

## Dyersville

Mr. McGowan I'm Clare Pins and this is Peggy Forkenbrook. Peggy how old are you and what school do you go to? I'm 14 and I go to Beckman High School. And would you know that Mr. McGowan is 99 years old. What do you think about that? That's something, it really is. Yeah. I was 99 years old on January 31, '87. Now they're all waiting for me to make a 100. I hope we don't celebrate too much. Well, I was born in Dyersville. I went to school here, the first years. When I was 7 or 8 we went to Dubuque. We lived in Dubuque few years and I went to St. Mary's school which was a German school, and with a name like I had they couldn't understand how I got.... But I had learned German here because that was prevalent at that time. Germans were just coming in here. When I was a youngster this was an English community. Our grandparents, the McGowan's, came here with the railroads, most of the people were Irish and went along to the west. He was a gardener, and this being an English community, they had a lot of work for him to do. And he had about two acres which is now in a residential neighborhood in Dyersville. I was wondering, did you walk to school? Oh yes, we didn't have any transportation. I didn't even have a bicycle. Yeah, we lived up on the East end and we used to go home for lunch too. It took up the whole hour. Where were you married? We were married in Dyersville. When the brothers came here I went to high school and I graduated in the first class that the brothers had of the full high school. They had a winter class in between they didn't go as long as we did. After I got out of high school I went to keep books for the old Interstate Phone Company. After a couple of years, I decided that this wasn't a man's job, that I should be out learning how to fix telephones and things like that instead of keeping books. They got a high school girl in here, she graduated, and I went out to learn how to fix telephones. And we were going to be married around the 25th of January 1910 and we expected to live here and on the 1st of January 1910 I was sent to Cascade as manager of the telephone company because the previous manager had decided to take up another occupation, so he was twice as old as I was, I guess, and oh, people looked at me.... But, I got along there and spent some happy years there. But the telephone company was in trouble and I knew that when I was keeping books. They expanded too far and didn't have the money to fill in so we wouldn't get paid maybe for 2 or 3 months and we'd go along like that way for quite a while, but you change your mind after a while. I was going to go out and go into the insurance and real estate business and that was when the war was on and some of the boys were taken into the service so actually they drafted me into the auditor's office, the longest days of my life I spent in there, to see all those books and all of the work that had to be done. But I stayed there until the boys got back from the service. I lived up on the hill in Dubuque and the clerk of the court lived up that way and we used to walk home together, and he said [inaudible] "would you like to stay at the courthouse?" and I said "well I'm kind of getting used to it now" I said "I'll talk it over with my wife." So, I took the job as the people who were in the clerk's office, clerk of the district court. That was interesting, but, Mr. Walsh came along one day and he had the Ford agency in Cascade and I had bought a 1912 Model T from him and he knew that I was interested in a new car and he come in one day and he said "What in heavens name are you doing in here?" and I said, "Well they kind of drafted me over at the auditor's office" and he said "I want to talk to you" so I went over to see him, he had four places Dubuque, the Ford Agency in Dubuque, Bellevue, Cascade, and Elkader. He said the sales manager is leaving on the 1st of January and I want you to take over. I think you can if you.... will start to work. I said "well...." and he said I'll give you 50 dollars more a month to start and if you make good you'll get the job and you'll get a commission on all the sales and I was really quite enthused. So, I took the job and I made

good on it and about four years after that he got mad at Ford one day and sold [the dealerships]. And I was out, I could, the new people that bought in, I could take the used car, if it's like it is today with used cars it'd be different, but those days, Model T's and things like that there wasn't very much money in it. And I had a pretty good salary before that and I didn't like to give it up. So, I didn't... then I came up to Dyersville and we took over the Ford Agency here and ran it for 7 or 8 years until the Depression came on. Then the Depression hit me and then my wife got cancer and had 7 operations and boy that was pretty tough, but there's nothing you can do about it. How long were you married when she died? Oh, 35 years. Can you tell us a little bit about your family? Well I only have one brother and I don't like to talk about our family because it's rather sad. My mother's grandparents were on my mother's side were out here on a farm between