well I was unconscious for...I think it was a week to ten days.

W: Three weeks. Three weeks, wasn't it?

H: Maybe it was.

Q: Oh goodness.

H: But the doctor—Flick was the doctor I had—he come in. He sat by the bed. And he said he had my death certificate all filled out, just waiting for me to take the last breath so he could sign it. I was cut from ear to ear and he cleaned all the glass out of my head just with his hand. My hip he cleaned all the glass out of that just with his hand. And then after we were married I was looking through her scrap book one day, and she had all...everything about it. I said, "How come you got all this? You didn't know me then." She said, "Well, I went to school with the boy that hit you."

Q: Oh.

H: Right from kindergarten all the way up.

Q: Oh.

H: He was sixteen years old. He was drunk. Wasn't his car. No driver's license.

Q: Oh my.

H: So his punishment was he had to go into the Navy.

Q: Oh you're kidding me. Oh that's terri...whatev...so tell me about your recovery [inaudible].

H: Oh well, it was a...could be...I haven't recovered from it yet. I've had three artificial hips put in my right hip that was tore up in the accident. And well when I was seventeen, I had to have a pin put in my hip because I would...I could be sitting down and get up, and I couldn't just stand up. I'd just fall. It would come out of the socket. So...and then the bone started deteriorating in '4...I know what...

W: You had to have your [inaudible] taken off first.

H: Yeah. When did I have my first hip in?

W: '73. Was that the first...first time?

H: Yeah. And... 'cause all...all my bones were just...in my hip was deteriorating. So...but it still isn't any good.

Q: What...what ever happened to the other boy?

H: The one that was driving?

Q: No. The...the your friend.

H: Oh he was killed.

Q: He was killed?

H: He died instantly. They said there was a stream of blood running from--that was Romain's Drug Store then...

Q: Uh-huh.

H: ...about a foot wide, running a half a block down to the sewer.

Q: Oh my gosh.

H: And...and his girlfriend, she was standing right there with us, and she didn't even get a scratch. She seen the car coming, she got out of the way. So that's where I got the nine hundred dollars to build my house.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: Not a very good way to get it, is it?

Q: No. No. Huh.

W: But I had went to school like, you know, the next day. One of the girls that was in one of my classes, oh she was crying. And I said, "What is wrong with you?" "Oh," she said, "there was a bad accident last night," and she was in the car. There was girls in the car but the paper never told that. You know, they kept that quiet.

H: But...

W: [inaudible] some girls [inaudible].

H: We've seen a lot of changes in Madison Heights. I know when Virginia Solsberg [Solberg] was running for...I know she was trying to get it into a city.

W: Yeah.

H: I handed out flyers and everything for her.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: She...she was a very nice woman.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: And then I used to hand out flyers for her when she was running for different things.

W: But you know, it's just...you go down John R now and upi just think of the places that used to be there.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: And what it used to look like.

H: Well we moved out to Eleven Mile Road, which is two lanes.

W: We had a ditch [inaudible].

- H: A great big ditch on the side, always full of water.
- W: And I didn't...I had just more or less learnt to drive, you know [inaudible]. "All I need to do is go in one of them big ditches. 'Cause I don't like to drive anyway. But ...no, we've seen a lot of changes.
- Q: Well...well...tell...tell us some of the things that you remember, moving in and having.
- W: Let's see. I remember the old junior high.
- Q: Yeah, tell...
- W: We can remember when it was the high school.
- Q: Yeah, tell us about that.
- H: Yeah, where...where the library is, out at the south end, that was the junior high. That was for the seventh and eighth grade.
- Q: Mhmm.
- H: And I went there the first year it was open.
- Q: Oh. Uh-huh.
- H: And...but I never did get to high school. I quit. Which I'm sorry of. But I had broth...a brother, sisters that graduated from...I had...my aunt graduated from Madison High School. There was three people in the graduating class.
- Q: [Laughter].
- H: Her and...oh I can't think of the man's name but they're all dead now, of course.
- Q: Uh-huh.
- H: And Mr. Wilkison, I remember him real well.
- Q: Mhmm.
- H: He was the school superintendent.
- Q: Right. Yeah.

W: Remember we could...you remember when they had the...when the night [owl?] used to be...what was that before?

