

**Charles Kelton interviewed on October 30, 2004 by Beverly Bishop at his home in Westminister, Vermont.**

**BB:** Charlie Kelton down in Westminister, Vermont. It's October 30th, 2004. We're doing an oral history for the Town of Hartford and we are going to be talking about the past and about what you, you know about your memories of your life in Hartford.

So why don't you fill me in a little bit about your, you know like where did your roots come from, what, what are your family roots.

**CK:** We were, both Shirley and I, my wife of sixty years, who you just met, were born and raised right here in Windham County. She was in Saxtons River, and I was born in Saxtons River and raised on farm in Athens, one of the smaller towns in the State of Vermont. When I mention Athens I think of World War II. I think that there were something like, I don't know fifty-five legal voters in the Town of Athens and they sent something like fourteen or fifteen to World War II so I often think if somebody could look in the archives that the Town of Athens probably sent more men to World War II per capita voters than many other towns.

We moved to White River Junction in 1948 and we were hauling milk into the Bellows Falls Creamery and oh, I guess I really would say I had a lot of happy memories of Hartford, done a lot of things. I was a senator from the town and I was on the highway board when we built the Interstate and many, many other things but I think the thing that I have the, probably got the most out of and had the most pleasant memories was the Hartford School Board. I was on the board for fifteen years and I was chairman for thirteen and we built the new high school and I think about that everyday of my life. I mean it was something we needed and we had a wonderful board. We had Alfred Guarino, the lawyer in town, Don Fletcher, a banker, and Frank Neopolitano the Treasurer of Twin State Fruit and Simmy Kivey of the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical deal. We had some very capable people and the school system was, was growing and we needed a new high school and the board told the superintendent, the principal we are going to get a new high school and you people are not going to have to get out and beg for it, it's our responsibility as citizens and by gosh we got it on the first vote and the people that were opposing it and perhaps a lot of people that really didn't want to pay that much in the taxpayers thing were

just amazed that we got it on the first vote so they ran another vote and they, we lost it by just a very few votes but the, but the school board had a lot of courage, they went right ahead and put in the foundations and everything because we needed the, the high school so bad, made some minor reservations and by gosh we got it on the second vote again, I mean the third vote really and so the high school I remember the last year of the fifth term that I was, ran, I was over, we were, my business is right close to the high school where we were building the high school and I was over there 18 times in one day and I said, I didn't tell Shirley, I didn't tell anybody, I didn't tell the board, but I said when my three years is up I'm not going to run again, fifteen years is enough, not that I minded being over there 18 times, because I was delighted to do it, but I thought well fifteen years I'll give somebody else a chance to run the show, and it was, it was a very rewarding experience. We had some good people. I look back at the teachers. I know my first years chairman hard to believe now but the, we had a pay scale and the pay scale was \$200.00 less for the women than it was for the men. If you were a woman teacher you got \$200.00 less and we went about changing that so that everybody got an equal pay and we cut the classrooms and we brought some very capable people to run it. We got Dartmouth College. They came on with a program with us for Indian students and we participated in that which was very beneficial because they guaranteed so many of our seniors would go to Dartmouth College if we would go with the program and we did and it worked. So on that I look back I never had a lot of education, I look back that if ever I have a contribution in life that was it.

**BB:** What were those years?

**CK:** Oh, boy, you're going back now. That was back, my gosh I'm trying to think.

**BB:** Do you remember maybe --

**CK:** Yeah, in the, in the late '50s, in the '60s, in the '70s. Yeah, in that fifteen-year span, that time, yeah because I was, I was in the senate in the late '50s. I was on the highway board we built the, gee that's another thing, I ramble a little here, but a lot of people don't think about it, going up the highway now 89 and 91 that cost the State of Vermont a million dollars, not cost the State of Vermont, I correct myself, it cost to build the Interstate a million dollars a mile and Vermont's participation was \$100,000.00, the biggest bargain the State of Vermont ever got, and

we would be, you know, as far as tourism and light industry and business and the State of Vermont our green mountain state here we'd be in pretty tough shape if we didn't have the Interstate today, and it's, it's done a job and it's really, it's, we're grateful that we have it, so and I, then I got another little side deal that was kind of fun that perhaps brought me closer to the people which I'm a, I love to talk to people and visit with people and that was that my radio program, I started a radio program the WTSL the announcer, I'd call him in the morning and say I've got such and such a truck to sell, and he'd say well, Charlie why don't you come on the air and say it yourself what the truck is, call me, we'll put that on the air so we did, then we got to visiting so then that turned into a program and we had The Country Store and we had it for twenty years and I, I, I really enjoyed that but if I run back --

**BB:** Well, what did you do? What was the --

**CK:** Well, we had it; it was really the forerunner of the, the people on radio talk shows today. I had people on, we had the governors, we had the senators, we, everybody came because they would come out to the hippodrome there, that went with the building and we had a talk show with them right there --

**BB:** What was --

**CK:** -- and if they weren't right there well we did it by telephone. So --

**BB:** Now where was this station?

**CK:** Davalle's, right where the Sheriff's Department I think south of White River Junction, they were there right up until maybe a few years ago, and they maybe moved back to Woodstock, it's right south, the station was right south there's a, oh a garden, a thing there just south of White River and the building is in, just in back and WTSL, it was a --

**BB:** So it was a local station?

**CK:** It was a local station but it, it had good coverage and we had, I can remember we had a lot of fun I advertised one item after we talked about, we talked about politics and of course if we, if I had somebody there why I remember Governor Madeline Kunin came and --

**BB:** Can you remember talk, like anything unusual or different that is memorable about any --

**CK:** Well, I --

**BB:** -- of those shows?

**CK:** -- you a memorable guy was Mel Thompson, he was governor of, of New Hampshire and of course we went to Caanan Fair with all our pony hitches and our elephants and stuff like that, that we used for advertising our business and I remember the first year he came through and he introduced himself, he said I'm Mel Thompson, and he said I'm running for governor, I'll axe the tax was his big deal, and I said, well, gees you're running against Walter Peterson the PF speaker of the house and you'll, it's, you, you know you're going to have a tough deal, I be doggone he came within five thousand votes of making it. Next year at Caanan he comes through the thing, and he said remember me I'm Mel Thompson and I said yes, I do, he said what do you think my chances are, and I said well, gee, you know maybe you come within five thousand votes but Peterson is a sitting governor now so you may have some problems and he said well, and I will doggone he came within five thousand votes again. So Peterson was going for his second term, the third time he came through the tent where our, our ponies were and he said, you know what do you think my chances are this time, and I said Mel three times now I don't believe you're going to make it, and I'll be doggone he got it by five thousand votes, and I had, I had him on several times, some little, kind of little stories and I don't want to stray from your thing here, Beverly, but kind of a cute story, he, after Hugh Gallon defeated Mel Thompson for governor of New Hampshire, and the, then Sununo two terms later defeated Hugh Gallon and Hugh Gallon was very sick and I remember the night that he, Sununo beat him, he said at least I won't have to go to all those meetings and they took him to the, I think the Presbyterian Hospital in Boston he was very, very sick he was and one thing about New Hampshire, New Hampshire doesn't have a lieutenant governor and Vestor Roy was the senate president so she was acting governor while Hugh Gallon was in the hospital in Boston, and just before, I think either just before Christmas or little after, he had maybe two weeks left of his thing and Vestor Roy was having an executive counsel meeting and she called Hugh Gallon at the hospital and she said governor, is there anything special that you would like to have me do and he said Vestor I, you're a republican and I'm a demonstrate, but he said I would appreciate it if you would get Mr. Taylor, Steve Taylor from over in, I believe Steve's from, oh, where's there, I'll think of it in a minute, it's

not Plainfield but it's right close by there, Steve Taylor, he said I'd like to have him confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture, she said I'll do my best and she called back at say a quarter to two in the afternoon and Hugh Gallon the governor reached for his phone she said governor I have got good news for you, they have just confirmed Steve Taylor as commissioner of agricultural, he said thank you very much Vestor and he hung up the phone and died within seconds.

