



MUSIC HISTORY IN BLACK RIVER FALLS

FALLS HISTORY PROJECT

2005

HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

How do we actively engage students in the study of history? This is the ongoing challenge that history teachers must face at the secondary level. Historian David Blight of Yale University suggests that "all historical experience . . . must be imagined before it can be understood." One way to engage students and their imaginations more fully is to connect them to the actual process of "doing" history and relate that process to an increased understanding of their local environment. Indeed, the story of Black River Falls and the surrounding area provides a rich and diverse landscape for historical research.

OVERVIEW

The Falls History Project was initiated during the 2001-02 school year with the intention of promoting history education at BRFHS and connecting our students more authentically to the history of our region. As a symbolic beginning for the project, we established a permanent display related to Corporal Mitchell RedCloud, Jr., a BRFHS graduate who posthumously received the Medal of Honor for heroism in the Korean War. His life story offers a compelling example of the power of memory in our community. Our intention is that the project will be ongoing and that it will involve a number of teachers and students. 2005 marked our fourth full year.

COMPONENTS OF THE PROJECT

INTERNSHIP

An advanced senior history student serves as a department intern and helps develop the project each year. This is designed for a student that has completed AP US History and has a particular interest in history.

ORAL HISTORY WORK

The central component of the project involves the gathering of oral history. The focus of the interviews depends on the particular aspect of local history that we are dealing with at the time. We have had a different focus each year. The intern first researches the topic under consideration and then conducts four interviews. The interviews are taped, transcribed, and ultimately compiled in a publication that is made available to the public.

RESEARCHING LOCAL DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Each intern is introduced to the sources of history available at the "Jackson County History Room" of the BRF Public Library, particularly the microfilm archives of local newspapers. Preliminary research is conducted in the History Room.

THE FALLS HISTORY PROJECT ARCHIVE

In the fall of 2003 we established an archive to house the materials that are being gathered in our research. The archive is located in the high school LMC and the materials are made available for our younger history students for primary research. Over

time, we expect the archive to become a rich source of local history for future generations of students.

THE FALLS HISTORY PROEJCT WEB SITE

We have developed a FHP web site to document our work with the project. The web site includes numerous photographs and interview transcripts. It can be accessed at the Social Studies Department homepage, accessed from the high school page.

PAST AND PRESENT EDITIONS

2001-02 PROJECT

Andi Jo C. was our first intern. Her work focused on World War II. She interviewed local veterans, including Bob Teeples, Elmo Johnson, Vilas Johnson, and Floyd Pratt.

2002-03 PROJECT

Kristen B. was our second intern. The focus of the project in 2003 was on Black River Falls in the 1930s. Kristen interviewed Ozzy Moe, Bob Pratt, Lillian McManners, and George Brudos.

2003-04 EDITION: BLACK RIVER FALLS IN 1952

Jill J. served as our third intern. The focus of Jill's project was BRF in 1952. Jill interviewed Jean and Janet Krohn, Dick Faldet, and Basil Holder, all of whom were students at BRFHS in 1952. She also interviewed Sam Young who was in the early years of his long coaching and teaching career at the school.

2004-05 EDITION: MUSICAL HISTORY OF BLACK RIVER FALLS



Our 2004-05 intern was Kirsten B.. Kirsten's love of music prompted her to explore the impact of several personalities on the musical history of the community.

THIS YEAR'S INTERVIEWEES

AXEL DRESSLER: INTERVIEWED NOVEMBER 11, 2004

LARRY HANSEN: INTERVIEWED NOVEMBER 11, 2004

RICHARD CAMLEK: INTERVIEWED NOVEMBER 11, 2004

DICK DENO: INTERVIEWED NOVEMBER 30, 2004

MARGARET SEVERSON: INTERVIEWED DECEMBER 17, 2004

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you wish to have further information concerning the Falls History Project, contact Paul Rykken at Black River Falls High School.

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Axel Dressler
November 11, 2004
Falls History Project Interview
Interviewer: Kirsten A. Bjerke

KB: What is your name?

AD: My name is Axel Dressler.

KB: When and where were you born?

AD: I was born in 1947 in Munster Germany.

KB: Munster?

