

**SAN PIERRE REVITALIZATION PROJECT**  
**ORAL HISTORY**

ST: Sarah Tannehill, interviewer

ES: Emil Smolek, interviewee

*ST: This is Sarah Tannehill for the San Pierre Revitalization Project. We're here in the home of Emil and Dorothy Smolek conducting an interview with Emil Smolek; an oral history for the San Pierre Project. It's the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2007. So Emil, could you give us your full name, please, and the names of your parents.*

ES: Emil Theodore Smolek.

*ST: Emil Theodore Smolek – you say ee-mil, not ay-mil, is that right?*

ES: Mm-hm.

*ST: And your parents' names?*

ES: My dad's name was Benny... Benjamin R. – was Rudolph Smolek. And my mother was Bessie Mildred Smolek.

*ST: Bessie, not Elizabeth...*

ES: Nope. Bessie.

*ST: And when were you born?*

ES: July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

*ST: And what position were you in your family?*

ES: I had a brother and sister that were twins. They were born in March the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1917, and I followed them, 1919.

ST: *What were their names?*

ES: Edward J. Smolek and Mildred Anna Smolek; they were twins.

ST: *So it was just the three of you.*

ES: No, I have a sister that was born in 1925, Blanche Marie Smolek.

ST: *So that was it then – four children?*

ES: That was it, mm-hm.

ST: *And where were you born?*

ES: I was born in the new house my dad and his father-in-law built; my brother and sister were born in a log cabin that my dad's parents built on the farm. And they built the house in between there, and I was born in the new house.

ST: *And what area? In this area?*

ES: Right where this house is. I had it moved and I built a new house here in '66.

ST: *So you've really taken up residence of this place!*

ES: Yes. Grandparents, parents, myself. I think 1885 is when they bought the farm.

ST: *Ah! So roots going way back on this land.*

ES: Yes.

ST: *That's very unusual these days.*

ES: I was very happy to be able to buy the home place. My dad, bein' the youngest in his family, tradition is the youngest boy got the farm, and he had to pay the other heirs off, and I was the youngest, so I ended up... the same thing happened.

ST: *And what was your family's ethnic background? Anybody immigrant?*

ES: Yes. Grandparents came from Czechoslovakia on both sides, my dad's side and my mother's side.

ST: *So full-blooded Czech.*

ES: Yes.

ST: *And you said it was your grandparents who came?*

ES: Yes, yes. When I was five, five and a half, I went to school only knowing the Czech language, didn't speak any English; teacher came home with us... the school was on the corner of our farm. My dad gave 'em an acre, and they built the school on the corner of the farm, and we walked to school and the schoolteacher walked home with us, and said, "I can't understand your children, you're going to have to do something!" She would point to different things, like if a hoe... the Bohemian was *kopat*, and a rake was a *hrábe*, and she didn't understand that. So from that time on, my parents did not speak any Czech, only English. If we talked Czech, they pretended like they weren't there. So we were forced to learn English.

ST: *Wow, tough love learning!*

ES: Tough love, mm-hm.

ST: *Do you still speak Czech?*

ES: Very little. I went with... my son went to Czechoslovakia and he took me with him, and we went to a commune farm, and the only words I could remember was like potatoes

were *brambory* and things like that. And this man that we were... that ran the commune farm... didn't understand English and I didn't understand him. But we were together about two hours, and I mentioned the word potatoes in Czech – his eyes lighted up! And he had us get in his car, and we drove and he took us to a big potato field that the farm was raising potatoes for the community, and he was really excited that I knew a word or so!

*ST: Recognition! Where were you in Prague... were you in Prague?*

*ES: We were in a town... I can't recall the name, but it was a resort town. And they had... the country had just been transferred from Russian back to the people, and the people were very poor. And they had a place where the normal workers ate... didn't know the language, so we would stand and point to – when the meals went by the register – and that's how we picked out our food. The bill was like three dollars and fifty cents, and I think there was five of us. Across the border in Germany, it would be like *four times*... beer would be like twenty cents a glass, there it was a dollar forty.*

*ST: Yeah. I think things have gone up a little bit since then, but, I know...*

*ES: I'll bet they have! [Laughter] But they were very poor and they had to do this otherwise the people would starve.*

*ST: Right. Well that must have been a fascinating trip for you, because that was your first time back there?*

*ES: It was really fascinating, especially when we went to the farm. And being a farmer, we were pretty excited to be able to talk to another farmer in another country!*

*ST: When we get into more about your work I may want to come back to that and ask you a little bit about that, if you have more to say about that experience of being on the farm there. Emil, what is your religious background?*

*ES: When we were young we were Catholic, and when I married my first wife, we got married in the church in San Pierre, and that's the church I still go to.*

*ST: Do you want to say the name of that church?*

ES: St. Luke's United Church of Christ.

*ST: So you've been going to that church for a long time.*

ES: Yes. Been president a number of times of the church board.

*ST: So you've lived in this area your whole life, and what was your education like?*

ES: I graduated high school in North Judson, and I was going to Purdue University, and I was wanting to study aeronautical engineering, and I had the year and the second year I was going, I joined the Air Corps as a cadet.

*ST: What year was that, do you recall?*

ES: 1942, February.

*ST: So that was where your education...*

ES: That's where it stopped. And I was going to continue because I wanted to be in aeronautical design – that was my idea – but my first wife was scared of airplanes, flying. And I did it during the service, and she was so afraid of flying, I said, "Well that's not a problem, I can be a farmer," and that's why I'm on the farm. Not a problem.

*ST: I see! [laughter] Very flexible!*

ES: You have to be.

*ST: Well you've shared one or two early memories of the area, going to school, speaking only Czech... are there any other early memories you can...*

ES: There's things that happened... it was during the Depression. The towns would have what they called Free Movies one night a week. And this was like gathering... there was no television; people could talk to other people. They'd go to these free movies and before it started you would socialize, and meet people, and then the fairs. They had a lot of fairs every year; they'd have a fair in each town.