here and Bankston, Grandpa Quirker?, that's my mother's name, went to California mining gold and came back and he met my grandmother who was a Daily and they were married and they bought the farm out here where Louis Becker has it, and that's where my mother was born and her parents died when he was 48, her father was, her mother was 50 when she died. And she lived to be 95 and Mrs. Duffy, one of my cousin's lived to be 101, but of course there was no doctors, and things like they are now, to keep you going and take care of you. But, so I never saw my grandparents on my mother's side, so I don't know anything about them. And well, I hate to tell the story about my family..... You don't have to. I was wondering, did you have to rent pews for church? Yeah, and of course I was with the Manley's so I sat in the Manley pew all the time. And they used to raffle off the seats. I used to say that.... now when I think of it I just can't believe it. John Manley used to go down on Sunday when they had the raffle. I think he paid 35 dollars one time for 6 months. I remember a little bit about it, but I know that.... I went down there one time to see about it, how the salesman.... You can't believe that now. Did you have to fast from midnight so you could receive holy communion the next day? Oh, Lord yes, yeah we fasted all the time from midnight till when we were going to receive at mass. We didn't go to mass every day like we do now, usually on Sunday and holy days and things like that. Because when we were going to school, we couldn't hardly fast. They didn't have breakfast facilities and things like that. You asked another thing about wakes; you know in those days when a person died they were kept in their home and then some of the neighbors would come and stay with that body all night. The services would be 10:00 in the morning. So that was quite a change from what it is now where they have homes to keep the bodies in. But, I can remember I had one uncle, his name was ??? McGowan too, but he worked in Chicago at the stockyards there and he had pneumonia and he passed away. He [was brought back to] grandpa's home. That was the first thing I could remember about years ago; people being brought from Chicago into a home and the services were held after that. What did people do during the night when there was a wake? Well, they prayed a lot and of course they didn't have something to eat after midnight and in the morning before they left usually, especially if there were people around who were familiar with the.... The neighbors took care, guarded the body. What did the Knights of Columbus do for the church? Well the first thing I can remember is..... when they put an assessment of \$2.00 on every member of the order. Out the west coast, some state had passed a law that they couldn't have any catholic schools in that state and we fought it and they say, I think the Knights gave at that time, of course we weren't very large, we didn't have a big membership, they gave \$25 or \$50,000 dollars to fight that and they were successful. All the other times, there was always something coming, you make a contribution that you don't want too many people to know about.... I can't tell you any specifics other than that, because I remember that so well. It was such an unusual thing. The Knights didn't know what to do to counteract.... so that's what they did, they made an

assessment. When you were younger did the priest travel from parish to parish? I can't remember that they did that around here, only when they had 40 hours or something like that. I don't think they made it a practice. I don't know what facilities they had until the Model T came along and cars like this and Lord if you saw the roads we had..... What were the roads like? Well, just mud. I tell you I'd hired a car from Cascade and we were coming up here and the road used to go around out East of town and years ago, now it's cut straight through to Worthington, but anyhow we got stuck on the hill out there. Well, the mud just sucked you down. We had to rent a car. So, I know the old gentleman that lived, he knew my dad pretty well, I went over and I said, "we're stuck on your hill out here" could you have a couple of horses that you could give us a little help. So, he got his horses out and he came over. He pulled and broke something, and we were still in the mud, but between here and Cascade you just pretty near wore your leg out with the old Model T trying to get up those hills and through the mud, oh the mud was terrible. Of course, now people don't know what roads are compared to what they were in those days. Between here and Dubuque down around Farley it'd be sinkholes or some kind of thing, they had a name for them, anyhow they had planks, you had to drive over planks, if you slipped off the plank you'd go down, so I tell you you can't believe what we had to put up with for transportation in those days, and as I say, some of these big cars, you know the Model T, the Model A, these were smaller cars, that we're coming back to, but in those days big cars, you know big heavy ones, they got out in the mud and they were stuck, and oh boy..... it'd be