

**SAN PIERRE REVITALIZATION PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

ST: Sarah Tannehill, interviewer

JO: Joe Origer, interviewee



ST: *So we may be related—not by blood, but by marriage in some distant way—because I'm related to the Dolezals on the Tannehill side.*

JO: Oh, is that right? Now... um, there was—this goes way, way back—John Dolezal who had the large store in San Pierre, maybe by about 1900; he was my wife's father's uncle. That goes back several generations. There is a distant relationship between my wife's folks and the Dolezals of San Pierre, but it's...

ST: *Well, I know, because I've been to Prague—have you ever been to Prague, in the Czech Republic?*

JO: No, no.

ST: *I went there, and I looked up the Czech family names, and Dolezal is very common. It's everywhere.*

JO: Well, now, one of my older brothers—'course he's gone now—his work took him to Lincoln, Nebraska. And he said in Lincoln, Nebraska he looked in a telephone book, and there were 14 Dolezals.

ST: *[Laughter] Yeah! Dolezals made a big impression in this country!*

JO: Yeah. Right. Now I don't know how much you know about this. [Shows photographs.] Did you ever hear of Gehring?

ST: *Yeah, yeah. My aunt used to work for him.*

JO: Oh, is that right! Well, he's my brother-in-law. Mrs. Gehring was my wife's sister. And their son, Bob, is a Catholic priest; and he traveled to Prague, and he said he couldn't find that much about the Dolezals.

ST: *Well, I just looked in the phone book. I didn't go to look for anyone, because I didn't know which part of the family would be any relation. And anyway, I don't even have Dolezal in my name; it's like "one removed," I think.*

JO: [Laughter] In other words, you don't speak the Czech language!

ST: *No, I do not! [Laughter]*

JO: Well, I could talk all day, but you'd lose your time... When I started school—my first day of school—it was a quarter mile north of here. 'Course, my folks were European immigrants, but the majority of them were of Czech descent, and kids would speak the Czech language out there during recess, and I stood there like a dummy! [Laughter] I couldn't even speak English when I started school! We always spoke the Luxembourg language.

ST: *Is that called 'Luxembourgian' or what is that language called?*

JO: Luxembourgish. See, you're familiar probably with the country of Luxembourg—maybe, maybe not: 999 square miles.

INTERRUPTION IN RECORDING

ST: *When we finish I'm going to take a couple of photographs of you, if that's okay.*

JO: If it won't break the camera.

ST: *I think it'll be fine. You look absolutely fabulous! You must have lived a good life.*

JO: Well, I worked hard all my life, and there wasn't anything I hesitated to tackle. I graduated from high school in 1930. I had two older sisters that were on their own; they took business courses. They had local jobs. And I had another older sister who was going to the Chicago Art Institute. She became a commercial artist. And the next two boys, they had local jobs and helped at home on the farm, and my older brother Frank was four years older. When I

graduated from high school, I thought in the fall I'd go to Purdue in 1930. And he says, "Well, I've been at home helping Dad, and I'm going to Purdue this fall!" Then brother John says, "Well, if Frank's going, I'm going too!" And then an older sister's at the Art Institute, and my folks had three kids in college and the beginning of the Depression... there was no need for me to ask. So I stayed home on the farm, later got married and took over the farm, and that's... I'm still here. I have one sister living—she's two years older, and myself. The rest are all gone.

ST: Okay. I'm just going to open the recording now by saying this is Sarah Tannehill, and I'm in the home of Joseph Origer in North Judson, Indiana; and I'm interviewing Mr. Origer as part of the oral history project that is connected with San Pierre Revitalization. It's July 18th 2008. Mr. Origer, thank you so much!

JO: Sitting home by myself all the time gets old.

ST: [Laughter] So you're just doing this for the company?

JO: [Laughter] Yeah, I'm doing it for the company. [Laughter]

ST: Okay. Can I start with the questions then, and you can just feel free to tell stories as they come up.

JO: Sure! I'll give the answers as I know them. Okay.

ST: So if you could give me your full name and your date of birth.

JO: Joseph William Origer. March 29, 1914.

ST: Okay, so right before... or during World War I?

JO: Uh... yes.

ST: Just before.

JO: Yeah.

ST: And your mother's and father's names?

JO: Well, my father was John Peter Origer, and my mother was Elisabeth Barbara—her maiden name—Straus. S-T-R-A-U-S.

ST: *And was Origer the way that your name would be pronounced in the old country?*

JO: Yes.

ST: *And they were both born...*

JO: In Luxembourg. However, they did not know each other there.

ST: *When did they come to the U.S.?*

JO: My father came in 1892.

ST: *In a wave of immigrants, probably. I think there were a lot of people...*

JO: A lot of them were leaving Europe. And my mother came eight years later, 1900.

ST: *Were they about the same age?*

JO: My father was two years older than my mother, however my father left home when he was 17, and my mother was close to 20 when she left home.

ST: *Did they talk about why they left?*

JO: I asked my dad, I said, “Weren’t you afraid to leave home at 17? You had no money, you didn’t know the language, and you didn’t know anybody—and you didn’t know what you’d find here!” And he said, “I didn’t know what I would find here, but I figured it couldn’t be any worse than what I was leaving behind.”

ST: *Yeah. That’s probably what drove a lot of people... no matter how hard it looked coming here.*

JO: Right. And my mother, of course, did not know... her parents both died young, and she was almost too young to go on her own. This is a story I've got. She had an aunt who volunteered to take care of my mother. She had a saloon or a tavern in Paris. But my mother found out later, "She was not interested in taking care of me; she thought she'd get cheap help." Slick. And then this aunt of hers, every time someone came in who was a good spender—had a few dollars, or whatever money they used—she'd try to hook my mother up with him. One day a young fella came in from Luxembourg who grew up with my mother. And of course, they'd reminisce and talk about old times, and she asked the fella what he was doing now, and he says, "In so many days, I'm leaving for America." And my mother says, "I'm going, too."