**BB:** Wow.

**CK:** Which was a little bit of a, you know, and so I had Steve Taylor on, Meridan, and I had him on and I said was that a fact I heard it was true, and he said that was a fact that, that he died immediately after that, and so he never finished his, really he had a few days left of his term as governor and Vestor Roy filled it out, and then Sunono came in. So that was a little, but if we, you know I kid you and I ramble a little bit on Beverly, but jumping back onto the high school which has a lot of my pleasant memories we had built the memorial school before I went on the board up where the whole campus is now and we had talked about it, where we would put the new high school and we decided that the best place was that if we could get all the property up there that would be the best place to do it, and a man by the name of Doc Tanning, he was a veterinary and he lived right there, right close by and he had his cows out in the pasture and so on and so forth, and so we decided to approach him so one night before I went to the board meeting I went up as chairman of the board and I said to Mrs. Tanning, they're awfully nice people, and I said is Doc here and she said yes he's out milking the cow in the barn. So I went out in the barn and Doc is there and he was very cordial to me and I pulled up a milking stool and sat down beside him and we visited awhile and finally I said, Doc, you know what I'm here for, don't ya. He said yes, I do and he said now Charlie do you have to have all the pasture where I pasture my cow in, and I said yes, we do, Doc, we're going to have a recreation building, in future we hope we'll have a swimming pool, we need this property, all of it, Doc, and he said, well, I was kind of afraid of that. He was kind of a slow talking guy and he said, you know, it's a big thing for my family and I want to talk it over with them and could you come back next week at your next board meeting and I said, fine, Doc, that's no problem. So next week before I went to the board meeting I went down to Town Treasurer and I said, I need a check for a thousand dollars. So I

got a check for a thousand dollars and Alfred Guarino had typed up an acceptance thing for me, but I didn't fill in the amount of money, I just put in the –

So I went up and I said to Mrs. Tanning, Doc out in the barn? She said yeah, he's out milking his cow again. So I went out and I said Doc, I'm here again. He said I kind of thought you'd be back. So I sat down and visited awhile and I said Doc, have you made up your mind? Yes, he said, we will. He said I've talked it over with the family and we'll sell the property, and he said we don't want to abuse the town but we think we ought to get \$20,000.00 for it. I said Doc, you got yourself a deal, and I said I've got a check for a thousand dollars and I've got a contract and I -- of course, this is all subject to approval by the Town but I'm sure that they'll go along with it, I don't think there is any problem and I remember I stood up and we didn't have anything to write on, we put it on the flank of the cow, the cow was there and I wrote my name in, then we filled it in the \$20,000.00 and Doc signed it, and we bought that whole complex for \$20,000.00.

**BB:** Wow.

**CK:** I, you know I think about it so many --

**BB:** How many acres was it?

**CK:** I don't remember how many acres but it was a pretty good sized plot because now we put in the swimming pool, they've expanded, of course we put in the high school, then the vocational school and the athletic fields and the rec, rec building. It was a nice piece of property.

**BB:** Did he keep his house and that?

**CK:** Kept his house. Yeah, kept his house right close by there and I don't know what's happened. I think that's gone now whether, I almost think the Town bought that too, the school district bought that after, but it was, certainly you have to say that Doc Tanning and his family made a very substantial contribution to the welfare of the education of the Town of Hartford. There's no question about it, and I, I think about happy memories of that time of, and Doc was very public spirited citizen, she was too, she was, worked hard in the church and one thing and another they, they were just nice people and they, we were lucky to get it but there was some talk at that time of going up onto the old airfield or what we know now where Frank Gilman had, where all everything is up there, you know the dealerships and everything but my feeling at that

time I said that's much more valuable for commercial use and that's where it should be, we started our school system here, it should be here, so it's, hey, I, I, like I say that's a very happy memory for me.

**BB:** Yeah. Do you want to talk about your family a little bit?

**CK:** Yes, yeah. We have, we have four, Shirley and I have four children, three sons and a daughter. We were altogether there when the, the world came to an end to us in 1989, which was I guess you want to say was primarily my fault, we were, the highest year that we did full business in Hartford we did over a hundred million dollars worth of business, hard to believe, and of course the, the biggest bank, well the two banks that were financing us in that recession they went under and we went right along with it. I mean that was, I tell everybody I was worth a lot of money in '79 and '89 I was broke, and that was a fact. I tried desperately and the family did, too, to try to save it. We, I did some things I shouldn't have done to try to do it, but that's neither here nor there, it's water over the dam now. We came down here because this was where I started and where Shirley and I were married and we just dug in and started, rented a place and started over again, and I'm, I'm happy that the children we have now one of the sons came down here with me and now another one of the sons is here, so one son is in business for himself with the car dealership, one son is with me and one is semi-retired and still lives in White River Junction and our, our daughter and son-in-law have just and we're trying to help as much as we can purchase Santa's Land down here in Santa.

**BB:** Oh, really?

**CK:** And so they're diligently working on that and so, and I'm, I'm happy, I'm eighty years old and I get up every morning at 5:00 and I go to work at six and I'm delighted that I can. It, it's just --

**BB:** Wow.

**CK:** That's a lot of fun. If, if you would, if somebody said if you'd had it to do over again you'd do a lot things different well probably would, but one of the things I had in my business and I come to find it quite rewarding now I helped a lot of people, awful lot of people, probably I did some things I shouldn't have done and helping people and that has come back to roost. It's surprising how many people walk in and say Charlie I remember you know when you financed my truck and

when you did this and that and put me on the road and I was awfully pleased that so many people came to see me and said, Charlie do you need some money, do you need something to get going. I said no I did it before alone, I got to do it again if I do it, I got to do it alone. So it was nice to have the people offer anyway and so forth.

**BB:** Yeah, wow. You really started from scratch here?

**CK:** Yes, no, it was just a little bit worse than scratch because we had quite a, you know, quite a few things around, around our neck to overcome and go, so it's, it is.

**BB:** Can you tell me about this fantastic business of yours, how did you get into it?

**CK:** You mean in White River?

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** Well, we started, we did, we -- I think selling is one of the things that --

**UV:** Is there anybody --

**CK:** You want to -- You want to turn it off?

**BB:** Oh.

**CK:** Yeah.

(The tape stopped and started.)

**BB:** Yeah. So you, when you moved to the Hartford area what were you doing?

**CK:** We were --

**BB:** Why did you go there?

**CK:** We were hauling milk out of the South Royalton, Jericho, Lebanon area into Bellows Falls Creamery.

**BB:** And who's we?

**CK:** Shirley and I, I mean we, we had four, five people working for us, and gradually that evolved around to a bigger leasing trucking company, then we took on GMC, General Motors and for thirty-five years we were GMC dealers, and that's where the growth came. We, we probably expanded too far and fast, we had, we had an agent in Barre, garage in Barre. We had one in Rutland. We had one in Saint Johnsbury. One in Brattleboro, Bellows Falls, and it grew every year, it would grow maybe ten percent every year until it was, it was, it was huge we had two



hundred and sixty-five people working for us, and, and again good people, very, we, we were, we were extremely lucky to have very, very good people.

**BB:** Like who were your -- Who were your main --

**CK:** Well, we had, we had in our shop, we had a shop foreman, Levi Fielder, he was there. We had Dick Shaddock in our, in our parts department. These were all people that were with us. Gees, where Eddie Wells he was our shop foreman in our tractor shop, he was with me thirty-three years. Lot of people went with us a long, long time.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** But we had good employees.

**BB:** You talked about two women, too, that were there?

**CK:** Yeah, we had two women Rose and every one of those people who gone on to, to greater and better things, Rose McKenny, she, Rose Temple, she married Dick Temple, and she was my secretary for twenty-three years. She was, say Diane Curtis she was another gal she was with me a long time, and they were, they, they were kingpins and they, Rose said many, many times I know you as well as I have knitted you.