H: No, the...the night [owl?] was always the night [owl?].

W: Oh was it?

H: Yeah that was...

W: When Mrs. Donovan...

H: Yeah, Mrs. Donovan. She owned the...

Q: Well tell us about that.

H: She owned...well first her and her husband owned a little shoe shop...

Q: Mmhmm.

H: ...at Bretton Woods...no, Barrington and Eleven Mile Road...

Q: Mmhmm.

H: ...and then he died.

Q: Okay, what was her name again?

W: What was her name before she married?

H: Hale.

Q: Oh. Uh-huh.

H: I...I...I...I...Iva...Ivy Hale.

W: Ivy Hale.

Q: Mmhmm.

H: And then she rented a little store over at Eleven Mile Road and John R. And she sold coal by the bushel, and kerosene, and milk. And then she kept getting bigger and bigger. Then she bought the building next door that was a pretty good-sized building, or she had it built, and she had a grocery store. She was really a wonderful person. She was a wonderful [cap and an eye?].

Q: Uh-huh.

H: And...well what else? Other she...she was just...

W: A lovely person.

H: ...person.

W: Yeah, well, they tore all those buildings down.

H: Yeah.

W: Because when we first got married, right where...at Eleven, between John R and Groveland on Eleven Mile Road there, there was a restaurant in there.

H: Yeah, and that's where the trailer park was.

W: Yeah, and the trailer park was there.

Q: Mmhmm.

W: And then...

H: Did you know that there was a trailer park [inaudible]?

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

W: I can remember when all that was there.

Q: And what year was that?

W: Well, we got married in '46.

H: It must have been there up until '50.

W: Yeah.

Q: Mmhmm.

W: And then the ones that owned that, they're the ones that went over on Dequindre, Stephenson.

H: Yeah.

Q: Oh. Uh-huh.

W: And I...and I remember Dor...that was the younger couple, Dorothy Stephenson and her husband.

Q: Mmhmm.

W: I remember they used to live in an apartment up above the store [inaudible].

Q: Up above the store?

W: Mmhmm.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: Harry and...probably his folks owned the trailer court [inaudible] you know. At...you know...that corner.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: They owned...they owned that corner I'm sure...

Q: Uh-huh.

W: ...they did.

H: Oh that trailer park was there later than 1950 because Ivy had her new store and she worked twenty hours out of the day, you know. She'd go...she had the trailer in the park. One night she went home, there was a little mouse in there, under cupboard. "Oh he is so cute!" So she went back to the store and she got some cheese and she fed him. Well, she said, in about three weeks he went out and told all of his friends what good food they had there. So, she said, "I had to call Jack Davis" (he was the owner of the Madison Heights Cab Company) "to come in and help and get rid of them." She said, "One night we caught over fifty." So she says, "I can't feed 'em any more."

W: [Inaudible].

H: Said, "I didn't feed them any more." So the Cab Company was right next door to us up until '70.

W: It must have been.

H: So I bet...I bet the trailer park was there until in the '60s.

Q: [Inaudible].

W: And then Mrs. Donovan, she'd go out to Cambridge Nursing Home.

Q: Mmhmm.

W: She'd go out there to cheer all them old people up.

Q: Aww.

W: She was in her eighties herself but she'd...

Q: ...go out there and cheer them all up. [Laughter].

W: [Inaudible]. You have to know this woman to really appreciate her. She was something else.

Q: So when did the Cambridge first open up?

H: I don't remember that.

W: I don't remember when they opened.

H: But we went out to Cambridge for about nine years, once a month.

W: Nineteen years.

Q: Oh.

H: Our church, it was supposed to be Madison Heights Baptist Church, but when we'd go out there and say, "The Winfree group is here." 'Cause Cathy played the piano and I led...

Q: Oh. Uh-huh.

H: ...the singing and there would be maybe fifteen or twenty of us that would go. And we'd take ice cream, and we'd take ice cream cones, and then we'd take cookies, and every week we had something special.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: But we done that for nine or ten years.

Q: Wow.

W: That was...that was nice.

Q: Uh-huh.