ST: *That was bold!*

JO: My mom made up her mind—right now! If you'd say *wait 'til tomorrow*, "No! Right now!" So she came to America. She had an older brother here already. I think she went to live with him... [Pause. Laughter.] I don't know if you want to know all that... I don't know if there's any connection with San Pierre.

ST: *This is good information. It's more that I want to get your story, so tell me these things because this is all great background.*

JO: Well, anyhow, when my dad came to this country, he said there were always people waiting for immigrants. They knew they'd be healthy, they were young, and they wanted to work—you get cheap labor. Well, my dad was hired by the first one who approached him. He was a large vegetable farmer north of Chicago. So my dad took a job with him—fifteen dollars a month, a place to sleep, and food to eat. And he said he was working on the field with some other fellows one day, some man came across the field, introduced himself—said he was a politician looking for votes. Well, he happened to be a Republican, so... uh, my dad became a Republican! He introduced himself and they were having some political convention or a meeting; he said, "You fellows are all invited to come there. You get all the beer you can drink, and you get all the sandwiches you could eat." So naturally we went," he said, "With fifteen dollars a month, we didn't have many extra nickels for a beer!" He said, "The Democrats never offered me anything, so I don't care about the Democrats!" [Laughter]

Oh, anyhow, then, my dad—after working for this fellow for a few years, he could tell that the farmer was making money. So he decided to save his few dollars and borrow what he could, and go into the vegetable farming for himself.

ST: *Was that here?*

JO: That was Chicago—north of Chicago. And of course, that was in the late 1890s. The only time fresh vegetables were available in a store was when they were locally grown—nothing shipped in like now. And well, my dad made some money in that work also, so he wanted to buy a farm that he was renting, but it was not for sale; it was in a trust for minor children. So he went to the realtor to see if the realtor had some farm for sale. Well, the realtor happened to have *this* place for sale. ‘Course, my dad never heard of North Judson, and he asked the realtor what kind of community North Judson was. He said, “Well, there must be money here, because there’s a new \$4,000 home going up!” [Laughter]

Well, anyhow, my dad bought this and he moved out here... [Laughter]. Oh, first... Before they moved out here, there was one of the fellas was working for my dad told my dad that he should get married—then my dad wouldn’t have to work all day and then prepare his own meals! Then you’d have a wife to prepare your meals, and she’d launder your clothes, and patch them, and so on. And this fella kept on nagging my dad, and finally my dad said, “I haven’t got time to go out and look for a wife.” And this fella said he knew a girl that would make a good wife—it was his sister! [Laughter]

ST: *He must have really liked your dad to recommend his sister!*

JO: Anyhow... and it must have worked. Because I don’t know what day of the week they met, but the first Sunday they went to church together! I don’t know if you’re Catholic, or familiar with the Catholic religion...

ST: *Catholic.*

JO: After mass, they stopped at the rectory, announced their intention to marry, and the priest says, “Gee, if you’d have stopped here before mass, I could have announced the first banns.” My mother said, “I didn’t know him then yet!” [Laughter]

And then when they bought this place, of course that was in horse and buggy days. There were older buildings on here. Well, all the buildings have been replaced since then, except one we’re just keeping for keepsake. But there was no lumberyard here in North Judson to buy building material, but there was a lumberyard at San Pierre. So my dad went to San Pierre to buy

the lumber to build... first he built the barn, then the chicken coop, and the house later. In other words, San Pierre at that time must have been more on the ball than North Judson, because North Judson didn't have a lumberyard, and San Pierre did. And then the south end of the farm had some woods where the timber had been cut off but the stumps were still there, and my dad wanted to clear that. Well, they didn't have any tractors to move any of those stumps; they needed dynamite to blast 'em out. Well, San Pierre was the only place in Starke County where you could buy dynamite. So my dad went to Dolezals' in San Pierre to buy dynamite.

ST: *And they had the lumberyard, too, didn't they?*

JO: Yeah, I think later on the Dolezals had about anything. If they didn't have it, you didn't need it! [Laughter] But they had about everything. I remember when I was a teenager—of course I never had a car then—had a bicycle. The neighbor kid over here, well we grew up pretty much together. We had to have firecrackers for 4th of July, otherwise you couldn't celebrate—you couldn't buy any in North Judson, so we drove our bikes over to San Pierre to buy fireworks.

ST: *[Laughter] It was the 'go to' town for whatever you needed.*

JO: Everybody went to San Pierre. And my wife passed away in the nursing home in San Pierre.

ST: *Little Company of Mary?*

JO: Yes. I remember when that was started. Oh I could tell you a story about John Tierney.

ST: *Yes, I'd love to hear about him.*

JO: Well, my wife was getting home health care for about seven years... she had heart problems as long as I can remember. And she needed round the clock care, and I'd get ladies lined up for eight hours at a time, then I was waiting for them to come; they'd call and [say] *Oh, I can't come today... I've gotta take my granddaughter out to get her hair fixed* or something. So I had no choice, and then she suffered a stroke. And she was recovering quite well, but she still needed care, so I took her to the nursing home, hopefully that she could come back home. That's why I built the wheelchair approach here, but she never... She had another stroke and... well, she was there about six months when she passed away.

ST: *And how old was she when she died?*

JO: 85

ST: *And how long ago was that?*

JO: Uh... Almost about eight years.

ST: *That's a pretty good long life.*

JO: Oh yeah! Yeah. But she had medical problems... Well, it's a long story. In my opinion, it was a result of malpractice with the doctor. I know, kids say *well, why didn't you sue 'em?* Well, the damage was still done... it wouldn't help anything. But that was... she was a wonderful gal.

ST: *And her name was Agnes?*

JO: Yeah. And about this John Tierney—I don't know if... have you got some other questions first?

ST: *Well, I think this is as good a time as any to talk about John Tierney. You knew him, yes?*

JO: Well, do you know anything about [him]?