ST: *And what would they consist of?*

ES: Oh, the fairs... they'd have it right down the streets, and they'd have different rides and things.

ST: *So not like sideshows, carnival things, or like that.*

ES: It's more something where you would be active... rides and things. And then they would have all of the other selling things... food and trinkets and usually guns, where you knock down animals and things like that.

ST: *So would it be also a place where people would bring things that they had made to sell, or not that so much?*

ES: They had that, but that was a different time. Back then, during that period, they were separate, and now they're starting to mingle the two together, like the 4-H, and they'd have the fair with the 4-H the same time. Then they didn't.

ST: *So the fairs you're talking about are sort of on a smaller scale, not bringing in all the selling.*

ES: No, you're talking of the 4-H part, no. They didn't have that early. This was more of a fun type, amusement type thing.

ST: *And not the competitions of 4-H.*

ES: No. Now it is, and it's been that way quite a long time, but we're talking, like, 60, 70 years.

*ST: Any other traditions in this area that you participated in. You mentioned the movies.*

*ES: When we grew up, there was no driving of cars, because you didn't have cars for the teenagers – all had bicycles. You made your own amusements, so to speak. You didn't have no television. There was no electricity, and you made your own activities, like stick hockey... or you would play ice hockey. There was a lot of things like that that you don't see too much of... people skating... where the whole area would go to a pond and you'd socialize with your neighbors and your friends.*

*ST: Was there a pond in this area?*

*ES: Yes. It was on 421. It was on the Alberding estate; they had a lake. And by the way, we farm that ground now.*

*ST: Oh really! No pond anymore!*

*ES: Yes. No more pond.*

*ST: No more skating!*

*ES: It was... it must have been 30 acres underwater. Good size!*

*ST: I suppose that had to be drained?*

*ES: They put a ditch alongside, and it's been tiled, and very productive ground now.*

*ST: So your parents, I guess, were farmers.*

*ES: Parents were farmers. My dad, he was sort of center, where the people would come. He would buy fertilizer, and they would come here and get fertilizer from him. He was like a salesman, so to speak, not like they do now with the plants... you going to the plants and getting it. They would come here and get it. They would come in to San Pierre on a train... the fertilizer would be bagged, and they would haul it to our shed, and then the*

neighbors would come and pick up whatever they needed. And butchering was done. It was done in our... we had a corn crib that had a driveway... and four or five neighbors would come, and they'd all butcher together, and hang all the meat that was butchered in the driveway.

*ST: So what period is this? Is this your childhood?*

ES: This period would be during my childhood... I'm saying 12, 14. We had a smokehouse and all the neighbors would have their hams and stuff... they'd all put 'em in our smokehouse, and I was the one that took care of the smoking of it, and keeping the wood in the fire going for smoke.

*ST: What a great thing to know how to do.*

ES: Yes. The hurricane come and picked the smokehouse up and it disappeared, we never saw it again.

*ST: It went the way of the pond, I guess.*

ES: Sort of.

*ST: So by the time you were 12, though, did that butchering, that sort of community sort of...*

ES: That was happening then.

*ST: And did it go beyond that, or was that about the end of it?*

ES: That was just at the time of electricity, just before that. Then we got electricity and people did their own.

*ST: So that was during the...*

ES: Thirties.



*ST: So that was during the Depression that you got electricity.*

*ES: Hm. I'm not sure. [To Dorothy, his wife] You remember when it was you got electricity – '36?*

*DS: We got it in '39, that's my...*

*ES: It's '36 to '38, in there someplace.*

*ST: Okay. Mid to late '30s.*

*ES: Yeah, mm-hm.*

*ST: Was that part of a works program, or was that just...*

*ES: That was the REMC. It was part of Roosevelt's... when he was president.*

*ST: Recovery. So have you ever... I'm just curious about this work thing, because you had wanted to fly – that was your original dream – and was there ever a period that you had any regrets about not pursuing that?*

*ES: The Depression. We had a drought at the same time. We had about a 20-acre field; we got 35 bushel of corn off of it, which was hardly nothing. That was when... the bad drought in this area.*

*ST: So you've lived through the Great Depression... can you talk a little bit about what you remember of that?*

*ES: We never... we never went hungry, because we raised our own food. People in the city were starving, and they would sometimes go to the country so they could get something to eat.*

*ST: You saw a lot of that?*

ES: A certain amount of it.

ST: *I remember as a child in this area, there were still men who came through on the trains and would get off, and my mom giving them a plate of food. And I'm told that that was sort of a carryover from the Depression; that there were men that just got into that way of life in that period and continued to ride the rails, basically. So is that the type of person you're talking about?*

ES: That's what I'm talking about. When you're hungry you do a lot of things.

ST: *But your family did okay then, during the Depression.*

ES: We had... we struggled. I felt that they struggled somewhat, but as far as bein' hungry, that never was a problem. They had people that went hungry, so... they shared more than they do nowadays. People shared with less fortunate... there's some of that, but not like it was back then.

ST: *Were there other people in this area that struggled more than your family did, or was it pretty much that because it was rural it was...*

ES: Rural people fared better than city people. The people at that time... they knew that they had to feed themselves, and they had the wherewithal to plan, provide... until the next year's crop, and they were what they called survivors.

ST: *So it sounds like everybody got very organized.*

ES: Much more organized than we are now. They had a tendency to pay their bills instead of putting it off, 'cause they knew if they didn't they'd lose the farm! And that is one of the things they knew best, so... that was number one, taking care of the business, which is so important today.

ST: *Still. It never stops being important.*

ES: It's getting probably more important. If you're not capable financially to handle your money, you'll have a problem now as well as back then

ST: *I guess the people that lived through that time and were aware of what was going on came out of it with a real sense of how to take care of themselves.*

ES: You have a different outlook. You have a tendency to survive now, where the people that hasn't gone through that, they may not have that surviving ability, and a lot of them suffer then. They lose property or whatever, farms, or whatever's involved.

