Interviews with Arthur Ehrat

AI-A-L-2008-029

Interview # 1: June 16, 2008
Interviewer: Newlyn Hosea

Hosea: My name is Newlyn Hosea and it's June 16, 2008. This is an interview with Art Ehrat. He lives in Virden, Illinois and the interview is in his home. Art, just to get things started, can you give me where and when you were born?

Ehrat: Yes. I was born at home on December the 20th, 1924. The address would be Shobonier, Illinois.

Hosea: How do you spell that?

Ehrat: S-h-o-b-o-n-i-e-r, Shobonier, which is about twelve miles south of Vandalia, which was the second capital of Illinois.

Hosea: Oh, yeah, very much so, very much so. And what are your earliest memories? Was this a farm that you grew up on?

Ehrat: Yes. I grew up on a farm. My father, I would say, for that time, probably was one of the more active people in agriculture in our area. We did several things: we thrashed, we graded road, we filled silo, we had hogs, cows, milk, we had chickens, you know, sheep, baled hay, filled silo. Almost anything that had to do with agriculture, we did. Then later on in agriculture, we sold Case machinery, J.I. Case machinery, which was out of Racine, Wisconsin. It was their main headquarters back in that day. We had a lot to do and we usually had hired men in my early days, you know. Probably the earliest thing I can remember on the farm – I don't have the date right in front of me – but it was in 1927. I had to be young; we had a tornado that hit in April, some day in April. Now somewhere in those pictures I had the date on there. I can remember this date; that's one of my very earliest dates. And my mother was washing and we hung clothes out on the line.

Hosea: What were the names of your mom and dad?

Ehrat: My dad's name was William Ehrat. And my mother's name was Sophia Schmid. S-c-h-m-i-d. They got married in 1914, what they did. Where I grew up was a very German solid, in fact, it was solid German Lutheran territory. If you didn't speak German , it was a like a clique almost, I mean, everybody… We had a section south of Vandalia, the address Shobonier, we had a Augsburg Lutheran Church, was named after Augsburg, Germany. That's where we went to school. We went to parochial school there, we went to church there and the next church about four miles down the road was another. Now this Augsburg held maybe five hundred people and it's a big, and it's still today. In fact I was just there the other day. Then there was St. Paul, didn't have any…on your map. You might can find it if you have a right good map. Augsburg, St. Paul and then as you went to the next town was another big Lutheran Church, St. Peter. Now this was a range of probably ten or twelve miles through there, or a little longer, you know, it was just solid people, immigrants that came from Germany.

Hosea: Were the services in German?

Ehrat: Oh, yah, yah.

Hosea: And you started working, I suspect, at a very early age; you were put to work.

Ehrat: Oh yeah, yeah, I would say, we all did; that was the way it was back in that day. You know we raised our own, I think, unique things, like we raised our own chicken and incubator in the living room, you know. It was with lights with three or four coal oil little lights and it took so long to hatch an egg, you know. Now we would raise five, six, seven hundred, a thousand chickens in the living room. Then you'd taken them out to the thing, but that would be in the kitchen.

Hosea: You had electricity from a very…

Ehrat: We had no electricity until about, I would say, until about 1950. I was long gone from home before they got electricity on the farm.

Hosea: And indoor plumbing I suspect…

Ehrat: No indoor plumbing. No, nothing like that. Kerosene lights, you know, Aladdin lights, so there was no convenience, I means for years, for years, almost for thirty years.

Hosea: So when you started out you were raising livestock for your own consumption, to feed yourself. Did you do that to sell also?

Ehrat: Oh, yes. We milked, not a lot of cows, maybe ten or twelve cows and we sold milk, you know. We had ten or fifteen horses, and when I grew up, we had at least, in that era. Also we had usually at least four Fordson tractors, old ones –this was back in the twenties, or in the early thirties –and we had tractors before anybody.

Hosea: Oh, you were using tractors, even in the twenties.

Ehrat: Back in the thirties, yes. In fact, we had this Rumely, [Rumely Oil-Pull tractor] then my dad had a steam engine. Actually, I helped pump water out of the creek. In the early days of thrashing that I can remember, we would take the team of horses and you have a water wagon with a steam engine.

Hosea: So you used horses, too.

Ehrat: Well we used horses, tractors and we'd take this water wagon, because the steam engine took water. So you'd go down usually to the edge of the creek, and then you'd put a hose in the creek, you'd get a point where you can pull a wagon with a team of horses. Then you had a long handle on this pump and I would always help with the pump, pump that handle to fill that – how many gallon – hell, I don't know, maybe two or three, couple hundred gallon. So then you take the horses out and then you'd go wherever they were thrashing at. Now I did myself – probably at the age of twelve or thirteen – I run the thrashing machine myself.

Hosea: The which machine?

Ehrat: The thrashing machine.

Hosea: The thrashing machine.

Ehrat: But not with the steam engine. But I did lots of time with the 30/60 Oil Pull Rumely. Now then, I don't know why we got the Rumely but I wanted to finish the tornado.

Well anyway, my mother was washing and hanging clothes on the line. It looked like a storm was coming. So my mother and I we went to my father. He was working on the tractor and I think it was on the Rumely, not the steam engine. And she said, "Willy, I think we're going to have a storm." "Well," he said, "that's going to blow over." So it wasn't shortly, it got kind of bad ,so they gathered up all my four sisters, my brother and I and my parents we went in the house and we had – some people call it a basement, we called them a cellar –underneath the house. That's where we stored our potatoes. That's where we stored our homemade beer we made, homemade wine we made, in there. So anyhow, the storm, things were pretty bad. I can remember my dad praying. It destroyed most of the farm. In fact there's a few pictures that I did have of the tornado if you've seen them. It did not damage the house. But we had a new dairy barn; it took all the tin off and a lot of the siding was off. We had a cement wall about three feet tall all the way around the dairy barn and we had lots of chickens, hundreds of chickens we always had. And it blew a lot of those chickens against that concrete wall and killed them. So we had, I don't know how many, but kind of as I heard it we had a hundred chickens that were dead from the storm. And then in the machine shed, it kind of squashed it down; the down draft squashed it down and kicked out the sides. Some of the pictures that I had there, if they could tell there, you could see part of the thrashing machine in there. That was kind of an experience, of course. And the tin. Most tornadoes go from the southwest to the northeast and some of the tin off of the barn

went about six or seven miles to the St. Paul area and some of it landed on, several of them, on the Albrecht farm at St. Paul. Later, I don't know how many years later, twenty, not twenty years, back in about 1936 where that farm was, where some of the tin was, my daughter married the boy that lived there on that farm. (chuckles). And that was the second time that a tornado had hit that farm over the years. When it hit before, I don't know. It has not hit it since.

The one thing, a hay tether, I don't know if anybody would know. A hay tether is a machine you put behind the wagon that had loose hay and it went back and forth and it was maybe eight or nine feet and they had usually about two by two slats and as you pulled it, it would bring the hay on a slide underneath the bottom and put it on the wagon so you could load it. Well, in this tornado about half a mile away – it's made out of wood, the bottom slats were about a quarter inch by 3 inches that scooted the hay on it and this thing would jiggle back and forth and shove the hay up – it picked it up in the field that was over a quarter mile away and moved it behind the barn a ways and broke one slat on that tin thing. But it carried a quarter of a mile, that little light wooden thing. And so that kind of took care of my very first experience…

Hosea: That is some experience.

Ehrat: …on the farm.

Hosea: Hay. Did you have corn, soybeans, the usual mixture?

Ehrat: Ah, yes. We farmed. We were probably one of the largest farmers in that area.

Hosea: How many acres?

Ehrat: Well, I would say… well I can tell you, I want to back up just a second.

Hosea: Sure.

Ehrat: Well, what happened –I I got a copy of it. My great-grandfather came here in 1871 from Switzerland. And he was here four months and died. Katherine, his wife, which was later, but my grandfather, Jacob Ehrat, they acquired land that's a mile and a half long on each side of the road and a half mile deep. So that's six-hundred and forty and eighty: about seven hundred or eight hundred acres. I mean it's just one strip. My dad had some sisters as I grew up, and we farmed some of their land they inherited from the other generation. So we farmed, I don't know, three or four hundred acres back in that day. And most people farmed eighty acres. So that's kind of how the farm went and then we did lots of other things. We bred other people's horses with jack –we had breeding jacks and then horses and mules both, but we didn't have any bulls. Now we usually fixed our cows once in a while. We had our own bull or two, but if you wanted a good registered one we'd take it to somebody that lived at St. Paul and maybe get those cows bred over there occasionally. If you had a pure-bred you kind of have to have it registered.

Hosea: I'm sorry, going to your family. Did you have brothers and sisters?

Ehrat: I got one brother and four sisters. And we are all still living. We're having our brother-sister reunion next month. They're in the nineties and eighties year olds and we're all living. In my father's family there was two boys and four girls and most of those were married at least fifty years.

Hosea: What were the sisters – the women on the farm – what was their function? What were they doing?

Ehrat: They kind of helped with farming, but they helped more around my mom. Because we always had a big garden, because we usually had hired men, you know what I mean?

Hosea: Uh-huh.

Ehrat: So they didn't work so much out to milk the cows and feed the hogs, I mean basically, too much you know. And then my older sister, seems like when she got about sixteen she got a job to work and she went to work in Decatur for a Congressman – McMillan was the name –in Washington. In fact, I went to visit these people in Washington, D.C. when I was in the Army. Another person worked for him then, this McMillan, and that's where my cousin worked for in Decatur, anyway I'll take that back, my cousin worked for McMillan that was in Washington. In fact I went to visit him when I was in the Army in Washington. But then my sister worked there and then she worked a few other places. Then I had another sister she graduated in 19… she was one of the very first in our area to go to high school. Nobody went to high school in our area. We were fifteen miles from town, there's no bus, a mud road and the only way you got to go –some of us kids – was that my grandmother lived in town. So you could live with her to go to school and then you'd come home on the weekends part of the time. We did some of both of the things though.

Hosea: Did you go to high school?

Ehrat: I went to high school in Vandalia. But I could tell you some very interesting things about that, how I went to high school, at least one year. I'll give you a little bit of high school.

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: The first year my sister worked when they started the Farm Bureau in about 1935 organized and she graduated from high school in 1936. In fact she was one of the few times my dad ever made any activity, she was Maypole Queen. That was about the only activity I can remember my dad ever went to in high school. Later on then my sister, Bernice, went to town, then I had my sister, then I did, and Ruth. So one year in – I guess that's a good way to go – my grandmother had an apartment upstairs. It had a kitchen. So my sister Bernice, she was a year older, me and my sister a year younger than me, we were all in high school at the same time, so we

lived in my grandmother's apartment on the second floor. We did our own cooking, did our own housekeeping in that part of the year. That was in 1940, I guess. Then in 1941 my brother was in the first draft and he lived on the farm. In the meantime my dad – he always said his dad retired when he was fifty years old and moved to town in about 1912 when his dad moved to town – my grandpa Jacob – so he said when he was fifty years old he was going to do the same thing his dad did, Grandpa did. So my brother got married and he lived on the farm. So then he got on the first draft, he got drafted, left for the Army on February the 14th of 1942. And I can remember one thing that's a little bit unique. My folks were still working on the house; they bought a house in town to kind of remodel it. We was in the cellar or basement. My dad called my brother –and I thought it was kind of unique you know; you couldn't send too much messages during the war. I mean you couldn't; they'd blank it out, but maybe not at that time. So my dad told my brother, Now when you write home, if everything is going good use a lot of "i's", and if you have a little dot above "i" when you're writing home a letter that means things are going pretty good and if you put a big dot in a little circle above it, that means that things aren't going too good. So it was a code right off the bat.

Hosea: Oh, my goodness.

Ehrat: So I thought that was kind of unique. So my brother goes to the Army. So here we are on the farm. Now we're fifteen miles from town. We still had not depleted our livestock; we still had a few cows, you know, we had hogs, chickens and so it was my job – with the help of another neighbor – so I would drive as far as I could every day from school to home to milk the cows by myself and feed the chickens and feed the hogs and I'd stay at the farm house. Didn't have any electricity, you know, nothing. We had a wood stove, but half the time the fire was out if it was winter time. Cold weather you have to build a fire so I usually, honestly, I'd get home maybe done with the milking by nine o'clock and by four o'clock I'd have to be out milking again and I couldn't get home. Many a days, I'd walk two miles and a half because the roads were so bad I couldn't even get home. I'd walked two and one-half miles then I'd have to walk back the next day to the car because the roads were so bad you couldn't get there. And I never missed a day of school.

Hosea: Your whole time in school you never missed a day.

Ehrat: That's right.

Hosea: That's extraordinary. That's extraordinary.

Ehrat: And I think that was kind of a challenge there for a while, though we did have a cousin come in to help maybe take some manure out of the barn and do some of that stuff because you couldn't do that just after school.

Hosea: Now this must have been kind of unusual during the Depression for a family to be able to have a farm and send their kids to high school and do all of these things.

Ehrat: My first sister, Grace, the reason she got to go to high school, my dad – I remember plain as day, in I don't remember what year it was, it had to be about '29, maybe '30 – Dorothy that's ninety-two, she was working in the field that day mowing hay. And my dad sent her younger sister – she's ninety now –to take her a drink of water and we was mowing with the horses. My sister had dropped a line – you have two lines on a team, she dropped a line – so she asked my sister… A sickle mower, they go back and forth, so my sister is to pick up the line and so as she stepped over the sickle the horse took up a step and cut her heel almost back that far on her heel. So then she had to go to Barnes Hospital in St. Louis. She was in the hospital a long time so she got to go to high school probably because of that. She had so much problem with that foot and today it still bothers her. But anyhow, that's kind of how the…

Hosea: So your family really didn't feel the impact of the Depression that the folks in the cities were?