just miserable for anybody that had..... [inaudible]. And of course, you had to be a little courteous to people you know we're all kind of amateurs on how to keep..... On Friday's did you eat meat on Friday's? Oh Lord, no. No, and of course we didn't have any meals down at the school either. We had to get home or bring our meals with us, you know. We survived. When you went to school you carried a lunch bucket. Yeah. It was probably a tobacco can. Yeah, that's quite a change. Let's see what else you got here. Oh, Sunday afternoon, oh we had to go up to devotions at 2:30, half an hour for instructions, and then exposition of the blessed sacrament. So, we'd be there about an hour on Sunday and on holy days. What kind of instructions? Did you have nuns that taught school or not? Oh, the brothers or the pastor or his assistants. I remember one of them very well, Fr. Wieneke, he had a sister here that was a nun who was head of the nuns in Dyersville and he came here when he got out of the service and he left for a little while and then he came back in later years and became pastor here. Do you remember when there was the communion railing between the sanctuary and the....? Oh, heavens yes, that was there until not too many years ago, I don't think that was very many years ago since they took that railing out. It may be longer than I think. Yeah, it was really pretty. I wonder what they're going to do, I haven't been in to see the Cathedral to see how that's changed. I wonder what they'll do here if they start to make a change like they're talking about now. Changing all the.... I think that's just going to be for the South entrance isn't it? We were talking about Dubuque about the Cathedral there you know, taking the side altars and things out there and I just wondering what they done that... because if they start there, they'll start here you know, cause we'd probably be the next one because this is a basilica you know. [Inaudible]. Did you go to high school? Yes, I went to public school one year and when the brothers came I went down there and finished high school. And I was in the first class that the brothers had, the five of us in the class, and the brothers were pretty strict, a lot different going there than going to the public school I went to for a year. They gave us a good training, I think. One time after that I took some people, one of their son's was thinking about being a brother, and I took them down to St. Louis where the brothers had their home and Brother Alphonse, my teacher, was there and he took me on this... I walked about 2 miles on the plantation. But if you went to... I went to a

party one time and somebody I guess wasn't invited and they squealed on us. Monday morning, they had me out and boy.... that was against the rules. And boy you.... [inaudible]. One of the brothers who was boss of the brothers that were there, he was a big fella.... and I thought he was going to come down and clobber me. Even though you didn't stay down there, you didn't board down there? Oh no. But it was just because you had gone out? Yeah, Friday night we were out there partying, something I didn't know about.... Well, I don't know if I can remember this little poetry we had on the black board one day, you know the school was divided on the Eastside, was the women and Westside was the men. There was few men, but quite a few women. But anyhow one morning we come to school and Brother Alphonse had written on the blackboard and he said this boy and I be held with scorn for tutoring nincompoops. From this eastern section, but to my surprise the western counterpart didn't.... [inaudible]. That was really [inaudible]. I went home and told my mother that and she said "didn't he have a mother?" [laughter] Did you get diplomas? Did you have a special day when you got a diploma? Oh yeah. Do you remember the first priests? Well the first one that I can remember and I think that he was here first after the church was built, was Fr. Heer, and you know it was a Heer, I don't know if it was any relation to him, was the [inaudible] he lived in Dubuque and he was an architect and I don't, I never found out, but my aunt used to work as a housekeeper there and when they had parties or people, and he was great to get the people who had money to build the buildings, and he had success with it you know. He had some of the buildings down there, of course I shouldn't say anything about it because my wife was, her mother was a Halster. But there were two Halster families here and they had a store over on the Westside and then afterward it was the Gertz store, you probably don't remember that either. No. But Fr. Heer was a builder and as I say he was catering to the people who had money and he was able to get money. And Fr. Warning came along and he was just the opposite you couldn't help him you know, he would, any money that he had, when he died they said he didn't have anything, he just gave it all away. And then of course after that, the one I remember was Fr. Herbers....[tape ends]

