

Jim Withey, Mesa Arizona, 2010? Right after I interviewed John Sweren

We were flying, in clouds, and this plane came in. We dunked our wing and the guy that's flying he lifted his up and the guy flew in between us. The pilot turned around, Did you see that?

I said yes I did.

We quite often, it was cloudy, I was a fair weather navigator, the pathfinder for through the clouds, we'd have a bit cloudy over the target, they'd say [let's bomb another target] but I'd always go over the target just in case. So a lot of the boys didn't like me when I was leading because we'd catch hell, flak and stuff. Quite often you could see it.

I was in the 701st Squadron. We were on the St. Lo mission, the first and second. The first got aborted because of the clouds and stuff and then the second one, the Germans shot their flares over our flares. That's why we hit the wrong place. But we didn't, because we looked at it and said Something doesn't add up, so we kept flying and then we saw the other flares. We used the same signal both days, so the Germans shot their flares over our lines, and the B-26 boys who were flying so low dropped their bombs so they could get the hell out. But we were up around 13,000 that day, which was low for us, but we could see it wasn't right, and so we went and we hit the right place.

I had never flown with this crew before. I knew Robinson, the co-pilot, because they lived in the same shack that I lived in. I knew we were off course, because that's about all, because I was really just along for the ride, to get my last mission in. I didn't give a damn about anything. We were following the group.

All of a sudden, there were fighters all over the place. We'd taken our ball turrets out so we had no protection underneath, and the Germans were kind of hanging below us where we couldn't reach them, and there were no fighter pilots there for a while. But it only lasted two minutes or something like that. We lost an engine, but we escaped that, and we started heading back, and we ran over a 20-millimeter range. They were out there firing, and they got another engine. We'd lost one engine in the battle. We had too many seriously injured people to try to bail out, so I told the pilot to crash land into this hill. There was just a little bit of a hill, and we bellied in. It was a beautiful landing. But our problem was,, just before we landed, the fuselage cracked around the pilot's shoulder and slid over, and one of the tail rudders fell off, and I got crushed in between the two seats because I was up there navigating. I was knocked out, but I was okay.

Another thing is, I'd gone back to check the injured, and then I went forward and I sent the nose turret gunner to take care of them and I navigated, and he got killed within a couple of seconds. They were still firing on us, over the 20-millimeter range.

There were nine men on the crew, and two of them got killed. I'd gone back to assess the damage, and I saw that the guys back there, there was blood all over the place, so I went forward and I sent him back down to take care of them, because I was more important than he was to navigate.

JW: There were nine on the crew, and I think three of them got killed. I know two of them did and I think the third one did, if not he was seriously injured.

I'd gone back to assess the damage, and I saw that the guys back there were, blood all over the place, so I went forward and I sent him back down to take care of them, because I was more important than he was to navigate.

AE: In the initial battle, did you see anything? Were you able to look out and see what was going on.

JW: Yeah, you could see planes going down all over the place. But I mean, we turned around to get the hell out of there, and we were heading back. It happened so fast, that what do you see?

AE: The crash landing was near Koblenz?

JW: Near it, yes.

There's a book out on the 445th, I've given all my stuff to my daughter so they'd have it, but in there, Engleman was the engineer on that job, and he's got an article in there about our crash landing.

In prison camp, the guy in charge flew for Pan American, and the guy that interviewed me down in Frankfurt when I was in solitary, his family was still in Texas. And two of the guards we had in Stalag I were from Brooklyn. They'd gone over in 35 when all the Germans were going back. So it was almost like old home week. Y'You're on one side, I'm on the other, after it's over we'll go and have a beer.

AE: Did you ever think at that time that that would come to pass?

JW: As far as I'm concerned, I've got no use for them still. My brother married a Hungarian that escaped in the Hungarian revolution, so we did go back to Hungary. He picked up a car in Germany and we did go back probably 20 years ago now, but until then I didn't want to have anything to do with it. Plus the fact that I got home, I got married, I had two kids. I had another one on the way shortly thereafter, and I was busy trying to support them. So I never had time to even think about it. I didn't think about it until I retired in ... Moran's wife, no, Chapman's son had the diary of Moran. And he was trying to find Moran's wife to give it to her. And he didn't know how, so he knew me, so he got to the History Channel and the History Channel called me, and I got him with Pelton, the pilot, because Moran's wife had been picked up for drinking by the police, and he called them up to try to explain what the problem was and see if he could smooth it over. So anyway, through me, Chapman found Moran's daughter, and the History Channel had a little show on it. I've got a copy of it someplace.

AE: What was your interrogation like? What happened when you landed? How did you get picked up?

JW: There were farmers out in the field. They laid down their flocks(?) and picked up their guns and come over and pried us out. We didn't catch on fire which was another miracle. The top turret dropped like a sledgehammer so the back was cut off from the front, so they had to go out through the waist and through the tail and we had to go out through the front.