Ehrat: Well, I'm not saying all that now. I think I can talk about this. If you want to go to the Depression days I remember them quite well. I'm going to tell you a story that I think is good. During the Depression we would go to town, not often. I'd say maybe my dad and my folks they would go to town or my dad, maybe once every two weeks or so, three weeks, you know. If you wanted anything from the store you went to a local country store just out here in the country for staples – if you want some sugar or salt or flour, you know. We had the big garden, but to show you how things worked. We had our own cows, we had our own milk, we did our own butchering and usually we did community butchering and we butchered together.

Hosea: The different farms?

Ehrat: This was kind of unusual. Now here we are at this land. Every time my dad's sisters got married, my grandpa would give them forty acres. My Aunt Emma lived here; we got forty acres there. My dad's brother lived here, my dad's sister lived here, and the two youngest ones went with them to town, but they had their forty acres, too. So we had all that family living a little over a quarter a part. Now there were seven kids in this family, six kids in this family, three kids in this family, eight boys in that family and we're right here in a row. Now this is Marion County line. Here is Marion County line. If you went thrashing and you thrashed in this area maybe five, six, seven miles. Whenever it was thrashing time they always brought out, you had a lunch in the morning before noon, you had a lunch in the afternoon, you had doughnuts or coffee or something, you know and so then when you thrashed in this area when it was time to eat at noon, the big meals you know. Everything tasted like home; it was just like eating at home. (both chuckle). Damn, it was good. But when you got across this line, except for my uncle – he married what you'd call a Yankee, he didn't marry a German girl – (both chuckle) he lived on the county line. And whenever you'd thrash for a few of these people over there – we'd call Yankee territory – ah the food was terrible, just awful. (Hosea laughs) Things just was not good.

Hosea: So the community was your family, it sounds like.

Ehrat: That's right. And we were related to everybody. We was related to all the rest of them. I mean it was all your shirt-tail kin, somewhere down the line we were all shirt-tail kin.

So when you'd go to town in Depression days my dad would go to town and always had the –well you could call them bums or drifters or what –they were looking for a job, you know what I mean? So my dad he would pick them up and my mom would get so aggravated at him. He'd bring one or two of them home to help. They would be from any place in the world, believe it or not, but most of them kind of from the Chicago area. Now we had a lot, off and on; some maybe only stay for a day or two or week, some maybe for a couple of years. And these guys –that's when things were bad. The wages that they got: basically if you were busy, my dad would pay them roughly twenty dollars a month, room and board.

Hosea: A month?

Ehrat: Yeah. Now, when things got bad in the winter time that you couldn't really work in the fields or nothing – you couldn't thrash, bale hay – so my dad would say, Can't pay you. So then you'd get down to maybe ten dollars a month. I can remember plain as day, some of them would say, "Could I just live here for room and board?" And I remember one guy said, "Till you have work in the spring just buy me a great big can of Bull Durham tobacco. That's my pay."

Hosea: (chuckles)

Ehrat: And the next guy he wanted a pair of overalls and that's exactly what happened. Buy them a pair of overalls and they'd work all winter for nothing—for food.

Hosea: Did they stay in the barn?

Ehrat: No. They'd stay in our house.

Hosea: Oh, they stayed in your house. You had a pretty big house, did you?

Ehrat: Yeah, we had a pretty big house. We'd put the hired men upstairs; us kids were usually up. I guess we had four bedrooms upstairs. Now I'll tell you, one of them in his spare time, he whittled and made violins.

Hosea: Whittled violins.

Ehrat: He'd go out in the shop, whittled and made violins and he sold some of them. It seems like one of them he sold for seventy-five dollars. I mean that's a couple of months pay.

Hosea: Big money.

Ehrat: Big money. And they did, what they did, my sisters' got it yet. She's got some quilts, you know you put those boards up and quilt it with a needle. My mom did that all the time: quilt you know. Well, he got a quilt and he quilted, too. He'd quilt during the day, you know. Quilt you a quilt you know what I mean. So that kind of passed the time. My sister has got one of those quilts yet like that.

Hosea: So you got to know a bunch of interesting people, I bet, over that time.

Ehrat: Yes. And I want to tell you one and I just wrote it down here. The one guy was kind of a world traveler. He traveled all over the world. I can remember, back in the early thirties he was telling about Germany. That he was in Germany and probably in the early thirties and I can remember him as plain as day saying they are just really going big on some things. He said they got a thing in Germany you can point it at an airplane and knock it down. That's what this guy talked about. I remember that just plain as day.

Hosea: Oh, yes.

Ehrat: Just plain as day. Back in the 1930's, like '32.

Hosea: I think you were talking in relation to high school, that they were starting the Farm Bureau then.

Ehrat: In 1935. I have the list right here of all the first Farm Bureau members. I got all kinds of stuff here.

Hosea: Are we talking about the Illinois chapter or the national?

Ehrat: The Fayette County, the county.

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: You see there are 102 counties in the thing I guess, but they were starting the Fayette County. Now here, like Macoupin County probably started earlier, but that was Fayette County. And then I'm going to tell you something that's just hard to believe. I don't know, if you want to go back to the Depression days and kind of how it was there. I bet money was tight. I want to tell you about… My mom would say once in a while – we had quite a bit of wheat, I mean several hundred bushel in our granary We ate wheat a lot of times; Mom would cook it, just cook it on the stove. Just keep cooking it. It'd be kind of like mush, you know. Mom says, Go out there to the granary; if the chickens have been there, wipe the chicken shit off, mice shit, the rat shit, shove it down and drop it through the air – we'd drop it on a pan and let the wind blow through it, a little chaff – get it nice and clean and bring me a pan of wheat and I'll start cooking it. We had that quite often.

Hosea: Sort of like a cereal?

Ehrat: Yes. It was kind of like a cereal. And then what we did, we'd go rabbit hunting and shoot rabbits on the weekends with all my cousins. See, we had fifteen cousins right there. On the weekends the boys would get together and we'd go rabbit hunting when I was ten years old with a twelve-gauge shotgun or rifle. And we'd shoot them rabbits. I'll tell you a story about the rabbits. So we ate a lot of rabbits. We always had rabbits and fried 'taters, seemed like, for breakfast. And we had also, not only a wood stove, a kerosene stove burner that you could cook on a little bit.

But then the rabbit business; I think that's kind of unique. Now the rabbits. Bill Schaefer had this country store. So what you would do, you'd buy you a box of 22 shorts for a dime. Now you weren't like my grandkids; they'd shoot up a box of things just to shoot at the moon. But if you didn't get a rabbit and you had to get one rabbit out of that box of fifty cartridges…

Hosea: To make it pay, huh?

Ehrat: So you could take that rabbit three or four miles to the Schaefer Store and get a new box of new fifty bullets. When you got two rabbits then you got two boxes. You get three rabbits, four rabbits then you got maybe a penny's worth of chocolate Hershey (Hosea laughs) in a big block of Hershey. I tell you that used to be good stuff that Hershey candy in them big blocks. And then you get a dime. Then if you get enough you was rolling in the dough then. If you had all the bullets you thought you would need, old Bill would give you a dime for that rabbit Either you got to be a pretty good shot if you want to really get in the money, or else, you're a circus monkey. (chuckles) You was out of business, you know, the rabbit business.

Hosea: Was there a big push now in the fall to store up stuff for the winter? Ehrat: You canned all the tomatoes, and the corn. You had your own fruit trees: you canned the apples, you canned the peaches. You were self-sustained except all the things you needed was a little salt and sugar and flour to make bread. Make sure you kept the yeast good all the time. You made bread every day almost.

Hosea: So that's how you lived through the winter.

Ehrat: (laughs) Well, yeah. Then in the summer time them days, if someone went to town, of course, you had the milk or the cream to make ice cream. Uncle Henry or Uncle Paul or Uncle George or somebody was going to town, make sure you take a wash tub with you and buy you a hundred pound block of ice and a bunch of big old rags or towels so it didn't melt when you got home in the summertime. So everybody made three or four gallons of ice cream and then we were all right there close together. We had our own telephone line. We built our own telephone, Ehrat Telephone Line, built in about 1908.

Hosea: Connected where?

Ehrat: Our own.

Hosea: Amongst all of you?

Ehrat: Oh, yeah. You could ring everybody up. We dug our own poles, put our own wire up and then we went to St. Paul with our station and then some other people went there. We had like fifteen or twenty people on our line. So what we would do, we had the only radio. So I can remember when the Hindenburg blew up, German, you know: Dial up Grandma Schmidt, and tell her about this thing. Then we were all Lutherans and so lots of time we took the wagon almost four miles to church to Augsburg; we went in the box wagon. We'd get all there, maybe the neighbors there, we'd all get in the box wagon and go to church in a wagon. Because you couldn't get in a car; it was too dadgone muddy, you know what I mean? So anyhow, on the telephone, when you wanted somebody to know something, of course, everybody could hear it ring. Ours was three shorts and a long and some had three longs and a short, some had a short and a long, and a long and a short – everybody had things – but everybody wants to listen, you know what I mean?

Hosea: (Laughs)

Ehrat: And so, being all Lutherans and quite diligent at going to church every Sunday, sometimes it was just so bad you just couldn't hardly get there. And then we'd have a Walter A. Meyer at a radio station at St. Louis; they were on the air way back in the '30s. Sometimes some of those things, we'd dial up the phone. We had the radio with the big horn speaker like that, you know. Dial up the phone: ding ding; you'd just let it ring, make sure everybody knew that something's up wind. Turn the receiver…

Hosea: So you'd have church at home.

Ehrat: Everybody would listen on the lines; then they could all listen, you know.

Hosea: Who had the expertise to build all that.

Ehrat: Well, it didn't take a helluva lot; about like a piece of baling wire. You know what baling wire is?

Hosea: Oh, yeah.

Ehrat: Oh them lines, I tell you what… And the wire would fall down and you'd have to go climb the pole. I'd climb the pole. They had a little porcelain thing on it. But then this went to this terminal. Now I can't tell you too much about that. I'll have a water. Could I get a water break?

(pause in recording)

Hosea: Okay, we're continuing now. Art, we were talking during the time we were breaking and you were saying that you had rather unique ways of getting fuel back then for your machinery.

Ehrat: Well, that's really right. I think it was kind of unique. Early when we needed gasoline, you bought it at the rail. I mean you ordered and it came shipped on the

railroad to the train station in a fifty gallon aluminum barrel that was kind of beveled, about like these beer barrels, I mean like keg beer. But they were much bigger, but they were just like that. And that's what gasoline came in to.

We used to have a 30/60 oil-filled Rumely and with that we'd grade a road. Now this is a large tractor. It had basically twelve-inch pistons, diameter; and, two four-inch-top valve stems that were over a foot long which were about a one-inch diameter pin. Now this was 30/60—30 on what they call the draw bar and 60 on the pulley. Everything had a rating and then years after that they had the Nebraska rating. Well, we had this 30/60 Rumely we bought to take the place of the thrashing machine, so we'd use that for several years for grading and thrashing. So in about the year of 1936 maybe '35, they used to have oil wells at Sandoval, Illinois. But they went to Patoka to drill a well and drilled this well on a guy by the name of Benoigt and they hit oil. So they named this oil sand Benoigt, actually, not to do with that oil. In fact I got a daughter that's a geologist, that kind of goes in the oil business. So, anyway, my dad sold rock phosphate, and selling that he called on Mr. Benoigt. The people that drilled this oil well didn't know what they were going to do with it. I don't know who drilled it – and so my dad looked at it. Now in this 30/60 Oil Rumely there used to be – John Deere came out where you injected some water and oil to keep the motor from knocking, it kind of injected into the carburetor. So my dad says to him: Say that looks like that distillate we're using in the tractor and I'd like to buy a little of that. And we said, Well, go home and bring a couple of barrels and a hose and we'll put it on the end of that faucet and we'll just fill them up. So when Dad come home – we had a '22 Dodge pick-up, had big wheels on it –so we went down there with two 55 gallon barrels and as far as I know, my dad gave him a dollar for two barrels. And a barrel of oil is forty-gallon.

Hosea: So a dollar for eighty gallons.

Ehrat: No. A hundred and ten.

Hosea: (laughs)

Ehrat: So brought it home and we put it in that Rumely and I would say in this Rumely we could burn in a big day's work grading roads, we'd burn fifty gallon a day. By golly, they put that in that Rumely and you know, that darn thing ran on it. Now the Rumely had the fly wheel; most vehicles have fly wheels on them. But to tell you how big that is – and I got pictures of them – that Rumely fly wheel weighed two thousand pounds.

Hosea: A ton.

Ehrat: That's right. And you know, the lugs on it weighed over a ton on the back wheel. So we'd grade road with that. Lots of time you'd grade the roads for Wilberton Township – or another Foster Township, but we lived in Wilberton Township – so my dad graded roads there for a good number of years. This old tractor really could

pull. In fact, I used to run the road grader a little bit, probably wasn't over ten years old. You had the pulley wheels and you'd adjust it and make it go.