And we had the convention here and, the KC convention in 1935. I went down to him and asked him if he would be master of ceremonies, he said "that's no priest job, that's your job" he said. But I met one of the parents of one of the priests and he said "well how do you like your pastor?" and I said, "well, he's pretty strict." He says, "I like him because he's pretty strict and my boys starting out as a priest, I think it's wonderful to have somebody like that...." [inaudible]. And as I said, the parents of this priest who was sending this priest.... glad to have him as.... He was a good leader. Of course, I could tell you more about his dad, he ran me off the place one time. But, Fr. Hoffman came here you know and he was made a monsignor while he was here. And then when he [brought about] the basilica he got this cardinal over from Germany, I remember... I could understand German then you know, and when they would talk about you know, the basilica, I was one of the fourth degree that was there and I guess they didn't think anything about [inaudible]. But afterward, as I say, when he was made monsignor, I had to be master of ceremonies, and after the basilica and that I was down there, I don't know when he called me down, but he used to call me every once in a while because he remembered me because I went to St. Mary's with an Irish name he said "I'd never forget you" and he couldn't believe that when I was down there one day and I said that I was born in Dyersville he thought I was born in Dubuque. So, he said "did you say that you were born in Dyersville?" and I said "yeah" and he said "no record of

you" and I said, "well, I don't know." I said, I went to school here and was married here and I decided to live in Cascade and Dubuque after that you know, so he said, no I wasn't on the record. I said "you can...[inaudible]. So, I had to get my record from the state and they got it straightened out down here now. And now I'm going to, I was talking to, this lady over at the gift shop..... Mrs. Showalter? Is that her name over at the shop with the cards and things like that? Mrs. Showalter works in there. Is that who....? I can't remember. That's who that was. I didn't know that was here. But the lady who runs it is, he's got his horses out here.... Eike? Eike, yeah. It used to be Eike's who lived East of town here, but he came in here from someplace, I don't think he came from here, I don't know, maybe. But, you know when we were going over some things now, I want to [inaudible] she came over and she had a plaque and I said, it just floored me, I've never saw one of these before. Have you ever seen one? No. What I was going to tell you... I'll finish up. Over to the Mrs. Eike brought this over, so I was kind of curious to know how she got this. She had my name up here, when I was born, and then all the people, the whole plaque was a.... [inaudible] was people who were born on that same day, and all the things that happened, and on the day that I was born they had a terrible storm over in the eastern part of the United States, like they did just recently where.... [inaudible]. That's a repeat performance for my birthday. Yeah. I couldn't help but laugh. So, I went over and they showed me how they put it in the computer and she said all that they have to know is.... and I said "how in the God's world did you get to doing this for me?" She said, "well [inaudible]..... So, to finish up, we went to mass, Crawford takes me out to mass from the nursing home on Friday and Sunday, because I don't drive anymore. I drove until I was 97 and a half when I scraped the side of my car and I got cataracts, you lose your side vision so I figured that's probably time to quit. All the years that I drove and the last 60 years that I drove pretty near 25,000 miles a year [inaudible]. Well, it was a really wonderful thing for me because I was alone and we had [inaudible]..... And I got 80 years old and I thought it's time for.... [inaudible]. But of course I, you want to know something about the Knights of Columbus as far as I was concerned. Well, Fr. Weineke was here and assisted me and he had joined the Knights up at Charles City when he was there as an assistant, and I had taken part of [inaudible] so he got after me, I was old enough to join the Knights of Columbus now and he... I said "Father, what does it cost?" I don't know, I forget what it costs.... I figured it cost \$19 or \$20 and I had to go into Dubuque on the train and all that. I'd have to spend the money to go in and go to the meetings, so anyhow he talked me into it and I went in. And that was just in 1909 and 1910 the telephone company sent me to Cascade and they had a council down there. It was the only one around here that had a council. So I got involved down there and I was grand knight of the council when I left there. Of course, then I belonged to the greeting staff and we started all these councils around here Monticello, Anamosa, Farley, Dyersville and Manchester and I can remember. We were busy. And we never got any fee for anything, just to get them started. That's doing a lot for the church. Well, I think that they were trained to help the church you know, and of course nationally we all have to pay so much a year nationally and they even help over in the Vatican. They