**BB:** Explain, describe that situation when you were getting all the calls and --

**CK:** Well, at one time we had, I, I forget the figure but if I'm close 968 calls or something like that.

**BB:** In one day?

**CK:** In one day, and we could tell where they went, the shop and here, there and so on and so forth, and we, I had one hundred and twenty-six or seven and it was -- You want me to shut that off?

**BB:** No, he'll go away.

**CK:** Huh?

**BB:** He is going to go around the building so.

**CK:** So they, it was just something, it was just hopping. I mean it was just moving there all, all the time and we, we had all, many people said we should open up Sundays and I said you can't we've got to give our people some rest because we were, things were going so much and so fast

and it did, it, I enjoyed it but it was to give time to your family and so forth. It was, it was sometimes kind of, you were spread kind of thin.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** But again I, I think back, those people stop in to see me quite often, and that's always nice, the fact they talk to you.

**BB:** Do you -- are other businesses, did other businesses exist because your business was doing so well?

**CK:** Yes, we started a lot of people. We, which actually got me into a little trouble, a little, quite a little trouble people would come in and say, listen I need a log truck, well, we'll certainly, we'll, you know, fix you up, if I felt he had the ability to do that we'd put them into business and so forth and many people would come in to, needed financing in some ways and I'd get them financed somewhere with their equipment so the, I, I probably shouldn't mention that but the Judge mentioned to me, you know, when he was talking to me, he said Charlie I understand you probably put more people in business than the bank and probably that was a fact in some cases, and sometimes they come back to haunt you but most of the time they were good loans, one would, when we left GMAC, I forget how many, it was a big amount of paper that they had with the, that we had given them, I mean our business had developed and it was, it was a center really for trucks and cars and pick-ups and so forth that people came from miles around and I enjoy -- I enjoyed meeting people they were, it was, it was, it was fun, I, I look back it was some good days, some darn good days, there was a, a lot of fun with a lot of people we had, some, we, well, we had the first in Freight Liner which is the biggest seller of trucks today in there. We had the first -- Bobbie Duval, in fact I met her the other day again, she was our parts manager and she was the first Freight Liner woman that was a parts manager in the United States, yeah.

**BB:** What was the first car you sold?

**CK:** GMAC, we were, we were, we, we, the first cars we sold were later on, we sold GMC pick-ups were our first deals and they were, that was in, oh '48, probably '53 maybe, '54.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** Somewhere in that neighborhood, yeah.

**BB:** And how did you get involved with these, all the show animals and --

**CK:** Well, I liked animals and everything and they were, they attracted, my gosh we had International Harvester, too with Cub Cadet Tractors and gee we, the, the elephants, and the chimps and the so forth, they brought, we'd have an open house and we'd have huge crowds and we'd sell an awful lot of stuff, the Cub Cadet Tractors, pick-ups, excuse me, and it really was, was fun. Yeah.

**BB:** And what was this?

**CK:** Those are our wagons that, with the, that went with the hitches, sometimes we, a calicophy was our, the --

**BB:** The what?

**CK:** The calicophy was, which talk real loud music, "Good Old Summertime" and things like that, old tunes, that was the big, that was a big draw, a big draw.

**BB:** What was this room?

**CK:** That was what we called the hippodrome, still there and I, I don't know what they use it for now, but it's, it's a, that was our showroom really for our units and that what, at that particular time for whatever occasion why, might have been an open house or something.

**BB:** So but normally this was filled with new --

**CK:** Yes.

**BB:** -- new vehicles?

**CK:** Yes, right, that's a fact.

**BB:** And --

**CK:** Those are the, those are the pony hitches, yeah, those.

**BB:** And who's driving?

**CK:** Dick Baleau, he was my son-in-law, yeah and I believe Shirley my wife of sixty years is on the back, yeah, that was at Caanan Fair.

**BB:** At the fair?

**CK:** Yep.

**BB:** And --

**CK:** That was Sammy the chimp, yeah.

**BB:** Where did they stay?

**CK:** Huh? They'd live right in the house, they were, you could, they, you see probably of the, all the animals the smartest are the chimps and the elephants, they remember and they have the greatest memory. Now he, him, I mean he was in at the dinner table and I taught him to clap and he clap, clap, finally, so you would say clap and he'd clap and so then we would go out to get in the car and you'd say clap, we'd lost it, he would, you clapped, you clapped at the dinner table, you didn't clap at the, at the car so you had to move rather slowly, then you moved from the dinner table to a chair and you clapped, then you got on the porch and you clapped, and then you got in the car and you clapped, and then once you got the clap, never, it was always there, all you had to do was say clap and he would clap. Yeah, he was –

**BB:** And how --

**CK:** They're, they're smart, very smart.

**BB:** And you had?

**CK:** We had I think four of them, not all at the same, we only had one at a time.

**BB:** So were these, are like family pet?

**CK:** Well, pretty much but they, their, their care because you've got to watch them they're right on the stick, I mean they, they, they, they are all almost as smart as we are.

**BB:** And so did you keep them in a cage?

**CK:** Yeah, at night you put them –

**BB:** At night.

**CK:** -- in a little cage right in the kitchen in the little cage, and then, then you'd let them out in the daytime.

**BB:** And you had elephants?

**CK:** Yeah, yeah, we had three elephants, I think, and Beverly, you got one of the pictures there in the back you have the elephants, yeah, not --It's in your flyer for, yeah.

**BB:** Oops.

**CK:** Yeah, right there.

**BB:** Oh, and how many elephants did you have?

**CK:** Three. I wish that, well, of all the things I lost I wish I could, could have kept them, those Asian elephants are worth about a hundred thousand dollars now.

**BB:** Wow.

**CK:** You see there's no more Asian elephants, there haven't been any in the country for gosh, 50 years.

**BB:** So these are still alive, huh?

**CK:** Pretty much, yeah, would be, see they have about the same life span as a human.

**BB:** And where did they go?

**CK:** We kept them right in the, in the, we had a place right adjacent to the hippodrome and eventually as they grew I put them in the hippodrome but where, they went, you know if we were marketing in some particular place like Burlington and so forth where we were selling some stuff, we had Essex Junction Fair, they went to the fair. If we were at Rutland Fair, they went to Rutland Fair.

**BB:** Oh.

**CK:** They were all, we, we used them. They were in the Shrine parades. We, they were our advertising thing and they sold, I mean they sold stuff, people came.

**BB:** Wow, who trained them?

**CK:** We had a guy that trained them, but after you've, there's no trick; after they learn a trick anybody can do it.

**BB:** Really?

**CK:** They're, they're very fallen, and they, on the, when you were, they would, you would get within five miles of home if you were up they'll start to rock the truck, they know they are heading home, yeah.

**BB:** Wow, and then you talked about --

**CK:** Yes. No, we did, I ran for Lieutenant Governor and the last month I could see with the business growing I could not do it so I dropped out. I didn't officially drop out, but I didn't, I didn't

do any more campaigning but I was pleased it came within nine hundred votes of getting the nomination I was, wasn't even an official candidate.

**BB:** Yeah, was this at the time that you were a senator?

**CK:** Yes, I was a senator when I ran for that.

**BB:** What years was that?

**CK:** How's your glasses?

**BB:** About?

**CK:** How's your glasses?

**BB:** Oh, I don't know how good they are, looking at this great ring, wow.

**CK:** Maybe '59, '60.

**BB:** Is it on the inside or outside?

**CK:** No, I think it would be on the outside or the inside.

**BB:** The inside is just about worn off.

**CK:** Yeah, the seals, State seal, I think it's '59 and '60.

**BB:** I think your initials are on the inside.

**CK:** Yeah but there's, on the side or somewhere the year, too, the '59 and '60.

**BB:** Oops, wow, it's a solid gold ring, wow. I can't read this date anymore.

**CK:** I believe it's '59 and '60.

**BB:** I think it was right here.

**CK:** I get so I forget, forget my head if it wasn't hooked on me.

**BB:** Huh, well, I can't see it.

**CK:** No, I'll take this chair.

**BB:** I'm down low here.

**CK:** Yeah.

**BB:** And then have you, and this is your home or?

**CK:** That was, that's the farm. That's, that is the farm.

**BB:** This is where –

**CK:** That is the farm where we were, that's the whole, where the hippodrome --

**BB:** So this is where, wow.

**CK:** -- is everything, yeah. This is before we built all the buildings and, but it was one of those nice little things that happened to you.