Then we would thrash with it. So one day we was thrashing in Marion County for Peck Bassett and was just about to his place and the Rumely – we were pulling the thrashing machine – the Rumely had a problem and it died. Well, I was following it in a '35, ton-and-a-half Dodge truck we always took along to thrash. We hooked on to the thrash machine and we pulled it back a little bit and pulled it around with the truck and we hooked on the thrash machine. Now thrash machines: either you could get a 28 inch header, 36 inch, and you pitch from both sides. If you're big enough you could throw bundles from two different sides to feed those thrash machines. So we hooked on to the thrash machine and pulled it over to Peck Bassett.

I don't know if my dad or something, or however it came out, well everybody's there to thrash. You had thrashing runs; you had a certain group of people you thrashed for basically every year. So you dug the back of the wheels down in the thrash machine six or eight inches because a thrash machine needs to be level when you thrashed. The riddles would shake; you want them level. So we put that down. Now the belt that ran the thrash machine usually was a belt that was probably was a twelve-inch wide belt at least. Those belts sometimes, they're double as a belt, would be maybe fifty feet, so it's a hundred foot of belt, or maybe a hundred and fifty foot of belt. So what we did with the tractor, it had duel wheels on. So we got that tractor lined up – and you got to be lined up or else it's going to run off the pulley – so we got the truck lined up and we blocked the truck, got it pulled forward some way, jacked up the truck and put the belt on the back wheel and we used that to thrash at Peck Bassett's for several days. I can remember putting it in second gear about twelve or thirteen mile an hour on the speedometer and it just thrashed like a top. Now there's not many people ever heard thrashing off the back wheel of a 1935 Dodge truck.

Hosea: (Laughs)

Ehrat: And I think that is a very unusual deal what that was. and In that time, then a little bit later, maybe in about '35 my dad got the dealership to sell Case Machinery. Now in the Case Machinery, we traded somebody that had a Case, I'm not sure, it wasn't an "L", but it was about that, it was fairly good size, but the motor in that Case sit crossways instead of like most tractors they sit long—the motor. It set like these front wheel drive cars; it set crossways. And so for some reason, my dad said we ought to try—it had a gas tank on and this Case burned distillate also. But it had a two-gallon tank on the back of the regular tank, say it held twenty gallon – and that held two gallon, it was a separate tank on the back of the gas tank. You started on gasoline and as you got hot, you switched it over to the distillate, about like the Rumely did. So my dad said we ought to try that on that crazy Case so we burned that right out of the ground and that Case cross-motor tractor; we burned it in even it for a while and I thought that was kind of unusual.

And this may be kind of a silly story. But last week, of June, which would be about the ninth of June, they drilled on my sister down in that country and hit oil on her.

Hosea: Is that right?

Ehrat: They don't have the pump on yet.

Hosea: Well, that's extraordinary.

Ehrat: We know where to get that oil right out of the ground.

Hosea: Probably can't burn that in the cars today.

Ehrat: No. (both laugh) So that's kind of the thrashing story, the grading story and as we sold machinery. They made balers. Now we used to bale from a stationary baler. You'd thrash, you had to stack and then you'd pull up with a baler. Some had a motor on it – had their own power, you know a one-cylinder motor – or you had a regular tractor powered motor, and then we'd bale hay right out of the haystack. And then you'd usually put these bales in the barn. But back there, a little later than that, we had this Case baler and it had a… The old balers there were blocks and most bales, you went about eighty pounds. So what they did, Case came out with this here, it had a Wisconsin motor on it, four-cylinder Wisconsin, air-cooled motor. One guy sat on each side; you pulled it through the field; you have a windrow and you start to go down there and it picks up the hay and one guy on each side. You poke wire though a blocks and they had a little slit on each block so that each bale, like a square bale of hay you see today, basically a square, they were individual. So we went and had this job for Taylor Hunt farm, which was part of the Bunker Hunt, the Hunt that was their dad that cornered the silver market years ago.

Hosea: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Ehrat: And I think we baled about ten thousand bales on that farm. In fact, a kid I graduated from high school with –I seen him just last week as I went by there. I graduated from high school with him and he bought that farm. He owns that farm today. And I drove out by there about seventy years later to see how things look today on that farm. So that kind of took care of the baling story.

Hosea: Let's go back to Farm Bureau. Why was that started? What was the impetus for getting the Farm Bureau started? What were you trying to accomplish?

Ehrat: Well, it was time to get to organize the farmers. It was basically to help promote newer ideas from the University of Illinois; Department of Agriculture usually was involved in that thing and then they had some of the farm programs, too. Back in that day we dumped the milk, you know. If the milk prices were cheap you'd dump the milk; you'd kill the damn pigs, you know. And it was things to help some of that thing. Now my dad was a charter member of that. In fact I got a list of that county here at the Farm Bureau. Then my sister – when she got out of high school

in 1936 – she went to work there. The guy that was in charge of it and Fayette County was J.B. Turner. Then they had some of these things where you have to measure ground, that I went with David Brown. One of my first money I made, oh, I think I might have made about fifty cents that day.

Hosea: (chuckle)

Ehrat: We would measure ground. There was something to measure ground with. David Brown –I think he was an A.C. [Allis Chalmers] dealer, wife is still living –so I helped him measure ground. They'd come to each farm. They'd measure your ground – see how many acres was in these fields – with a tape measure. You'd put a little stake down and every time they pull out another how many feet, a hundred foot or whatever it was, you'd put another stake down. You'd measure how many feet it was around these fields to see how many acres it was. It takes 43,560 square feet is an acre. Or it's thirty-three and a third feet wide and a quarter mile long and that's an acre. Well, so that was one of my first paying jobs. Basically in thrashing, you got paid fifty cents a day to pitch bundles. And if you took a team, two horses and a wagon, you got a dollar. So that's kind of, back in that day, that's kind of was just a standard price for several years, seemed to me like, if you got a dollar a day or fifty cents a day. Now if you were just the water boy you might got a dime or a nickel if you'd carry water, if you were the water boy carrying water out to somebody. I remember my Uncle Henry, I took water out to the shop and I think he gave me two or three pennies one time.

Hosea: (Laughs)

Ehrat: It was really kind of high finance.

Hosea: So you helped out with the farm until you were how old?

Ehrat: Well, until I got out of high school and then my father... Well, I helped even after that a while; I helped on the farm. And then during the war we sold machinery but we kind of got out of the machinery business like in '43, yeah, I'd say in '43 it was about over. The war, you couldn't get stuff you know, things were kind of, you couldn't get nothing. My brother was helping a lot. You know how things changed when you were using some horse and you got better equipment. You could just do so much more than you could just a few years before. And so one day, my cousin Roy Kneck that lived next door to us, a quarter mile a way or so, come by one day and we were done with our fall work about. We were pretty well done with our fall work and he come and he told my dad: I got a job up by Naperville, Illinois to work on a farm. I just wondered if you're about done with work if maybe if they need help up there on these farms. He said, Maybe Art would like to go with me up there. And my dad said, Well, it might be a good experience.

I want to back up; I want to tell the corn story.

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: I guarantee you there is nobody –and that may sound a little boastful –that can tell a corn story like this.

Hosea: (laughs)

Ehrat: During the Depression and I can't tell you what year it was, in about 1933 I would say, about the height of the Depression, corn got to be eight cents a bushel.

Hosea: Oh, my.

Ehrat: Now my dad said: Anything that cheap cannot get no cheaper; it's just got to go up. I'm going around to visit all the neighbors and brothers-in- laws and sisters-in-law. If they want to sell any corn, I want to buy it. But nobody had any money, basically. So I don't know how much money Dad had, because I can remember just right before that when they called in the gold. My Grandma Schmidt gave all the grandkids five dollars gold at Christmastime. My dad said: You kids go get your gold; we got to turn that gold in.

Hosea: Oh, no.

Ehrat: So, doggone, took it to the bank. In the gold days. But anyhow to get back to the corn. So now my grandpa, he I don't think could read or write his name and he couldn't speak English very well.

Hosea: Is this your Grandpa Ehrat?

Ehrat: Grandpa Schmidt. But he was a very good dairyman. In fact, he had the best dairy barn in the country. He had Delco system; man you could push a button back in the early '30's and you'd have lights. In the barn you had lights. You had lights everywhere. And that was just almost unbelievable to me. But anyway, so my dad wanted to go buy corn. I don't know how much money my dad had. He went to my grandpa and says he wanted some gelt –that's money in German –he wanted some gelt. So I'm thinking Grandpa loaned him five hundred dollars. That would be like a million today.

Hosea: Oh, absolutely.

Ehrat: And so my dad bought corn. When they came, my dad put a sign up, maybe two foot square on a cardboard in a marker. Now all box wagons were basically the same length; I can't tell you if there were twelve feet, I think. But they were all the same length, but they were not the same width. They were twenty-eight, thirty, thirty-two, thirty-four, thirty-six; but not many had thirty-six. So on the sign my dad had box wagon so wide and if you took a yard stick my job was to level off the corn and make it level, stick the yard stick in it and whoever is bringing it. Is that twenty inches deep, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-one. Then he had listed – well let's say if it was thirty inches and so much and so high, let's say it was twenty-five bushels times eight cents: two dollars. Pay the man two dollars. Tell him to scoop it in the barn and when the barn and sheds got full he emptied out the hay loft and we'd

throw it up in the hay loft. The doors were maybe two foot square, he'd shovel it up there; couldn't get ten or fifteen bushel up there. Our job was to throw it back another forty feet in the other end of the barn. And we'd pile it up clean to the roof. Now how many corn we bought I do not know. So then I can remember Dad run out of money and here come Grandpa Schmidt driving in one day in his Model T [Ford] and Dad said; Need some more gelt.

Hosea: (chuckles)

Ehrat: My Grandpa said, "Nichts," no more. (both laugh). But I think he might of got some from the bank or somewhere. So shortly after that, which was probably in 1936, and it could have been '35, we bought this same truck we thrashed with, that thirty-five Dodge truck and we sold that corn to St. Peter to Schnocking Grain Elevator, I'm thinking for seventy cents a bushel, in that ball park range.

Hosea: And he had paid how much for it?

Ehrat: He'd paid eight cents.

Hosea: Eight cents, boy.

Ehrat: And sold it for seventy cents a bushel. However we had a few mice turds and rat turds in it and a lot of it got off the corn, but any how off the ear it got dry. To finish the corn story…

So from there when my cousin come to see about working on the farm in Chicago. We worked on this farm. He saw in the paper where this farm was, so he took me by this farm; it's called the Danada Farm.

Hosea: Danada?

Ehrat: D-A-N-A-D-A, Danada Farm. Now, that is Dan and Ada Rice, called Danada.

Hosea: (chuckles)

Ehrat: Dan Rice owned 51% of the Chicago Board of Trade Building. There's a Rice Grain Company. He owned 51% of the Arlington Heights Race Track in [a suburb of] Chicago plus two more race tracks. In that time, this was 1943, he about cornered a grain commodity. Though this commodity, I guess – I don't have all was Rice – now he made, I don't really want to say it, but understand he made, apparently, millions of dollars. In fact, there's all kinds of stuff on the internet today. But I helped on that farm. We fed cattle. We raised turkeys; I don't know how many turkeys we raised. We built a corn crib that held almost ten thousand bushel. We had about 5[000] in a corn field. I got caught in the corn picker and broke all my fingers in this hand on that farm. And then I think I got paid disability, a hundred and some dollars. But this Dan Rice was big in the grain merchandising business. In fact, he had the office at the Rice Grain Company; I don't think its existent today. They're both dead. He wanted me to be his butler. I went to the

Army. As I remember, in *Life Magazine* he had one of the ten most plushest houses in the United States. The gal and the cook, I took milk and eggs to every day. We milked, and chickens and one of them in the kitchen there was King George V's cook, in England. But it was quite a thing; it's quite a place. In fact, they wanted me to do a video live thing for them what happened sixty some years ago, but I haven't got back yet. Anyway, so I thought that was pretty interesting, that he was in the grain business, I mean, humungous.

To go on with the corn story, in 1969 we had the [President] Eisenhower *People to People* agriculture tour. I was one chosen to go on this tour all across, well in fact the map is on the wall. We went to England, Belgium, Italy, France; we went to Russia, Czechoslovakia, and you name it, and Berlin, in Germany. That's when there was an East and West Germany. So, as I was getting ready to go, I'd helped my grandma clean house one day and she said there's a number of her sister's kids in Germany; one was a general and one was an admiral and they wanted to come to this country. Ingrid Kleppon was her name. So I said to Mom, I'm going to go on a trip to Europe with a bunch of guys – and Mary went with me – I said, What about Grandma's relation that live in Berlin? She said, I think I got that address somewhere yet; haven't seen it since before the war. So she wrote and got a response back. So on this trip we happened to be in Berlin so I said well, I'll go see them. Well, they lived just right by where the fence [Berlin Wall] was in Berlin. He had the contract for all of West Berlin's zoos that was left for feed. So he had lots of corn for feed and fertilizer for the parks. He had this twin screw Mercedes truck with a double tandem trailer. It held a hundred ton of fertilizer on a load: a hundred ton. So anyway, I thought was kind of an interesting story and I'd like to finish that story.

So at that time I was Manager of the Farmer's Elevator at Lowder. I was in Virden for twenty-eight and one-half years. We bought corn there and now today, even though maybe it shouldn't be this and not really antique, but, as a director of the elevator we'd ship hundred car trains to Hereford, Texas. That's four hundred and forty thousand bushel per load. Also I have a little farm out here and we're raising corn today. Corn prices are high. About three months ago new-crop corn for delivery this fall of '08, got to four dollars. I thought, well, you could pre-sell ahead of time, so I sold a little corn from my farm for four dollars on 2008.I It went to five dollars; I sold a little corn. It went to six dollars, and I sold a little corn, maybe not a wise move. Today on the 16th day of July, I sold some more new corn off of this farm that's not even in the ears for seven dollars and thirteen cents a bushel.