- W: I mean, lots of times, when that Friday night came to go, you'd think, "Oh I too tired to go."
- Q: Uh-huh. Yeah.
- W: But then when you left there you felt so good because you could make these older people happy.
- Q: Yeah. Yeah.
- W: You know, they just...they would sing. You'd be surprised. Them people we'd just sing hymns.
- Q: Uh-huh.
- W: That's all we'd sing. And you'd be surprised, some of them older people, they'd sit there and sing without a book...
- H: They wouldn't have a book.
- W: ...they wouldn't even have a book but they knew the words.
- Q: Mmhmm.
- W: And it was really a blessing in itself.
- Q: Yeah. Yeah. I...I've done that too.
- W: Yeah. But I can remember first time I went I said, "I'll go play piano but don't you expect me to talk to any of 'em!" [Laughter] Because I so soft-hearted. But I got so I could, you know.
- Q: Uh-huh.
- W: But...
- H: In the..in their historic book they have in there that George Pappas was the owner of Sloppy Joe's.
- Q: Mmhmm.
- H: But he wasn't the first owner.
- Q: Oh no?
- H: Ann and Joe Korts. They were the first owners.

Q: Oh.

H: They sold it to George Pappas.

Q: Oh.

H: And I told Ann and Joe Korts' daughter-in-law that I was going to make sure I told 'em that. Because she brought down pictures and showed us the other day of Joe and Ann Korts and the grocery store. There was the bar.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: Then there was a alley. Then there was a barber shop and then a grocery store. And they owned all that. And then they built a beautiful brick home right behind the bar and that's where the daughter-in-law lives now.

Q: Oh she still lives there now?

H: Yeah. She's eighty-four years old. She gets out there and works, just like somebody in their sixties.

Q: Oh. So do you remember any of the dates when...

H: No, I'm not very good on dates.

Q: Uh-huh. Well that's interesting. And how do you spell their last names, C-O...?

H: I wouldn't even know that.

Q: Yeah. Uh-huh.

H: But she has...she has some pictures on [inaudible].

W: She could tell you a lot more.

H: Yeah.

Q: Oh, okay.

W: About...

H: About the bar.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: About the bar.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: Because, let's see, she said she...she moved in after we moved in our house. So...

Q: Mmhmm. That's interesting.

W: We've been there a little bit longer than she has.

Q: Oh. So when did you get your first car? Tell me about your first car.

W: First car.

H: First car?

W: Yeah. Oh dear.

H: Well...

W: Let's see, we've been married in '46...

H: Yeah.

W: Right after that.

H: It was probably in '47, and it was a '42, no a '37 Pontiac. It was ten years old.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: And it was on the next street. So we went over and looked at it. Then we come back, and told her mother and Dad about it. Her Dad, he gave us the money to buy it, three hundred dollars. And it was the old stick shift, you know. Naturally they didn't have the automatics then. So I thought, "Well, it would be nice if Catherine learned how to drive," so I said I'd take her, "take you out and teach you how to drive." I took her out one time and I made her so nervous, she'd never go again with me. So she said, "Leave the car home tomorrow and I'll have your sister teach me to drive." I said, "All right." So I left the car home. She got the car and drove two miles to my sister's house, but my sister had to take her out to teach...teach her how to drive.

Q: So what streets did you drive up?

H: She drove down Gardenia.

Q: Mmhmm.

W: [Inaudible].

H: Huh?

W: Yeah, I went to...from Forest...

H: From Forest.

W: ...where we lived. I lived....we lived on Forest...

H: In Royal Oak.

W: ...and I drove down, went across to Gardenia...

H: To Gardenia and [Hampden?].

Q: Mmhmm.

W: ...and then I drove right straight through to Pamela's.

Q: I see. Uh-huh. Ah.

W: [Inaudible].

Q: Yeah. Aw.

H: And she's only had one accident since we been married.

Q: Wow. Wow. That's wonderful.

H: Well, we thought we had something when we had that '37 Pontiac.

Q: Yeah.

H: No heater in it. We'd take her mother out at Christmas time to see the Christmas lights. Her mother was sick with cancer.

Q: Oh.

H: So we put her in the front seat and wrapped her up in blankets to keep her warm, 'cause there was no heater in it.

W: See, when...when we got married, my mother was sick.

Q: Oh.

W: So my dad, he asked us if we'd live there so I could take care of her. So...

H: So we lived there [at Bedford?] over two years.