AE: And the farmers helped you out?

JW: Yeah. I was pinned in. We took the bell of a 50-millimeter and used it as a pry to get it up and I could slide my head down and get it out. But if it had been on fire we'd have probably all been burned.

AE: Were they hostile?

JW: No, very friendly. I mean, we were far enough away from where the bombing was. We were out in the farm country. So they marched us down to Frankfurt and we got on a train. In fact, I was the commander on the train, I had to take the shoes and belts off my fellow prisoners to make sure they wouldn't run away at night. It was only one night or two, kind of ridiculous. And then from there we went up to Stalag 1. We were a week in solitary.

AE: Did they interrogate you?

JW: They wanted to know where, what we were bombing and what squadron I was in. They had me down within two squadrons. They knew all my commanding officers. They were off by a rank here and there, but they knew more about me than I knew myself.

AE: What was solitary like?

JW: We

AE: Did they know about your family?

JW: No. They were just interested in what we were bombing, and what squadron I was in.

AE: What was solitary like?

JW: We would decide we had to go to the bathroom, and we'd go, and sooner or later one of our buddies had to go, so we'd be in there BSing until they woke up and realized there was two of us in there. It was just a game. But you know, at 20 who cares? The only concern we had was what the end date was. We were sure we were gonna get out, but what's the end date?

AE: What was Stalag Luft 1 like?

JW: Good. We had 28 in a room. Three high all the way around except for a window, a door and a stove. And we cooked our own meals.

AE: You would divide up the Red Cross parcels?

JW: Yes and no. The Red Cross parcel, the cigarettes and the candy you kept, the other stuff would be divided up.

AE: I've heard that the cigarettes were the gold standard for trading, but you smoked, so would you trade food for cigarettes?

JW: No, we had enough cigarettes. The cigarettes were poker chips. We played poker with cigarettes. And we'd always wait for somebody to light up, and then we'd ask him, and by the time he got it back he had to light up another one. But matches were difficult. And the oleo we got we burned as lanterns. (margarine). Until. Like, they gave us barley. When we got there we wouldn't touch it. Then the food got scarce we took the worms out. Then the food got scarcer we'd eat the worms too. It all depends on what shape you're in. We had, the Salvation Army supplied us with books, stuff to read, and we had kits, baseball and stuff like that. I played bridge all the time.

AE: Did you play for cigarettes or just for points?

JW: Bridge was points, but we played poker for cigarettes. And we found a way to get a little yeast and we had a little booze once in a while.

AE: Was that with the raisins?

JW: Yes

AE: Tell me about New Year's Eve. Did they brew up a special batch of raisin brew?

JW: No, we had a, I guess it was Christmas or New Year's, one of them, we put on a show. Local talent. But most of the time, come sundown we'd be stuck in our barracks. One of them, it was probably New Year's, we had a show. It was just one of those things, we waited for the end, I mean we had a newspaper, which I'm sure you know about, so we knew what was going on. We were kind of unhappy when the Battle of the Bulge started, but after a couple weeks it got straightened out.

AE: What about clothing? Did you have one set of clothing or more?

JW: I had one set. I wore a heated suit, so all I had was the heated suit, which was pretty thin, but luckily it was not too cold up there so we got by, and we had one blanket, a straw mattress. We had one shower in nine months. And that was 25 or 30 in a big place and the water would come down and they shut it off, you'd soap up, and then the water would come on and you rinse off and then get out.

AE: What about lice? Did people get lice?

JW: Not really. We were pretty clean. We did have more VD there than...

AE: In the camp? How did they get...

JW: Cigarettes and the Germans would give you anything. At the beginning they used to go out on wood chopping missions and stuff. A Couple of cigarettes there'd be a woman out there. Not for me, but for ...

AE: I never quite heard that. I think somebody did tell me once who was at Stalag Luft 1 that some people could get out of the camp to meet some women. But for cigarettes? How many?

JW: I don't know.

AE: There was no penicillin. What would these fellows do?

JW: I have no idea. I'm not a doctor. But we did have a few cases. And our commander was in solitary for a long time.

AE: Was that Zemke?

JW: Yes.

AE: Why was he in solitary?

JW: We snuck out of the barracks one day. His philosophy was, Don't do anything to get in trouble but do something to make sure they have enough people around us because every person that's here was not at the front lines. So this one day we had a Red Cross box which is what, a foot square, and we filled

it full of you know what and we snuck out the door and around, we dug a hole and buried it. Then we snuck back in.

AE: You filled it full of you know what. I don't know what.

JW: S-H-I-T. And half an hour later the Germans come up, the guards and stuff and they go around the place and dig it up. They didn't approve of that so that night when we fell out in formation, they stayed outside for a while and kept us standing there, and as soon as they came in, he dismissed us. So then they had to wait for us to re-form. So they hauled him off and put him in solitary. Another thing, when I got there, they wouldn't accept us until somebody could verify us, and I knew somebody that was there, so he accepted me in. This guy had been shot down three or four months before. In fact I thought he was still in Belgium. I knew he got away the first time but he got caught and I was surprised to see him there because I thought he was in the underground.