Hosea: (laughs)

Ehrat: And I started out at eight cents a bushel. And I would say this is a three dollar and seventeen cents spread in this cash corn and I'll venture there is not any time in history that you could have had a three dollar and seventeen cent spread in corn in the period of one year. That's more than the value of corn had ever been for a year, three dollars, not even the value of the corn. Now this may not be what anybody's looking for, but I'll guarantee that's got to be a story, in my opinion.

Hosea: (both chuckle)

Ehrat: Now my opinion may not be worth a damn. (both laugh)

Hosea: Now you left the farm to go help on this other farm, essentially.

Ehrat: That's right.

Hosea: And then what's your story? What happens after that with you?

Ehrat: Well, from that farm, I came back home to work and then went back again for a little bit. The army didn't take me because my eyes were too bad.

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: They didn't take me. While I was at this farm, at Danada Farm, one day they said, We're going to take this chicken house, we're going to convert it to living quarters. So we took rock sheet –you couldn't drive a nail in that rock –about a quarter inch, eighth inch rock. It was hard, just like concrete. We fixed that chicken house up and put bunk beds in there. You know what we put in there?

Hosea: What?

Ehrat: Japanese.

Hosea: (laughs)

Ehrat: From the west coast.

Hosea: Oh.

Ehrat: I can see them to this day. I can see them to this day.

Hosea: So this was an internment camp?

Ehrat: Yes, for ones off the west coast.

Hosea: Oh, I didn't realize they were in Illinois.

Ehrat: They brought a bus load. I can visualize – I wished I had a camera – I can visualize them today, getting out of the bus wondering where in the world are we at? So also as I worked on this Danada Farm I got paid seventy-five dollars a month, room and board. We were close to Wheaton. But on Friday night usually, or maybe Saturday night and maybe Sunday evening, I liked to bowl. And I set pins. So I'd set pins and I set pins at Vandalia, too, during high school once in a while. So they needed a pin setter, you had to set them by hand, you know and rack, you know.

Hosea: Yes.

Ehrat: So I made more money setting pins a couple nights a week than I did working.

Hosea: (chuckles)

Ehrat: Then after that I came home and worked on the farm until we got caught up and then I went back to the same guy and worked for him one more time. Also, maybe a point that relates to these Japanese, when I did go to the Army, I had a few German prisoners at Fort Sheridan and then when I went to the Philippines, I had Japanese prisoners help me. I worked in the medics and the hospital; they scrubbed the floor and stuff for me.

Hosea: So you did eventually get in the service?

Ehrat: Yes. But anyway, then I had Japanese prisoners. And then I'm going to tell you another story that I think is a little unusual. I got it right there in the drawer; I may show you after a bit. But the war was just over and then we sent these Japanese back home to Philippines and then I had to scrub the floor myself. And I worked in a children/maternity ward. But to get back to the Japanese. Our chief of police across the street – he came by here yesterday and he went on vacation – he wanted somebody to mow his yard. He's half Japanese, but that's OK. When I was in downtown Manila one day, me and my buddy and I seen the sign that says, Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, Army Center. I said to old Elrod, Hey, I can see that sign from here. I want to see what that sign is. It was Sunday. And here they're going to have a church dedicated, this little mission, not as big as this room. And I got the original bulletin right there. I had it just a day or two ago. I still got it; it's a dedication. And in that lists the five Japanese prisoners that helped build the bamboo walls, because they had a lot of free rein there; German's had a lot of free rein here, too, during the war. There was a lot of them had free rein. In fact, my uncle was a Provost Marshall at Fort Benning, Georgia; he was the Colonel, Provost Marshall, Fort Benning, Georgia. And he said he couldn't believe the first German prisoners that he got that came here. He said they worked like anything he'd never seen and he was a World War I; he was in the Mexican War, too.

Hosea: (both chuckle)

Ehrat: Anyhow, that's off the subject a little bit, but it's kind of a little tidbit maybe, I don't know if that would interest anybody or not. Where are we going from here?

Hosea: Now eventually you were in the service and in the war. Is that right?

Ehrat: Well, the war was just over.

Hosea: You had just completed the war. So what did you do when you came out of the service?

Ehrat: When I came out of service, my father, my grandfather when he retired, my grandpa sold him the farm, I think it was for thirty-two hundred dollars. And I got a list in them papers there of every animal, every machine that he bought.

Hosea: My word.

Ehrat: And I think in 1912, or '13 or '14. Anyhow, so my dad said: Well, I'm going to sell you boys everything I own: the tractors, or whatever it is, animals, anything, for two thousand dollars."

Hosea: Wow. Okay.

Ehrat: So we took the offer and me and my brother farmed for about two years. We farmed for '47, '48, I guess it was. Now, my brother got some bigger farm equipment and you can farm a lot more and so I wasn't married and he was married, starting a family and he seemed to think that maybe I wasn't doing as much part as I was. I was probably kind of running around just a little bit. Some days didn't show up too quick, you know. And so one day, I said, Well, I'll tell you what, if you think you can handle it yourself I'll go do something different. So as I did that, too. I got to tell that story. So I thought that's sure nice to fly. I check this GI Bill and I said, I think I'll take pilot lessons.

Hosea: Oh, my goodness.

Ehrat: So you got time to do that, you know. So I went to the airport right there and I signed up on the GI Bill to learn to fly.

Hosea: (chuckles)

Ehrat: So then I did that a little bit; I mean, not a lot. I'd fly out to the farm, look at the crops and I'd take some pictures. And you cannot believe, I said, you can see stuff up here that you can never see on the ground. I can see where we had our hedge pile, where we used to pile our hedge trees out there, posts, you can't see down there on the ground. That just kind of marveled me. And I didn't fly much, and I'd go by some of my cousins and maybe getting the cows in to milk and I'd holler down there, "Get them cows in, David." (Hosea laughs) And I'd fly down there just ground level by some of my buddies plowing on the tractor. I mean, a foot off the ground, you know, fly under the telephone lines. Sometimes that wasn't the best. One more and then I'm going to tell you a big story. One day I was up and I kind of had that little old Aeronca [single prop private plane] trimmed out and I was going to take a little drive back to the country, down to the farm. I'd drive over the farm; that's where I always drove over the farm so I could look and see. One day, I had the map in front of me and I looked up and I said, "A dirigible. I'm going to run this dirigible." Well, it was the maiden voyage of the first B36 from Chanute Field to Scott Field and they was flying at a thousand feet so everybody could see it.

Hosea: Oh, my word.

Ehrat: And all I saw was, like this. All I saw was the fuselage. I just couldn't believe it. You know, and I thought that was kind of fascinating. So anyhow, as time went by, I never knew what happened to my pilot's license. In December of '07 as a volunteer at the Abraham Lincoln Museum one day, I was visiting with a guy and I

said, “Where are you from?” He said, “I’m from Washington, DC.” A lot of times I’ll say, What do you do?” He said, “I’m with the FAA. Name is Nelson.” I said, “That’s good, that’s kind of interesting. Do you get over to the Smithsonian a lot?”, “Yeah, I got something over there in the Smithsonian.” I got to talking and I said, “By the way, one time I had a pilot’s license and I don’t know where it’s been for sixty years.” “Why”, he said, “No problem. I’ll get you a copy of it.” I said, “Oh, man that would be great.” That was last fall. I was working on something and going through some stuff and he had given me his card and so –today is Monday –it must have been two weeks ago today, I run across his card. I called him up on the phone, he answered the phone. He says, Yeah, give me your name”, and this and that. “By golly,” he says, I’ll look that up I see an Ehrat in there. It’s a Rodo Ehrat from Switzerland.” “Why” I said, “I know him, too.”

Hosea: (chuckle)

Ehrat: And then he called back and he said, “What’s your Social Security number?” Then he called back, “When were you born? I’ll have to call Oklahoma.” I said, “I’ve got to go to Springfield in a minute, if you got anymore information”, after I had given him my Social Security number and my height and what color my eyes are and how much I weighed about. He said, “I’ll call you back.” So I came back and the telephone rang and “Hey, Art, this is for you, this message.” I got it recorded on that thing. He said, “I found your pilot license. I got everything filled out. I got the envelope. I filled out the form. All you got to do is date it and sign it; I got it in the envelope. All you do is put it in the envelope, put forty-two cents on it, mail it with a two dollar check and they’ll mail your license back.” Well, I don’t have it yet, but I’ll probably get it in the next day or two.

Hosea: That’s neat.

Ehrat: So, anyhow. I’m really probably getting off the drift.

Hosea: That’s okay. So you came back and worked on the farm for a little bit with your brother.

Ehrat: Then I sold my interest out to him. Now I went to Minneapolis. My sister was a nurse and so she said to come up there. I said I’d just go to school up there. I still had some GI Bill benefits left, so I went to Minneapolis Business College for about two years.

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: I lived with my sister. She was a floor nurse. Since I was in the Army medics, I got a job right away on her floor. So then I was kind of like an orderly on the floor for the next couple of years, went to school there. After I got out of school there, my brother-in-law – well, he wasn’t my brother-in-law yet – he had a job with 3-M, but then he quit that and he went to work for Randle Awnings. You see a few those around here. He said, “I’m selling these Randle Awnings. Maybe you could work

for them maybe a little bit." So I worked for them a couple of months or something like that.

Hosea: But you ended up with Dickey John. I wanted to go there.

Ehrat: No, my wife.

Hosea: Oh, okay.

Ehrat: So we got to go down the line a little bit. So then I came down here and soon as I got here my brother-in-law, his name is Randy Albrecht –that's where our tin landed from our cyclone, in his folks' farm. In fact, I lived with them for a little while one time. He run the FS gas truck in 1939, '40 and then he got a job as the Assistant Manager at Rockford for FS Farm. Are you familiar with FS?

Hosea: Yes.

Ehrat: Farm Service. Then he got a job as Manager for Randolph County in about 1943 or '44. So when I got out in 1950, '51, he had a guy that was getting in the till that run the elevator at Baldwin, Illinois, down by Chester, Red Bud. He called me up and said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "I got a job if you want to come down and go to work for me." So I went down there and kind of run the elevator down there. We had to figure every crazy load by hand. You wrote the weight down, gross weight, tare weight, the net weight, how much a bushel; you had to multiply everything. We never had an adding machine or calculator or nothing; it was all…

Hosea: Hand figured.

Ehrat: I mean a lot of wheat. Thirty or forty thousand bushel, you know, a hundred loads a day. They got a lot of wheat down there. So I was down there a couple of years and then I played with Randy, his nephew; he was a good basketball player. He got to be a good player; he played for St. Louis U four years. He coached freshman in college for them about ten years, varsity three years. He's now coached for thirty-nine years at Merrimac College and is ready to retire, maybe in another year.

Hosea: By that time, how much was corn selling for?

Ehrat: Some of that corn still was only a dollar and something a bushel.

Hosea: Is that right?

Ehrat: My brother-in-law was a good friend of J. Ralph Turner. He was FS Manager in this county, in Carlinville. There were several people looking for managers to run the elevator. So I had a chance to go a couple of different places with my brother-in-law, but I just didn't do it. But he was a good friend of J. Ralph and he told J. Ralph, My brother-in-law probably would come up there and run the elevator here in Virden. So I came up here to run the elevator here in Virden.

Hosea: So that's the first time you came to Virden?

Ehrat: That's right, me and Ronick Walls. I had an ice cream cone with him last night. So I came to Virden and ran the elevator here and that's kind of where I met… Ronick was married to Doris and they lived right next to the elevator, right over here about four blocks. I was kind of running around with Ronick and Doris a little bit and one day there was a high school dance here in Virden. They said, Let's drive by the dance and see what is going on. And there were two gals over there, Mary and the Wainwright girl. And he said: Why don't you go dance with one of those two girls there. So that's where I met my wife at the high school dance.

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: She was working at the Marine Bank in Springfield; the old Marine Bank.

Hosea: Oh, yes.

Ehrat: I went over there and we went together there for a while. Then my dad was talking to a guy in the fertilizer business down home. We sold fertilizer and feed along with equipment. So some guy stopped by there and he said, Maybe my son would like to go to work for the fertilizer company. Well, he came to see me. I went to Macon County to work for Macon County FS from here. They were looking for somebody so I went to Macon in Decatur. I worked there a year or so and then we got married while I was working over there. And then Mary worked at Milliken Bank in Decatur. Then my dad met this guy in the fertilizer business. So we talked a little bit and he said, I'd like to hire you. So I went to work for Federal Chemical Company. (Hosea chuckles) So I worked for them for a while and that didn't happen. So I came here to Virden and went to my father-in-law out there at their farm west of town. He said: Hey, they're looking for a manager at the elevator at Lowder. That would be a good job for you. So I went over there and got that job. So I was really moving around a lot.

Hosea: So you had done a number of different things, but always something to do with farming. Seems like you'd come back to that.