ST: *I have heard about him, that he deeded the land to Little Company of Mary.*

JO: Yes. From the way I heard it, he had a sister who never married either, and they lived together, but she died first. Supposedly they were retired schoolteachers, and he lived in an old home on San Pierre Road, east of San Pierre. He had money, but he did not enjoy any of it. He lived, you might say, like Ben Cartwright [*sic*]. Of course, in a small town a cashier in a bank would know the wealth of every individual, and he didn't enjoy any of the money, and he had no living relatives, so whenever he would die, tax collectors and attorneys would end up with the estate. So he was approached by some of the citizens of San Pierre that if he would donate his wealth to some charitable organization, they would take care of him as long as he lived. Well, the Little Company of Mary order of nuns, when they came in to move in with him to get started, well, the place was very run down. It needed the walls painted and it needed linoleum on the floor, so they came to Two Joes Store here in town, which was operated by my wife's brother.

They bought some linoleum and some paint, and then my brother-in-law, Joe, called me, and he said, "Could you help me install the linoleum in that house." I said, "Sure!"

So anyway, we set the date to install the linoleum, there were two or three nuns there, and it happened to be John Tierney's ninetieth birthday! And she was preparing a special dinner for him, and they had made a beautiful birthday cake. Well, he wanted boiled chicken and chicken soup, so of course, we were invited to dinner. I was 26 at that time—I was just married a month—and I thought to myself, "Gee, that man is old! 90 years old!" [Now] I'm 94 and I don't feel old! And his mind was clear as a bell. We'd ask him some things about the background, and before that, I never knew of John Tierney. And he says when Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, his body was shipped from where he was assassinated to be buried in Illinois, his hometown. And it was shipped through San Pierre. John Tierney says he was 15 then, he flipped a train and went to Lincoln's funeral. So anyway, I can say something a lot of people can't say: I had dinner with a fella who attended Abraham Lincoln's funeral!

ST: *That's pretty distinctive, yes!*

JO: [Laughter]

ST: *[Laughter] When you say he "flipped" a train, do you mean he boarded a train?*

JO: Yeah. He boarded the train. See, San Pierre had two railroads then, New York Central and Monon. I don't know... I think the body was switched from one railroad to the other... transferred there in San Pierre. I don't know which way, but that's what Tierney said. He went to Abraham Lincoln's funeral.

ST: *Wow. You know there's a book out about the Little Company of Mary; did you know that?*

JO: No, I didn't.

ST: *And I could probably get a copy for you if you're interested. There's mention in there of John Tierney, and how the Sisters came by that land, and a little bit about his background as coming from... he was from Ireland, is that right?*

JO: I would think so.

ST: *Yeah, he was actually from Ireland, and that he also had a bad cancer.*

JO: Yeah, he had skin cancer. He had bad skin cancer when I was there. See that was between Christmas and New Year, and he died the following April.

ST: *Oh, so you saw him very shortly before he died.*

JO: Yes, yes. But his mind was clear.

ST: *But the first time I heard about him I think there was someone who didn't even really know his name or what role he'd played in the town. They said that there used to be a man who lived out east of town who had almost a hole in the side of his face, he'd had such bad skin cancer. And apparently when the Sisters first came and moved into that house with him they had to do a lot of care just to take care of his medical problems.*

JO: Well, I do remember then, I think Tierney had more property than actual cash. I know they had several committees going out trying to collect cash when they put up the building... I know I got hit too, like everybody else did, but it was a good cause. And I think it was originally a nursing home, and then they changed it to a hospital. I don't know what the reason was; of course, if they wanted doctors to move into the area, the doctors' wives probably didn't approve that there was no social life there. So that didn't last long as a hospital. And then the property was sold to the Sisters of the Holy Cross at Notre Dame or St. Mary's.

ST: *Yeah. I've been out there since they took it over and talked with one of the Sisters a few years ago.*

JO: I don't believe there are any Sisters left there.

ST: *No. It's shut down, as far as I know right now.*

JO: That's right. That's too bad.

ST: *It is. And I think they're looking at what can be done with that building... how it can be utilized... because it's a tremendous asset!*

JO: Yes, it is. I know when my wife was there for several months it was not a cheap place to live! And, of course, I'm on Medicare, and I have an AARP Supplement; and when I bought the supplement, I didn't know what I was buying. They had different premiums and different coverages, and I figured I'd take something about halfway in-between... I didn't even know what coverage I had! And I had some income, and I figured something that would give me enough income to make up the difference... I forgot what I was going to tell you now.

Anyhow, when Agnes went, of course they wanted to know what my income was or insurance. Well, I had Social Security and some rent from the farm, and then I thought I'd better take some coverage for myself also. Well, I applied for some [inaudible], but she had it with her supplement! I wasn't aware of that! The fact is, the supplement for Medicare? AARP paid more than the nursing home cost! But they don't sell that policy anymore. Agnes had it, and I applied for it a couple places, and I couldn't get any coverage.

ST: *And that's like a long-term care coverage?*

JO: Yes. At that time I think it was about \$150 a day, plus your medication, so there aren't many people that could afford that, besides their own living expenses. And then this Little Company of Mary took it over. Some place in Michigan owns it now. I don't think Little Company of Mary is involved in it any more.

ST: *Shall we look at some more questions?*

JO: Yeah, what else?

ST: *Okay. I know that you told me this before we started recording, but could you give me your brothers' and sisters' names?*

JO: Oh yes. My oldest sister was Anna, or Ann, and... oh, golly... would you want to know when she was born?

ST: *You don't need to give me that, just there names and birth order.*

JO: Anna, and second daughter was Alice; and then a son, John; and Frank; Dorothy; then myself; Alma, and Emil. My sister Dorothy and I are the only two living.

ST: Wow! And how many was that? I lost count.

JO: There were eight kids, four boys and four girls.

ST: Big family! And you must have been born at home.

JO: Yes! I was born in that large house there [gesturing]; I don't know if you can see much of the house...

ST: Well, I think I saw it coming in.