AE; What can you remember about the arrival of the Russians and the Germans leaving the camp?

JW: The Germans killed most of the Russians that were there, and then they left. When they left, they told us they'd put us in charvge. And they left. But the Russians caught them, and we came back and we saw a couple with their arms off and stuff like that. They had no use for each other. but the Russians were there and they wanted to march us back to Russia and down on the Black Sea, but we had enough fighter pilots who were high up and they said We're flyboys, we don't walk. And we stayed there. Then we got traded. The story I heard is we were worth three and a half Germans for every American. But the German women used to cry to have us in there, because the Russians, if some went out for screwing the woman it was okay, but if the woman was alone, he was there. And they were kind of rough, so they didn't want to have anything to do with the Russians. And they'd eat, they'd catch a fish and then cook in a paint can. And they'd get on motorcycles, bicycles we had, and they could go like hell straight down, but they didn't know how to turn, so when there was a curve you'd see them all piled up. I mean, they had to show us how great they were. Almost ridiculous. But we stood our ground until the Americans finally took over and flew us out.

AE: Did you go into town at all?

Jim Withey: I didn't. We were allowed to but the kids were planting mines around, and our CO said, You're only here for another couple weeks so why don't you stay? And I figured what the hell, there's nothing there I wanted so I stayed. But there were some, some of them got killed and some got sick. I mean, are you going to eat a lot of stuff after you don't have much. I just stayed there. Then I went back to Lucky Strike.

AE: How much weight did you lose?

JW: Not much. Ten pounds. But I didn't work. I told my mother when I was a kid, no sense in both of us working. And she said well she's gonna work, so I said I'm not. That's the way I've been.

AE: You never had any doubts?

JW: No. It was just a matter of when. I'm an optimist anyway. We used to have a chart up in our room for night victories (wet dreams). And every weekend, how many women are getting it tonight? Then

we'd pick a city. Well, that city has a hundred thousand people and fifty percent of them are women, and 75 percent of them are having a good time.

AE: Now wait a minute. Everybody from Stalag Luft 1 that I've talked to has said oh, all we talked about was food. Nobody talked about women.

JW: No. You talked about women until you got hungry. And then you talked about food. I have a book which I gave to my daughter of what I'm gonna eat when I go home. And then as soon as you got food again, you talked about women. It was a cycle. Just like at work, you know, a union shop, you can check, it takes a while to get up to power, and then coffee break you see the electricity go down, and then go back up lunch time, I mean Curtiss Wright, you could see it, it would be (unintelligible). That's what it was with us. Women. No food.

AE: Now in camp, you were how old?

JW: I had my 21st birthday in prison camp.

AE: When you came home, did you go to school under the GI Bill?

JW: Yes. Best thing America ever did. I went, we went back, we landed in Fort Dix, then we went to Atlantic City, and they gave us ten days, and I was home when the Japanese surrendered. And then we went back down to Atlantic City and I wanted to go into pilot training, and they said you could but you'd be broken to a flight officer. And I said no, I'll go back to second looie but I got the commission and I'm gonna keep it. And they said no, we had an argument, I said to hell with that, I'll get out. So I went to Indiantown Gap and got out. And then I went to college. University of New Hampshire. Which was a decent engineering school. And it was at a time when engineers were a premium. Curtiss Wright interviewed me, I didn't interview them. And I got a job, and went down there. We were down there and we had to work as test engineers running the engines and stuff for the first three months. And they always gave us an adjustable wrench, and said This is the engineer's wrench because you don't know one size from the other. So instead of getting the wrong wrench, this one will fit 'em all. From there I became an engineer. And I was ambitious enough to keep working. I moved. And I was back at Curtiss Wright in ten, fifteen years, and I more than doubled the salary of anybody that stayed there. Which is common. But a new contract would go out, I'd go to that company and get a job. Like I went to Reaction Motors and the engineer that brought me up there got 200 bucks. That's how desperate they were for engineers. And I just pushed on forward.

In fact, when I went to Reaction Motors, we called it Recreation Motors, I was being interviewed by this guy for a job, his boss comes by, and he looks, comes in, I played basketball against him in high school, he was from Wilton(?), I was from Peterborough(?). So after he left, the guy says well, if I want my job I guess I better hire you. So you know, it's not necessarily what you know it's who you know, and that's jpw O gpt tjat kpn. I was smart enough and ambitious enough to earn it, but I had a lot of breaks along the way.

AE: Your wife, is she still alive?