**BB:** Tell me about the Clydesdales.

**CK:** Well, that was another thing, we had the Clydesdales for just one year, we bought them, but we had them already sold to Budweiser and they went down here to, to New Hampshire and we bought them, they were the Wilson Hitch, the Wilson Packing Hitch out of Chicago who bought them and then we sold them to them.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** But we didn't, we, well the pony hitches were our big deal, we, we really couldn't afford a horse hitch.

**BB:** And this was a really great photograph.

**CK:** Isn't it? Yeah, we're delighted with that.

**BB:** So at head table, can you see from there?

**CK:** Yep, yes.

**BB:** From the left?

**CK:** That was the State Police, head of the safety division, yeah, and that was Shirley.

**BB:** Oh, okay.

**CK:** Yeah, and that was ex-Governor Emerson, and that was me, and that was Governor Joe Johnson, that was Judge Duval, and that was Mrs. Emerson.

**BB:** Huh, and do you remember any of these people?

**CK:** I, I don't recall.

**BB:** Do you remember any of these?

**CK:** Well, that's my brother-in-law right here on the left here, right there.

**BB:** Oh, facing.

**CK:** Yeah.

**BB:** Yep.

**CK:** And most of those are employees, they were, Alfred Guarino I can see him with his head right there, right there.

**BB:** With the glasses?

**CK:** Yeah, with the glasses, yep.

**BB:** Yep.

**CK:** He just died not too long ago.

**BB:** Yep.

**CK:** Yeah.

**BB:** They were fantastic.

**CK:** He served on the school board.

**BB:** And this was, this, what, the occasion was?

**CK:** A safety meeting banquet for the employees.

**BB:** I want to take a picture of that. I forgot to take a picture of this. Okay, I think that was –

**CK:** Those were, yeah.

**BB:** I just wanted to kind of, if there was anything there to talk about I wanted to do it. This is one that I didn't take a photograph of yet, but I will.

**CK:** Oh, okay, good.

**BB:** Let's see. So just downtown White River can you think of any people in your mind that really stand out as, as people that inspire -- were inspiring or valuable to the community or?

**CK:** Yes, Briggs, the hotel, well hotel over there, my God, he and his father and his mother who just went out business not very long ago they were, you know they were outstanding people for the, for the community.

Alfred Guarino, his son who died prematurely was a coach, I'm, I'm trying to think of his name, my gosh he was, oh what he contributed, you know, to the, the Town. I look back John Frattis, our superintendent of schools, he, he gave an awful lot. Frank Neopolitano, manager of Twin State Fruit gave a lot of his public time and things. Oh, there's just an awful lot of people that worked everyday for the good of Town of Hartford and they, they really didn't get a lot of notoriety for it either. I was trying to think, a lot of things behind the scene that got me in bad



with the, I'm trying to think of his name, Nolton, was it Nolton? Patricia, Moulton, Moulton, that's it Moulton.

**BB:** Pat Moulton.

**CK:** Pat Moulton, her father.

**BB:** Al?

**CK:** Al Moulton, very, very capable guy probably brought a lot of business to the state and the town and everything, at one time he was the administrator for the Quechee Lakes when the Quechee Lakes was growing, and here was a case where the Valley News and I can say that, you know, where they were dead wrong in promoting what they did, they promoted a fight between the selectmen and the Quechee Lakes people to the point where nobody dared do anything and everything was at a stalemate and Moulton, Al Moulton come to see me, I was no longer on the school board or anything, and he said Charlie, we need some help, he says you know all these people that are involved, he said they're so scared now they are getting the paper everyday and they are on the front page of the paper, we were right at a stalemate and we are just fighting and nothing is getting done and he said I believe Charlie if you called each selectman personally and say we want to sit down and have a meeting with nobody around and see if we can hash out our differences here so we can be on a plane and I said, no, I'll be glad to do that and so I called each, we had three at this, three selectmen at that time, and I called each one of them and I said you know things have got to the point there, there you people are scared because the Valley News has got you on the front page of the paper everyday, they were hanging on every word and you're saying things to each other you shouldn't be saying probably, how about coming out and we're going to give you something to eat and come out to the barn and at 8:00 such and such a day and stay as long as we need to stay to see if we can come to, get some consensus of opinion here, and by gosh they all agreed to it and the Town Manager, of course a long time Town Manager that been there a long time, he was there and we, they came out and fortunately nobody said anything to anybody, the Quechee Lakes people were there they never got done, I didn't get into it, I didn't even, was none, it was really none of my business and I just kind of hung around if they needed anything and I didn't even get into their deals, we had

plenty of room there in the barn and we give them a turkey dinner and they were, the selectmen and the Town Manager and them were things, and about half past three in the afternoon the Town Manager come into the little office I have in front there at the barn and he said Charlie, it's working, we're getting this thing straightened out, and I think the Valley, the Valley News is pretty near crazy, they, cause they couldn't find out what happened or why it happened, things just kind of smoothed out and things were straightened out and Al Moulton said nobody, and they didn't know until about six months afterwards and when they found out I think there was a vendetta, they held that against me as long as I was there, I never should have done that, but we got it done and it was, it was, it was eventually a good thing for the Town. It was one of those things that happens.

And I have some amusing things too, if you remember before we put in the dam, the North Hartland Dam, there was a guy in the Corps of Engineers with the name of General Madden, and they set aside a day where the public could come to Quechee Gorge and look, and he would explain and then he'd go down where the dam was going to be and everything, would explain the whole thing, and the public could have a chance to put some input into it, and we have a character, he served on the school board a short time, but they, he was quite controversial and they cut him off, by the name of Ham Dupree, and he is a great big heavy set guy, and he was, had one of the little farms that started Quechee Gorge, Quechee thing and he was one of the farms that sold, he and his brother, and he was, well he was kind of a gadfly, I got along with him fine, he was a good friend of mine, and he and I would spar at Town Meeting and we thought the world of each other, and but he always wanted to be in on what stuff was going on, and so I always called him the Mayor of Quechee and just kidding and, then I, at Town Meeting I would introduce him as the Mayor of Quechee wants to talk, everybody would laugh and so on. Well General Madden was there, we were at Quechee Gorge and so on and so forth. They had this, Valley News had a paper published in the afternoon then, and they had a young fellow by the name of Salsville I think it was, was new cub reporter, and I was a senator of course and I said to General Madden, I said the General, did you ever meet the Mayor of Quechee, Ham Dupree, and he said, why no, I, I didn't realize we had a mayor and so he shook his hand and Ham ate every

bit of it up. He was, he went the whole line and they showed a picture of that afternoon of Ham Dupree and quoted him twenty-four times, the mayor said this, the mayor said that, and it showed a picture of General Madden and Ham was, with his point, pointing out over where the lake would be, and I had to go over Monday morning and save his job for him for Valley News, they were ticked, but it was, it was, and I, so I always accused Ham, I said how many of those front pages of the Valley News, I said how many did you buy ten or fifteen of them, so no, no, he said I never brought any he said, but that was one of the amusing things that happened. It was fun. But it was --

**BB:** I bet you have a lot more of those.

**CK:** Yeah, we do, you'd think about it, you know I think about, you know when I went to school in a little one room school in, in Athens, still there, it's a town office there now, and what would have been, would have been, would have been '34, 1934 would have been, wouldn't it because '35 would have been the, of course it was Roosevelt and Garner and Landon and Knox, Landon, Governor Landon was the governor of Kansas, his daughter Lydia was a, was a senator, and when I went to school in the morning of the November 5th or whatever it was the date, whatever it was, I went in there I was absolutely sure listening to my family that Landon and Knox would sweep the country, that there, Roosevelt wouldn't carry one state. Well, when we listened to the Majestic radio that night he, Landon and Knox carried Maine and Vermont. Roosevelt took a clean sweep of the whole deal.