Ehrat: So I went over there and interviewed with the board and they hired me and I went to work fifty years ago there. But to really go back to the early days, I would say my dad was kind of an innovator to the fact that he was the first one, he probably bought the… in 1919, I really got a lot of this stuff down in print. In 1919 he wrote the University of Illinois; he was very interested to progress in agriculture. He was interested in building the ground up, putting fertilizer on it. They didn't even have fertilizer then. And so he wrote Fred Bauer, University of Illinois, and in 1919 he come and talked. My dad said, I'll get a bunch of farmers together at Metzger's Store at Augsburg where the church was. There was a little country store there, too. And we'll talk about soil; bring some soil samples and we'll test it if it needs phosphate or limestone. And so, he did. That was in 1919. And then in about that time we sold Robin Jones phosphate by the carload. I'd unload and deliver in that

‘35 Dodge truck and I wasn’t very old; I’d drive that at eleven or twelve years old. I could load a thirty ton car and haul it to the country and drive a hundred and fifty miles a day and unload the whole car by myself, every bag.

Hosea: Goodness.

Ehrat: Hundred pound bags. We sold that. Then they had the Brownstown

Experimental Farm: I don’t have his name at the top of my head, but anyway, they went to buy an experiment farm, the University of Illinois and J. Ralph Turner. So my dad went with this professor on horse back.

Hosea: Now about what year are we right now?

Ehrat: This would have been in about 1933, ‘34, ‘35. So they went to this farm to buy this farm. There was a farm in Brownstown between St. Peter and Brownstown. I don’t know if you know where those places are.

Hosea: Um-hmm.

Ehrat: There was forty acres. It was the only colored man in the county, farmer, and forty acres. And I think they bought that for a thousand dollars, the forty acres, twenty-five dollars, house and all. But my dad went with this professor and they rode around the country on the horse. It was muddy he came on train, he helped raise the money that first forty acres, Brownstown Experiment Farm. And I think that Brownstown Experiment Farm, I tell you that was really interesting and it’s still going too, but now they’ve bought, in the mean time, there’s probably three hundred acres.

Hosea: So that Brownstown Experimental Farm is still working?

Ehrat: It’s still there. They do some stuff at the Brownstown, do experiments. They have plots out there that’s never had any fertilizer on – no type, no lime, no rock phosphate, or nothing like that. When I was a kid back in that day, even with a horse and wagon before we had this truck, my dad would buy car loads of limestone and they’d ship it to Shobonier. So we’d take the wagon and we’d take long handled shovels, not scoop shovels. The wagons down here and the car’s here and the sides is up here. So I can remember the horse a time or two, we’d scoop that out – there’s probably about thirty ton in there – we’d scoop it over the side of that and make sure it hit the wagon, and sometimes we’d spill a little on the ground. Then we’d take it about five or six miles down to the farm somewhere and we’d take that shovel and we’d just sling that limestone. Spread it by hand, you know what I mean.

Hosea: Yes.

Ehrat: Spread that stuff by hand. And then we really got modernized and we took an old Model T rear-end with the wheels on and with the drive shaft and the axle, and

build a frame like that that you could hook behind the wagon. Then the drive shaft is up there, would turn, put a plate on there, took a fifty-gallon barrel, made a bracket for it and set it on top of there and had kind of a fan around the drive shaft that would turn the barrel and you'd cut the bottom of the barrel out. So then in the back of the wagon you could throw in there and that would spin as you'd pull it behind the wagon; it was easier than throwing the damn thing out there with the shovel!

Hosea: So, it was you folks who designed that and got it going?

Ehrat: Yeah, it was just a homemade outfit. And then another design thing was when we combined. We had one of the first combines in our area, probably in 1937.

Hosea: So was this a bought combine?

Ehrat: Yes. Brand new. It was Case; we sold Case.

Hosea: It was Case so you got all the new machinery as it came out.

Ehrat: Iit was a ten foot, I think, eight or ten foot, had a motor on it, somebody had to ride up and this and that. We made enough money, and I can tell you exactly what we got for combining. I got it wrote right down here. I mean, if you want to know a couple of prices of machinery I could tell it.

Hosea: Yes, That's interesting.

Ehrat: I got some right here. You could buy a new 1938 Case C for nine hundred and ninety-five dollars. You could buy an RC Case for seven hundred and forty-seven dollars. You could buy a John Deere B for seven sixty. You could buy a small McCormick-Deering Farmall for six seventy-five, ACWCAC for eight hundred and thirty-five dollars. On rubber, the AC at eight thirty-five, they got a lot of money. They got a thousand and fifteen dollars, so the hundred eighty dollars they got for rubber tires for the tractor. John Deere A was a thousand thirty. And a Farmall F20 was a thousand dollars. Now if you wanted to buy this RC Case with a plow, is seven hundred and ninety-eight dollars. A new, two-bottom plow was eighty dollars. Then we had two gas stations. Give you the gas price in 1943. We paid, for regular gas, thirteen dollars and a half cent. Ethanol was fifteen cents a gallon, white gas was thirteen dollars and one-tenth, kerosene was ten dollars and two cents, tractor fuel was eight cents, lube oil was thirty-seven cents, oil was fifty-one cents, Sinclair was sixty-six cents. Now, we sold the white gas for fourteen and one-half cents; we made one point four cents. The regular gas we sold for fifteen, made one and one-half cents a gallon. And ethanol, we made a penny a gallon on the gas. I'm looking for a tank of that today. We thrashed. Here's a thing on thrashing. You want me to read some of this?

Hosea: Yes. Go ahead. In doing your thrashing now we're in the '30s, right?

Ehrat: Well, this is 1935, it says.

Hosea: Okay. Okay.

Ehrat: We thrashed from Red Top and we got five hundred and sixty-nine pounds from one load. That is forty bushel. Red Top didn't weigh very much per pound. So it's forty bushel and nine pounds. Now it says here we hauled on that truck ten thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds of lime rock on one load. Then for thrashing, we thrashed seventy-six bushel of oats from one load, and then we thrashed a load that made twenty-six of wheat. I'm going to tell you what we charged here. In 1937, and this combine, we paid for it in one year.

Hosea: Wow.

Ehrat: But this is our rate. We got two dollars an acre to combine in 1937. There were seventeen hundred wheat farmers in Fayette County. We got two dollars an acre and if it made over twenty bushel per acre we got six cents a bushel extra per bushel for thrashing. On oats, we got the two dollars a bushel, plus if it made forty bushel we got three cents extra. Now at this time my FFA project in 1939 was pigs. Hosea: Which is Future Farmers of America?

Ehrat: Yes, that's right. But in 1939 for my FFA project…

Hosea: In 19- what?

Ehrat: Thirty-nine.

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: In seven and one-half months old, the pig weighed 240 pounds. Now one of the supplements, proteins that we fed these pigs along with the corn – in a batch of feed we used one pound of salt, two hundred pounds of tankage, a hundred pounds of alfalfa and a hundred pounds of soy meal – that that was our mixed protein portion.

Hosea: To fatten the pigs?

Ehrat: Yeah, along with the corn.

Hosea: Did you enjoy your work on the farm? Or was this something you were hoping to get away from eventually?

Ehrat: I probably would have been better off on the farm financially, because we were kind of aggressive, you know.

Hosea: It sounds like you have a very progressive family in terms of business and so on.

Ehrat: I can give you some statistics on land. I bought land for twenty dollars an acre.

Hosea: Oh, goodness. Okay.

Ehrat: I got some ground I bought for twenty dollars an acre and they sold it the other day across the road for four thousand.

Hosea: (chuckles) That's a pretty good profit.

Ehrat: But mine is not quite as good as that; it's got some timber on it. But when I bought it, I give twenty dollars an acre for it. Well, I think basically anybody that bought land, you know, land was cheap. In the bottom of this here piece that is comparable to it, I remember I wanted my dad to buy it for ten dollars an acre and he didn't buy it. Just as a kid, you know. Every inch was farmable Maybe you got a different question to whip on me there somewhere.

Hosea: No. I just wanted to get the idea that it sounded like your family was really progressive and you enjoyed being part of that kind of business and working through that.

Ehrat: Now in here too, I'll tell you a couple of stories that's in that stuff in that bulletin. I'm going to you a couple of them at least. I don't know how much time you have.

Hosea: Got about twenty more minutes.

Ehrat: The Metzger's – that was part of the Ehrat family – the Metzger's came into this country in 1863. Now these are young. John knew his dad – what his dad was. But I remember John knew quite well. So they came here; couldn't speak no English. They went out in that neck of the country and they tried to buy some food – meat, you know – killed meat. They finally bought some. They couldn't talk sign language and it came to four dollars and, I think, eighty-five cents. So the guy said, "I got a cured ham in here; I'll cut it off for fifteen cents, that will make our… Because they had a five dollar gold piece and they were going to move into this house. So next year they planted corn, in 1864; now that's during the Civil War. They had thirty acres of corn. On August the fourteenth in 1864, it froze so hard it made the corn turn black. Corn was, I think, a dollar and twenty cents; wheat was two dollars and something – roughly what it was fifty years ago.

Hosea: My goodness.

Ehrat: But this was during the Civil War. And he tells of all the stuff that happens. It's in that back, his hand-written letter is in there. My dad's letter's in there, my Grandpa's letter is in some of this. Probably no body has read it. But there is some big history, I think kind of interesting.

Hosea: Oh, absolutely.

Ehrat: I don't know what they did with the pictures, if they took any of them. I don't know.

Hosea: We'll talk about those after the interview.

Ehrat: But also in this thing that I think is a little unique. I do have two U.S. Agriculture Patents, you know what I mean?

Hosea: Yes.

Ehrat: Along with my basketball patent that's in the Basketball Hall of Fame; it's in the Smithsonian. Now I think that's just a little bit unique.

Hosea: (chuckles) Well, we're going to do a separate interview on that. But when did you get these patents for agriculture?

Ehrat: I got them about the same time. I got them roughly in '82 and maybe '83.

Hosea: Okay so those are relatively recent.

Ehrat: Yeah. It took a long time to get them, but anyhow. I think some of that stuff there is kind of unique, you know. It didn't make me any money, but the one did kind of make me some money: the one that was a sports outfit.

Hosea: Yeah.

Ehrat: I'll tell you a little story about the grain elevator business, but that's agriculture, you know. Fifty years ago I went to work at the elevator at Lowder for maybe $175 a month, or something like that. Our total equity, net worth, was eighteen hundred and eleven dollars to the audit.

Hosea: By "ours" you mean you and your wife's …

Ehrat: No, the total equity of the Farmer's Elevator at Lowder was worth $1811 .By Rick Bile; I don't know if you ever heard of Rick Bile.

Hosea: No, I haven't.

Ehrat: He was bought out by Ernst and Ernst.

Hosea: Oh, okay. So it was an auditing firm.

Ehrat: Well, in the last ten days, within the last month we had a buyer to buy – it's a hundred and two years old – the elevator. We had a first outfit that wanted to come to buy that elevator. And, being on the board, I'm a board member, they finally offered enough money; we decided we needed to take it to the stockholders and we decided it was a sale if the stockholders voted to sell that Farmer's Elevator at Lowder. At a meeting three days ago we decided we'd take it to the stockholders; they're all being notified this week to see if they want to sell the elevator.

Hosea: Oh, yes.

Ehrat: This won't be on Channel 20 or nothing?

Hosea: (chuckles)

Ehrat: And so, anyhow, I'm not going to say the amount, but it's in the millions.

Hosea: From eighteen hundred.

Ehrat: Yes.

Hosea: That's extraordinary.

Ehrat: I think that's a kind of a little noteworthy situation. I shouldn't maybe have mentioned it, but it was on my mind.

Hosea: Just briefly, you said that you spent a long time working with one firm; was it 20 some years?

Ehrat: The elevator at Lowder. 28 1/2. I say a short 30 years. I could have quit first, but I had a bad heart attack.

Hosea: Oh, my.

Ehrat: Lost the back of my heart. And thought I better retire at 62.

Hosea: (chuckles)

Ehrat: And that's been 22 years ago.

Hosea: Well, I thank you for giving me your time, Art. We have a huge amount more to talk about.

Ehrat: But there's no doubt, I think there is some real good history in that. I don't know whether anybody tried to peek at any of it.

Hosea: Well, thank you very much. I'm going to turn this off.

Ehrat: You're welcome. I hope I haven't made a big boo-boo somewhere.

Hosea: Not at all.

Interview #2 continues

Interview #2 with Arthur Ehrat

AI-A-L-2008-029

Interview # 2: July 10, 2008
Interviewer: Newlyn Hosea

Hosea: This is Newlyn Hosea and we're continuing our interview with Art Ehrat, who we interviewed earlier. This is July 10 in the afternoon at his house. Art, we talked last time extensively about the farm and lots of stuff you did at the farm, but I know there's another part of your life that we just gave short shrift to that I think would be interesting to a lot of people. And that's the fact that over your life you've been involved in one invention in particular, but a number of other inventions, too. I'm assuming that this penchant for inventing things on the farm, that you and your family had to make do and kind of make things happen in terms of mechanics all the time?

Ehrat: That's true. When something broke, either you had to fix it, because you were a long way from somewhere, and so you have to make do for what you had. We had a forge and if we had a piece of iron and it needed to be smithed, out or a new hole poked in if the hole was busted out, on the anvil I'd turn the forge and my dad would take that iron and hammer it out and make a new hole. And we'd have a new piece made if it wasn't too complicated. You get that iron red hot, you could bend it and turn any way you want to. I would say, maybe not more so than some people, but I think my father was quite creative.