ST: *Because they don't think in the same way.*

ES: No. We are what they call the Saving Generation. My wife, she saves everything, whether it's food, or bills, or whatever – she's a saver.

ST: *Cottage cheese containers?*

ES: [Turns to Dorothy] Is there truth in it Dorothy? [laughter]

DS: Shoes! [laughter]

ST: *So you've seen a lot of changes in your lifetime.*

ES: When I started, I started with horses – not my own! The neighbor's horses. I borrowed them when he wasn't using them, then I would help him to pay back for the use of the horses. And I had a neighbor that was a wonderful person... he wanted to see me get started, and he was willing to do this! See my dad was killed in 1931 in a car accident, and I was 12 years old at the time. But when he was farming, he had farmed with horses – everything was with horses – he had six black horses, matched teams, and he would plow or do whatever he needed with horses. And when I started, I started with horses, and then I purchased a tractor; husked corn by hand. Finally I got a one-row corn picker, and look where we are now! Twelve rows! They do as much in probably five minutes than I did [in a] 14-hour day. Plus it shelled, and mine was done in the ear, and then I had to scoop it off and put it in the corncrib.

*ST: Lots of improvements for you! [laughter]*

*ES: Ah, yes. A slight improvement, mm-hm.*

*ST: And as far as your experience of World War II, you were how old when that began?*

*ES: Well, that was '42, so I was probably 22, and I went in as a cadet in the Air Force. I became a pilot. Three years I was in training, and I ended up a B-25, 4-engine pilot.*

*ST: That sounds like a pretty fast-moving clip you were on there.*

*ES: Well, it's a long time compared to what other countries... in a year's time you were flying in other countries, where it took us three years to get this training. That's why our country put out real good pilots. Had more training, understood what they were doing more; all of this helps win the war, which was in... Second World War. I was in the South Pacific.*

*ST: Oh you were. So no time in Europe.*

*ES: No. We were in the staging area, ready to go out of Kansas to go to Europe, to the East Coast, and General Kenney from the South Pacific, friends of Roosevelt, and he begged him for B-24s, that they were going to... Japanese were getting ready to attack Australia. So Roosevelt used his powers, and our orders were changed overnight, the day we were to leave, instead of going to East Coast, we went to the West Coast, and we went to the South Pacific instead of Europe.*

*ST: What are your memories of that time?*

*ES: A lot of memories! [laughter] Longer than what you've got time for!*

*ST: [Laughter] I'm sorry about that, because I'd like to hear all of them! But share some of the highlights.*

ES: When we went in, my first flying was done in a little Piper Cub in High Point, North Carolina. They took half of a girls' college, and there were 225 of us, all with the letter S. We started training half a day flying and half a day in the classroom, 'cause we didn't know if we were going to be a fighter pilot or a bomber pilot; so we had to learn navigation and where we were going, if we were flying... if you happened to be flying by yourself. But we ended up... I ended up... in a B-24, and I had a navigator. There were ten people on board, each one havin' his own job. So my problem was flying the airplane and getting there and back. And we had a navigator, and I had a bombardier, and... so I went through service. I went from High Point to Lakeland, Florida; and then we went Bainbridge, Georgia, ended up in Indiana – my twin engine flight – and from there we were sent to B-24s, which was Nashville, Tennessee; and from there we went to Smyrna, gettin' our transition in B-24s. Learning to fly, we went to Mountain Home, picked up our crew; we trained with them three months, and then from there we went to Kansas City, and went to the South Pacific instead of Europe.

ST: *And what can you tell us about the South Pacific?*

ES: We all took our planes. We flew from California to Hawaii, and from there we went to another island; we went to Biak – and that is part of New Guinea, and that is where we ended up. And from there they sent us to our air bases, and the one they sent us to, half of us went to Australia, and the other half went to Mindanao, which is an island in the Philippines.

And we flew from there and bombed China, oil fields – got a picture up there on the wall – of the oil fields that we bombed probably six or seven times, because the Japanese needed this for their warships and their airplanes. They needed the oil real bad; that was one of our main targets. Went from Mindanao, went to Mindoro, and we ended up on Okinawa, which is an island that used to belong to the Japanese. The Marines, they captured it, and so we flew from Okinawa, still bombing places in China – all along, wherever there were big factories that was makin' war goods for the Japanese, and those oil fields I was tellin' you about, we'd do a lot of railroad – if there was terminals where the goods came, we would try to bomb those. So I ended up, I had 31 missions, and they took a crew from... a lead crew from each squadron in the 380<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group... they took 'em off of flying status, and put us into B-32s, which was a big 24 – the new 24, in

competition with the B-29; like the 17 was our... we replaced the 17, so to speak, because we could fly farther and carry bigger loads... 17 was first, and then the B-24 was another company. It ended up B-29 was with the 17, and the B-32 was like... it was a big version of the B-24. So all we did was practice bombing on the B-32, and then they dropped the atomic bomb. And so we didn't know what we were doing in the B-32, because we were taken off of bombing in the last two weeks. That's all we did. We had no idea what we were doing. In fact, you never had much of an idea what you were doing until the day it happened. They'd tell you what you gotta do, and that's what you did!

*ST: What does it feel like, to live like that?*

*ES: [Slight laughter] Actually, our lives were a lot better than the people that were fighting, like the Marines that were takin' these islands – their lives were much more miserable than ours. Sometimes the Japanese would attack our airfields, but not that often. We weren't put in the dangers of, like, the Marines or the people that were fighting to take these islands. When they were going onshore, it was a bad life.*

*ST: I guess the danger was a lot more close up for them.*

*ES: Yes! They were right in the... facing the action. Ours was to bomb and soften up and keep the enemy from supplying their troops... that was our job. See, each one had their job, and we would take off, and we would have land maybe for less than five minutes, and we would have water... we'd be a 12-hour mission; we'd see land maybe 20 minutes out of the 12 hours; the rest of the time was over water. So you had to have a good navigator.*

One time we went through a thunderstorm, and I had 24 planes, and when they came out the other side I still had 24 planes – we could not believe it! Thunderstorms are not fun. Even today, they're not fun to fly through.