have a few years ago they put in a [inaudible]. But you know it's getting to be a sad situation with the church. Many people are taking what I call the wrong view of it, in other words we believe, at least I do, that the Pope is set by the Lord to take care of the church, and what he says goes. Even well, we had trouble with Boston that goes wrong. If we have trouble with a bishop goes wrong or an archbishop, it could happen. I just, some this stuff, like this priest over there with the teacher you know, things.... [inaudible]. This isn't the way we were brought up? Well, not only that but isn't it the law of the church, that's the important thing that I think anyhow. I'm a little radical in my ways. I'm human like the rest of us, I've made mistakes and things like that. As

I say, I think that the Pope is the head of the church and what he says goes and this new stuff coming in well they're talking about homosexuals and things like that and you know it just hurts my ears. And this teacher, the priest with the teacher, and they had to get rid of them. Gosh, and the stuff he was teaching I just couldn't see how in the God's world he could be teaching that and still believe in the Pope as the head of the church. When the archbishop's out here and having a little trouble and just can't understand that. As you say, it's a common phrase, "that's how we were brought up." But the thing I always say if he were brought up that way it wasn't right, it was different. But you were brought up and I was brought up that was the right thing that the Pope was the successor of the apostles. He's the head of the church. Yeah, and he's the head of.... the rules are there and he says you go by the rules. Well, every day has a little peculiarity. I always say, of course the three... but I think sometimes the other two get ahead of the third one. Something happens when I'm praying this is where I'm asking the father, son and holy spirit.... I always say that it isn't how we're brought up but what is the right thing, as I say we always believe that the apostles were set out by the holy spirit so I figure he's pretty strong. Well we're all the same, though he seems to be slighted a little more. Oh I used to argue in religion something terrible, and if I get [inaudible] I'd go down to the priest. Well of course we had a lot of nun Catholics here and of course I was, like the Gerrick's and them they were the bankers and I was of course, I was looked at... I remember one time I bought a new suit of clothes, and boy one of the Gerrick's said to me "oooh, look at this new suit of clothes, but he hadn't got two bits in his pocket" stuff like that you'd have to take that because as I say, my dad had imbued himself with liquor and we just didn't have anything. You worked for it, so why shouldn't you have it? Well, the thing about it is when I was going to high school I was janitor over at the public school. 5:00 in the morning, haul coal up the steps, I think it made me strong. Yeah, I used to start the three rooms. A stove in each room? Yeah, a stove in each room. And that one, kind of a winding steps you know, and with two.... of coal you had to be careful. Yeah, right. But actually I was pretty tough. In the summertime, I used to [inaudible] and when school was out for three months of the year, I remember the first time I got paid, when I was coming home they brought me into Manchester to catch the train and she put a 20-dollar bill in [inaudible]. Well they were looking up some records down there and they saw where I was the janitor down there at the public school and I got a raise, I got raised \$3.00, and I said it must have been pretty good to get a 3.00 raise. Oh, they were kidding me one day, of course, they have the records down there, we'd go there to meals and they'd say.... Doc Hagle says "you must have been a good janitor, you got a \$3.00 raise." Well, I guess somebody said to me the other day, or not too long ago said, "you must have had an easy life" I said, "yeah, you might call it easy, but I wouldn't call it easy, but I survived" and I said "You can't change things, you can only change so much in your life, if the Lord wants you to stay around a little while, you stay around, if he don't why you won't." I don't know why he has me here, I said I don't think I'm any good anymore. I said "I used to be out doing something for people" and I felt a little different. But now, I just don't get out much, I've had so much trouble with this leg of mine. I had it broke first when I was a kid I had a splint, and the bones split a little and you know like with horses, Dr. Barr was the doctor next door here, and he thought they ought to put a splint on it or something, but he said "oh I don't think that's necessary" so he left it go and then when I was about 14 I guess it was, I broke my leg. I was 5 years older than Burt Vanley and my brother and they wanted to go sleigh riding someplace and I didn't want to go, I wanted to go bowling or something. We had a little bowling alley in the barn over here. But I had to go down and go sleigh riding and I had to go along. So we had two sleighs and we put a big plank on it and I was sitting on the back one and when we went over I broke my leg. I thought it was gone, I had to