You know one of the, that's one of the cute stories of course it's, you know I find a lot of parallel today of people that hate Bush, they were people, my grandfather with Roosevelt which I feel was one of our great presidents, Roosevelt if you mentioned his, at the supper table, his name he had a vein in the side of his neck and it squirt right up there, Roosevelt was, you know, a terrible thing and there was --

(The end of side one of tape one. The beginning of side two of tape one.)

**CK:** Roosevelt's favorite story they tell us was knowing how the country felt, was that the man got on the subway in the morning and he grabbed the paper and the guy said why do you grab

the paper with such a vengeance, he says I want to look at the obituaries, well he says you don't find them on the front page, he says when this fellow goes he'll be on the front page.

So I think back the Roosevelt and Garner and the story was Roosevelt and Garner and Beregan, that was, of course the, the prohibition might come to a halt then, and I can remember my aunt, I was a young guy and I said well, look at all the gambling, the things that go on that are bad, why my aunt said it's way overrated, there wasn't anything like that in Chicago, and so forth. She didn't want to believe it.

**BB:** So tell me a little bit about your, you know, your childhood, and your, do you remember your grandparents, your parents?

**CK:** Oh, yes, very much so.

**BB:** Tell me, talk about them a little bit.

**CK:** Well, they were, my, my, they came from Athon, Mass., my grandfather did, and they came up to Athens, Vermont, they bought that farm and my dad started farming and he was born I think the turn of the, 1900, the turn of the century and he farmed and he hauled, he had two trucks that hauled milk into Bellows Falls Creamery, and I guess you would say that we were, we were lucky we were farmers, we had, in the '30s when things were really tough, not many people visualize that today, but we were lucky, we had enough to eat, but in those days, well really you had to, there were two things that were paramount, to get enough to eat and to keep clothes on to keep you warm and to keep heat in your house, that was, it was, it was that tough, and Roosevelt, I think was, done a very great thing he was trying desperately to bring us out of that thing and I went to agi school in Randolph and hoping to be a farmer and I always hoped that I might get rich enough to be a gentleman farmer, but I never did, but I, I, you know, I guess I'm awfully proud of the fact that I was a farmer. Many people don't feel that way perhaps but I do, and it was, it was a, certainly an experience growing up and you would learn the value of a dollar, you learned the value of friendship, and you learned the value of being a neighbor.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** Those things came about during your lifetime.

**BB:** So tell me what your grandfather was like.

**CK:** My grandfather, he had a horse, he went to Rutland Fair to race it, and I can remember a little deal that I suppose everybody had their little thing, you know, how to do things and he had a horse by the name of Tameny and the horse was very good natured, but when they would line up they didn't have all these nice things you know where they come out on the track they have everybody in a little thing, they had to line up and then watching him, when the guy said alright, but he would take Tameny and he, Tameny would run front and back and just kind of revved up, and of course they couldn't get going and finally the announcer would say Kelton, you either get your horse in line there or we're going to disqualify you, and then of course he would get in the line and of course the other horses got so agitated sometimes he would win so there was little tricks that, that they all pulled and my, my grandfather was, you know like a lot of people lean and hard work was, was his thing and like a lot of people he died and his, well in the early 60s. I mean it was, the life then people didn't live as long --

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** -- because --

**BB:** Was he big, small?

**CK:** He was a tall man, slim man, and was very, very courteous, he, we learned a lot from him as I did my father that, to be a good neighbor, to be a good farmer and to do things that you should do. I think about him often.

**BB:** Yeah, but what, what about your grandmother did you; did you know her of your grandparents?

**CK:** Grandmother she had a kind of a tough time, my grandmother on the Kelton side she was, she had been brought up by a minister and had everything given to her and then of course she was, she, my grandfather married her and she found herself out raking hay and she did, she, she, you know was, she adapted herself to the situation. It was a Depression and you did what you had to do and she did it, but it was a little tougher for her than it was because of her background didn't lend herself to it.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** So I think of course you think more because they died early I think more of my mother and my father. My mother was a very religious women, but I, I'm very proud of her, she, she didn't, what is it they say, wear it on her sleeve. She was very nice to, I guess it would be anybody if they didn't believe in God or the Lord she; she was their good friend anyway. She was, she was sorry they didn't feel the way she did but that's okay she was very condescending to do that but she did it every opportunity, try she would to church every, my grand -- my grandfather on the A side was a minister, a Methodist minister and that of course my mother was his daughter and they, they did, of course have a different life than the farming life of course, but my mother was very, you know, very anxious to help anybody in the town and the church was her life.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** Yeah.

**BB:** What about your parents?

**CK:** Now when you say parents, my mother --

**BB:** Your parents?

**CK:** Huh?

**BB:** Your mother and father?

**CK:** Yeah, my mother and father that's, primarily I think about when we were in World War II we were all, I was in the Navy, and we're all gone, my mother wrote me a letter Sherman Oakes lived way up on a hill here and he was a person that, you know, I'd seen him and he was a World War, probably a World War I veteran and he died, and they didn't have a minister to go out for his funeral so they went up and the summer person up here in Grafton they rapped on his door and asked him if he would, they understood he was a minister and would he officiate at the funeral and he said, yes, he'd be glad to do it, and so my mother wrote me that she and Mrs. , Sherm's wife were sitting in the front pew and they had Sherman of course stretched out in the casket there and this, what they didn't know was the minister that they'd asked was the head minister of the First Presbyterian Church of New York City, and, and they were not aware that he did and he did a little research on Sherman before he did, and mother said we sat in that front pew with Mrs. Sherman Oakes and she said, and he grabbed that altar up there as if he owned it and he said

Sherman Oakes, and she said it brought everybody right out there, he said he knew what it was to have Indians outside his house at night and she said he gave a sermon, why she said I thought Sherman Oakes was the president of the United States, she said Mrs. Oakes looked over in the casket, she couldn't believe it, but she said it was a tremendous sermon, of course naturally that, that and of course when, when I read it I know I was in the Pacific and I could smile cause I could think of Sherman Oakes when, Memorial Day he always came and he was dressed in his World War I uniform and it was a sobering thought, very nice thing for Memorial Day for all us kids of course it was warm and so forth, and it was, it was one of the amusing things that you think about growing up in the, in the family.

I remember the day we were picking up milk at Harland barns in Saxon River, it was in the spring of the year and Joe Barnes had loaded a horse into his truck, it was a dump truck so it sat up high, and we heard him coming down the road, and we looked up and the horse had got loose in the dump truck and put one hoof right over on the roof, jamming it down in, the next hoof went right over onto the radiator, and the next one went right out on the road, so Joe was driving dump truck down the road with a, with a cab broke in and the thing and the horse is running down the road in front of him, so we caught the horse.

So hey, it was a lot of nice things that, amusing things happened, you know.

**BB:** So in your family, did you have siblings?

**CK:** Yes, yeah, we did. Yeah, we, well I'm happy that we're all, our kids and our grandchildren, we're, we're, Shirley and I have two twin grand -- grandsons and we have twin great granddaughters.

**BB:** Oh, my gosh.

**CK:** So we're, and everybody, you know is, is there, we're both Shirley and I are 80 years old.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** And we're here, we work everyday and that's, hey we're glad we're here.