JO: Okay. Anyway, my folks built that—or had it built—in 1913 in the year before I was born, and of course that's where I grew up. And when it was decided that I would stay on the farm and was getting married... we built this home. My folks were still living then, and of course that house is a problem now... I'll give it to you if you want it!

ST: [Laughter] Why is it a problem?

JO: Well, I don't want an outsider living there. That was built in connection with all the farm machinery and all that. I did have it rented out for a while.

I was on the school board here for eight years, and we hired a new principal, and he could not find a place to live. Of course, this was vacant then, so we wanted to get a place for him to live, and so I offered that he could move in here. Well, he had three kids, two pre-school age and one in school, and I still had my dairy herd, and they were into everything all the time, and you know how kids are. And after he left Judson, I rented it out again to someone, and of course it had oil heat. And I know once in a while, the furnace did not kick in when it should. It didn't take much but... some little gadget. But when they left over Christmas vacation—and if he'd have mentioned that to me, I'd have kept an eye on the furnace. And it got below zero temperature, and the furnace didn't kick in, everything froze up and all the water lines. So I never rented it out after that, and it's been vacant. I had a new roof put on, it needs another one now, and I don't care to rent it out to anybody. I don't want to go into the real estate business.

ST: And you don't want to sell it?

JO: I'll give it away!

ST: *You just want somebody to take it off your hands!*

JO: Right, right. I want it *moved*, you know. Now, there are several people that want it moved. There are building sites available in any direction, but it costs money. If they had the money they'd take it. So I may have it dozed down one of these days.

ST: *Oh! That breaks my heart!*

JO: Well, there are a lot of memories there. That's a Sears house... so is this.

ST: *So were a lot of farmhouses back then Sears houses?*

JO: Uh, I know of only one about three miles east of here. I don't know why, but they're not prefabs. They're top quality. The only difference is, the dimension lumber was already cut and marked.

ST: *There was somebody I interviewed in San Pierre who said that their home was a Sears home... Well, I'll see if I come across anybody who has some property and they're missing a house... and they're not destitute!*

JO: I have the list of all the building material for that house. Do you know what? Maybe you won't believe me, all the building material—eight-room house—all the building material with paint and varnish for inside and outside, all the finished lumber, everything: \$970. Freight paid to North Judson. And of course that had indoor plumbing then, and of course there was no electricity in the area then. We had to pump the water by hand, and by gravity build the pressure. My dad said that when he went to the freight depot in North Judson to get the house—it was in two boxcars—the depot agent, when he was carrying out the bathroom fixtures, he said, “What are those things?” They didn't have indoor plumbing in town! He said, “What are those things?” [Laughter]

ST: *Hadn't seen it! [Laughter] So all of you were probably born in that house?*

JO: The oldest ones were born in Chicago before my dad bought it.

ST: *That's right, because you were one of the last ones. So he moved here from Chicago...*

JO: He bought this place in 1904, and then my mom and dad decided that *Since we never had a honeymoon celebration, let's make a trip back to Luxembourg.* So they went back to Luxembourg. But my mother said that she did not enjoy it because she had two small children, and anyplace you wanted to go, you had to walk. And my mother did not know my dad's relatives over there, and her relatives were dead, and she had one sister—she was married to a drunk; so she didn't enjoy it... she said it was two weeks going over to Luxembourg, two weeks over there, and two weeks coming back. She said the happiest day was when she came home.

ST: *Was that the last time they went back?*

JO: Yes.

ST: *And so your father got into farming... how did he know about farming? Had he done that in Luxembourg?*

JO: Well, yes. In Luxembourg it's a different set-up... not only Luxembourg, but I think most of the western countries in Europe... the land originally was deeded, went to homesteaders, suppose you were deeded a hundred acres. Well, you did the best you could; you made a living on it, and when you died you had the hundred acres—you didn't have any money, but maybe you raised four kids. Well, then each child got 25 acres, that's the way you split up the estate. Well, then when those [four] children got married, they married [four] from another village, so my dad said they're farming over there... they had a little over 100 acres, but it was in about 75 different places. But they lived in the village, and they had their cattle in the village. Then if each one got a few acres, when their kids got married, then they split them up again, he said the fields got smaller all the time. Then before I went over there... before I ever dreamt that I'd ever visit over there, I says, "Did you use tractors or horses or oxen?" And my dad says, "Some of the fields weren't large enough to park a tractor!" [Laughter]

ST: *[Laughter] More of a garden.*

JO: A garden! [Laughter] But anyway, then when my dad came here, he put up a new building and kept livestock. My mom and dad... I said, *they did well.* There was nothing inherited, but they did well. Of course, anybody who bought land and knew how to handle it...

ST: *So they did farming for their whole lives.*

JO: Oh yeah, yeah. [Laughter] I'll have to tell you a little more. I don't know if I'm wastin' your time.

ST: *No, you're not!*

JO: My dad grew some vegetables here and trucked some and shipped some to the Chicago market, because season-wise, the vegetables that came to the farmer's market in Chicago were grown about 25 miles north of Chicago, and we were about 85 miles south of Chicago—it was about 10 days to two weeks difference *season-wise*! We could get 'em to the market earlier! And since there was nothing shipped in otherwise, my dad got the idea that we'd grow vegetables here and we'll truck them to Chicago. Well, for the first couple of weeks, we'd get a fabulous price; then when the other farmers' crops came in, it was cheaper, see? I can remember my dad—I don't know if I can remember or if I've just heard the story so many times—my dad shipped a carload of carrots [inaudible] on consignment. That, again, was carrots, and we kids weeded them in the summertime, pulled them in the fall, and buried them in a pit, and covered them so they wouldn't freeze until spring. And then we'd ship them to Chicago.