AD: Munster, it sounds kind of like the Munster cheese, but it isn't it's a totally different town. It's a little town in northern Germany.

KB: Where did you grow up then?

AD: Well I grew up through age nine in Germany, then my family decided to emigrate to the US, and we moved to Reedsburg, Wisconsin, and that's where I was introduced to playing a string instrument, that's where I learned how to play Cello, and was interested in music, and from there I moved to Watertown, and that's where I went to high school.

KB: Where did you go to college after that?

AD: After going to high school in Watertown, I started at UW Whitewater and was a physics major, and decided to transfer to UW Oshkosh and go into music, so that's where I graduated then in 1970, with a bachelor in music education degree.

KB: Why did you choose music as a career?

AD: I've come from quite a musical family, my father studied to be a classical pianist, and as a young child we listened to classical music, to the symphonies, choral works, all sorts of music, and it was always an interest of mine and I always thought I wanted to do something in my life with music.

KB: You said you started out as a Physics major, what made you change your mind?

AD: Well I had lots of interest, when I was at UW Whitewater I also played cello in the orchestra and I really truly enjoyed that. It was a choice, was I going to stay in Physics or music, I think the love of music took over and that's why I changed.

KB: Did you have any early influences, any people who might have shaped your music?

AD: My father for sure, I remember as a little boy sitting on his lap as he was practicing and playing the piano, and I was always touched by, there was one particular song that I remember he played that I thought was so very, very beautiful, and so I would plunk around on the piano even as a little child and play things, and then as I went to school and learned to play in the orchestra I really enjoyed that, and my high school orchestra director in Watertown, Wisconsin was a big influence in my deciding to do that also.

KB: When did you start teaching here in Black River?

AD: I came here in January of 1970, so that was in the middle of the year, and I was hired as an orchestra teacher.

KB: How long did you work here?

AD: I worked redeveloping the orchestra program until 1989 or '90, and so that was almost twenty years and then I had the opportunity to go into band and I thought, well I've done orchestra almost twenty years, and so I became a band director I believe in 1990.

KB: When did you retire?

AD: I retired in 2002, so I've been retired two years.

KB: After college did you come straight here, did you have other options?

AD: Back in 1970 it was quite different than it is today to get a job. Today for an opening there might be 300 applicants or 50 depending on the demand for music teacher. Back in 1970 I wrote in an application to the then superintendent and he called me up Christmas Eve and said I had the job and I came here in January and started teaching.

KB: How come you came midterm?

AD: That just happened to be when I graduated, it took me longer than four years to get through college, that's why so it just turned out that way.

KB: Why did you choose to apply at Black River? Did you apply other places?

AD: I believe I only maybe sent out two applications, it was mid-year so first if all there weren't that many openings and this was the first place I applied and I got the job and initially I thought maybe I'd stay in a small town for two three years, and then maybe move on, but roots grow fast and deep.

KB: What all did you teach when you first came here?

AD: Well, that was quite interesting, even though I was hired to teach orchestra, to develop the program but I also had to teach kindergarten music, I remember I used to get in my old car and drive to Millston which is a little town away from here, and they had their own school, this was a consolidated school district and taught some elementary classes and then drove to Hixton and did the same thing there, taught some elementary classes, so orchestra by far wasn't the only thing that I taught.

KB: How did that change over the years?

AD: Well over the years for various reasons the school district decided that outlying schools needed to be closed for financial reasons I would assume, so I didn't need to go, I wasn't required to teach music at those schools and then the orchestra program grew, I believe when I came here there were maybe twelve students, and that changed to at one time I think we had sixty string players, and a lot of things have changed from the 70's to 2002.

KB: Who was your predecessor? Did you have one in the Orchestra?

AD: There were probably the biggest name of predecessor was Mr. Grietzman, and he was very loved by the community and in talking to a number of people that are my age and grew up in Black River Falls and were involved in music he was almost a god of music education in

Black River Falls, he then left here and went to Nina and I'm not sure if he also was band director, but I know he was Orchestra director for sure, and there were some interim teachers before me that were just here on short term basis, Sherry Bock was one, and there was a string teacher from Sparta that came just to work with the high school string students I think, Mary Bodick. So it wasn't until I came then that there was a long-term string instructor then.