**BB:** Now do you have brothers and sisters and?

**CK:** Yes, I have, regrettably I have two brothers, neither one of them are here. One was four years older than I was and one was four years younger and both of them have died, and I have a

sister, and she is in Grafton, Vermont, and she's six years younger than I am, and I'm happy, on occasions I call and we go out and meet her and so on and so forth so.

**BB:** So you had three sons and --

**CK:** Yeah.

**BB:** -- you're from a family with three sons and a daughter?

**CK:** Right, yeah. I feel bad I, I, I say, you know to myself, Beverly, gee whiz my two brothers I wish they were here.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** Hey, but that's the way it is.

**BB:** Yeah, when you think about growing in your household though and your parents what are some of the characteristics of your household that you can remember? Was it a, you know, noisy, quiet --

**CK:** No, I don't know.

**BB:** -- musical, laughter?

**CK:** It was, there were certain things you lived by that were pretty, it was a, it was a warm place, and there was things, but nevertheless dad called the shots and that's the way it was, you know sometimes you could come up to mother and say you don't think this is quite right, you could talk to her but with him that was the way it was and you didn't sit down and have a confab. I wouldn't say we're that close, it was one of the things that I tried to do with my children, but be able to talk more freely but by the same tokens it was an era and that was it. I mean this is hard to believe that, you know back in those days we shot gray squirrels to eat, frog legs to eat. I mean and the most important thing was to have enough food and clothing to, to, you know, stay alive and they were, you know there were tragedies, I can remember up here we have a pond up here in the east of, in Athens and gee whiz many times because of the Depression younger, maybe they had five kids or six kids and they would call a sister or a brother or something and maybe in another state or even say gee, you know, my daughter is fourteen or fifteen years of age she could help out with the chores on the farm, could you take her because it would be one less for them to feed, sadly this was the facts of life and many times that fourteen or fifteen year old girl would come to



the family with her sister maybe who was married and they had children and the sister scarlet fever or something took the sister who was twenty-two or three years old, and this girl was maybe sixteen, seventeen so she married eventually the widower who might have been thirty years old so there'd be maybe twelve or fifteen years difference.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** But that was, that was the way it was, and I remember one tragedy up here on the Athens farm my dad was selectman, and they got, he got a call on the telephone which was a new wrinkle then and they said to dad, he was chairman of the board of selectmen in Athens, you better get up to Athens Pond, there's been a death and so he called the Sheriff of Windham County, and they both met up there and come to find out this seventy-seven year old man, who had married a twenty-one year old girl, and because she needed a home and that was it, and they made the mistake of taking in a boarder who was twenty-one years old, and they were up there hornpout fishing, and for whatever reason why he got drowned, and so the Sheriff said to my dad, he says, you know, he said this funny business going on here and he said I, but he said they killed him, that's what they did, and the old man, he says and there is proof of it look at the old man's, I shouldn't call him an old man he is younger than I am, he said look at his neck the oar they hit him, he got out of the water and they hit him with an oar, and there is an oar mark right across his neck, and so he says he, she was crying and taking on very great, and finally the Sheriff said alright stop your crying here, he said, we'll get a report made out. So he was making out the report, and he said now tell me what happened. Well, she said, you know, we got out there hornpout fishing as we always did, and he got up in the boat and started rising the boat. Well, of course the Sheriff didn't believe that quite all, and but he said we told him to sit down, he didn't sit down and he got rocking the boat until he fell overboard, seventy-seven year old man been there a long time, but to rock the boat and fell overboard and then she started to cry again and he said, what are you crying for? She said, well, you know, I think I didn't help, I was trying to get him back in with the oar and I hit him on the side of the neck when I tried to get him, and dad said he remembered the Sheriff with his book out, and said damn it, you're smarter than I thought you were, and there, there was, hey that was one of those things that happened.

**BB:** So they just got away with it?

**CK:** Yeah, they just got away with it, but that was the era we lived in but I think one of the things that I always remember my, there in Athens, I was perhaps five, six years old, gives you a little idea of the discipline of that, of that age, that era, I was maybe five or six and my brother was four years older than I was and the roads were just starting to plow them and they were pretty narrow on the farm and this car pulled up and we were, it was, you know say a '32 or '33 or '4 car, we didn't see many cars unless we were out there, you know shoveling or doing something me and my brother, and they got out of the car, very, two very important people, all dressed up and they said is Mr. Kelton here, and my brother said yes, he's in the horse barn, and so we tagged right along in because we wanted to be in on what was going on and we were logging, dad was logging off the whole mountain so he had a lot of French guys that came out of Canada, were up there logging and they had little, small little shacks and they would, with wood, they'd cut some wood and keep warm and that was it, and there were, they were probably six or seven of log teams coming down the hill and going back up the hill, bringing logs down to be shipped to the mill and so we tagged in and they said, you're Mr. Kelton. He said, "yes," and they said, "We're from the Federal Bureau of Investigation." Well, I'm telling you, we, I'm sure, dad was somewhat of a progressive guy cause he was hauling milk into Bellows Falls, but to have the Federal Bureau of Investigation was something else and we were, you know, aware of the thing, and he said, they said we want to show you a picture of these two men and the, dad looked at them, and he said, yes, and they said have you ever seen them, yes, dad said I've seen them. He said where, where are they? He says they're right on the hill in the shack and they were two of the ten most wanted criminals, they were killers in the United States and he said, they said listen we've got to get them down off the hill, what's the best way to do it, Mr. Kelton, and he says well I can do that, that's no problem. He said Meryl, Charlie, and this is all he said to us, I want you to go up on the next scoop with a team and he says go to the far end and he says those two guys are in that corner cabin, they'll be working right there, they're tall and he said tell them that I want them to come down to the horse barn right away and he says, if they ask you why, tell them I want to change locks, go. That's all he said. He sent his five-year old boy and his nine year old

boy to get two of the nation's worse criminals, he didn't even say be careful. He said this, that's what you do and that was law, you did, you knew and if you got hurt in that deal it was your fault because you should know, you listened, you knew those were FBI guys, you knew the situation was serious, he didn't need to lecture, you didn't have to have a lecture, you knew what to do.

I remember I got off the scoot, me and my brother did and we walked over and they were two, they were two bad guys and why I can remember to this day, one of them said what the hell do you want to us boys and I thought my brother was the smartest boy in the whole doggone world, and he said dad wants you down at the horse barn right now, and they said what the hell does he want, and he says he wants you to change locks, and I remember one of them had an axe and stuck it in a thing like that, so we rode down on the first scoot, they got on the next scoot with the horses going down and of course we were hanging the other side of, dad didn't say stay out of the barn, didn't say anything, these two, so we were, we were standing outside because nobody invited us in, and they said where's your father and Meryl says he's in the horse barn and they'd hid the car, the other, the FBI had. I'll tell you when they walked in they didn't get read the Bill of Rights, they were on the floor so quick it make your head swim, and they handcuffed them and so on and so forth, and thanked dad and they didn't say anything to us boys, they didn't even thank us boys for going up there, they just took it and went out, but what my point of my story is, Beverly, that these, that was the era, you knew certain things you should do, you didn't need to be told two times about it or three times about it, you didn't need to be told at all, you knew what you had to do, and you, you know it was the topic of the supper conversation that night of who they were and what they were, they had an old car and we found, we never found any guns but we found underneath some billy clubs and one thing or another that these guys had had and so on and so forth, but you know, it's, it was an era of the times and that was, that was, that was it.