*ST: And you were in the service how long?*

*ES: I went in '42 and got out in '46 – like four years.*

ST: *When you got out, were you ready to get out, or could you have...*

ES: They wanted me to stay. I was captain because I was leading group flying. They said they would make me a major if I stayed and helped to clean up what was left before they left the islands and things. I says, No, I'm ready to go home.

ST: *You were ready.*

ES: I got out, and when we got out, there were all the leaders that was flyin' in the groups, they would offer them jobs flying for Braniff or Boeing – these different companies – Continental and American. They were looking for these people to finish training and to fly their commercial airplanes.

ST: *Was that not something that interested you?*

ES: My wife was scared of flying, so that was it!

ST: *[Laughter] It was over!*

ES: I came home to the farm, and that's how I started farming.

ST: *It's just such an interesting story; I mean it was a really clear choice of a certain kind of life, or another kind of life; a real choice point.*

ES: Oh, yes. It would be completely different. I was planning originally, when I got out of the service, I was planning to go back to college and become a aeronautical engineer. I like what some of these designers of airplanes and things... it fascinated me. Even today, I still feel different people that make these designs in the airplanes... it's a fascinating thing to me! And that's what I wanted to be a part of.

ST: *Yeah. So you couldn't have been an engineer without flying?*

ES: No. There would be a certain amount of flying, but she was so afraid of this that I said, Well, I can do anything. It doesn't matter. So, one especially is [Elbert] Rutan, that man that... he designs a lot of stuff, and I like that kind of work that he was doing.

ST: *So as far as social changes, not just maybe in your own personal life, can you talk about...*

ES: Farming. In '55, they moved the schoolhouse, previous, and the community got together... this was before television was popular... or they were just starting it... we built a community center, and the ground that I got back from the school, that came back to the farm, I gave it back to the community and we built a community center on the corner where the schoolhouse was. And there they'd have, after the spring work, during the summer, and in the fall, we'd have dances and cakewalks, and community all got together, and that's how they socialized. And it was broken up when television got popular. It faded away, and maybe 20 years later television became so popular, and the children in the area got cars. They don't want to stay around their homes, so they go to these different towns; so that took care of the community center. It was called the Blue Sea Community Center.

ST: *Blue Sea. Is it still there?*

ES: No, we had to take it down because the county wanted to charge me commercial rates to leave the building there, which wasn't being used, and I says, *Well, no way*. So I had it taken down.

ST: *And I think you gave a year when we started talking about this, when the school came down and the community center went up.*

ES: The year we built the community center was in '55. The schoolhouse was maybe gone for 10 or 12 years previous. It was moved to another location. They centralized the schools in this area, and they moved that school to this other location.

ST: *And is that still there?*



ES: No. A young lad was disturbed about going to school, and he burned it!

ST: *That's an overreaction.*

ES: And he came from San Pierre! [laughter]

ST: *Did he? Are you naming names?*

ES: No, I'm not! [laughter]

ST: *When you had these dances... well, by this time I guess you had electricity, right?*

ES: Oh yes, maybe 20 years – 15, about 18 years.

ST: *Yeah. But did you have live music then?*

ES: Live music. They'd have accordion, and maybe a bass player.

ST: *Like a stand-up bass?*

ES: Yes. They'd have that, or sometimes someone would come with a concertina, and his brother, he played the drums. And my present wife's husband, he played the concertina. And I think he even played one of our dances!

DS: Yes, he did.

ES: Yes, he did. He played for our dances, yes!

ST: *Can you say the names for our tape of some of these musicians? Do you remember all of their names?*

ES: The people? One of 'em was Breitman – he played a piano-accordion, and his daughter played, and they played together. Another one was Henry Plotz – a wonderful concertina player! Probably one of the finest players I've ever heard – he played for us. And

Dorothy's husband, Mike Gundlach, he played for us. In fact, this area was known for musical talent. The Eckert family, the boys grew up... they all had cranes and dredges and things; they all played a violin or the banjo, and the wives played the piano as a bass or something with them. And after my dad got killed, my mother was so interested in children and stuff, my mother would have dances in the house that was built in 1919. She'd roll up the rugs, and live music would come – the violinists, these different neighbors that played, they'd come and play, and the children in the community always had a place to go. To this day, those children... well, they're 80 years old now, they still remember my mother having these dances, and having children's doings, and they came here on Sunday a lot, and she'd have cookies and things made for them... they still remember all this. She didn't have a husband, but the children sure loved her.

*ST: It's as though she had some kind of calling to do this thing with children.*

ES: She was a very outgoing person. When she was young and married to my dad, while he was farming, she went to Purdue – 'cause they had a lot of chickens; they had like 3,000 chickens – she went to Purdue to study diseases and things with poultry. She became known as the poultry doctor in this area. If someone had a problem, they'd bring their sick chickens over to my mother, and she'd dissect 'em and tell them what was wrong and what they'd have to do, and she was like the poultry doctor.

*ST: So she was very multifaceted!*

ES: Yes. She was very talented. But everybody... I shouldn't say everybody... the community had a lot of musical talent, and they would play for these different doings.

*ST: And what sort of music were they playing, 'cause it's sounding like the names that your giving sound like sort of central European descent.*

ES: They were all nationalities. We had German, Scottish, Bohemian... different nationalities, and they played the songs that were popular in the '40s and '50s, and '60s as time went on.