KB: Who all did you work with then?

AD: At the time there was an elementary music teacher by the name of Chuck Knutson, and Dick Camlek was the middle school band director, Larry Hansen was the high school choir director, Margaret Severson was elementary and at the time it was junior high music, and Al Perner was the high school band director.

KB: Then who took over, well after you went from orchestra to band?

AD: Well, oh and I forgot one name, Dennis Ruda who is still presently teaching music in the system was band director after Al Perner unfortunately passed away, and because of budget cuts and a smaller enrollment in the music department they did some cutbacks and gave me the opportunity, so I actually followed Dennis Ruda as band director.

KB: Then who followed you?

AD: Kind of an interesting story, when I taught way back, and first came here in 1970, those first two years there was a French horn player in the band by the name of Barb Olson, and it just happened to that when my retirement came close that I heard from her and saw her at a state contest, she was accompanying a student, and she said she was going to school to become a band director, and she'd love to have a chance to teach at Black River Falls, so would I not retire before she graduates so she can apply for the job, well it just turned out, not that I did it purposely, but it just turned out that come retirement time for myself that she was assigned here to be my student teacher, and that worked out quite well and then she got the position as band director.

KB: Before you started teaching, what did you expect both of this school and of teaching?

AD: Being involved in college music organizations for, in my case four and a half, five years, your standards get to be higher than they are for high school musicians, and as a teacher you're all excited about teaching and you're bursting with this knowledge and you come to a school, a high school or an elementary school and want things, and here are all these students that just want to absorb all this knowledge from you, and it isn't that way at all. There are some students that are like that, that are very interested, but there are also many that are there in a music organization just to relax and not to be in an academic course, so that took some getting used to that maybe the seriousness of the student wasn't what I expected.

KB: Did that change over time?

AD: I guess, looking back realistically, when I was in high school I was one that happened to be very much interested in music and I did my share of goofing around during orchestra rehearsals, but it was quite a love, perhaps that hasn't changed, there are the same kind of kids today in music organizations, high school organizations, as there were back in the '60's when I went to school.

KB: You didn't work with Verna Keefe because you came in 1970, right?

AD: I knew of Verna Keefe, I've met Verna Keefe and I saw her, the only thing I remember of her was giving piano lessons, of course she was retired and of an elderly age, in fact I was in her house when she was giving piano lessons at one time, but that's really all I know of her. I know that she was also a big name in the alums of music teachers here in Black River Falls.

KB: Can you think of anything else dealing with her?

AD: About her? No not really, I know she was really active with the church music and community music and that there are, I believe there are still some scholarships awarded in her memory, to high school students going on to college to possibly go into music also, but that's about all I remember of her.

KB: How did the popular music affect your teaching?

AD: I thought it affected me in a positive way in that when I went to college, there were a lot of music professors that thought popular music was very boring, it wasn't sophisticated. Of course I grew up in the '60's when popular music was hip, and it was enjoyable and as a teenager you would go to hops, which are dances and you would go to community centers where they would just play music, popular music of the '60's, so I had the chance to incorporate that into orchestral music, and arranged, oh gosh I think maybe 20, 30, 40, 50 songs that were popular in the '70's and '80's and even in the '90's for my orchestra students to play. And I think that was one of the successes of the program is that we were able to play, first of all in orchestra, and then later on as I taught band too that now there were a lot of arrangements of popular music written for band, that was something that was not done in the '60's.

KB: Did your students pressure you at all to get certain music?

AD: I think there's a fine line, you can't just teach popular music, because there's so much great music literature out there for band and for orchestra, but you can't always have it be so heavy either. You need, the kids enjoy playing popular music and yes there were requests to play certain songs, and I wouldn't say it was pressure because I already did it on my own to play popular music.

KB: Did it get harder to choose the popular music as it went along or did you keep up pretty well?

AD: Well, surprisingly, a lot of the music literature that was written by arrangers and composers for high school groups was not the most, not necessarily the most current music but music from the '50's and '60's, and even today you can go into a large music store that sells music and there'll still be new arrangements of old standards, Louie Louie, and songs like that.

KB: What is your favorite style or genre of music?