JW: No. My wife died in '97 and I joined up with a significant other in 2000, a gal that I'd gone to school with, graduated, she was in Green Valley, and I was here, and a mutual friend told her I was here so she called up. We used to go out for a ride when I had my ... I don't know what happened, I think they thought I was gonna steal her money, so they sued me, and two thousand bucks later I won, so I kept

her for another year and then she got so bad with this fall I had to put her in a nursing home. So she's in a nursing home up there. But when we joined forces I made her give, she had a farm, she gave the farm to her son and she had a summer place, she gave that to her daughter. I mean we gave the stuff away, she had a place down here and I couldn't take care of it any longer so I put it up for sale. That was what they sued me over. I didn't have the right to do that. But I did. But we had ten good years. We hit all 48 states in those ten years. We had an RV. We had a big one, we kept going down and down until we finally had a car and stayed in motels. But we hit 'em all. She had a kind of rough life, her first life. Her husband was a Marine. I don't think he ever had a steady job. He was in the special police or something. I don't think he had a rough life. But he had friend that did. And we went to, the Air Force band was playing down there at the high school so we all went there, and then coming out, he and Ann went this way and I went this way, so I took a while to get there. He says Yeah, the Air Force is late like they always are. Because he'd been someplace where they had to wait quite a while for the Air Force to strike before they could go in. Yep, the Air Force late again.

AE: Your original crew, the one that you flew most of your 29 previous missions with, from 7 to 29, most of the missions, do you keep in touch with them?

JW: No. We graduated from navigation school. They said Know your neighbor, but don't get too friendly, because one of the three of you will not come back. So you know everybody, and, I mean, I was busy, I had three kids when I was still in college, and I had to find a way to put food on the table. I went through in three years. We went summer and winter.

My family, the two girls, my wife was into music and dancing and stuff, like her family, she's a Orange Irishman, and they don't like, the women, housewives, she never did it, so my kids, we were in New Jersey, and they went to dancing school. And so the oldest one became a ballet dancer and the younger one was a showtime dancer. So anyway, the older one ended up with New York Ballet in Montreal, and with the Chicago Ballet they toured the country. And her husband to be played the trumped in that. So she's from New Hampshire and he's from Illinois, and they got married and then the other one was doing the other stuff, she was on a cruise ship from New York to the islands and back, and he was a photographer, and he was an Englishman, so that's how they met, so we got the English and the Americans, that's how the family got all tangled up. I've got ten grandchildren, three and three from my own, and four from the stepkids. And I've got two great grandkids from the steps and two from my own.

AE: Now the step was your significant other?

JW: No. It was my first wife's kids. She had two. And they're in New Hampshire.

AE: So the woman you married first...

JW: The only woman I married was married to my cousin. We got married in '45 and she died in '97. She had Alzheimer's.

AE: So your step children or grandchildren were from your significant other?

JW: No it was from her. She had two children. Her family didn't approve of the marriage either. I was still in college. They said "Why don't you go get married to somebody that's got a job now?"

AE" OK, so those were the children you had while you were in college.

JW: And immediately we got pregnant, or she got pregnant. I had my POW money, and we had \$45 a month for housing. We had beer the first of the month and water at the end of the month. We got by. I was gonna go to college regardless, and when I worked on the farm for my aunt I'd get the first week's pay and then the rest would go directly to the bank. So I had a couple of bucks in the bank. The English are pretty damn thrifty. They gave me enough to live on but not enough to be foolish. Which was a good thing.

When I married the significant other, they came from North Orange, and we went up there, to see the homestead. I was big on genealogy, I mean, our family's been in every damn war that the United States had, and we checked with somebody and they said the old homestead was here, so we went up there, and it wasn't, but she did show us the house, and she said "When you get done, go down the road, and there's an old lady sitting in a barn, you go up and ask her, because she knows everything. So we get done, we went down, and lo and behold we saw her, so I drove up and I said We've been up here and I'm looking for the Hager homestead and she told me to come down and see you because you know everything.

She said Yes I do and you've been by here twice today already. But she knew the homestead, she knew the family.

AE: Now what can you tell me about your ancestors? Were they in the Revolutionary war? Did you find out who they were and what they did?

JW: Not too much. I know one of them helped found a college in Michigan, Olivet College in Michigan, and a couple of them got killed down in Germany someplace. I don't know that either. We've got some mail, this one, "I'm sorry I can't afford the postage on this thing but we haven't been paid for three weeks," and stuff, and a lot of people are taking off sick but if they were home they'd be working.

AE: Had your father been in World War I?

JW: That's another story. My mother worked for Tapioca pudding in Athol, Mass., and she put her name in a carton of tapioca, and her husband to be was in California, and he got that, so he started writing to her, and that's how they met. But you know, there's somebody up there deciding what's going on really, no matter how you figure. Figure the times that you've been someplace and the accident happens a minute after you were there.

AE: Just coming out here, leaving New Jersey, they had a major snowstorm just to the south.

JW: What part of New Jersey?

AE: Hackensack.