*ST: Popular here.*

ES: Popular in the country – *our* country, yes. Just like now, when I go to these... we still have these 380<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group reunions, and we don't have that many left. 'Cause when we started going there'd be four or five hundred. Now we're down to like 100, 150 of us left. 'Cause we're all in our 80s. In my crew, I only have one left out of 10, and that's my bombardier; he lives in Alabama.

ST: *And have you been doing that reunion?*

ES: The reunions? We have it every year. Last year it was Washington, D.C., this year would be, uh, in Ohio where they have the museum, Dayton; that's where the reunion will be. WE have it all over the country; we have it in New York, we have it in San Diego, Houston – there's a picture from that artist I was telling you about in Arizona... maybe I was telling her [gestures to Dorothy] [laughter]. Okay! And we go all over, Omaha, Nebraska, and different places, Florida. We were supposed to go to New Orleans the year that the...

ST: *Katrina?*

ES: Yes. So that got wiped out.

ST: *So no reunion that year?*

ES: No, no, it happened before the reunion.

ST: *It must be... well, I won't say how it must be... how is it to reconnect with those men?*

ES: Uh, it's fun to see the people that you were in the service with, that you have made friends... [END OF SIDE A]

ST: *You were saying that it's fun to see the people that you met.*

ES: We became friends with a lot of different people, and we have reunions so many different places that different people come to different reunions, so we get to see a lot of different people.

ST: *Oh, so it's not the same faces every time.*

ES: A lot of them are, but then there's another group that doesn't go to the faraway place; they'll go to one if it's close. See, I think we've only missed one reunion in what, 14 years?

DS: Oh, it's more than that. You were going...

ES: Oh, I was going before we were married, 'cause Dorothy and I got married in '93? August of '93, so we've been together in the reunions... before that I think I went to four or five.

ST: *Okay. And is that because the reunions didn't start happening until that point?*

ES: No. We didn't know about them. My bombardier... in '88... he picked up a paper in Georgia – Atlanta, Georgia paper – and he was looking through the want ads where they have cars and animals and things, and he saw this article in there: 380<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group reunion at Disneyworld. And it didn't ring a bell with him, he threw it away; and he went out and he was working on his lawn, and he was thinking, 380<sup>th</sup>... 380<sup>th</sup>, you know... that's 50 years... he says, *you know, it kinda sounds familiar*. So he digs it out, he goes to his war records, and he says, *By golly, that's us!* He calls me on the telephone – that was two weeks before the reunion – calls my navigator, and he lives in Oklahoma – called him, and he said he couldn't make it, so I says, *Well, I'll just drop everything and we'll go to it!* So, that's how we started. It was by accident that he saw this; otherwise I would have known nothing about it.

ST: *Wow! That must have been so great after all that time!*

ES: It was exciting! That was when we had almost 500 there. Through the years I think we're down to a hundred and something.

ST: *What a thrill to be able to reconnect with those folks when you've lived through such a time together. There must have been a lot of really deep bonding.*

ES: Yes! It's fascinating. Camaraderie.

ST: *Have there been, in your life, just personally, any experiences that were significant for you that you'd like to talk about... any people that were important or events?*

ES: Probably the things that changed the way that... what I did, was probably my first wife, changing from being aeronautical to being a farmer... which, I already had this farm, and I enjoyed farming, and I still farm, and I'm 88... so that shows I enjoy it. Before the boys came home, I lost my wife – my first wife – and I had decided to join this man who runs Habitat for Humanity in Georgia. We went to see him, my first wife and I, we stopped in to visit with him, and we stayed with him all afternoon, and he showed us what they were doing, and that interested me.

And so, after she died, I decided that I would rent my farm and I would go with him, and we were supposed to go to Africa to build things for the people that needed it. And he fascinated me – how he was doing with his life – and I was interested in that, and I had it all set up, well what happened? My son worked for Continental Grain, and he had two children, and he says, *I am not raising my family in the city!* They wanted him to move to New York, headquarters. And he says, *Buy me a farm; I'm gonna come home and farm.*

Well, I did, and ended up bought a couple farms; and my other son was in Florida, and he decided to come home, my son Randy. The first son was Don, and so Randy decided to come home, and so that changed my plans from goin' with him to workin' with the boys. And since that time we got... we were farming in the '80s, and then we come to '88 when we had a big drought, and my son Don had been workin' for Continental Grain – he said *There's not enough income off this because of the bad year – of the dry – and so he says, I'll work at the elevator.* And he became the manager of the Medaryville Farm Bureau.

And he stayed on, and now he had changed from there to Monterey – they were in financial trouble, so he turned them around. The Japanese firm, who he works for now, heard about it, so they hired him from them, ‘cause they were in the red. And it took him a few years, and he got them in the black. So now he’s the general manager of the ethanol division for... CGB... I’m trying to think of what it is. It’s a Japanese firm, they buy grain in this country and ship it to their country. They buy soybeans – edible soybeans – and they buy certain grades of corn. Well, they’re getting to be pretty good size. It’s Consolidated Grain and Barge, is the CGB. It came to me! And he must be with ‘em, I don’t know, 12 or 23 years, now.