I can remember two things that he made to help in agriculture. One of them was a binder. The grain didn't want to feed into the platform, which was a canvas, that took it in. It wouldn't raise up and down long enough. So on the wood paddles that would turn, we made a U-shape out of number nine wire and we bolted it on this wood paddle that stuck out another three or four inches farther than two fingers across these paddles. Maybe in four or five feet we would have put three or four of these fingers on there so as it turned it would reach out a little further and it would have a tendency to pick it up and throw it back in to the feeder. About anything that needed to be fixed, basically we fixed it. The harness on the horses: you had your leather punches and they were riveted. We always had a box of rivets; you'd put a rivet in there and then a washer, then you'd squeeze the rivet down. You pretty much fixed everything that broke or needed fixed.

Hosea: So most of the mechanical ability you got, or inclination that way came from your work on the farm and with your dad and family?

Ehrat: Yes, I would say so. As far as I know, I didn't know anybody in our community that did the things that we did on our farm. We had people that thrashed; we had a couple people I knew that thrashed. But we had the thrashing machine, we baled hay, we filled silo, we graded road. So we were involved in a good number of things that took different types of machinery. So, consequently, you had a little broader scope, I guess, because the more machinery you got, the more breakdowns you had, and the more things you needed to be involved in to get her back running.

Hosea: When was the first time that you began to think that you had an idea that might be worth something?

Ehrat: I had several ideas, younger. I'll tell you one of my first ideas I had and never ever saw; I do remember that. Always you had to polish your shoes. You had Sunday shoes and you had everyday shoes and then you were barefooted, which was pretty common to go barefooted a lot of the time. I can remember that I thought, Well now, you got to polish your shoes. I thought, well why don't we have a machine with a buffer on that you could have your shoes on and you could stick your shoe in there. They might have had them even back then in the big cities or somewhere, but that was one of the very first things. I needed to get a machine to buff my shoes. That would save, with a rag, how you have to shine your shoes. Later on I had several ideas to try to get patents and some of them didn't work, but I could tell you about a couple of them.

Usually when there's a need, you need to make something that will make it work better. Then after you come up with an idea, always someone comes up with a better mouse trap or has another idea that makes it even better. But I think one of the first things that I ever tried to do to get a patent was for a split bearing. That was the first thing that I ventured on pretty hard. We would spray chemicals and we had a shaft that was, say, seven or eight feet long, and it had about three bearings. It had a pillow-block bearing on each end and at least one in the middle, to keep it from vibrating. Spreading fertilizer was very corrosive and consequently those bearings would go out. So the only way you could get this center pillow-block bearing out, you'd take it off and you have to take this shaft and you'd have to shine it, maybe for four or five feet, to sli-i-ide that bearing off. I thought if there was some way to you could take this split bearing, and have it slipped together, you could just take that other bearing and cut it off or torch it off and put two pieces – half and half, split bearing – and slip together. I thought that was a cat's meow.

Hosea: What date are we and how old were you?

Ehrat: Well, this is probably back in about 1960, I guess. So then I did quite a bit of tinkering around with that. I found out a year or two later that there was a company that made a split bearing, but it had an English patent in England. So that was the end of that.

Hosea: Where did you learn about patents? Who talked to you about patents, or how did you get to thinking in those terms?

Ehrat: I always was kind of interested in lots of things, I guess. But the first patent person that I saw was at the elevator. One day I was talking to a guy that had a machine shed right aside of the elevator. He came over, Ernie Rechter, and he knew that I was working on stuff. He said: I got an —idea—it had to do with a cultivator shovel. I saw in the Springfield paper where there's a patent guy and he's coming down here to see me in a day or two. I said: Man, I'd like to talk to him; that was Ralph Staubly. So that was really the first patent person that I'd ever seen. And that's a guy that I did

use for several different things. I did receive three U.S. patents and I tried on several others. I tried this split bearing, and another one that I tried to get a patent on was a Japanese patent. I always thought: Everybody drives down the road, either drinking a sodie [colloquial for soda] or a coffee. I said: Certainly would be good if we had something that would really help that situation out. What we need in your automobile, we need a holder that would hold maybe a half a dozen cans of a liquid, distilled water, or something. The top half would be a blank dummy that you could put maybe coffee in. Let's say you put coffee in a little speck there for a can, or maybe you had a spot that had tea or maybe you had a thing with a little sugar or some type of a creamer. So you had two different holders in your cup holder. One was for hot, which would be very simple to do, and the other with air conditioning – we have Freon, [a refrigerant later banned by the EPA] – you could keep one can cold. So you have a cold coffee, you could have a cold sodie or hot sodie or hot coffee or hot tea. You'd poke one of these tabs and it would filter in to the can and then you could shake it up. If you wanted a little sugar, you tip it in, but the rest of it you'd have to destroy or throw away. You'd have to have a special can with the top of it. There are several different compartments, but then it would get a little wasteful for what you didn't use. But at least you'd be able to do some of these things like that. And I thought that was a pretty darn good idea, but that didn't seem… Somebody else had a can that was close to that; whatever happened to it, I don't know.

Hosea: Tell me the story of the first patent you actually got.

Ehrat: Well, actually the first patent that was issued was the basketball patent. It was issued first.

Hosea: Okay. I've been just really anxious to ask you about that. Tell me the story of how you came up with that.

Ehrat: I know that thing quite well. (pause in recording)

Hosea: Okay, Art, we were talking about the basketball, the famous basketball break-away.When did the first idea about that come up?

Ehrat: Well, I'll tell you how that happened. It was in '75. I went to my sister's place and it was around my Dad's birthday. I think it was his 80th birthday or something. My nephew was there and he was a basketball coach. I was telling him about two other patents that I was working on, but had not really applied for. He says: You know, we have people that are bending up the rim all the time at St. Louis University. He played there four years; he coached freshman basketball, I think, for ten years there, and varsity, I think, two years. Hosea: What's his name?

Ehrat: My nephew's name is Randy Albrecht. A-l-b-r-e-c-h-t – rather German.

Hosea: A-l-b-r-

Ehrat: e-c-h-t

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: So I said what I was working on. He said:, You know, Uncle Art, at the basketball court the guys are bending the rim. Now we can't take the rim down ourselves. We have to have union iron workers to take the rim down. We have to have union iron workers to straighten it up, union people to put it back. Then they're bent up again. And, when they slam-dunk that ball through there, they're breaking the little bones in the back of their hands. So I never thought much.

So I came home that next day or that day and I went right over here to True Value [Hardware] and I got it right back in there, a twenty dollar basketball rim. Sitting right there. I never had a basketball rim – though I had five daughters that really ended up, I think, had 36 or 37 years of cheerleading. I didn't get to go to many games because it seemed like I was always working. So anyway, I came home and I bought this rim and looked at the thing out there a little bit. It wasn't long until – well that's a lot easier to make this basketball rim work, I think than the two, or especially to start out with this one patent of the fertilizer – I said it was so much simpler. So then I started on that thing. I applied for the patent in July 26, 1976 and it was issued on December 28, 1982, which is roughly six and one-half years.

Hosea: Now, just in general, can you describe what the patent was. What the actual goal was? What is it made of?

Ehrat: The main thing was that it would yield to a force, because I was under the impression that the biggest problem was that the rim was bending and they were breaking bones in their hands. It was a safety feature in this rim. It was more a safety than breaking the back board. However, in this same era, Dawkins started breaking the back board. He was a big guy and he slam-dunked the ball. They didn't yield to a force; he would break the back board and that delayed the game.

Hosea: That was on the pro level.

Ehrat: That was on the pro level. And of course, the high school or college were also doing some of that you know. Of course, the ones that got the publicity were the pros. Like in the NBA, [National Basketball Assoc.] the Commissioner called him to the office, said that he couldn't be breaking no more of those back-boards, because they had an hour delay on national television. They couldn't be having that.

Hosea: So you had a goal, and then did you have a spring in there?

Ehrat: So then I tried different springs. I went to my nephew in St. Louis, because I never had a regular rim. I had this real cheap rim, twenty dollars. These other rims that they played college and high school were much better rims. So I went to my nephew and I said, "Randy, you got any bent up rims?" "Yeah," he says, "I got three or four of them there in the closet." I said, "How about giving me one of them. I want to take it home to cut it up." So I brought the rim home, which I got right here. I cut it up and I made an extra plate. I took just a galvanized pipe, cut it into three pieces, took a solid iron rod from someplace, junk, that would fit inside this galvanized pipe, and that was

my hinge. I mean it wasn't no machine; it was nothing that was very, you know down to the thousandth of an inch or fraction. And so, that's how I made my hinge, just with an old little galvanized pipe and a three-eighths rod, or whatever it is. That's still in these. Practically all of the ones I made was just nothing very fancy there. Then I looked for springs. Well, I went to several places. Down at Greenville, Illinois, they made lots of springs for Ford – all the automobile people – for the trunk hinges and hood hinges. I mean, they made them by the **thousands.** So I went to see, and I got maybe 25 or 30 different types of hinges. But really before that, I went to a neighbor at the elevator;; he kept everything. Morris McNaught. He had a big barn. And he had everything in boxes, organized. And his son says: He's got all kinds of springs and stuff there. Well, first I thought about taking the valve spring to put in to bring it back. It seemed like most valve springs were not stiff enough, I mean for the automobile, most of the tractors. And then some of the springs I bought – the ones I got, I think, in Greenville – they weren't made with good enough steel that after you pushed them together to bring the thing back, they would lose their strength. They would stack and pretty soon you did enough times, instead of being four inches long, they'd be three and one-half inches long. They just weren't made with good enough spring steel. Now good spring steel is going to stay pretty consistent all the time. So then one day it just kind of dawned on me: Now these field cultivators that goes down through the field, they jiggle all day long, year after year after year. Of course, valve springs do too, but I didn't get one that seemed to be right and I may have found one. So I went to the John Deere store in Virden here and I bought one of them and I cut it up and basically that's what I used as the spring that returns it. So then I said: Well, we need a detent. Now, there's all kinds of detents.

Hosea: What's a detent?

Ehrat: A detent is the same thing you could have in your kitchen cabinet door. It had a little magnet in there. It would hold the door tight, but you could pull it apart and shut the door and it would stay shut. They have several different types of things that would hold tight. So I thought with this spring it would compress as the end of the basketball come down, and the more down it comes the tighter that gets, the faster it's going to come back. It wants to go back to its original state. I thought: well now we want something that's going to hold it taut until it starts to breaks loose. So then I thought: Well you need a detent in there. So I come upon this idea of a magnet. Magnets always fascinated me. In fact, they still fascinate me. We used to have them on the Fordson tractor back in the twenties. Those Fordson tractors had a U-magnet. So I found a place that sold magnets and I ordered some. This particular magnet that looked pretty good was one that they used to – and maybe they still do – to lift four by eight sheets of metal, quarter inch metal or tin; they'll hold about two hundred pounds on each end. They got a little handle on them. They're only maybe four inches long or five, and a half-inch wide, and three-quarters of an inch thick. Very small, but unbelievable. You can't hardly pull them off. You can twist them off, but you just can't on a good straight pull on a good solid thing. That's what I started on the magnets. Then it looked that was going to be a pretty good deal – this magnet here. So the patent lawyer…

Hosea: Is this the lawyer from Springfield?

Ehrat: Yes. That's right. He was a retired primary examiner in Washington, DC for I think thirty years. And he came to Springfield…

Hosea: Do you happen to remember his name?

Ehrat: Yes. Ralph Staubly. R-a-l-p-h S-t-a-u-b-l-y.

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: Now, he had two sons that were medical doctors in Springfield. One of them was. I think he had two. His wife helped him a lot. And he was a marriage counselor also.

Hosea: A patent attorney and a marriage counselor.

Ehrat: That's right. And his wife helped him. In the meanwhile his health started to get bad. But he did file the patent and then I did have a guy, MacPherson Moore,kind of took over.

Hosea: When you file a patent, as I understand it, you have to have a plan. and don't you also have to have a working model?

Ehrat: At that time you did not have to have a working model. It would be better. I had basically a working model, but I didn't send it to Washington. You know what I mean.

Hosea: Uh-huh.

Ehrat: We had a picture drawing here, which I did not like, that they used in this patent. I didn't like that, but anyhow you got to have a drawing. But it seemed to serve the purpose because when he went to Washington, he said, I got a friend out there that draws these up. It wasn't just exactly liked I hoped it would be, but it covered the thing. It's not how you sweep the floor exactly, I guess, as long as you get it done.

Hosea: Getting it done.

Ehrat: You could use a broom or a mop or a scoop shovel or whatever. It's that you get it done. So it took a long time to get this patent and we had all kinds of problems.

Hosea: Did they request more information and that kind of thing? You had to get back to them and that?

Ehrat: Yeah, they wanted to know… well what they didn't like. Basically, there were two things they did not like. In agriculture, and I think it was in an 1890 patent, that when you cultivated with horses and you were cultivating corn, on the back of that shovel there was a spring, probably six or seven inches long, with a long bolt on it. If you'd hit a root out in the field or a stone or something that shovel would flip back. As you

were riding on the seat you just took your foot and you hit it and it would just pop back up. Then you could knock it back over center. Now to tell you how that worked, almost every automobile today has the mirror. On the side of your mirror, you hit the mirror and it will go back. It doesn't break off, but it yields to that force. But you have to manually shove the mirror back to its original position. That's what you have to do with this field cultivator; you have to take your foot and push it back. And I did it myself with horses, cultivating with horses. And so, they didn't like that. By the same token, the other thing which they did in about the thirties, a German company had this mirror on the car which works as they do today: basically, they fall back. So they didn't like the guy with the cultivator because you had to shove it back and this way you had to shove it back because it had that spring on there to put it back to the normal state. So anyway those were two things they did not like at all. So we hassled over them for a long time. Staubly said they should allow those patents; it has nothing to do with car mirrors, it doesn't have nothing to do with cultivating back in 1890. He said: "They should allow that patent." Now some of this stuff would go on for a month or two; you'd have no correspondence; you didn't hear nothing. Then you'd get a letter back. When they finally denied this he said: Well, just one thing to do, you could take to a Court of Appeals. They have three other examiners that could override this man and say he is wrong. You know, they were higher echelon people, I guess, in the patent office. I said: Well we're dead in the water if we don't, I guess. He said: It's going to cost you more and more money.