JW: Oh yeah, I told you I was Fair Lawn and Little Falls.

AE: Then I was in Dallas a couple days ago and they had the biggest snowstorm in Dallas history, but I left just before it got really bad. It was bad, it was snowing all the way up into Oklahoma, but if I had stayed another day in Dallas they had another seven inches the next day. And the roads froze over.

JW: My brother died a couple weeks ago, just before that snowstorm, and I couldn't go, so I sent my daughter down. She was down there for two weeks, and then the girl that was maid of honor at her

wedding was gonna come down, but she's in New Jersey and she can't get out. Theoretically she's getting there today.

AE: I missed the really bad weather in the East.

JW: When I lived in Kittery, Maine, Portsmouth, we could go, my son lived in Berwick, which is ten miles, but we'd go there and we'd get about halfway there and we could see the snow almost a straight line would go up a couple inches because it was away from the shore effect. Then one day, one Christmas we were in New Jersey and we were gonna fly to Canada for Christmas and I just wore a jacket and stuff, never dreaming, and we got there and my son in law comes out and says I didn't even shut off the engine it's so damn cold. We went in the house and we never went out.

AE: That about, is there anything I'm missing.

JW: Not that I know of. To me it was just another job. I was just, I didn't hold a grudge against the Germans but I just figured they're our enemy. One of my grandsons married a Japanese. Now that's rubbing the hair the wrong way, but I'm nice to her. He's happy and that's what counts. But he's a lieutenant commander in the Navy, he went to Annapolis. He was a fencer. He's a Canadian and his father had a sabbatical down in Long Island, and he'd fence against the Navy team, and the coach told him to try to get in, he said if you can get somebody to recommend you I'll get you in, and they got a Congressman or a senator, somebody from Long Island to recommend him, and that's how he got in. So he turned to his father, he said I hope you're not disappointed. The old man said You probably saved me ten thousand dollars, why should I be. But he's done good, he's a plugger. His brother is a violin soloist, goes all over the world. He was born with a silver spoon. It's amazing. And his sister just married his brother in law.

AE: What led you to collect pins like that?

JW: Oh, most of those are, I'm a shuffleboarder. I'm park representative for the shuffleboard. But they give pins out. The senior Olympics here and in Green Valley. I used to live in Green Valley. So we do that, then we've got a lot of pins from various places where we stopped. I get gadgets, souvenirs from places. I'm not gonna let anybody smoke my cigars and sit in my chair and thank me for the money when I die. I'm gonna spend it all. And I figure, no, I'm 100 percent disabled, so Uncle Sam, the VA is gonna take care of me. I don't have to worry about anything, just upkeep and stuff. I tell my kids I'm only happy when I'm spending money. I give them money, help them out and stuff, and I like to buy sometimes too. I've collected all the Presidential dollars, and I've got all the state quarters, and I'm now collecting stamps again, it gives me something to do. I play bridge five days a week, poker two nights, and Unico one night. So I keep busy, and then I go every weekend with my daughter up here. It's okay. The only thing is, it's lonely as hell at night when you're alone. And it takes me a while to get going in the morning, even if I get up now I'll have to stop and think for a while.

AE: My mother's cousin is in Tucson. I'm gonna go see her later. She was my mother's first cousin. I came out here in 1995 I think, I haven't seen her since. She's in a wheelchair now.

JW: You know, it's tough to keep track of everybody. I haven't seen, the brother that died, he was the one that lived in New Hampshire with me, so he was the closest one to me, and I bought a business. He went in the service and he was at Yale learning Japanese when the war was over. But as soon as he found out that they were gonna send him over to Japan for a while they all flunked out. So he got out.

And then he went to college, and then he traveled America for a while. And then he came back, and I bought a newspaper/stationary store with him, and he ran it during the day, we'd split nights and split weekends, and he lived with me, so it gave him a chance to get his feet on the ground, and then he became a teacher, and he had a gift shop too after that. We were always close. He lived in New Jersey when I did. So it was kind of surprising, he had an aneurism, just like that. His wife is a Hungarian, and she had cancer and she had a double dose of chemo so she lost her immune system, so everybody thought she'd be the first to go but no, it's the other one. She doesn't know where anything is. She wants to stay in the house, and we're having trouble, but hopefully this person will come down today and then the niece is coming at the end of the month, so hopefully that will help for a while. He was in Jacksonville, Florida, or Palm Coast. He was a geology teacher I guess, and he made bracelets and stuff. Gemologist. He was born in 27, he was three years younger than me, so he was 82. In fact, Washington's birthday is his birthday, he'd be 83 next week. But he had a good life. It's been tough. They had no children. They're down there, and I suppose I could go but it's very difficult. I'd be almost as much bother as good. I told my daughter, you go down, I'll put you on my expense account.

AE: How long have you been on oxygen?