*ST: And you said he was where before?*

*ES: He started... while we were farming, he started workin’ at Medaryville Farm Bureau, they were in the red, and they got turned around, and Monterey Grain Company heard about it, so they hired him from them. And then the Japanese heard about it, so he got hired, and he’s been with them ever since.*

*ST: Okay. And then Randy... you have two sons?*

*ES: I have two sons, and Randy stayed on the farm with me, and it ended up, he’s going... he used to come home two weeks out of the spring and in the fall, and help us farm. Maybe for eight years or so. And slowly, Randy and I, we took over all of the responsibilities and stuff, and we farmed together since then. We got crops... we have 1600 acres of corn and soybeans. We used to raise about 500 acres of peppermint, but there was a period in there that peppermint was... you couldn’t sell it, and we got out and we have never gotten back in to peppermint, so we just raise corn and soybeans.*

*ST: And so who buys this from you?*

*ES: We sell most of our products to the Medaryville Farm Bureau, or, south of there is another Farm Bureau that also buys... we sell them probably a third, and probably two thirds of our crops go to Medaryville.*

*ST: Can you talk about what a farm bureau is?*

ES: Farm bureau is originally started where a group of people got together and they started the farm bureau, and it caught on... probably started when the REMC [Rural Electric Membership Corporation] started. And that started... and I think they use probably the same laws as the REMC. And it's a group of people that hire someone to take care of the grain – they have a board – all the farm bureau members get together and they have a board, and then this board hires people to run the operation. And any profits made, some of it goes back to the people that sell 'em the grain. So we're like a part owner of the REMC or the farm bureau. You have a membership, and you pay your membership, and we sell our grain there, and we'll get certain percent of the profits back, because it's a non... It isn't like a business where it's run by a company and the company gets the profits. Here, the members either get the profits, or they put it back... and build a bigger grain bin or new elevator, or leg, or whatever they need.

ST: *Well, that sounds very Roosevelt.*

ES: It's like "farmer owned." And the REMC's the same way.

ST: *So it's been around for a long time.*

ES: Yes. Yes.

ST: *What a great idea!*

ES: Yep. Yes, it is a very good idea. It is something where you have a voice in, and you get enough voices, things change.

ST: *You talked about that decision and your sons coming home, and we haven't really talked about your sons too much. When were they born?*

ES: That would be a good question. Randy is 51; he'll be 52 on September 25<sup>th</sup>. And Don is 61 this year in December, so he's 60.

ST: *So big gap in between the two sons!*

ES: Don was our son; Randy was adopted. That's the problem with this heart now. He needs open heart surgery. It'll be either first part of this week, Monday or Tuesday, we don't know when. His genes from his parents, which we know nothing about.

ST: *So this is just something that he inherited from his biological family.*

ES: That, and smoking. Not good.

ST: *And so what possessed you to adopt a second child?*

ES: She had problems, and we wanted more.

ST: *And I'm curious how that worked back then, because adoption has changed a lot over the years.*

ES: Yes, it has changed. We got him when he was two weeks old, and it was through a doctor that we were going to. She helped – it was a lady doctor, Mrs. Dublin – and that's how we got him when he was so young.

ST: *But it wasn't through an agency, then.*

ES: Yes. Oh yes. The doctor was a part of the process.

ST: *Difficult?*

ES: Not really. Nope. You have your problems raising children, just like normal.

ST: *Oh, actually I was referring to the process of adoption.*

ES: The process of adoption I don't think was any... well, it probably has changed some, but I think the process is probably similar.

ST: *But you didn't have to wait a long time or anything.*



ES: We almost got two children from Wisconsin. They weren't doing nothing for us here in the state, and we had relation in Wisconsin, and this lady told us – my wife's aunt and her cousin – *why, it would be no problem gettin' children here*. So we went there, had made arrangements to get two children; our state had to okay it, they says, *No way! We'll see that you get children here!* and boom, we had children! A big surprise, because before that, nothing ever came of it.

ST: *It's the old story.*

ES: Squeaky wheel? You bet.

[TECHNICAL ISSUES WITH VIDEO RECORDER]

ST: *So can you explain your relationship with Bev?*

ES: With Bev? I married a Paulsen lady, Lorraine Paulsen, and her brother was Tom. They had five children; Art, Tom, and Harry were the boys. And Lorraine, which was my first wife, and another lady... she's still alive; we used to call her Tootie. Her name was Barbara, so to us she's Tootie. She's the only one alive. My sister's alive in my family, but of the two families, it would be Barbara, she's married.

Well, Tom... after Art got killed, Tom and Del were closer to me, because in the fall, when I had my crops done, I would take my machinery and go over and help my two brother-in-laws do their farming, because they just didn't get things together, and they were slower in what they were doing, and I'd help 'em every fall. And so they would furnish the fuel, and whatever breakage the combine had, they'd fix it.

And so, I became very good friends with them, and after Dorothy and I got married, Tom and Del became our best friends. When we got married, we went to their house and we played cards one night, and that turned out to be twice a week – or maybe three times a week in the wintertime – or at least once a week, even when we're busy, they would come to our house and play cards, or we'd go to their house. If it rained, we'd go to their house; if it didn't rain, they'd come to our house. And we played cards, and we became

best of friends. And so that's how Bev knew us so well, 'cause whenever she'd come home, we'd be there playin' cards. They'd either be at our house and she'd have to come here, or we'd be at their house, and so that's why we became such good friends with Beverly.

*ST: But your actual family relationship goes even further back than that really close relationship that developed.*

*ES: Yes, that goes back to us working together, and we were always good friends.*

*ST: It seems like there must be a lot of that kind of reciprocity that goes on among farming people.*

*ES: Yes, especially if you're close. And Tom mentioned one time, he says, "I don't know what happened to our lives before. We must have been bored to death! 'Cause we never went like this to someone's house, or they'd come to our house!" And if we'd go on vacation, they'd come and take care of our animals and stuff. And... just that we were real close. Then after Tom died, which was three years ago or more, Del, that was every Friday night was date night for Dorothy and I. We'd always go pick up Del and we'd go some place for supper. And we'd go and play cards at her house, or she'd sometimes stop here on Sunday, and we'd play cards here. So that's how we were involved with Tom and Del. And it went like that all the time since Tom had passed away.*

*ST: How do you account for your incredible vitality... youthfulness... sharpness?*

*ES: Uh, the doctor told me... that we go to now... he says, "I'll take care of you until you're 100," he says, "then you're going to be on your own." He said, "I don't know where you got your genes, but you've got good genes." I have to thank my parents. They... very industrious people – the families were. There was like 13 or 14 kids in one family, and maybe 10 or 11 in the other family. On my mother's side I think had 14, and my dad's side had 10 or 11. Very industrious people; that's where the genes come from, I guess.*

*ST: We have your father's name. Did you give your mother's maiden name?*

ES: Hulka. H-U-L-K-A, Hulka. And her family came from Czechoslovakia, just like my dad's side.