AD: My favorite genre, that's a real tough question because I've been exposed to so much, and I'm sure you've heard this from all of them, I like all, I truly do, I like most all genres of music myself, I love ethnic music, but I also like classical music, I still listen and play classical music, I've had the chance to play with some symphony orchestras and college orchestras, and so that's the love of mine, I love popular music, I don't particularly love rap music, but for the most part, and really, really hard rock probably not my favorite, but I can tolerate it, but I don't have a favorite, I can't narrow it down to one.

KB: Were you involved in any co-curricular activities outside of school?

AD: As teacher, yes, when I first came here I was the 5th and 6th grade basketball coach, which only meant Saturday mornings, and I also was assistant high school track coach at one time and then I was the first cross country coach we had in Black River Falls, I've helped with musicals and with madrigal dinners, so I've done my share of extra curricular things.

KB: Were you involved in other stuff, like were you in your own personal band?

AD: Oh yes, it started out as a joke, where a number of teachers would get together and doo-wop some old fifties and sixties songs, before you know it there were five of us, who then just for the fun of it entered a talent show in Alma Center Wisconsin, and we gave ourselves the name of Generic, and it just so happened that we won the talent show and the judge was a man by the name of, his handle was Brucy Bumchuckle from Z93 in La Crosse Wisconsin, and he heard us and he was very excited and he invited us to come to the studio at Z93 and do a live performance of the song that we did at the contest, the song was Lil' Darling. Well that was great and we performed that for the students at various schools and then we added more numbers, then there were some female teachers that also became involved, they were singers, so our name grew to Generic and the Discounts, the Discounts were the ladies in the group, and we had received requests to play at our county fair, so yeah that was a lot of fun. I've also had a chance to play with Mr. Camlek, a band that plays at supper clubs and play the old-time music and easy listening music and dance music also. As I said before, I also would go to Eau Claire, I've played with the Eau Claire symphony, I've played with the Wood County Symphony Orchestra, for my own personal enjoyment.

KB: How did technological advances help or hinder your career?

AD: It certainly changed it, technological advances first in the music area, came in terms of the synthesizer. I remember in 1986, I also taught general music classes and I did that throughout my career at various levels, junior high school, 7th grade, 8th grade and then at the high school level also. Because general music classes were intended for students that enjoyed music but didn't want to perform, in other words be in choir or band, but still had an interest in music and wanted to learn things, so we acquired the first synthesizer which was an old Arp synthesizer, I remember buying it in Milwaukee in 1986 and it was a synthesizer that was not very user friendly, it had slides and it was an old machine, so that was my first indication that music doesn't stand still, and that I needed to become informed about synthesizers, about midi, about all sorts of things, and of course at the high school level, teaching jazz band also there were electronic instruments that were used, bass guitar for instance. Threatening maybe a little bit at first because I had to learn at an older age about those things, but I believe it certainly helped the interest of the students, they liked it.

KB: Did you see any differences in your students as computers and TV's became more widespread?

AD: Yes, back in the, are you asking as teacher watching the students, or from my own personal perspective from the '60's?

KB: As a teacher.

AD: As a teacher, in the '70's, yes, and I would say late '60's too, there were maybe three channels or three networks on television, ABC, NBC, CBS, and maybe a public television station, that students had the opportunity to watch. Well, now you know yourself that there are

hundreds of stations and programs that students can watch, as technology advances, not only televisions, but with computers with electronic keyboards, students can be much more diverse, and it's good, it's all good, as a retired teacher, as an older person, part of the older generation, of course which means that I need to keep up, which was sometimes hard to do, because I soon found out that students were able to learn and knew a lot more about some of those things than I did, which was fine too.

KB: Did social changes affect your curriculum?

AD: Yes, I think positively, maybe not so much in the performance areas, like band and orchestra, but certainly in my general music classes. Black River Falls happens to be an area, as you know, with a percentage of Native American students, and as a society we became more aware of the positives that come from living amongst varied people, ethnic groups, etc., that became an important factor in teaching also, so maybe in the '50's and '60's one would never have taught anything about native American music, well certainly as we became more aware, the civil rights movement in the '60's with Afro-American music, we also became more aware of it later on, in our modern times, and that was a good thing. Yes, and so I, and the other teachers incorporated Native American music in our classes.