JW: Maybe three years. They say it'll never get better. Pretty crappy. There's (a picture of) my kid, my grandson. That's a story too. He was playing in Seattle and this guy that works for Microsoft heard him, and this guy had something Microsoft wanted, so he got a deal and he became a bigshot at Microsoft, so he invited him over to see his instruments, and they got to talking, and he said the Canadiens were going to buy this instrument, but every time they agreed on a price the dollar value would fluctuate, so it's still in limbo, so he says the hell with it, I'll buy it for you. He says you can buy it back at the price I paid for it, which he hasn't but now he only had to play one show a year over there for his benefit, and now he's musical director or something for that society out there and they're gonna buy the instrument for him, and they money they give him as salary they're gonna deduct to pay for it.

Ae: So that's your grandson, James Ehnes?

JW: Yeah, he's over in England right now. Then he's going to play the south side of Vancouver next week. He's in Fort Myers. He married a Yankee fan, she was from Connecticut. But he told me, Don't worry, Grandpa, I've converted her. She's a Red Sox fan. And then when his sister did it, she said the same thing.

AE: Just last night at the hotel I was flipping channels and they had the Ken Burns thing on baseball, and he had a segment on Ted Williams doing poorly in the one World Series he was in, he never got another chance to play in the World Series. Very poignant.

JW: When I got married my wife's family lived in Brighton, and he drove for Charles Francis Adams who was Secretary of the Navy for Hoover and they'd go down to Scituate Mass. every summer. So I told them, for Chrissakes, rent your house out here to a baseball player and that'll pay for your taxes, so they did. They became big baseball fans. Sibby Sisty(?) who played for Braves rented it, and during the World Series time they gave them World Series tickets. Everything works out. He was brought up in Canada, Manitoba, so evry time they'd come East we'd always go to a couple baseball games. They became real Red Sox fans. But I mean I used to be, back then when I was growing up the Red Sox were Catholic and the Braves were Protestants, so we'd go see the Braves play. They were the poor folks and the Red Sox were the rich folks. And I mean we'd go from Peterborough and the sun would be shining and it was about three years before I'd get down there when it wasn't raining. I had a Heinie Manush baseball for a

long time, and I was cleaning my desk and I laid it in a wastebasket and I put stuff on top of it and I lost it. This was back before 40. I saw Babe Ruth play for the Braves. He should have retired before he did that, but he was there.

AE" What was your first car?

JW: My first car was a Ford. And it was a 37 Ford that I got after the war, and every time I'd go around a corner the lights would go out or the door would open. And my wife had a Dodge, and she placed her order before the war was over, and she didn't go anyplace else, so when the OPA(?) or whatever it was, the salesman says You didn't go anyplace else so I will give you the car for the price it was at that time. So she had a nice Dodge. And so I told everybody I married her for the money. I mean, my car was mechanical brakes. My family almost always had Fords. The guy that had a Chevrolet was a politician in Peterborough and we were on the other side. I was a politician, and I stopped taking milk from this guy. So he came and cried, he said Just because I'm against you in politics is no reason to take food off my table.

I said, Well some of that food is going against me. As long as you're on that side and I'm on this side, I'm not doing anything to help you out. But he was an old Dutchman. What's good enough for my old man is good enough for my kids. And I was the other way around. I want each generation to be better. Like his sister that just got married, I've given her the down payment to buy a house. And I had to sign a statement that it was a gift. And she said We're paying it back. I said, I don't want it back. I said it's an investment. And as long as I think the investment is doing well I don't want it back. If the investment turns sour, then I'm going after you. She said don't worry, it's a good investment. But that's it, make that generation a little bit better. That's the way I look at it. As long as they do as good or better than I did, and I think most of them have, hell, he's a well guy, the other guy's a lieutenant commander, one of my sons owns a paper mill, the son in law, the Englishman down here, his career is making videos of trains. High Ball Express. He worked for the railroad in England and then he came here, when he got married, he said You'll probably never see us again. Then after he had his first kid he decided that maybe America was a little bit better than England so he came back. He asked me for a job and I gave it to him. But he got into this High Ball Express. And he moved down here because there's more trains down here than anyplace else. So that's the real reason we're down here. So he does that and his son is a photographer for the Zanesville newspaper. So I don't take pictures because every time I do, "the light's not quite right," or this or that. And my significant other was a good picture taker too.

AE: And what's her name?

JW: It was Ann Enagis(?) . It was Ann Cavanagh. Her family owned a tavern in Peterborough, which was a hotel more or less.

AE: And your late wife's name?

JW: Was Dorothy Barr. Dorothy Barr Merrill. And she was an Irishman. So it's been a great life. I've had fun. We were, at the right time of life, we'd start with old solid rubber tires, and the planes, you could almost touch they flew so low, look at what they are now. And actually during a flight it's gone now, you just read the instruments, you don't fly.