Hosea: I was going to say we're getting to a little expensive process here, aren't we?

Ehrat: That's right. In fact, we really are. That wasn't as bad as comes later. (laughs)

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: But it is a money thing. Yeah, I don't remember what this Court of Appeals… I don't remember how much it was just off the top of my head. I would suppose it was a couple of thousand dollars to take it to them look at. So, I said: Well, Okay, we'll take it there. Well, they overrode Shapiro, so consequently, this makes a good patent now. I kind of put it on the same thing as going to the Supreme Court. If they say that's it, that's it. Of course, they change their mind, too. (both chuckle)

Hosea: Okay, we're at the patent appeal process.

Ehrat: That's right. So they overruled him, so consequently then it was time to issue the patent. About two or three weeks and he sent a notice that they were going to issue this patent. So then I got the patent.

Hosea: How long was that whole process from the time you applied for it until you actually got the patent.

Ehrat: Roughly six and one-half years.

Hosea: Six and one-half years.

Ehrat: So it was kind of lengthy. You know, you kind of get frustrated after a few years, you know? But now we had six and one-half years of this. Now we got fifteen more years of frustration. Six and a half was bad; the next fifteen was worse. I guess. I don't know, maybe it was worse. So at about this time when it looks like we were going to get the patent I had a couple kids in college and I said to them: Now you get to college, find out who manufactures basketballs rims. Get a list from – I can't remember the name of the book – who the manufacturers are. I don't know how many there was. So then we got this list, basically who made basketball rims. In the meantime, Staubly had left. So we had a farmer out here in the country, Roger Ladage, and he was a lawyer in St. Louis. He come to the elevator one day, and I said to him, "Do you happen to know a patent lawyer?" "Oh yeah. I know a patent lawyer down in Clayton, in St. Louis." And I said "Would you take me down there and meet the guy?" So I went to St. Louis to visit this lawyer and so we walked over to this other building in Clayton to McPherson Moore. "Yeah," he said, "I'll take your case." So after we got along with him there, with these names my kids had, we sent out registered letters with a copy of the patent to every manufacturer that we knew that had anything to do with basketball to see if we get anything. However, before this, in 1978, that's four years before this patent, at the Final Four in St. Louis, we had some slam dunk contests on this rim. By then my nephew, Randy, had been a coach at Merrimac College in St. Louis. And he, of course, knew quite a few people around St. Louis in basketball because he'd been around already for twelve or thirteen years. On the Final Four we put up these two rims at Forest Park University and so we're going to have a slam dunk – they have every year at the Final Four.

Hosea: You happen to know what year we're at?

Ehrat: This was 1978.

Hosea: 1978. Okay.

Ehrat: My wife, Mary, and my nephew Randy, wife Linda, they made the popcorn. We Somebody at the school put the rims up.

Hosea: These are hand-made rims that you…

Ehrat: Right here, right here; one of them is still right here. We put them on each end of the court for the slam-dunk for the Final Four. I don't even remember who played; Kentucky might have been one of them. But here we had all the big name people. The only one that I can tell you that absolutely was there was John Wooden. But I think Smith, Bobby Knight, and some of those were there because I was within ten foot of John Wooden. There was probably only a couple of hundred people maybe at this slam-dunk contest. There were some kids down there. As they started to shoot around and slammed the ball, John Wooden said they got to take both rims down because they're both broke, because he didn't know what the deal was. Maybe I should back up just a hair. Some of these little kids, ten years old, they were kind of running around there, and when they slam dunked the ball some of those kids would go underneath the basket and they'd look up there, you know. They knew there was

something, something the matter. (chuckles) They thought something was the matter because those kids would always, got their attention, you know. Then we had another slam-dunk contest; might have been after, for the East and West in St. Louis. We had a couple of slam-dunk contests in St. Louis. That was way before the patent was ever issued in '82. And then, too, about three days before the patent was issued…

Hosea: Back to the story. They said the rim was broken.

Ehrat: John Wooden said, "Both rims are broke."

Hosea: And then you showed them?

Ehrat: No, I didn't show them. I never told them.

Hosea: Oh, (chuckles) okay.

Ehrat: I'd like to tell John Wooden that today. In fact, and he may know it today. Then my nephew, he put up two rims at Forest Park College and they just never got bent up. He put up two as an experiment; he put them up there for a long time. I don't know how long it had been, maybe a couple of years. And they didn't get bent u. So we knew we had something pretty good. Then I bought just the ring a couple of different places. Actually, I bought some from Jarret and I bought some Shutt. The first time I bought in Litchfield, Shutt Manufacturing, from Bob Humphrey. Then I probably made twenty-six or -eight rims. And then I had a guy maybe help me a little bit, Bob Lambs over at Greenfield, they helped a little bit. Then my buddy, Bob Kopen, helped me. Then I did some myself. But we had probably roughly 27 or -8 rims that I made that were workable rims; that includes the ones I got for each one of my grandchildren, the Virden High School, the Vandalia High School and the Smithsonian, the Springfield Basketball Association. They got a Springfield one up there by the court house in Springfield – inside they got a little sports thing in there, where the county building is, right there north of the library –and one of the rims is there, and there's a few others. And then my nephew in St. Louis has got a couple of those rims.

Hosea: And you are applying at the same time to manufacturers, hoping to get them interested?

Ehrat: Well, really what happened about my thing is, in '78 at the Final Four, my nephew said, come over to the Chase Hotel; there'll be some activities over there. So I went to the Chase Hotel; this is in '78. And lo and behold, when I got to the Chase Hotel here was an outfit displaying basketball rims to sell that would yield to a force; they were, I'm not too sure, I think there were maybe two of them. One of them would snap back, which was done by the Chuck Randal and it had a shear pin in it. It had a hinge at the bottom, but it had a shear pin. And so as you put enough pressure on it – he says two hundred and twenty pounds – it would shear this pin and the rim would fall down. If you was tall enough – today it would almost hit them on the head – and a shot was made, it would almost hit them on the head if the rim falls down. So they had to take a stick or a broom and push it back up and put a new pin in. And it

seemed like there was another rim there. However, on that rim there was no patent ever; I don't think a patent was issued on that rim. So though he claims to be the inventor of the break-away rim, he had no patent.

So this is another thing that happened that I think is quite unusual. I can't tell you exactly what year that was. I should know. But in about 1982, winter, in Seattle, Washington, they had the Winter Olympics and they were the company that was furnishing the equipment. They were not licensed to me and they were using a break-away rim which, I think I'm right on this, the lawyer complained about the fact that they were infringing upon my patent, for the Olympics. I think that, consequently, they went back to the stationery rim to play on because of that. So then, after I got the patent, was the idea to license people that would manufacture this thing. And, of course, Basketball Products International was the first company I licensed to John Simon which is part of this Randall. Actually first he rented to Ely tossed back in Torrence, Kansas, make some rims for him and they he went to John Simon up in Bellingham, Washington, to make rims for him, but he was the first guy I was licensed to in 1983.

Hosea: So Basketball Products International was your first license.

Ehrat: That's right. I don't know exactly, he tried to do some things that… And then there was another guy, this Tiner in West Virginia, I think it was. He applied for a patent about a week before I did. However, I had documentation back before he could go back, you know, less than a year. So that kind of put him out so then it appears he was trying to, I'm not sure what they were trying to do. They were trying to get Simonson., BPI was trying to rule the roost a little bit; I give them an exclusive. There's an exclusive patent on the U and a non-exclusive. Then they could license to anybody that made them. But anyhow, he got into trouble here somewhere, so we withdrew that and give him a non-exclusive license. Now I could license to anybody that I wanted to. To Porter, Huffy, SureShot, Garret, Toss Back, Shutt, Indian Industry, Compton Sports, Fisher-Price. I was licensed to, I think, fifteen companies.

Hosea: So you licensed to fifteen companies to be able to use your product.

Ehrat: That's right. But now, this was over a period of the next thirteen or fourteen years. It just kind of seemed like when you got one of them licensed, somebody else was coming out with one. And nobody wants to pay you.

Hosea: So they would come out with a product, you would have to contact them and say…

Ehrat: Say,We're going to take you to court. We never did to get anybody to court and some of those lasted.I'm not too sure, I'm thinking Garret maybe the longest one. I think maybe four or five years lasted. We hassled and argued and discussed and cussed the situation until really we had got about everybody licensed that was in the business. Now there were a few of these other patents that some people had an add-on or a little bit to make a few things a little stronger.

Then in 1999, that's when the patent was up. So about a year or so before that they were coming in from China. Well, you can't beat China or Taiwan or these places coming in with these foreign patents because they don't adhere to the law and they just do as they please. When I went down to Indiana on the way to Kentucky a couple of years ago I stopped by, they have the Gorilla Goal also that they make, that used to be down at Evansville, Indiana. That's Indian Industries and I stopped in there one day and I said: You still making your basketball? "Ooh no. All rims come from China. All come from China." That kind of basically is what happened.

What I thought was kind of interesting, too, was on BPI. Now they sold some regular standard rims also. Not only break-away, standard rims, and at first, I got a list of every school that bought the rim and how many and everything like that. And really the thing that really marvels me is how many of these rims they sold to the government: to the Army and the Navy and the Marines and the aircraft carriers. I still got copies. I saved a lot of those, ones that went to aircraft carrier, maybe got ten break-away rims, and all of these army bases and different ships, aircraft carriers that had these rims, and I saved a lot. I got a lot of that type of stuff.

Hosea: Now on most of your licenses you got so much per goal that was sold?

Ehrat: Basically, that's kind of right. Basically, about half of them the license of a dozen, half of them we pretty well settled out finally for a flat fee. The other ones, six others basically, paid me a percent. If they sold for fifty dollars I'd get a percent of that or whatever the price was they sold it for. I'd get a percent of that and they would give me a list of how many they sold every quarter and you'd get a check every quarter for how many that they sold for how many dollars. Also the guy in Seattle, Washington, also had a patent about the same time and he tried to license these same companies I did. A guy by the name of Toby Dieterich; he's a professor out there in Bellingham, Washington area, but he couldn't get anything done; his patent was kind of weak. So consequently, early when I'd had six companies licensed at least, or maybe more, we had some companies that were just reneging hard, not to license. Mack Morris said: Maybe we ought to try to buy his patent, or give him something for his patent. So we did. I gave him a percent of what I got. I was assigned his patent. They were assigned over to me. It was his license, but they were assigned to me. So consequently I got his patent, two patents and they got compensation for them; that was written up.

Hosea: How do you feel about this process? Was it a frustrating process, or fun, or what?

Ehrat: Well, some of both, I guess. Frustrating when you never heard about something once in a while for months. It seemed to me that as an individual compared to these companies that are big companies, like Huffy or Porter, companies that you hear about, Huffy makes bicycles, they make everything. Spalding and some of these. It's kind of odd who owns some of these companies. Quaker Oats. You don't know who owns these companies half the time. So when you think:, Well who's down there in Virden, Illinois? He's some farm boy. Gosh sakes. It kind of reminds me of farming;

the same thing as farming. The guy says I farm a section of ground, all but ten acres. I farm six hundred and thirty acres. This guy's got ten acres here in this corner. He says, I'm going to make one extra round. Hell he can't do anything; he's a little fart over there; he ain't going to do anything about that if I get two foot over on him. That's kind of what I figure: they just think they can run over you.

Hosea: So you're always protecting your turf?

Ehrat: That's the thing that really kind of irks me; nobody wants to go by the law.

Hosea: But now as I understand, your goal has been in the basketball hall of fame, is that right?

Ehrat: I'd had one there. I've got some papers there. I had one there, this one laying right here was in there for four years. But they do have some documentation that are still there. But the Smithsonian, I think, is kind of my pride and joy. Now the City ty put this in my name on the sign in town. I don't know if you noticed when you came in or not?

Hosea: Absolutely.

Ehrat: So that turned out to be kind of unusual. I think that is kind of interesting because when my grandson went to Turkey to go in Iraq, before they went to Iraq, Turkey wouldn't let them in. So they come back. He went out to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I'd been to Washington in the Army; I was stationed at Fort George Mead, Maryland. My buddy – his name is Walter M. Elrod – we went in the same day and we came out the same day. We was just together all the time. When we were stationed there, my cousin worked at the Lutheran Service Center right across from the White House. They could sleep maybe a dozen soldiers there if you want to come down for a weekend or on a night. And they always had some activity. So since she was there, I'd call her up and say: If I come down to Washington – it was only an hour drive on the bus down to Washington – we're going to stay Saturday night. You got an extra bed lined up? She always would have that fixed up. We'd walk downtown and we'd go through the Capitol. We went to that Capitol, inside the Capitol, we'd run up to the top of the dome as high as you could go, way up in the top, more than once. Sunday morning early, just daylight. You could walk in there and not a guard. We wouldn't see a guard or nobody. We could walk right by the President's office; door wasn't, I don't think, even locked.