KB: How has retirement affected your career?

AD: How has my retirement affected my career? I don't have a career as such, other than I do some substitute teaching, but I certainly enjoy my retirement, I've always thought teaching is a very honorable profession, teaching music I think is very honorable, and it's also very hard work, because you have to put in a lot of time, it isn't just 7 to 3 or 7 to 5, it involves many weekends because of performances that the students have, if you are a band director, you have parades, you have marching shows to get ready, and then in the summertime, the old fallacy about teachers having three months off really isn't true, because a teacher, especially a music teacher has to prepare for the summer, for the fall incoming students. To be quite frank, I don't miss that. I enjoy not having a watch to wear, I haven't worn a watch in two years because I enjoy not being on a schedule, which you really had to be as a music teacher. But I'm in the process of cleaning out my basement, and I still have boxes of things that are from school, and I have very fond memories of my profession, of the many fine students that I've had, and I have great memories, and a very satisfactory feeling.

KB: So which do you prefer, retirement or teaching?

AD: If I had to do it all over again, I don't think I would change a thing, I think things progress in their natural state, and I've worked hard, and now I want to play hard, and I want to relax hard, and I like to go fishing, and I like to go sailing, and camping and my wife and I enjoy traveling and seeing things, and I wouldn't give that up either, considering everything, the music career, and retirement things have fallen well into place.

KB: Have you ever gone back to visit Germany?

AD: Yes I have, I've gone in fact in 1970 was the last time I was there, but my brother lives there now, and he married a German lady and has children and is a little bit older than I am, and my cousins, my relatives other than my immediate family are all in Germany, so we keep in contact, and they come and visit here, so it's almost as if I've gone back every year. My parents are still alive, and when they come and visit we speak German, so I have the best of two worlds.

KB: Does your wife speak German?

AD: The unfortunate thing for my wife is she does not speak German, so when my parents come and visit, they oftentimes, because they speak a broken English, oftentimes flip into the German mode and end up speaking German to her, and I have to remind them to speak English, because she doesn't understand the German.

KB: When did you meet your wife?

AD: I met my wife probably I think I met her first in Black River Falls in maybe the '80's, and then we were married in 1991.

KB: Wow. That's a really late marriage!

AD: Well, we had both been married before, so that was part of it.

KB: Do you have any children?

AD: I have two boys of my own, and then my wife has three children also, and they're also very quite musical, and all doing fine, we're pleased with all our kids.

KB: How did that affect your career teaching? Your home life and stuff, having kids.

AD: It's hard, in some respects because, not so much, the teaching, but the teaching of music. It takes time away from your family, from home, which made the time we could be together on the weekends that much more valuable, certain holidays were all consumed, I taught for thirty years that were consumed with school for some reason, whether it was a parade or a musical performance for Memorial Day or Labor Day or Christmas time, and of course always preparing for a concert, which meant extra time and then there's the Solo & Ensemble which the students want the extra time, and need the extra time and get it.

KB: Is there anything else you would like to add?

AD: I think it's a neat idea that you're doing this, that you have the interest to look back and see what things were like way before you were born, I think in people's minds the '50's and the '60's were something very, very, very special, and most people immediately think of the music, but I think we have to look at it realistically that there were also things about the '50's and '60's that weren't quite so nice, that as a society we've overcome. I hope that you can interview some people that were actually in Black River Falls during the '60's, I know Mrs. Severson, I believe was here at the time already, and there were some non-teachers that, names I can think of, that went to school here and that talked to me with great pride, of having been in the band program during the '60's, so it's a great thing that you're doing.

KB: Do you have any hopes for the future of the Black River Falls Band?

AD: Oh, yes, quite honestly because I graduated from college as an orchestra director, although I needed to learn to play all of the wind instruments, there were certain areas in which I had to learn at my job, for instance, the Band literature I wasn't aware of, and when my, the person who took over, Barb LeRoy, who's the band director right now, Barb Olson, she is a very knowledgeable person, and she of course her expertise is wind instruments, and I was very happy to see her get the job, because I knew she could, and will, probably already has, bring

the instrumental program up another level, and I'm very supportive of her, I'm very supportive of the program.

KB: Would you like to see an orchestra again?