ST: *It recommends being... twice Czech! [laughter] Your constitution!*

ES: My mother... if you called her Bohemian, she didn't like that! She was from Czechoslovakia, from the Czech part. You've heard of High German and Low German? Well there was something similar in Czechoslovakia! If you were a Czech, you didn't want to be called a Bohemian or a Slovak, you wanted to be a Czech. That was also the case when we went to visit that commune farm. He was Czech, he wasn't from Slovakia. We were in the Czech part that we went to visit.

ST: *Good thing you were! I'll share just a little story related to that. When I was in the Czech Republic, probably 10 or 11 years ago, I went outside of Prague to visit a castle, Karlstejn Castle. There was a tour guide who took us around who spoke English. And it was a wonderful tour, and at the end of it he was saying goodbye to us and thanking us, and he said, "Have a nice day – but only in the Czech Republic!"*

ES: Well, there's a little bit of feeling between the two, so they separated. The Czech part is the high tech stuff, and the Slovak part – they make transmissions and heavy-duty equipment, and things like that. Because our tractor, the transmission came out of Slovakia! And the other part would be like televisions, high tech weapons, intricate...

ST: *More technological.*

ES: More technological, yes.

ST: *If I asked you to name a couple of people that had a big influence, could you?*

ES: Probably the first person, probably my mother. It's hard for me to name a man, one more than the other, because see my dad, when I was 12... and financial part, it'd probably have to be Tommy Daly, San Pierre Bank. But other than that, your life is made by people that touch you. My life, your life, all our lives are made by people that touch you. You help, and I help, shape other people's lives by touching them. Not physically, but

bein' around, your actions, your words, whatever. We shape people's lives. You don't think about it, but that's what happens. That's why we are what we are. My mother, I feel, has touched me more than most because she was by herself. She said I was hard to handle, and now my granddaughter named her last boy after me, and I told her, I said, "You do that, he's going to be hard to handle!" And she tells me that half a dozen times or more. She says, "Grandpa, you are so right!" But he is only, what is he, a year and a half, almost two? She says, "Oh, is he hard to handle!"

ST: *For the tape, can you tell the story that you mentioned earlier about when you were not quite two.*

ES: Oh the one that came to my mind that I mentioned earlier, we had a 35-foot windmill, and my dad, to climb it, had left the bottom part of the ladder so I could reach it. Well, I climbed the windmill, and I was walking around on the top platform, when my mother was calling me. I couldn't quite talk, but I'd answer with a grunt, I guess, and when she saw me up there she said she almost had a heart attack. But she remembered she'd better be calm, otherwise...

ST: *Something bad could happen.*

ES: Yes. She offered me candy.  
[A cell phone rings.]

ST: *I think that's someone's telephone... maybe Bev's.*

ES: Where do I hear that from?

ST: *It's from Bev's purse, I think. She's not inside though, she left. It'll stop eventually. But you climbed down by yourself, you said.*

ES: Climbed down. She offered me candy, and I always liked candy. That's what she said. Well, she said I didn't get any candy.

ST: *Other things awaited you. [laughter]*

ES: Uh, there was something else, yes.

*ST: So you're saying that it was your mother's influence, just sort of her presence, not something that she particularly did, or said, or taught you, but the way that she was?*

ES: Probably the way she was. That's something hard to explain, but if I had to pick one person that makes me what I am, it would have to be her. Because my dad, when I was 12, he got killed and he wasn't there to help.

*ST: To see you through your teenage years.*

ES: Yeah, probably when I needed to be takin' a man's influence. But I felt I never suffered. My mother done a wonderful job... She'd like to hear that.

*ST: Every mother would like to hear that!*

ES: Yes. But that's something that's hard to explain.

*ST: Yes. How someone is – when that's the influence, it is hard to explain.*

ES: Yes. But you look back, and you... the people that helped form what you are, it would have to be my mother.

*ST: And then you mentioned Tom Daly. Was that...*

ES: He was the bank manager at San Pierre Bank, and I would ask him different things... financial. The other people would be my neighbors that would have contact with me. The only reason I mentioned him was because of the financial part.

*ST: Yeah. I think that would be important when your father wasn't there, that there was a male figure that...*

DS: To fill in.

ES: And there's some teachers in school that would... that helped. Like the principal in school, and different teachers in school.

ST: *And you went to school where?*

ES: You were at North Judson. We didn't have a high school in Cass Township, so we could go to Medaryville, San Pierre, or North Judson, and my mother did all of her shopping in North Judson, with the exception of the San Pierre Bank, so we walked about 2 ½ miles, morning and night, to go to high school. If we went to Medaryville, they probably would have picked us up here, but she wanted us to go to Judson because this is where her main shopping area... where she did most of what she needed on the farm.

ST: *Two and a half miles... each way! Well, I'm trying to imagine a kid doing it now!*  
*[laughter]*

ES: If they don't have a care when they're a freshman or sophomore, they think the world has come to an end.

ST: *Anything you would like to leave with us, in closing this tape?*

ES: The only reason I'm farming, I just enjoy it. I do things, like with the big sprayer. It has a feeling that I had when I was flying. 'Cause you're up in the air about 12 feet... it's kind of a different... but... combining, I do the combining, and I just enjoy. And my son and I, we get along great together, and... if I wasn't farming or doing something, I'd probably be settin' in a easy chair and I'd probably be long gone. But now I got married to Dorothy, and we love to golf! Every chance we get we go on the golf course! And she likes it as well as I do. So, I guess I have to say I'm enjoying life a lot. We enjoy going out together, and whenever you see me, you see Dorothy. Somebody asked me one time, "Don't you guys ever fight?" I says, "Sure, we fight!" But we're always together.