reach out and find it. So, they put me on the sled and took me up to Manley and got the doctor and set it. I laid there for 21 days. Now, they'd put a splint on it with crutches. Boy I walked with crutches for quite a while after that. And they were building the bridge down here and they had to walk around there and it was slipper sometimes. I had to watch my step with that. I didn't want to break another leg. Well, that's what made you strong as you are with all the problems you had, you picked yourself up and you kept on going. But, as I say, of course, I was wondering Ms. McGuirk told me one time, "oh the neighbors thought it was terrible to let your daughter marry that McGowan." But she said, "my boys knew you and they knew you didn't drink or anything and all the rest of them were drinking and you didn't take a drink, and we figured you were all right." And I never took a drink until I was about 35 or 40 years old. Well Iowa was dry there for a long time. You thought it was dry.... oh it was terrible. Our people would try to give you..... and you know, you just wonder sometimes I know when we were in the Ford business, George Freidman was up at Holy Cross, we'd used to go to a meetings, we'd go to a show and some of those other fellows would go down to 12th street down there where they had this rot gut, I don't know what it was, liquor of some kind, bootleggers you know. And they thought we were aristocrats cause... they'd go down and spend all kinds of money on that stuff that might kill you, you know. I don't know anything about it, but when it was over George said now we can have a drink. I think that was the first time I ever took a drink when prohibition was over. And he, I remember George then he said we're going to have a drink, so he said what's the best you got. Well he said, I've got some 16-year-old Old Crow or something. He said, all right. And I said aren't you going to find out how much it costs? and he said it doesn't make a difference now, pour me a double. I think they charged .50 and I think he gave them a dollar for the two drinks. Well that's still pretty expensive for those days. Yeah. Well you've really got some good stories Mr. McGowan. We thank you for all your time, enjoyed it very much. I enjoy people. And as I said, I don't have any relations, the only relation I've got in Dyersville, a blood relation of mine is Sharon Osterhaus. You know Sharon's a teacher? She took me out for breakfast on my birthday. I said well [inaudible]. Yeah, she's a nice girl, she's a nice singer too. Well, her mother and I were very close cause she was on the farm you know. We'd be on the telephone. I told you once what she told me when I retired, that I couldn't be playing golf all the time. You didn't tell us about your golf. Oh, I still play golf. I played golf this year. Well the Manley's came here and they said, and he got in his brother-in-law's cart and I said I'll go out for a little bit with you, and we played nine holes the first time we went out then we played 12 after that. And when they were living I said to them well I think that I just hate to tell anyone that I played golf this summer I said they think I'm lighting them up with a story or something. And he said, "no, I'm giving these clubs to Beckman, they can scrap them off you know. Don't you dare, he said, I'll probably be coming back here next year and we're going out again, so my clubs are down in the basement. Peggy likes to play golf. Do you? Yeah, I love to play golf. Well I played a lot of golf years ago. I never could hit it very far cause I wasn't very strong. I was pretty good in my shoulders and that, but not like these big fellas who could hit it very far, but I could keep it down the middle and that's important thing. Oh, I play with most any of them years ago. Like I said I was going to give my clubs to Beckman. I gave my car to Beckman when I scraped the side of it. Well Rick Wolman over here at the barbershop I told him, you're pretty active over there, I scraped the side of my car, I'm going to give it to Beckman you can sell it over at the garage. I got a fella to come sit here that does that kind of repair work, so he sold it to him and he went over and said "it runs and everything." Rick said I think Bill takes pretty good care of his car, so you don't have to worry about it. You could see that it needs repair, and you know lordy-lou the price they want for repair. And I was 97 and a half I just figured the Lord was telling me it

was time to quit. And you were 97 when you quit driving. 97 and a half, six months past my birthday. I think you did wonderful. You see I wonder why he was so good to me but the only thing that I can say is that I was good to my mother and good to my mother-in-law and anybody that was ill. So, as I say, for the bad things I did he didn't [inaudible]. I think you did a lot more good things than you did otherwise. Well, but the hardest thing that I ever had to do was give up my wife. I got hurt pretty bad, when I came out here..... we had some good years. [tape ends]