Those carrots were grown to feed as a tonic to horses, because there were no trucks then yet. Everything was hauled by horses, and the carrots were fed in the spring as a tonic to horses. Anyway, he shipped a carload of carrots on consignment, then he'd get his check in the mail, and he generally knew—had an idea—what he'd get for them, and they'd take their commission out. Anyway, my dad got more money than what he thought he would get, so naturally he was happy. And then my mom said to my dad, “Since you've got some extra money now, why don't you go to town and buy a new carriage?” So that was in 1917, so my dad went to town to buy a new carriage, but he came back with a new Model T Ford!

ST: *Oh, wow! How did your mom take that?*

JO: Oh, well! Every Sunday we'd go out for a ride. Of course, she says, “We never got anyplace!” It was wonderful—\$375 for a new car!

ST: *Isn't that amazing! When did Model Ts first come out—do you know what year?*

JO: Uh, not exactly, but it was several years before. Oh, probably... of course there were not many sold then, because \$375 was a lot of money.

ST: *Right. So was it here in North Judson that he bought it?*

JO: Oh yes, yeah. North Judson. [JO gets up to retrieve a picture.] There's the Model T!

ST: *That is a great photograph! And these are you all... you children?*

JO: That is me, here. I was perhaps... oh, this car was probably not even a year old at that time.

ST: *And is this your father?*

JO: No, this was a fella who grew up... he happened to be visiting here. This is my dad. My mother's not on there... she might've... my youngest brother, who isn't living anymore isn't on there either. She might've been in the house with the baby! [Laughter]

ST: *Or maybe taking the picture?*

JO: Maybe, maybe! I don't know.

ST: *Good lookin' kids!*

JO: [Laughter] Oh, thank you!

ST: *Really good lookin' kids... So where did you go to school?*

JO: Uh, Brantwood School. It was a quarter-mile east of here. And they had rooms for grades 1 to 8. I could tell you history about that.

See, at that time, the school corporation in the town of North Judson was separate from the township. In other words, if a kid from the township—like my older brothers—if they wanted to go to high school, the township had to pay transfer tuition to the town, and they had to walk—there was no transportation! My older brothers—when they went to high school—they walked every day.

And my dad wanted to get the schools to consolidate, so the country kids could get an education, too, but he had a lot of opposition. They were not education-involved, but a neighbor—see, that one-room schoolhouse had a pot-bellied stove for wintertime—their boys got a few dollars a month in the wintertime to light the stove, and the mother got maybe five dollars to mop up the floor for the first day of school. A neighbor lived about a mile west, he had a daughter growing up—he hoped that she could become a teacher in this school, so they were all voting *against* consolidation.

There was one fellow, Clair Campbell—he lived a mile west of Judson on 10—fact is, where his farm was at that time, it's school property now. So he was for consolidation, so they had a referendum to vote for consolidation. My dad, naturally, went down to vote, and Clair was there, then my dad says, "Clair, did you vote already?" He says, "No, they won't let me vote!" He says, "Why not?" And at that time, you had to be 21 to vote. He says, "I won't be 21 'til tomorrow." So my dad says, "You're sure you'll be 21 tomorrow—well, they'll have to let you vote today. Your birthday is the first day of your 22nd year!" They both got attorneys down; they had to get the judge to come down from Knox to settle the argument!

ST: *Oh, what a smart guy he was to figure that out!*

JO: Well, he was no fool, I'm tellin' you. He says, "You don't have to live that day twice. That's the first day of your 22nd year!"

ST: *So that's where you went to school... starting out?*

JO: Yes, I went to school there first year, second year, and the fourth year. I never was in the third grade. In the second grade, there were two other kids besides myself, and they missed more school than they attended, so the teacher had to fail them, they didn't learn anything. And the teacher approached my folks and said if she'd promote me to the third grade, I'd be the only one in the third grade. And [my dad] says, "Joe knows enough, he can handle the fourth grade. There isn't that much difference." So she put me from the second grade to the fourth grade.

ST: *So you must have graduated early, too.*

JO: Yeah. I started school when I was five, so I was... well, I had just turned 16 when I graduated. I was by far the youngest one in our class.

ST: *Was that ever a problem?*

JO: No. No, no, no.

ST: *And so, you had told me that when you started school, you were only speaking the Luxembourgish language at home... so did you know any English?*

JO: Apparently not, because when I came to school, the teacher—of course she knew who I was, I had an older brother and sister in school—she said something to me in English, [and] I didn't know what she was talking about. I turned around and I wanted to run back home. Then my sister came and got me back. I must have learned it somewhere along the line. I don't remember, but the first day of school I didn't know English.

ST: *Do you still remember Luxembourgish?*

JO: Well, I tell you, the first time I went to Luxembourg, my dad's youngest brother stayed in Luxembourg, and he raised his family there. And my youngest daughter, she joined the Air Force, and she traveled quite a bit, so she looked up my relatives in Luxembourg, and she visited them and corresponded, and made plans so we would travel over there. And I figured, good. And we landed at the Luxembourg Airport, and my cousin's daughter met us—'cause she spoke English, too. She went to college in England. And I figured, well, I'll get a chance to speak Luxembourg again, [but] I couldn't get a sentence put together. I could understand them, but they had to speak slowly.

ST: *Yeah. It's interesting, because you probably had to make that choice as a child—to just focus on the English. And it takes a real effort between parents and children to try and promote two languages—that's tough!*

JO: Yeah. Of course, when my folks first moved out here, they had no car—my mother was home all the time! My dad got out once in awhile, to town, or maybe to the county seat. And they subscribed to the Chicago Tribune, first thing, and they... you know, to learn the language.

ST: *Because there was no television then, either.*

JO: No! And no radio.

ST: *And that's how a lot of immigrants now learn the language—from television or radio. But if you're isolated, it's tough!*

JO: That's right.