**BB:** Oh, my goodness. Can you, do you want to talk a little bit about the war years?

**CK:** I, you know I was a, a veteran. I, I guess that I shouldn't, you know my cousin, the first -- second person to leave World War II, to leave the town of Athens he went to Fort Bragg, he was sick when he got down there and he, to make a long story short, he was commissioned to lieutenant which we're very proud of, and he was made, at the Battle of the Bulge, a captain and

the infantry and the one person that had a college education of all us kids was a flatlander, if you want to call it, that came up here during the Depression and he had a college education and he was the first one drafted into the Army and he went to, to the Banton Death March and was, he died in the Banton Death March, and all the rest of us, I, gosh I think it was thirteen of us, there's, there's a stone out in Athens with all our names on it and I think there's thirteen of us and I think he was the thirteenth one, I don't know, maybe fourteen, but we all came back, and I, to say you know I think of my cousin at the Battle of the Bulge I was in Navy and you know really it was, when you consider him he didn't have his clothes off from say, I don't know, November 10th till January 15th or something, never had his clothes off, so to say, you know, we were with the, I, I had a firsthand look at World War II because I was on a destroyer and we were in the Third Fleet and so for about two months we were right off the coast of Japan and it was an eerie thing to, you know to think there's the enemy and you could see the coast, and of course they were getting pretty well done then, I mean it was, there were kamikaze trains -- planes were coming out but that was about it, but I can remember one incident there, I was up on the bridge and I heard the captain who you never spoke to, I was a petty officer, and, and he, I heard him come out of the, the top bridge and I heard him say he will go down as one of our great presidents and it didn't register with me, and then it was, that whistle came three times, we usually general quarters is two, three times is pretty serious, and general quarters is pretty serious but three times that whistle and it said we have just received word that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt has died, wants praetorian, it was, you know, I, I didn't even think, I said who in the world is vice-president, I didn't even think, you know.

**BB:** Right.

**CK:** But, it, you know was a, a striking thing, you know we said hey what's going to happen, but getting on with that it was an amusing, there was an amusing thing to it, the, being a farm boy I, I, you know, I knew what work was and so I'm sure the executive officer and so forth recognized that, and so we were all ready to go in, they'd surrendered, and we were all ready, the Third Fleet were right in the Tokyo Harbor, we were right there and so we were all going in, and of course we'd heard all these stories about Germany and people getting shot and killed and one thing and

another so we figured it wasn't, you know the Japanese weren't very nice people in the, at the islands, I'll clue you, they shove knives into you and so on, so we expected the worse, so it was Admiral Halzey said we'll go in right away to take control and McArthur said you'll wait until I get there and so we did, but then they decided to do it all in one deal that the Third Fleet, that we would all get in wheel boats, this sounds funny, we'll all get in wheel boats and we'll all go in at the same time, and in other words Tokyo Bay we were just full of wheel boats going in, but getting ahead of my story a little bit, they, they said they wanted so many men off each ship, Jesus, pretty near the whole ship signed up, and I didn't sign up, I had two children, I'd lived this long I said hey, I'm just not gonna push the envelope, although that wasn't a phraseology in those days and so the, a guy by the name, the executive officer was the name of Wilcox, and he was a contractor from Texas and he, over the PA system he said Petty Officer Kelton come to the ward room and so I said gees what the dickens have I done now and so I got up there and Wilcox says sit down and he, awfully nice guy and he says, I'm looking over this list of people that we got tomorrow, you know, were going into the, the land and he said I don't see your name on it and I said well, sir I said I've got two children, I got a wife, I've lived this long I thought why push the envelope and he laughed, and he said well your name's on it, you're going to be in wheel boat number one, you're going to be in charge of it, and I think probably I might have been the first naval person to set foot on Japan, but I was maybe a second because we rolled right up onto the thing you know I had twelve men in the wheel boat there and I was standing like, almost like George Washington you stand in front of it, all these wheel boats were going in, and we all got off it at about the same time, and you know when I got off, probably I jumped off, or maybe somebody jumped off the other wheel boat, so it might have been and we got there and all they wanted was Chesterfields, Camels and Lucky Strikes. Where, there was not a thing, they bowed, we walked through Tokyo streets and there was never an incident, not an incident, we never had a, an incident in the whole thing.

**BB:** Wow.

**CK:** And whereas in Germany they had a lot of incidents, there was a lot of problems, but we didn't, we didn't have any problems at all. I used to go in everyday and then I had a real lucky

break, I, I thank the Lord that I did, I was petty officer and I, I was shore patrol and I wanted to do something everyday so Wilcox, the executive officer, let me do it, I'd take about eight men over everyday to patrol and in Tokyo and Yogasuka (?) and Yoahama (?), and we'd go over there and you know you didn't do much, you dumping around, but and you had a 45 and you had shore patrol and so and so forth and then at night you'd come back and you'd pick up your men, make sure they all got in their wheel boats and it's one thing or another, some of them would get drunk, or something you'd pick them out of the, out of the wharf there, and I got there one day and I, I was walking down, I always did it about a quarter past five cause I'd be the last guy and I looked up and our ship was gathering steam out there, the USS Higby, destroyer, and I said, you know always these rumors you're going home see, and so then I looked and our wheel boat which has to wait for me but didn't and they were halfway to our ship, you know, and they were saying, Charlie, we're going home, we're going home, see ya, and I said, hey, I said who did, and they said we got orders, the next officer in charge to, to go and so I watched, and they pulled my wheel boat right up on the thing and pulled out of the harbor and so I said, Jesus, so I went back up to the Port Authority and I said, I'm Charlie Kelton from the Higby, and the guy looked up at me and he grinned, and he says ya ain't got a ship have ya, and I said, no I haven't, what happened, he said well we're not allowed to tell you that, and I said well tell me this are they going home, he said no, they're not going home, and I said well listen what can I do? He said do whatever you want, and they took me out to where the atomic bomb was dropped, I, a little ahead of my story, the Marines were there, the Navy was there, the Air Force was there, everybody was there and everybody was doing this and that and the other and so nobody paid, I walked around with a shore patrol thing, and thing and I had permits, you know I could go anywhere and do anything, and I could, you'd stop and maybe eat with the Air Force at noon, maybe that night you'd sleep with the Navy, you know, and it was fine, I had no, no problems with anybody, and so finally I wiggled a ride with an officer to go out to where the atomic bomb was dropped, and so I had an opportunity to go out there and see it and it was, it was, it shook you, you know what I mean, it was, he said not a very pleasant thing, is it, Charlie, and I said, no not a very pleasant thing.

**BB:** And how long, how much time had elapsed?

**CK:** Well, they didn't find out afterwards, my ship was gone for thirty days and they went down to China for whatever reason to patrol or do something, I don't know what it was, and so when I got, so I was, I had thirty days to run all over Japan and hook a ride with this one.

**BB:** Right.

**CK:** Hook a ride with that, and you know, and it was just fun, I mean I had a, a wonderful time.

**BB:** That's great.

**CK:** It was a break of a lifetime.

**BB:** Did, from the time that the bomb was dropped to the time that you went there, how much time was that do you know? I mean was it months or --

**CK:** Oh, no, no, no.

**BB:** -- weeks?

**CK:** No, no, no, maybe, oh, a month. It wasn't long. It wasn't long.

**BB:** One of the, I mean --

**CK:** I saw a lot of people, a lot, oh awful terrible, no, not there but I mean you, the results of it in the hospitals and one thing or another, they were McArthur moved very, very fast and he did a lot of things for the Japanese people, an awful lot he did.

**BB:** Wasn't there danger of radioactivity?

**CK:** We didn't know that at that time.

**BB:** Somehow you're eighty so I guess you're all right?

**CK:** Apparently it didn't, it didn't register or didn't, didn't bother me any. They, we didn't think, no, it was all, but, no it was all cordoned off, I mean you didn't walk into the hole, I didn't walk into the whole operation I saw it, and got to a place and you were not allowed to go any further, nobody was allowed to go any further, and but you saw it. I mean you were there, no, you, I, I don't mean to misinform you, you weren't allowed to walk through the, through the where --

**BB:** Debris is?

**CK:** -- the bomb was dropped itself, you saw it, you looked at it, you were there.

**BB:** Really.

**CK:** But they had it all cordoned off.

**BB:** You must have seen some of the people that --

**CK:** Yes.

**BB:** -- were affected?

**CK:** Yeah, it wasn't a good, a good deal. I, I thought about so many times that maybe you know you always thing quarterback, Monday morning quarterback, I don't know whether you could have, whether that should have been done or not, but I, I, it certainly they were fanatic enough so they would, we would have lost thousands and thousands of people if we'd invaded cause they would have, they were, they were, they're ready to fight for the last deal, see not many people, you know you thought, think about when the thing was going their hope was that they would give us so much problems that we would finally say well wait a minute let's make a peace here we'll let you do such and such, in other words they thought maybe we would relent on unconditional surrender but that wasn't to be, of course.