AD: I do have to say that somewhere there's a soft part in my heart, that I do, I loved teaching orchestra and I love listening to orchestra, and playing and so if it was up to me and I could snap my fingers and could see that there's funds and that we would have an orchestra, I would certainly do that. I think it certainly is something special, but I also know that there were many small schools that dropped the orchestra program long before Black River Falls, I think Black River Falls was one of the last to hang onto their program.

KB: Well, I don't want you to be late for your date.

AD: Thank you very much.

KB: Thank you for coming in, and being subjected to my questions.

AD: My pleasure.

Larry P. Hansen
November 11, 2004
Falls History Project Interview
Interviewer: Paul S. Rykken

Rykken: We'll start the interview now, if you could give us your name and where you were born, and where did you grow up?

Hansen: Alright, my name is Larry Hansen, I was born and raised in Ashland Wisconsin, and slightly outside of there, lived out in the country, I graduated in 1964 from a high school called Ondossagon.

Rykken: What kind of school was that?

Hansen: It was a K-12 rural school and that. There were forty-seven in my graduating class.

Rykken: No kidding? That's interesting. Where did you go from there?

Hansen: I went to college at Wisconsin State University Eau Claire, that's what it was called then. I started in the fall of 1964.

Rykken: I guess one of the things that I'd like to try to get into with you a little bit is, you obviously chose music as a career, at some point.

Hansen: Yes.

Rykken: I'm interested to know what influences you had early in your life, like going way back that got you interested in music.

Hansen: Well I always liked music; I was actually on stage the first time when I was a five year old. In a high school production at the Catholic high school in Ashland. I was in a production of Babes in Toyland, and the Christmas concerts that we did in our country school were really elaborate. So I had a chance to do a lot of performing. Both in music and also in theatre, we did one act plays and that type of thing, so I was in that a lot.

Rykken: Do you remember what the year would have been on Babes in Toyland?

Hansen: I was about five so that would have been early 50's.

Rykken: Is there a particular teacher that you had that stands out that got you interested in music?

Hansen: Yes, I had two teachers, my elementary music teacher was Elfrieda Cozar, and that, who actually only passed away a couple years ago. And then my middle school and high school band director was Stan Stangle, and he is still alive, and he was a major influence. I was primarily an instrumentalist; I was a saxophone player. I was active in music, I was not into sports, I did a little bit of track, but I was almost all music, and I did that through 4-H and through school.

Rykken: But you were in choir too?

Hansen: I was also in choir, I was in choir and band.

Hansen: They were just good people, and they were creative, and I just have a love of music, I have a passion for music and performing.

Rykken: How about your family?

Hansen: My Mom is a musician, was a musician, very active in music. My Dad not so much. But they were very supportive of it.

Rykken: Were they happy with the idea of you taking that as a career?

Hansen: My mom was, my dad thought I should be a math major. But no, math was not, I got B's in math in high school, that wasn't for me, I didn't like the B's, they screwed up my grade point average all the time.

Rykken: When you went to Eau Claire, obviously you were going from a pretty small rural environment to what would seem like the big city almost. Did you know right away when you went to Eau Claire that you were going to go into music?

Hansen: Oh yes, I knew I was going to go into music, from the time, basically when I was in the 8th grade, I wanted to. In high school, from the time I was a freshman, I was the student director of the pep band. And in fact at some points, they didn't hire a sub for the band director, or choir director, and I was the one who took over in class, sometimes without teacher supervision.

Rykken: So you got a little feeling for the feeling of conducting.

Hansen: Oh yeah, I love to conduct.

Rykken: I've heard this from other people, of conducting, that once you do it once, it's kind of in your blood. There's a little addiction there.

Hansen: Oh yes, it's in your blood, it's very addictive. And I love to direct I love to conduct. But I actually started out as an Instrumental major. I was an instrumental major for a year and a half and then I switched to vocal. And I don't regret that.

Rykken: It's an interesting thing, it's the same kind of thing you hear from people that are in coaching. Once they've done it they want to keep doing it. Let's talk about college for a minute. Did you do a lot of performing while you were in college?