ST: *So, just out of curiosity, what language is Luxembourgish related to? Is it Germanic? Or is it a Romance language?*

JO: Well, I'll tell you. My dad says the Luxembourg language is not *written*, it's *spoken*. And he says all official documents in Luxembourg are in French. And he said in school, half the day everything was German, and the other half, everything was French. So, when you got out of school, you knew the Luxembourg language from home, and you could speak German and French. And I know, then when my mom worked in Paris for several years, and of course she had the French in school, and, well, my only sister that's still living in Manteno, Illinois, she married a Luxembourg immigrant, and the first time she brought him out here before they were married—'cause he could speak French—then my mom said, "Boy, I'll be anxious to meet him. Then I can speak French again." She couldn't get a French sentence... [Laughter]

ST: *[Laughter] And you really don't know until you try!*

JO: That's right! You think you know it.

ST: *This is interesting to me, because I'm studying linguistics right now. So it's very interesting that they come from this background where there were two languages in school and one at home, and that one of them is not a literate language, it's just a spoken language.*

Well, when you were a child, I'm sure you had chores to do at home.

JO: Oh, yeah. Well, see my folks always had a small dairy herd; we had chickens, and some pigs; and grew all the feed for them. It cost a little more to sell, and of course at that time we did not have any electricity. Every morning before I walked to school here, it was my job to pump the water for the cows to drink. See, they were kept in the barn overnight, but they were let out twice a day during the winter months to drink. And I knew just about how many strokes it took to fill that trough, and I thought to myself, *Aren't those darn things ever gonna get enough water?* And of course, the furnace was a coal-fired furnace. Later on we had a conversion burner put in. But in the kitchen, my mom had the woodburning range. We'd have to get some wood

split and bring it in. Then later on my mom got a bottled gas. My dad had a Delco light plant—his only electric plant—put in in 1925. So then we had running water and electric washing machine... lights.

ST: And in those days would that have been a washing machine with a wringer?

JO: Yes. It would still work.

ST: So other than your chores, what kind of activities did you participate in? Did you play baseball, or...

JO: Well, we did play a lot of tennis and volleyball—never basketball. My grandkids play basketball. But tennis and volleyball.

ST: So were there tennis courts in North Judson?

JO: No, but we had our own. We just put the net up out in the pasture, and we had poles there, and the neighbor kids would come and play.

ST: And then you said some of your siblings went to college.

JO: Yes. My two older brothers went to college. They entered Purdue in 1930 at West Lafayette—'30 to '34. And then I had a sister that went to the Art Institute in Chicago from '29 to '33.

ST: And then what did they end up doing?

JO: John, he ended up working for an insurance company that had made farm loans, and the farmers defaulted and lost their farms in the Depression, and the insurance company owned... he was manager for the farms: collect their rent and establish their rates, and different things. And Frank, he started working for International Harvester selling farm machinery for a while, and then during the war time, there wasn't much farm machinery made—this was the second world war—they didn't get anything to sell. Everything went for the war. So he got in [as a] mechanical engineer for Cummins Engineering in Columbus, Indiana. It's about 50 miles south of Indianapolis. And that's where he worked, and that's where he retired.

ST: *And the other brothers and sisters... what did they do/*

JO: My youngest brother, during the Second World War, he was still living at home here, he was still single, I was just married. And oh, one day he said to me, "I think I'm going to enlist in the service, because if I don't enlist I'll be drafted, and they'll put me in the infantry. And if I enlist, I'm gonna be in the Coast Guard." He didn't want to be in the infantry. So he enlisted in the Coast Guard, and of course he was in the full length of the war, and his wife was a hairdresser. So when he got out of the service, I think they had some financial benefits to get more schooling, so he went to beauty school.

ST: *Really!*

JO: And he didn't care for the work, so then he wanted to get on the farm again. And his wife was from Chicago. He was living in Chicago, fooling around and not doing much of anything, and he told me if I ever find a good farm in the area for sale I should let him know. Well, I run across a farm, 200 acres... oh, it's 15 miles from here, southeast. About 10, 12 miles southeast of North Judson, a farm was for sale. Well, I told him and he came out and looked at it, and it was 200 acres, and I think he wanted \$20,000 at that time, and John, or Emil said, "I'd like the farm..." but he didn't know if he should take the plunge. He wanted me to go 50-50 with him. I talked it over with my wife, and she said, "Well, why don't you." So we bought it, and then my brother farmed it. He had only grain, no livestock. He'd go to Florida in the wintertime, and of course, he'd be on the farm in the summer time. And every year he'd make some money, and he'd buy some new machinery, and he said, *I'm gonna quit buying new machinery, then the machinery dealer can go to Florida. I'm gonna spend the money on myself!* And he liked it in Florida, and he finally decided, *I'm gonna stay there.* He stayed in Florida, and that's where he died.

We had it rented out for several years, then when my sons were grown up they wanted to farm, so they farmed it for awhile, and they said it was too much work. So anyway, my two sons farmed it for awhile, and we were making money here, and one day I says to my wife, "You know, we have no will, nothing, just agreement. We're both making money, and if we should die, what will happen legally?" So I talked to an attorney at Knox, and he said, *Well, if you don't need the income now and you want to give it to your boys eventually, why don't you give it to them now.* So anyhow, my brother died—his wife owns half interest in it yet. It's still in the family, but I don't have any financial interest in it. We just gave it away.

ST: *So that brings me to: you and your wife had children.*

JO: Yeah, we had four children. The oldest girl, Joann, went to St. Francis College in Fort Wayne, Indiana. And she was teaching school all her years. This is her first year of retirement—66. And she has one son and 5 grandchildren.

And the other girl, Betty, she went to the nursing school at Holy Cross, and she joined the Air Force in her senior year, and she was in the Air Force... well, 20 years. She retired Lieutenant Colonel. When you're in the military you're transferred to different locations. She was in Texas and I'd go to visit her; she is now retired in Fort Worth, Texas. Betty never married. She's Origer. And Joann's last name is Bender.

And Dorothy, she was two years older than I. She was going to the Chicago Art Institute, but she was boarding with an uncle in the city, who his wife died young, and they never had any children, and he was very close to us always anyway. And he belonged to some Luxembourg organization, a social club, and he met the fellow that also belonged to that club, and he bought a farm in Manteno—not too far from Kankakee. So they've been farming all their life, and they had two sons. They're both CPAs.