W: Well, yeah. Well, Edith was born in January of 1949 and when she was six weeks old we buried...we buried my daddy...I mean my mother.

Q: Oh. Oh.

H: Then we moved out to Madison Heights and her dad moved out with us.

W: And he lived with us for about...

H: He lived with us, yeah.

W: ...two years, yeah.

Q: Mmhmm.

W: Maybe a little bit longer. Then he passed away.

H: But the house I was raised in was right next door to where we built, so...

W: That's still...

H: ...been right there for...

Q: Yeah.

H: The first house we lived in in Madison Heights...

Q: Mmhmm.

H: ...when we first came to Michigan I was two years old, it was on Dartmouth too...

Q: Mmhmm.

H: ...but it was on the north side, one block down. It had one bedroom, with a living room and the kitchen.

Q: Oh.

H: And I think that's all. And there was my mother and dad. And...let's see...my brother, two sisters and me. Then I had one sister born there. Then my aunt and

- uncle. And then they had a son born there. That was nine of us in a one bedroom house...
- Q: Wow.
- H: And that house is still standing.
- Q: It's still standing?
- H: Yeah. It...it's real cute. And...
- W: But I don't know how his mother stood all that. She always gets mud in with it.
- H: And we had to walk a half a block there to carry water.
- Q: Wow.
- H: And then the people right across the street had a great big German shepherd dog. I was a devil. I was always running away. So they had a big German shepherd. Nobody could get near that dog but me. Mother would tie me up, tie me to the...put a rope around my waist, and then tie me to the porch so I wouldn't run off. Well, I got so I could untie it. I was just two or three years old. And that time I'd run across the street, and I'd get the...get on that big dog, and I'd say, "Ha ha! You can't get me now!" [Laughter].
- Q: Where did you get the water from?
- H: It was just a well.
- Q: Oh.
- H: An old pump.
- Q: Uh-huh.
- H: And you had to pump it. And on wash day that was a lot of pumping.
- Q: Where...whose...was it a city...township pump?
- H: Yeah.
- Q: Uh-huh.
- H: Yeah, back then about every...about every three blocks they had a pump.
- Q: Oh.

H: Between the sidewalk and the curb.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: Well then, not between the sidewalk. They didn't have any sidewalks. 'Cause it was right off the curb.

Q: Oh. Hm.

H: Off the driveway...street.

W: Did they put anything in the paper about that...where the dogs were?

H: The dogs?

W: Yeah.

H: The dog kennels?

Q: [Inaudible].

W: Did you have anything on that, at Gardenia and...

H: Dartmouth.

W: ...Dartmouth?

Q: No.

H: Oh they had a great big dog kennels there. At one time...I know they had five hundred dogs, most of them Doberman...

Q: Oh.

H: ... pinschers. They trained them for the blind.

Q: Oh.

H: And every Sunday they would put on a show, and we'd all walk down there for the show. They had bleachers and everything there.

Q: Oh they did?

H: Yeah, and...

Q: Uh-huh. This is where now?

H: On Dartmouth and Gardenia.

Q: Gardenia. Uh-huh.

H: Yeah. That's where that school is built now.

Q: Right.

H: I mean...I mean it's a church now but it was a school.

W: [Inaudible]. It's a church. Right there.

H: But that was way before we was married. Yeah, but they had that after we was married...

W: They had it when we was married. When we got married it was still down there, but then it...it didn't...it wasn't there too long...

H: No.

W: ...when we got married.

H: No, because it started building up.

W: Yeah.

Q: Mmhmm.

H: And they had to get rid of the dogs. A German couple, a German family owned it. But they...they trained them for blind leaders.

Q: Oh.

H: And then they had a little cemetery out there too.

Q: For the dogs?

H: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: And then there...

Q: Do you remember the name of it, the name of the...?

H: No.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: And then there was a pig farm over on Lincoln, Lincoln and...what's the name of that street, B-I-E Dye?

W: Dye.

Q: Yeah.

H: Yeah. It was a pig farm over there when I was about ten years old. And every Wednesday or Thursday, Farm Crest would bring out a truckload of pies for the pigs. So everybody in the neighborhood for a mile around would walk over there, 'cause we could get all the pies we wanted.

Q: [Laughter].