I built her house for her and her husband. We were good friends. When I picked my first wife up for a date, she was babysitting Dorothy's boy! That's the first time I ever saw Dorothy. They lived about ¾ of a mile apart – I didn't even know she existed.

DS: Sis and I was friends all our life. We only lived about a half a mile from one place to the other, and my mom and her mom was real good friends. We stayed friends all the way through.

ES: Same ethnic background! Dorothy and Sis were good friends in school, and they just stayed good friends. When she was babysitting her children I was dating her, and through life we'd be together different places.

ST: *So there was already a real kinship there.*

ES: There was a relationship there, but you know, that never entered my mind. My wife had died ten years before Dorothy and I got married. Her husband was gone a couple years; it never came in my head I should date Dorothy. It was an accident. My son bought some land from them, and he had a ditch cleaned, and I leveled his ditch bank. And I saw Dorothy had some ditching done, and so I went and leveled that ditch bank for her. And she was up in the garage workin' under a lawnmower, so she was all greasy! So I was getting ready to leave; while I was going one direction, she ran to the house and cleaned up; then she came out and she saw who I was, and we visited, and that's how I asked her if she wanted to go to a fish fry, and it all came from there. So we've had a nice relationship ever since.

DS: But he always thought he can do everything. He said, "I'll do the ditch all the way to the..." I said, "Naw, I don't think so, because that is pretty far." He said, "Aw, it ain't that far!" It was dark, and he was...

ES: Not quite! But I got it done! It was another ditch that I didn't see that was  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile long, so I leveled that ditch before I left. But that's how we got together.

DS: He built... how many houses did you build?

ES: Probably... I built homes when I wasn't busy on the farm, and summertime and the wintertime, I built homes for different people. I built seven homes. Had to keep busy!

DS: Never idle, I'm not kiddin' ya.

ST: *I see that.*

ES: I designed houses, and then I build 'em.

ST: *So you've been doing that for how long?*

ES: Oh, I must have been doin' that for maybe 20 years... different homes for different people. I built this one, I built one for my son, and my... this other son, I redesigned their house and put a section on their house. This house, here, I designed it and my wife would look at it, and she'd [say], "No, I want to see the road. I want to see in front of the house, and I also want to see the chicken house." 'Cause we raised a lot of chickens; we'd have like 5,000 chickens. "I want to see the chicken house." So that's why the house is so open. She'd stand in the kitchen, she can see us in the living room watching television and looking out front, she can see if somebody pulls up, and she can see where she was working in the chicken house. So that's why it's designed like it is.

ST: *I just want to see how much we have left here, because...*

ES: Surely you've gone out of tape by now, wow!

ST: *Well, it's a 90-minute tape, and we're getting close, but I just remembered that I had talked about... you mentioned the farm that you visited in the Czech Republic, and that I might want to go back, because you said that was the most interesting part of your time there.*

ES: Of the trip in Europe.

ST: *Can you just say a little bit about...*

*[Angel has a technical problem that requires pausing from the interview.]*

*So... to the... the farm!*



ES: He had been... the man that ran the commune farm... he had three counties, and he furnished all the milk, the meat, everything for these three counties and the town, and then the Russian government took a certain amount of everything.

So when they were occupied by Russia for 50-some years, the people they'd taken the farms away from, most of them had passed away. And so when we were there, it was run by the Czech government – the state itself – and so the time we spent with him, he showed us their dairy operation, which, I'd say it looked like it was a quarter mile long, and it had five rows of stanchions.

And when we drove up we saw these ladies setting on the fence. There was like 12 women, young women, setting on the fence with knee boots. So we were laughin', and we were watchin' them put silage up into the bunker silo. Everything was huge! We had never seen anything so big in the dairy. He drove up in a little Fiat, the manager did. The women jumped off the fence, and they all stood in line, and he talked to them, and they all left. And we went and approached him, and he took us and showed us the dairy, and showed us the glass pipeline – everything was modern!

They had coolers, they had everything clean; it was fantastic how nice they kept it! They had spreaders – modern, power takeoff spreaders, everything. Then they had a beef herd... he showed us the beef herd. Then he happened to think about his wheat! So he went and showed us his wheat field, and they had a pile of fertilizer on a cement pad, and most of how he talked to us was through his motions, and he'd draw pictures, and that's how we commuted between each other.

You would think that we wouldn't be able to understand what he's talkin' about? Not true! We did the things that he did in *this* country, so we had a kind of a mutual language. And he showed us the fertilizer, and he showed us how short he was of the fertilizer, because the country was so poor, that he couldn't get the fertilizer. And he showed us that the grain would be better, but the potato fields that he took us to? He took us to a 60-acre field of potatoes – *fantastic!* You could tell they were good farmers, and they did a lot of manual labor. We're getting away from manual labor here because of chemicals, machinery size, different kinds of machines that we didn't have. Well, they're just getting into that. But they have the modern, glass pipeline, the modern milking equipment, same

as we had. Their problem was shortage of fertilizer. The new things that came out, like big equipment for harvesting, that has just come on in the last 20 years or so.

So we enjoyed the time together, even though we spoke... he took us to his hunting grounds. In the winter he would spend three weeks in his hunting grounds, and he showed us where he hunted deer, so I invited him to come to this country, he could stay with me! And he thought maybe he could work it in. So when I got back to this country, I wanted to make sure he would come, but I couldn't write Bohemian from English. So I tried to find someone in this area, and my neighbor... actually, he's by San Pierre, he says, "I got a daughter that lives in this town in Iowa – it's a Czech town! I'm sure she'll find someone there." His daughter was named Christine, so I called her on the phone, and I told her what I wanted to...

[END OF TAPE]