Hansen: Oh yes, I was in several different groups, both singing and instrumentally. Because, instrumentally I was in marching band, concert band at that point, also the jazz ensemble. And then I was in two choral groups, and that was the earliest stages, Eau Claire was just starting to really grow, the class that I came in was the biggest class they had had enter, cause that was of course the first of the baby boomers, and the population of the school grew tremendously. Therefore the music department started to grow considerably.

Rykken: Is there a particular professor that you had there that was inspirational, somebody that stands out?

Hansen: My voice teacher, Mrs. Beatrice Bow she was actually the one who convinced me to go into vocal. Then I switched vocal coaches, to a Matthew Cappel, who was from Arkadelphia, Arkansas. He was a very large man, but he was a dramatic tenor, and he made all the difference in my whole approach to singing. And probably the one who I still worship is

Rykken: Where did you end up student teaching?

Hansen: I student taught at Memorial High School, with the swinging doors for student-teachers.

Rykken: And that was a big school?

Hansen: A big school, Class A choirs, and I student taught in the fall and became a part of the homecoming float building group, and we also took and put together a musical in six weeks.

Rykken: So you got right into all that. You had some experience before you got here with musicals then.

Hansen: Oh yeah, because I was in musicals all the way through college.

Rykken: How did you end up in Black River?

Hansen: Well, a man by the name of John Mills student taught here, and I knew John, he was working at Eau Claire Memorial and knew that I was graduating in January and he said that he had heard of an opening in Black River Falls, so I applied for it and Mr. Schmalberg came up a couple days later, watched me teach, talked to me for a little bit and I had a contract the next day. That was by the end of September, they had a long term sub that fall.

Rykken: Who were you actually replacing?

Hansen: I was replacing Shirley Radtke. Shirley Radtke and Gay Upton had both resigned at the end of the previous year. Al Perner was hired and he started teaching in the fall of that year, in the fall of 1968. Al Started teaching in fall of 1968, and I actually started teaching before I graduated from Eau Claire. I started teaching right after Christmas, I hadn't even really graduated yet.

Rykken: Is this still '68?

Hansen: This was '69 by this point.

Rykken: So December of '69?

Hansen: Yep. Actually, an interesting point too I would like to make, is that I really, going in to my student teaching experience, I did not intend to teach music. I had a graduate assistanceship to Indiana University in student personnel work, and then and I also could have had a graduate assistanceship at Eau Claire in vocal performance, because in fact I was studying to do a role in Rigoletto the following year. But when I started student-teaching I just fell in love with teaching.

Rykken: Interesting, I suppose that's true of so many people that are music majors, you probably are looking into performing and then the teaching might come as a second thing. So when you came to Black River then, you came in mid-year, and you took on right away a high school choir. Is that correct?

Hansen: And more than that.

Rykken: What all did you do?

Hansen: When I first started teaching here I was teaching K-12. Some days I was teaching all grade levels, and that. Talk about major shifts, going from little kindergarten kids to high school kids.

Rykken: What did you enjoy more? What level?

Hansen: I always enjoyed the high school level, and it's not that things are not able to be accomplished musically at the lower levels, but there was something inside of me that needed to be satisfied and I could only receive that satisfaction when I teaching at the level that I actually ended up teaching.

Rykken: Who were you working with at that time? Who else was in the music department?

Hansen: Al Perner was at the high school, Dick Camlek was at the Middle School, Margaret Severson, Sherry Bock, Barb Salveson, there were actually a couple others, the music department was actually rather large at that point in time.

Rykken: Margaret, what level was Margaret working at?

Hansen: Margaret was elementary at that point, Margaret was the high school choir director, and I think she actually left teaching when she raised John and Mandy, and then came back as an elementary teacher.

Rykken: If you can remember, and I know sometimes we remember with rose-colored glasses, but what were the kids like when you came in at that point?

Hansen: Oh they were a lot different.

Rykken: Different from the end of your career?

Hansen: Oh Definitely.

Rykken: What was different? Can you put your finger on that?

Hansen: You could get them a lot more enthused, they were more willing to make a commitment to you, they were more dedicated, and I don't say that my students over the years were not dedicated, I was very fortunate. But there was a definite difference in attitude.

Rykken: What do you think caused it, or why do you think they were more that way at that point?