**BB:** Right.

**CK:** Yeah, so.

**BB:** Wow. How was it when you got home I mean do you remember anything?

**CK:** Well everybody was glad to see me, we come across the, from, we landed in, in San Francisco and then we came across by train and it was just awfully good, with the Fargo building in Boston out and it was awfully good to be home and to be driving, you know driving milk truck again, and so on and so forth and that --

**BB:** Were things, how were things changed?

**CK:** A lot of things were changed, you know, just in the time you were gone, a lot of things had changed, you seeing new things were springing up and businesses coming and everybody was waiting for their first car and after the war and so there, you know many things were, were looking different. The, the people were building things and of course the big thing was education, the, the GI Bill and people were just mobbed to colleges where, you know, they would put up extra housing for them because there was so many people wanted to get into college and get a degree and so on and so forth, and I, I think the big disappointment, too was Russia. We were



concerned, you know I think, I don't think there was a GI come back that wasn't concerned about hey, what's going to happen with Stalin, and what they're, what they're going to do, and that was a long, long process finally, finally come to an end but it was a, it was a hard one, awfully hard.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** Now I look that a lot of nice things that happened in, in that World War II era and they, I believe I look back now I think Roosevelt was one of our great, he, you know he had, I guess you'd say he had some warts but like all human being, but he, he did, you know I'm very interested in, I'm interested in politics but I'm very interested that the power brokers that put Harry Truman in as vice-president, they must have known that that was going to be the next president, they must have known that because his health was, Roosevelt's health was terrible, it was deteriorating fast, anybody look at him you could see it and how much they knew, I, I've always been interested to know, but I don't know's, I don't know as you could every find out but you see they dumped Wallace and put, put Harry Truman in so.

**BB:** Yeah. Right.

**CK:** And we're losing, they tell us we're losing a thousand a day of World War II veterans.

**BB:** That's really –

**CK:** Yeah.

**BB:** -- an astounding figure, isn't it?

**CK:** Yep, it is, yep.

**BB:** Wow. We're getting very close to the end of this tape. Going back to Hartford area, what do you, what do you think about when you think of the Town of Hartford what comes to mind first in your mind, I mean is it the business or is it the people, the community that makes it?

**CK:** The people pretty much, my gosh we had, you know, I think the people that did so much for the Town of Hartford, I think Mr. Rising, former superintendent of schools, he was on the board with me and I remember he nominated me for chairman and I said Mr. Rising if you want to be chairman you certainly deserve it, and he said, no, you'll be good a chairman and he, I just think of people like him and Alfred Guarino, and the, the things that some of the lawyers in town and the Henry Black and back in those days they, they used to allow smoking, of course, in the

courtroom and one of the things that they said that he would do is put, put a wire in a cigar and then he would, he would smoke of course and things and as he smoked the ashes would stay right there so of course the jurors would keep looking at him because they think the ashes are going to fall off on the floor, and that way he had their attention most of the time.

**BB:** Oh, I just had something in my mind I was going to ask you, gosh. Oh, I know.

One of the things I was wondering is, can you think of some people that, I really, that should really get interviewed, that, you know, people that are longtime residents and involved in the community?

**CK:** I don't know where they are. Floyd McKetrist was our math man at the high school, one of the more capable math people in the State of Vermont. I don't know whether he's there now or whether he's, I, I'm sure he was older, he should be alive today. My feeling I know we had him into the school board and I said to him Floyd, we can make you, we'll pay you a department head, that isn't a problem but we don't want you as the department head we want you in the classroom that's where you, where we want you, let somebody else do the arithmetic, and you know, the sad but true a lot of people are gone that I, that I knew that played a very great part in the, in the town.

To give you a little quick era, you know when I was in the senate there was a representative, each town had a representative, there was a representative from, by the name of Koy Dimmick from Sharon and he represented the town, and he was also on the board of selectmen, was overseer of the poor and he would ride up with me, I'd pick him up and one day he didn't, he wasn't there and so the next day I said Koy, what happened to you yesterday, and he said well, we had a little problem, he said they called me at the store down here and told me to get down there after you let me off night before last, and I got down there and they were three Cuban children and two Cuban men and his wife and they'd come up from Brooklyn, New York got off the Vermont transit bus at the Sharon store and heard there was work up here, so they'd come up here to work, and so I said, well what'd you do Koy, and he said well I got some utensils together and I got some hamburg and some bread and some milk and got some clothes and the Town's got a little shack up back here and he says, we got, went up there and put them up for the

night and got them fed, and he says the next morning of course I didn't go with you, he said I went to the store and I, I got them some ham, got some ham and eggs and some oatmeal, some cereal and some milk and fed them, now he said folks, I've got five tickets to Brooklyn, and he says now I want to put you on the bus at 11:00 to go back there, we've just got a mill here in town, we have no work and he said, we're sorry that we just don't have any work here but we, you, you got to go back to where you came from, that's what you're gonna have to do. I said well, did they do it, and he said oh yes, they did it, and you know I think about it now, Beverly, that didn't take care of the problem but it took care of Sharon's problem and Koy Dimmick that's what he was worried about taking care of Sharon's problem, the taxpayer, he was looking out for the taxpayer. Now you know and doing the very humane manner, now with that came we'd send a taxi up to pick them up and take them to the Holiday Inn, and they'd be there for, maybe two or three weeks and the taxpayer would be picking up the bill. It's the difference that we have today, I think of, you know, the Koy Dimmick, and he got, you know he was paid amply for being selectman, oversee the poor, he got \$5.00 a year for doing that, but that's the kind, he thought about Sharon, he thought about the State of Vermont, he thought about it first, that was his deal, yeah.

So no, going back to what you're saying to me, Beverly, I, I've a little hard pressed to say because certainly a lot of the people that I had, I think are the people on the board, yeah, I'll tell you one gall you might call Cindy Kibby, she's working at Dartmouth Medical.

**BB:** Say her last name again.

**CK:** Kibby.

**BB:** K -i- --

**CK:** K-i-b-b, I think there's a firm in town that her husband founded, Kibby. I think it's K-i-b-b-y.

**BB:** Yeah. Good. I don't think I have her name on my list.

**CK:** Is that right?

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** Yeah, she --

**BB:** I have a lot of people on my list but --

**CK:** Yeah, good and of course Mrs. Briggs, and –

**BB:** Is it Marjorie?

**CK:** I'm not sure, if you told me her name, I'd tell you.

**BB:** David?

**CK:** David.

**BB:** David is the son?

**CK:** David is the, yeah. Too, you should talk to young By Hathorn.

**BB:** By?

**CK:** Yeah.

**BB:** Hawthorne?

**CK:** Yep, and certainly Bobbie Duval, I was, I think, she is a gal, I think she works for, she drives to Keene everyday from White River Junction, she works in a, I think it's a gas plant.

**BB:** Yep.

**CK:** Yeah.

**BB:** Well, I think you have a lot more stories to tell. I wish I had a lot more time.

**CK:** No, I'm fine, fine. I enjoyed visiting with you.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CK:** Yeah.

**BB:** Well, if you had one thing to, that you could pass along to your children or grandchildren that they, that you would like to be remembered for and that you hoped that they maybe adopted for themselves –

**CK:** Well –

**BB:** -- what would that be?

(The tape ended.)