Hosea: Now what year are we talking now?

Ehrat: This was in '46.

Hosea: '46. Okay.

Ehrat: Anyhow we always went to the brown Smithsonian. We would look through there. We'd go to Washington Monument, Abraham Lincoln, we'd see who could run up the fastest up the Washington Monument, and we'd go up there two or three trips. We'd always go to the Smithsonian; that's where we'd always hang out. We'd look at this stuff we'd never saw before. He had hardly ever been out of the county in his life. His wife, we went to visit her years later, his wife had never been out of the county.

Hosea: So the Smithsonian always seemed big time.

Ehrat: Man, they had stuff in there that would just blow your mind. So then when we went to see my son there a few years ago with Nort Briden and he was going to go back to Iraq, and another buddy, we took out to dinner and he'd just got back. He was only home for two weeks and he's going back to Iraq in two weeks. So I told the wife: We're going to stop through Washington on our way back; we'd been to Washington before. They just had dedicated the World War II memorial. So we went over to the Smithsonian. So when I went in there I didn't realize they had twelve or thirteen more of these – they got the Air Force Museum, they got all these.

Hosea: Which museum was this?

Ehrat: The American History Museum.

Hosea: American History Museum.

Ehrat: Where the Hope diamond is. So I went in there and I said to this gal in the brown building: Where's everything at? My gosh, you don't have nothing in here. I was pretty damn ignorant, I guess. I said:, By the way, have they got any sports thing? She said they got some sports. I said: Do you have any idea of anybody in sports? She said, I'll give you a name. I guess she must have given me Ellen Roni Hughes, she's the head curator for…

Hosea: What's her first name?

Ehrat: Ellen.

Hosea: Ellen.

Ehrat: E-L-L-E-N, Ellen Roni Hughes. I think she give me her number. She's the curator. When I got home I called a couple of these people up. They're interested in inventions and innovations. She said: We're interested. We talked and she said: Send me some stuff. So I sent her a bunch of stuff. She saidshe liked that stuff and we talked a little bit. She said: We have our archivist, John Flechner; I'd like to send him out to your house. I said: Fine with me. Well, he was going to be in Springfield. I said, Well, while you're here I'll meet you at the Abraham Lincoln Museum in Springfield. He had a great big long beard and long hair and he's about ready to retire. So I said: I'll meet you at nine o'clock at the café at the museum. So I went there and I'd seen this guy was there and was wondering and I said: Are you lost or something? And he said: No I'm looking for Mr. Ehrat. I said: Here I am. So I was a

little bit put up about it. Here's a guy from Washington. Now I know a couple of those people around there and I tried to get a couple that I thought were bosses around there. I got Julie to meet him, but they had somebody else there that they were really trying to get to. I was trying to get him introduced to a couple of those people. He went through the museum with a fine-tooth comb, I'll guarantee you. I thought I got somebody from the Smithsonian, the head curator, archivist in the Smithsonian and nobody even wants to… I couldn't get nobody's attention to even meet him or say "hi" or nothing. But, anyway, that's the way life is sometimes. So then he come to my house and was here that day and the next day. And what I had – which I have lots of pictures of, went from the floor to the shelf there, boxes, like seven or eight big boxes. –

Hosea: What happened to all of your correspondence and applications and this kind of…

Ehrat: I've everything yet, probably. The patent thing is over, so the McPherson lawyer said: We're moving, we're going to a new office. What am I going to do with all this stuff? The patent's over, it's expired. I said: I guess you can mail them to me. Well I got a couple of packages, so then I got the rest of them, so then I got these boxes come by UPS and seven boxes that stood as high as that shelf as tall as I am practically. I didn't really expect to have a bill for it, (Hosea chuckles) but I got really a pretty nice bill.

Hosea: So this is the stuff you showed to the…

Ehrat: That he had it. The reason why John Flechner liked it so much, it was all lined up by category in these boxes. Every client by every name and everything was just arranged. I mean, he had his files arranged just perfect. Every one was documented and labeled.

Hosea: So that ended up in the Smithsonian?

Ehrat: So that's what Flechner liked. He could look through there and just follow that all through and that's what he really liked. But I got the same thing, too.

Hosea: Was there ever a display at the American History Museum?

Ehrat: Now they've been remodeling for the last two and one-half years, and that's how long it has been. So as soon as it got there… Now I'm convinced, according to this gal, that it will be displayed. I've got video that I've taken. But I tell you, I could go back. So when we went to Washington to deliver it, Flechner said: How am I going to get the stuff to Washington? I said, I'll deliver it; I'll just bring it to Washington. Well, he said: I'll send you a special parking pass and you can pull right in to the museum. Nobody gets to do that hardly. So I did. I videoed the entire… I got video, my wife took it, I took video in the car, inside that little parking spot that they had, wheeling this stuff on the thing, into the thing and when we got in there was all this stuff. We got in the elevator and he says: Well, we'll go up and see the head curator. So we got in the elevator with the boxes and stuff and he says: Did you bring your rim and all that stuff? Yeah. He looked on the list in the elevator. He said: I see where we're

going to have a sports show here today at the museum. So when we got up there he said to her: We got a sports show here today? She said: Yeah, I'm going to put you on there. So I said: What do you do with all this stuff? I got a video of this, too. So we go in this back room somewhere and they got all these hundreds of trophies, just of everything. People that swam the English Channel and all kinds of stuff like this, the person's shoes and the water glasses and they got Joe Lewis's boxing gloves and Max Schmelling's [both famous boxers] towel they threw in to stop the fight and Michael Jordan's ball, Wilt Chamberlain's stuff, [both famous basketball players] and they got beaucoup stuff in there. So she starts down there at some of the stuff and I said: Where you got all this? As she was going through a lot of these drawers and some Yankee Babe Ruth uniform and she starts laying this stuff on top of the table that are about yea high, about four foot, flat on top. And she started laying all this merchandise out and this is Joe Lewis's gloves and here's Michael Jordan's basketball and here's Max Schmelling's towel. I said: What are you doing? She said: This is going to be on the show. The gal that swam the English Channel had just… a hundred items, I guess.

Hosea: That will be exciting.

Ehrat: So, then she said: We're going to put you on; bring the rims at one o'clock. Be there. So in this auditorium she had this show. She was telling about all these different items, artifacts. Then she said: Now we got the inventor of the break-away basketball rim and he'll tell you about that.

I thought: What am I really going to say first. I said: Sixty years ago I used to come down to Washington, go to the Smithsonian, see all these things that some farm kid never dreamed that there ever was stuff like this. And who would have thought that sixty years later I was going to put something in here. That was my lead line. So really, I never got too many questions about the thing, but I got it all on video. The whole thing, I got it all on video. I got all her show, what she talked about, all the items, got my talk on the video, moving the stuff into the Smithsonian, it's all on there.

Hosea: Okay. You have two agricultural patents as I understand.

Ehrat: That's right.

Hosea: What's the story with those?

Ehrat: These were started in the same era of time.

Hosea: So we're talking 1960 or thereabout?

Ehrat: I'll tell you. This here patent was actually the best. There's two of them at about the same time. One of them was filed in 1980. And the other was in 1982. These two here were probably – for our country's sake – worth more than the basketball really. Though it got very little play, they were both basically kind of parallel. (cell phone rings). Got a hot call. (phone off) They kind of paralleled the same line. The problem

we had in agriculture was of spring herbicides and insecticides. So really what the thing that I thought made good sense: a man wants to come in here and he's got forty acres, let's say. He calls on the phone, he says: I would like to have forty acres herbicide put on my corn; I'm going to plant corn here; I'd like to have it sprayed. I'd say, Okay. Now his wife or he or the hired man might call and say: Where is it? Oh's it right next to the barn, right behind the house, or something. Well, since you knew him you knew where you were going to go. You go out there. Well it's got a waterway [a grass strip to prevent erosion] on this end, it got one there. Of course, ground is measured from the center of the road. You never have 40 acres hardly; either you've got 38, 39. There are some 40 acres, but then you've got a waterway on it. He never has 40 acres. He might have 41 acres, 42, 38 acres. Every time you go out there you fix up 40 acres, and you're going to spray Atrazine. So you put it in your pick-up truck. Now we started out with pick-up trucks. You could use 10n or 12 gallon of water on 40 acres; a 500 gallon tank, you could spray 40 acres. Well, now this was all did with a pump, how fast you drove. You'd go up there back and forth, but there was no way in God's green earth you could ever come out perfect. There is no way. So what you did, when you'd look at the gauge back there and say, doggone that's coming out fast. At the rate I'm going by the side gauge, I should be half done and I got quite a bit over half left in my tank. Either I've got to drive slower and let the pump pump at the same rate to empty, and then you get to the end, oh, I got a little left, I'll just make one more round. Now you got the application on twice, taking two pills for a headache, (both chuckle) you'd put on four; well, that's good for the corn. However, we have a corn-soybean rotation basically. Fifty-fifty used to be a rule of thumb. So the next year you went back and put that extra two doses on, it killed all the damn beans about. Because it wasn't compatible to the beans so next thing you kill the silly beans. The next thing was, if you have some left in your tank and you just have one unit doing this and the next guy calls up, he says I want soybeans sprayed. Well, you can't use that on the soybeans. I got twenty gallon left in my tank. What do I do with it? Well, you pull around in the lot somewhere and you pull the plug, rinse it out, drain it out and that's bad; the EPA don't like that. So after a certain period of time, I said there's got to be a better way.

Another thing, you could go to any field around here, anywhere and you say, man, that looks like the same ground. That ground can be so much different; it is day and night difference in the organic matter of that ground. The higher the organic matter, the less Atrazine you need. From that end you could use two and a half or three pounds, this end you could use one pound. I said, Now if we had a system we could check that ground, sample it and we know the little bit lower ground, (we're only talking a foot or a couple of foot of elevation in a half a mile, you know.) That ground is heavier; it takes a different application. I said if we had a color coded system, manually we could adjust the rate if we're spraying; we could open the thing and add a little bit more. My idea was to put in the main tank –we would put water, usually we sprayed with water. You could spray with fertilizer, too. But mainly basically water. So you put some tanks on the side; you put Atrazine in one, or Treflan in the next and something in another one and then in the back here you meter that into the line, because it's all liquid. Then you spray it out. You don't contaminate what's in that big tank. To get it regulated right was almost impossible back in that day. So then

when you got done at the end of the field you say:, Okay, I got a bunch of water left in these bigger trucks that hold a thousand gallon. You could blow out the line – you was injecting Atrazine in the line and spraying it – you could blow that out in a fence row where it wouldn't kill the beans next year. And the guy says, I got beans next door, I got beans across the field there. Treflan. So you meter in some off of that thing there, use the water. You don't have to go back to the elevator, you don't have to re-do it and it don't make any difference whether it's 10n acres, 20 acres or 40 acres.

Hosea: So this gave you a lot more control over what you were doing.

Ehrat: That what I wanted to do. It seems as though the people that were in this business had manufactured these: Great Northern, Springfield, and by God, there were lots of them. The only thing is, I couldn't ever get that to solve the problem. But today we're solving the problem. We got the GPS system. We've got the ground all color coded where all these different types of soils are.

Hosea: The concept is the same…

Ehrat: It just was ahead of its damn time.

Hosea: What about the other agricultural patent?

Ehrat: It was a whole lot of the same thing.

Hosea: Oh, Okay.

Ehrat: But what it basically was, I'll give you this highlight on it.

Hosea: Okay.

Ehrat: As you are spraying –let' ssay you're spraying ten gallon of water, roughly eighty pounds. Okay? You put eighty pounds on one acre; 43,560 feet. The next one, dry. You got take the dry thing in the bed and you could have containers on the side. You could spray it as it comes out, before it hits the fan thing: a system that would mix it a little bit and spray on to the fertilizer. Most fertilizers are dry. You were spreading basically, 400 pounds to the acre. Now we're putting 80 pounds to the acre of water. You'd probably get a better coverage if you could get a real fine mist on this stuff; you'd get a better coverage because you're going to have to put the fertilizer anyhow. Now you you're going to kill two birds with one stone: you're going to get the fertilizer on with the chemicals. Here you put the chemical on and then you're going to put the fertilizer on. It saved one complete application.

Hosea: Now these patents you got with less struggle than the basketball goal, but they didn't work out in terms of economics for you?

Ehrat: No. Well, I'll tell you what. It didn't seem right. What all the people wanted to do is make their booms longer. Of course, they added some other things, they wanted to

put on a bigger motor, a bigger tank. All they wanted to do is everything but correct the problem. You know what I mean?

Hosea: Uh-huh.

Ehrat: They're putting much doing this today. But now we got the GPS system, we know where you're at. We didn't do that; you'd have to do all this manually. You didn't have the satellite and all things to tell you how it's broken. Then they started coloring all these different fields. You had four fields, they made different colors, four or five different things, and that section was different ground. With the satellite you can regulate all of that. Otherwise you'd have to do it all. Okay, here's this line about right here, you'd have to look at the map.

Hosea: And I assume the computer controls them.

Ehrat: Oh, yeah, now your computer controls it; that's a horse of another game. You don't even have to drive the tractor today on some of these things, you know. You plant corn, it'll turn around and come back. If you get the best, it will just turn. You got somebody in there just in case something does happen, I guess.

Hosea: Well, thank you for sharing this process of patents. You should get a recording. Thank you very much for your time. (End of recording)