And my sister... when they bought the farm, they built their new home and then one of their sons lives in that, and then she built a new home for the other one. And she just built a new home for herself about a year ago. Ninety-five years old! She said, "People were ridiculing me for building a home," she says, "even if I live only one or two more years, I gotta have a place." [Laughter]

ST: *[Laughter] Yeah! Gotta be somewhere! And she's in this area?*

JO: No she's on the farm in Manteno. My youngest son, John, he married a girl from Knox. They live in North Judson in town. He's a rural mail carrier. And the other son, Mark, he is about 56 or 57. He's a postmaster in a small community in Wisconsin named Lake Mills. He lives on a farm in Watertown, Wisconsin.

No, our kids did well. My son, John had two boys—they're only about three years apart. The older one is a graduate of Notre Dame. He's going to the University of Maryland now in...oh, what is it? Urban Planning. So he's working on his master's there now.

And John graduated from Purdue, his youngest son is now attending Purdue as well.

ST: *I don't want to keep you too much longer, because I don't want you to get tired.*

JO: Oh, no! I enjoy this. This is wonderful. Are you sure I can't get you something to drink—a cup of coffee or a piece of fruitcake?

ST: *I'm really good for right now, but do you need something? I just want to see which questions we've already talked about so that we don't have to go over them again.*

JO: Okay.

ST: *First let's talk about this. Were you raised in the Catholic Church then?*

JO: Oh yeah.

ST: *And are you still involved? Married there and everything?*

JO: Oh yes, absolutely.

ST: *What's the name of the church here in North Judson?*

JO: Saints Cyril and Methodius.

ST: *That's right.*

JO: I know one evening, for Saturday evening mass, I was talking to somebody and somebody drove up and stopped and said, "Is there a Catholic church here in town?" I said, "Yes, right here." He said, "No! That's a Methodist church." [Laughter]

ST: *And I think those were patron saints of the Czech [history]... like missionaries to that region or something.*

JO: I think so, yes.

ST: *Do you belong to any clubs or fraternal orders?*

JO: Well, I joined the Catholic Order of Foresters—it's a fraternal and life insurance—back in 1934—that's 74 years ago. There was one fella for the local court was a financial secretary, and for the second war he was taken into the service, so we needed a new financial secretary. We didn't have a regular election. The other officers gave the job to me *temporarily*. Well, I've still got it [laughter].

ST: [Laughter] *You don't walk away from things!*

JO: No. And I served two four-year terms on the school board out here in Judson. That was interesting, but... see, there are three townships in this school corporation, so the trustee of each township is automatically on the school board by virtue of their job. Then they had to get one citizen from the corporation and one from the township *out* of the corporation, and they had to be of opposite political parties. That's what I was told.

So one day the advisory board... I was working out in the field and they came out and started talking, and I said, "What do you fellas want?" And he said, "We want to have you serve on the school board." Well, none of my brothers or sisters were in school anymore, and the younger ones were in the Catholic school—our kids—and I said, "Why pick on me?" And he says, "Well, we have to have a Republican, 'cause the fella from town, Art Moser, is a Democrat." I says, "Am I a Republican? Thanks for tellin' me." I never paid any attention to that. I know I registered as one because my dad was a Republican, but I didn't know what it meant and I didn't care. He says, "Well, you're a Republican." Anyway, I took the job, and that's stinkin' politics, too. The three trustees did not always work to get a bill passed—in my opinion—what was the best for the kids and the taxpayers. They wanted to make sure that it wouldn't cost them any votes in the next election. Of course, I was shipping milk into Chicago, so I wasn't obligated to anybody locally, and my brother-in-law was in Two Joes in the store, and he had to be

careful what he said. I says, *I can speak my piece*. They wanted me to apply for it again, but there are plenty of people in Judson that are intelligent enough, so I backed off.

ST: *And also Republicans?*

JO: That's right!

ST: Could you talk a little bit about some of the changes that you've seen in your life? You mentioned that your family bought a car instead of a carriage at one point. What other things? Social changes or maybe political. You were around when women got the vote, for example.

JO: Yes, of course I don't remember much about that because I was eight years old. I don't remember much about that.

ST: Prohibition?

JO: Oh, yes! We were shipping milk, and of course now it's all bulk milk, but in those [days] they were shipped in cans. Sometimes the truck driver, the second day he'd pick up milk, tomorrow they'd have a tag on the can: *Returned. Bad odor.* And, of course we were on a grade A market, and I could smell there was a strange odor, but it was not lack of sanitation. And my dad would say, "I just wonder if..." See there was a ditch going through the pasture, and the cows would drink that water besides drinking at home, and you could see that that water was not clear. So my dad said, "There's something getting into that water, and the cows drink it, and it's causing this bad odor." So we walked upstream about two miles up, and there we saw stuff coming out of a drain tile and draining into the ditch. So we walked up to the house, people living there, fella saw us and met us. He says, "I know what you..."

ST: Why you're here?

JO: Yeah. He says, "I've got a moonshine still in my barn," and the drainage from the still was going into the water. It was not *his*, but some bootlegger from Chicago rented his barn and paid him X number of dollars a month to have it there. And my dad says, "Well, this has got to stop, because I can't sell my milk." And then he says, "Well, can't you water your cows at home?" I says, "Yes, but that costs money, too." "How much does it cost?" And anyway, this fella said when the bootlegger stopped in "I'll send him over to talk to you." So we were waiting, we had no idea who he was. And we had the appointment—he didn't drive in the yard, he parked on the road, he come walkin' in the yard. I guess he wanted to make sure we didn't have cops waiting for him. And I forget what it was... a dollar was a lot more money than it is today in purchasing power... I think he gave my dad \$50 a month to water the cows at home. Of course that got old, too. But somebody got wind of that still and it was raided. But then we found out later on the fella next door, a mile down the road, he had a moonshine still, too. Oh, I think within an average of ten miles there must have been 12, 15 moonshine stills.