H: So we had to be very careful not to get the moldy ones.

Q: [Laughter].

H: But it was a big pig farm.

Q: Oh. And who owned that?

H: Well that I don't know.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: Can you see our kids doing that today?

Q: [Laughter].

H: Well today they have everything, but back then if...if you'd get a...a pie, well we were very lucky. So...so I was about ten, so that would be sixty...fifty-seven years ago.

Q: Ah.

H: There was nothing over in that community other than that pig farm.

Q: Other than the pig farm?

H: Mmhmm.

Q: Uh-huh.

W: So now it's got factories, and [inaudible]

Q: Yeah.

W: Up and down the street...

Q: Sure.

W: ...apartment houses, and that's...

H: [But the house is still in there?] Huh?

W: ...[inaudible] and all that subdivision in there?

H: Yeah, but the house is still there, they had...that owned the pig farm.

Q: It...it is?

H: Yeah. 'Cause they [grewed?] a little party store in the house next to it.

Q: Oh.

H: That was the...the owners of the pig farm.

Q: Huh. That's interesting.

H: Well, what else was there out here?

Q: You know, if you don't...

[Tape recorder turned off and on]

Q: So tell us where you worked.

H: In 1953 I worked at Walker Sign Company and I got all the high work for thirty years, but the highest was the Ambassador Bridge.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: I put...I helped put the...those signs up. They haven't been replaced yet, and they're pretty...pretty...in pretty bad shape. But we would walk up those cables that go from the middle of the bridge to the top. You could go up that way and come down that way, or else they had a ladder that went straight up the black columns. And it was so dark in there you couldn't see your finger right in front of

your...right in front of you. You had to use the flashlight. So I thought one day I would come down the cable, with the other guys instead of using the ladder. And I got fifteen feet from the top, and both feet slipped out from underneath me. And they were down in front, and they couldn't turn around to come back up to help me. But I finally got my feet back up on the cable, and I wore a pair of gloves out coming down the rest of the way, 'cause there's two little cables that you hang on to. And I almost went down. So that was my worst experience at the sign company.

W: Except the one in Highland Park.

H: And then...and then in Highland Park, we was taking down a big sign on the Medical Arts Building, and it was up seven stories high. And me and another boy, we had to go up and hook the...the rigging up. And I asked him, I said "Are you sure you got it hooked up right?" and he said, "Yeah." So I said, "All right, we'll take the bolts out of the wall." We took the bolts out, and he didn't have his hooked up right, and the sign come down and hit me, and knocked me out in the middle of Woodward Avenue, knocked me completely out. And I...but I hung under the sw...I was in the swing chair. I hung on, and I don't know how I did it. But then when I stopped swinging back and forth out of...over Woodward Avenue, I hollered and told the guys to get the sign down, and THEN lower me down. My arms were so sore, I couldn't even lower myself down. They thought I'd broke both arms. But that was another close call.

Q: It's a miracle you're still here. [Laughter].

H: Oh it sure is. After the accident, and then the bridge, and then on that sign, well the Good Lord was with me.

Q: [Laughter]. That's right.

W: That's the only way he made it.

Q: [Laughter]. That's right.

W: All three times.

H: So I worked there for thirty years...

Q: So...

H: ...and I seen a couple of guys fall and get killed but I was fortunate, I guess.

Q: And where was the...where was the...the company located?

H: On...down at Woodward and...

W: Custard.

H: ...Custard.

Q: Mmhmm.

H: They're still...they're still there.

Q: They're still there.

H: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

H: Gammit's...Gannett owns it now. It's USA.

Q: Uh-huh. And what was the name again when you were working...?

H: Walker's.

Q: Walker's?

H: Walker's Sign Company.

Q: Uh-huh. And who owned that?

H: I...I don't know. I just knew the president, and the vice-president and all them...

Q: Mmhmm.

H: ...but I didn't know who owned it.

Q: Oh.

[Tape recorder turned off and on.]

Q: Thank you very much.

[Tape recorder turned off and on.]

Q: This is Connie Schmelzle of the Madison Heights Historical Commission, and we've just interviewed Cecil and his wife Catherine Winfree, W-I-N-F-R-E-E of 26741 Dartmouth, of course Madison Heights on October 7, 1994.

END OF INTERVIEW