(some skipped)

Back then we had money and Uncle Sam would pay us for any idea we had. We were trying to pulverize coal to use in fuel for rockets. We could pulverize it, but we'd have to carry so much. We learned something. And then scrubbers and stuff to purify the smoke and stuff. And noise levels. We had to make sure the noise was below such a level at night time because Wood-Ridge was right in the city. I mean all these things, we were developing. And now I do nothing.

AE: You've got your music, you've got your computer.

JW: The computer's got me. I play games on it. I have email. I do the bridge scores on it. But every once in a while the computer says To hell with you and shuts off, and I don't know what to do. I just, if I can't see it I can't understand it. And I don't want to, that's my problem. I suppose if I was younger I'd get interested in it, but electricity never was my favorite study.

(ksome skipped)

JW: I was always trying to catch up, and so I never had time to do anything really until they were on their own. And I resented the fact that you could sometimes get ahead because of what you belonged to. Like I was in Reaction Motors and you'd see the Kof C ring and then you'd see the Masonic ring, and then you'd see the Jewish ring, depending on who was on charge, who was up top and who was down below. I never joined anything until I bought the printing company, and then I joined the Masonic Lodge. Well I had the American Legion before because the American Legion I joined, then I was commander. I was commander, then I got into politics, so I had to resign and my brother was taking over, so my wife was there and she had white hair from way back and somebody who didn't know her said You must be very proud of your two sons.

Ae: When you were in politics, what did you do?

JW: I ran for town council, and I ran three years and I lost by a total of 13 votes out of about ten thousand for election. But we did get our group in. This was in Little Falls, New Jersey. We did get our group in. The other group, he was another Chevrolet dealer. He'd almost give the police cars to them. But then he'd charge the hell out of them for the service, and gas, and all that stuff. We were 99 percent all Republicans, but our group cleaned out the other group. I mean, they had 93 homes on 91 lots in one place. This guy goes to sell his house and he can't sell it because his bedroom runs through the property line of the next door. But you know how it is down there. My wife worked for the superintendent of summer school. And they called this kid in and told him if he didn't buckle down he wouldn't graduate, he wouldn't go to college. He said If I want to go to college my old man will buy it. That's how it was down there. So afterwards I joined everything, VFW. The American Legion because we had our own Boy Scouts, we joined the Boy Scouts, the kids, when we were kids we had Sea Scouts. And then we went to the Navy and got two ships and they were in my back yard. One had an engine and a broken ship, and they had a ship with no engine, so we converted them. And they were sailing long after I left the place. And all those kids they go to college and stuff, when they come back they come up to see me. In fact, one day, there was a big accident up there and a couple of our kids got off first, and they were down there taking care of the people, and the cops come down, Look, he says, you know more about this than I do, you take care of them, I'm going up and direct traffic. But we had the rescue squad come in and teach the kids first aid and stuff. They were all good kids. They all went to college. All improved themselves. I just didn't like the fact that business sometimes it's who you know, not what you know.

Aaron: Especially in New Jersey

This guy that said his old man would buy the place, they had an incinerator on the property, and they used to say only 50 percent of the guys who go in ever come out.. Wood-Ridge, where Curtiss-Wright was, was right by the big graveyard where a lot of the gangsters were killed. And I mean there'd be new flowers on the graves every day. But it's funny, remember when the lights went out in New York City? My daughter was taking dancing lessons, and she said that day was one of the best days ever. Everybody respected everybody and tried to help everybody, because there was a problem, they wait till things are back to normal before it's dog eat dog. And then she was in a show out in Long Island and this Negro, she would drive out with him, and the Negro would drive back and bring her back to Harlem and stuff before he let her off. I had a guy from Makrtin-Marietta come see me one day and I couldn't go in, I had something, so he got lost and got into Harlem, so he stops and asks this policeman how to get someplace. The policeman says Roll up your windows, lock your doors, and keep driving straight until you see a white policeman, then you ask him. He found out how to get home and went home. Well hell, I'd never seen a Negro or a Jewish person until I went to the service. I mean Peterborough was, it was the French Catholics against the white Protestants.

AE: Going back several generations?

JW: I mean when I went to school I never heard of the words. It was Catholic or Protestant. It was just a town of 2,500. I mean there were 34 in my graduating class. That's less than there is in a section these days. But most of them went in the service, and a lot of them never came back. There was one other navigator and there was one fighter pilot from my class. And several others in the regular Army and stuff. The navigator was over in Japan when the atomic bomb hit the prison camp, he was in that camp. And the fighter pilot, he got a new plane, and he went up to check it out before they put the guns in it and he got shot down. But you know, you're invincible, you see a new toy, you want to check it out. The Germans knew as much about us as we knew ourselves. We used to listen to, after the war people would, submarine commanders would come into Portsmouth and talk, tell about how they used to drift in under the ships when they were coming in and stay there and take pictures and stuff, and then they'd wait for the ship to go out and two or three days later, in the bottom of the bay there someplace. Then they'd go out with the next ship. And I know in our town we had, at least the rumor is we had one guy used to go up on a mountain and flash signals, because you could see the mountain from Boston Harbor.