ST: *Wow! And it was all people from Chicago coming out and approaching farmers and saying, "Could we put this in?"*

JO: Right. I guess those bootleggers were all over. I can remember my dad—he was doing pretty good financially—he bought a mortgage from a property in Chicago, and my dad was collecting his interest, and when the mortgage came due the Depression had started, [the owner] couldn't pay the mortgage, so he defaulted the property to my dad. He said, "If you'll pay me so many hundred dollars I'll deed the property to you, otherwise you've got the right to foreclose on me." And when we took the property over to rent it out or fix it up to sell it, he had a moonshine still.

ST: *No kidding! There must have been a lot of stills throughout the country! Now since your family came from Europe, did they make wine?*

JO: I never did. I had a brother Frank—he made wine out of local grapes. We had a grape arbor. Made some home brew beer a couple times. I never cared for alcoholic drinks.

ST: *Do you feel that has anything to do with you being 94 years old and so sound/*

JO: Well, I really don't know. I really don't know. I had... well, as far as prescription drugs, I take a couple of pills now for blood pressure. It's not terribly high, but it's a little higher than it should be. Oh, I had surgery. I had five hernia surgeries. I had a knee replaced. I had a gall bladder replaced about six weeks ago. I don't know. There isn't any one thing.

Well, I'll tell you, the rest of my family worked less manual labor—very little. And I always—with the cattle—[worked] a lot of manual labor. I think that... sometimes I didn't like it, but I think that helped.

ST: *Well, it certainly keeps everything moving—the blood, the lymph...*

JO: I think so. I think so.

ST: *And I think one of the biggest problems for people as we get older is sitting still, where everything kind of pools, and then we can get infections... So you've had an active life, very active. Do you know Emil Smolek?*

JO: Emil Smolek. Now, I know a number of Smoleks. I know who he is. They're a hardworking family. I think I know about three different generations of Smoleks. There was a Joe Smolek. I think he had a son, Emil. It's several generations. My son, John, talks about some of the Smoleks, and I always say, well, what generation does he fit in?

ST: *Well Emil is your generation, and he lives southeast of San Pierre. We interviewed him already, because Beverly, who is doing the San Pierre Revitalization Project, is a Paulsen, and Emil Smolek is her uncle. So we did an interview with him last summer, and I'm noticing the parallels, because when he started school, he spoke nothing but Czech!*

JO: I believe it!

ST: *So he had a similar experience there. And he actually went back and visited the Czech Republic... I think it was within the last ten years or so with one of his sons, and went to a farm, which is a collective over there, and was very impressed. He loved visiting the farm, even though he couldn't speak Czech anymore. He knew a few words, but was able to communicate with this farmer because they did the same kind of things. But [he] had a wonderful experience, and he's also had a very active life, is still farming.*

JO: Oh yeah. The Smoleks were—all of them that I knew—they were hard workers, very hard workers. I know years back, when we were still picking our ear corn, we'd crib it, and they'd have a custom sheller—they'd go around and shell the corn for market. They shelled corn for me a couple times. They were hard workers, hard workers.

ST: *Well, your spirit reminds me of him.*

JO: Oh, is that right?

ST: *Yeah. He's also very "with it"—so on top of things, and energetic.*

JO: Well, there were several Paulsen families, too. George, Fred, Art...

ST: *Tom was Beverly's [father].*

JO: Tom Paulsen. Yeah, I remember when he lived on 10. Of course he was probably my generation.

ST: *He might have been a little bit younger.*

JO: I think you're right. Of course there might be two generations of Tom.

ST: *Were there any people as you were growing up or throughout your life that had an influence on you—that had a positive influence that you'd like to mention—who inspired you?*

JO: Maybe my folks. I can see when I look back that there were several things... well, like with this school consolidation. My dad worked to get it. In my opinion, it was a wonderful thing and an advancement, but for personal reasons some people opposed it. Some people didn't like my folks because it ruined their way of life. And as far as reputation, well, like in the town of North Judson—especially the older people—they knew the family. We've lived here for over a hundred years. I can go... as far as credit it concerned, you get all you want anyplace—the name is good. And that's worth more than dollars.

ST: *So your parents would be the big influences.*

JO: Right.

ST: *I'm just going to ask you one quick last question. As a child or as a young person going into San Pierre, you've mentioned Dolezals' store and the lumberyard. Are there any other businesses or people that you remember from there?*

JO: I remember... See ordinarily we went to church at Sts. Cyril and Methodius. And you know my dad bought this Model T, and about four years later he bought this other new Model T, but this was a sedan. And of course, when we'd go to church, the whole family would take two cars. And sometimes, just out of devilment, we'd go to San Pierre to church so we could drive it, because it was a pleasure to drive! And a couple of times—I think it was in the old church—wasn't there a basement? We were playing Bingo, a corn game. And there was a lady there, a Mrs. Tannehill—she was of Mexican descent?

ST: *Oh, my Aunt Sara. She was married to my father's brother. She lives in North Judson now.*

JO: Oh is that right? She had cards sitting next to me, and she would say, “Call my number! Call my number!” [Laughter] I can remember she was a Mrs. Tannehill, however I didn’t know who she was before that. And didn’t her husband die?

ST: *Yes, Uncle Charlie worked out at the service station on the south end of San Pierre that used to be Gargione’s. It was on the way out of town, towards Medaryville, about a mile out of town. [Personal exchange]*

So you remember my Aunt Sara!

JO: Well I remember a few... there was a Falvey. And I think the fellow that had the lumberyard in San Pierre who sold the lumber to my dad... Moran? And then there was a mail carrier—Fullen?

ST: *Yes, there were Fullens. My mom was close with the Fullen family. Well, I think it’s time to take a few photographs.*

JO: There goes your camera! Here are a few notes I took down from your questions.

ST: *Thank you. It’s been such a pleasure to meet you!*

JO: Well, I’ve enjoyed it.