AE: These were German submarines that would follow the ships out of the harbor?

JW: Yes. They'd sneak in and sneak out. And the Navy Yard had a base there too, so they'd see what was being worked on and stuff. I mean it's like the old story that the guy drifts over into Switzerland and Switzerland calls up and says You're over our territory Get out and the guy says I know we are, shoot us down. So you do this for a living now?

AE: I do now. I used to work for the Bergen Record, the newspaper. But they laid me off two years ago, and I've been doing this for 20 years, just doing interviews like this, and a few years ago I thought why not make audiobooks, veterans like yourself telling their stories, in your own voices, not a narrator, not an actor, so I've been developing them and packaging them. It's a little rough at first, but I think there's a market for it. You can listen while you drive. A lot of people, you can't watch, there are so many books that have been written about the war, too many, and they're all great but there's just too many. Documentaries and movies. But there's nothing when you're driving 600 miles that you can listen to start to finish.

JW: Yeah I know my kid, he goes all over the country, all over the world, to take movies of the trains and stuff and he uses those things all the time. He said it's good.

AE: I've been developing, when I leave Tucson I'm going to Atlanta and there's a thing called AMPS East. That's the Armor Modeling Preservation Society. They make model tanks, planes, dioramas, and they have a convention, so they give out blue ribbons and put everything on display. Then they have a sales area where hobby shops come and set up, so I take a table and put them out, just to get them in front of history, people who are into history. Last year I did it in Atlanta and people send me email, I bought one set there, and they'll order two or three sets more. Just through word of mouth and the Internet.

JW: Well this son in law who's a train man, he goes up to Springfield, Mass., to the train show up there. He just came back a week ago.

AE: They have model train shows. I haven't done any train shows.

JW: He sells his videos up there. They sell anything to do with trains.

AE: One of the people who runs one of these shows is a model train buff, and the videos he has are phenomenal. Elaborate model train layouts.

JW: Well, the United States is becoming a vacationland, relally.

AE: And then I do, they have toy soldier shows, you know, people who collect the little miniature. Then they have war gaming conventions where they paint those toy soldiers and line up an army of them against an army of another, and then they have terrain, forts and hills, cannon, the whole shooting match so to speak. And they have eight sided dice and they have games. They have the craziest rules but they'll take over a hotel, a thousand people, three times a year in the Northeast, and then I take a table in the vendor area, it's like a department store with a theme. That's what I'm doing. It's just there are no good jobs in newspapers anymore. What I did, editing copy, has been merged, now the copy editor also lays out the page. I can do that, but I'm not always inspired to do that. I was always a headline writer, titles, I was good at that. If I went back to work for a newspaper it's nights and weekends, and all these shows are on weekends, so I'm hoping I can catch on with these and just do this.

JW: I've got a niece down thati's in El Paso on the newspaper there. She's a night editor and a weekend editor, but she's doing pretty good. Then I've got another one that, she has something to do with books for the University of California bookstore, or press, she goes around to find money to help support it and also authors to buy the books from. She just came back from Switzerland. She broke her wrist over there falling. It's amazing to see how the kids came out. I mean, she was a crybaby. She'd get something in her thumb and stuff, and now she goes out hiking and everything else. She got married, she got divorced and now they're back together again but it's more benefit not to remarry because they're both making good money. He's a lawyer that gets oil companies together with land owners and stuff. It's not a common every day lawyer. Big stuff. In fact, I'm surprised at the number of different jobs there are these days. i mean when I was growing up it was either a farmer or an engineer basically. And it was mechanical, civil or chemical, but now there's metal engineering and this and that. Like Ann was a Girl Scout director, and she checked that people were doing right, the councils, she'd train them and stuff like that. She was an outgoing person, and me, boy, I like to work alone, and she can't go into a store without finding something she can't find, ask somebody where it is, and I would just spend an hour looking for the damn thing than ask for something. And we always would disagree on that. It was funny,

she'd always find something she couldn't find, she'd immediately go to somebody, where is this? And then they'd strike up a conversation. But, everybody loved her. Only fifty percent of the guys loved me. If they didn't work, they didn't like me. If they worked, they did. I had a guy who used to come in early because he wanted to leave early. I'd tell, I said, Nobody knows when the hell you came in but everybody knows when you leave. And I said, If you're working for me, you stay. He says Yeah, but I get caught in the traffic. I says I don't care. That's what you get paid for. You don't get paid to come in any earlier and read the paper. Then I had another guy that would always take his three minutes, you're on the clock, you're allowed three minutes. He'd always take at least two, that used to gripe the hell out of me, because it's just as easy to be on time as it is to be late. Like he was getting something for nothing. It's odd the philosophy some people have.