Hansen: I think it was a different time in history, I think there was a lot more family unity type things. We did not have as many athletics, especially not female athletic offerings, and that really did have a major impact when that whole thing started, because it really did affect. But yeah, you can say rose-colored glasses, but I was fortunate in that I walked in to a program that had 42 students in the high school choir, 3 boys and they met 3 days a week for 50 minutes, and then I had a girls chorus of about 16 and they met 2 days a week, and that's what I came into. So in a way I was fortunate in that the world was wide open to as far as being able to build a program. Because I'm a performer, and you know me well enough, I started doing different kinds of things, and they enjoyed doing them. It was different opportunities.

Rykken: Let's talk about musicals for a minute, it was such a big part of what you did. There had been some history of doing musicals.

Hansen: Yes, there had been some history. Margaret had done some, and Shirley Radtke had done some.

Rykken: Did you do a musical, was the first one fall of '69?

Hansen: Yep, the fall of '69 was my first show and that was Oliver.

Rykken: Do you think that there was a marked change from Musicals that had been done before or was it just something that was a natural popularity for that in the community?

Hansen: Well I think that Black River's community has always had a wonderful tradition of music, and with my approach I think it became a positive thing. I was raised as many people have been, if you are going to do something, you should always do it well or don't do it at all. I've always had that philosophy, and I wanted to give the students as professional an experience as I could. In my efforts to do that I'm sure I stepped on people's toes.

Rykken: I want to work on that whole musical thing, one of the things that was noticeable, and I guess I can say that because I was a student at that time, and I was a younger student looking at older kids that were doing some of the stuff you were doing, I'm interested in that fact that you were able to get a lot of young men involved in the music program. Guys that were in athletics.

Hansen: Oh yes, the coach's sons I was able to get.

Rykken: When we interviewed folks last year about the fifties, they talked a lot about Grietzman, the band director.

Hansen: And the Orchestra director, the guru, the god.

Rykken: Yes and I remember Jean Krohn telling me that he basically told those kids you do one or the other. He didn't give them an option, if they were in Athletics they weren't going to miss their athletic time. Somehow when you were doing it, they were doing both, it seemed to work, did you do anything consciously to make that happen or did it just happen?

Hansen: It's hard to remember, I guess I was just fortunate in that the things we were doing attracted more guys, and it became more acceptable for them. It certainly did help that I had Sam Young's son in choir, and some of the coach's children, and that made a difference. Bob Bell, Dubs Young, and when you get Dubs Young, Dubs brought along some of his friends, and that helped to expand it, and it just continued. I was so blessed over the years to really be able to keep the athletes. It didn't mean that you had to do a lot of bending over backwards over the years in order to do that.

Rykken: I remember though, when I came here as a teacher in 1990, I think I've shared this with you before, but I think in 91 or 92, somewhere in there, Zach Thundercloud was very involved in music, and he played Hockey, and he was a Ho-Chunk student, and I said, I don't know where else I would go to find that combination. So it was really kind of an interesting aspect of the school, and I am sure that you had a lot to do with some of that.

Hansen: I was fortunate I had a lot of Ho-Chunk students, both male and female, and they did very well.

Rykken: And that was interesting, that was another dimension to the school, we have just a unique place I think. How many musicals did you end up directing at Black River, just out of curiosity? I know it was 25 at least.

Hansen: Oh no, it was more than that. It would have been 31 or 32, now some of those are repeats and I wouldn't be able to go back and say which ones.

Rykken: Which musical did you enjoy doing the most? What's your favorite musical?

Hansen: I enjoyed a lot of them, some of them I would not do it again, just because I found that I did not get what I needed out of them. I always enjoyed doing Oliver, that was kind of a tradition. But I think the two shows that I probably feel the best about, because of the creativity, was the Wiz, and part of that also was the fact that my daughter was the lead, deservedly so, it just challenged my creative juices, both staging, choreography, costuming and all that, and also Joseph, I think Joseph is probably the one I feel the best about.

Rykken: Is that just because of the music?

Hansen: Just because of the combination of people that were in it, the music and the way it fell together.

Rykken: And that was a little bit later in your career.

Hansen: Yep, and we had a lot of fun with a lot of shows before that, you know, Fiddler on the Roof, My Fair Lady, a lot of those shows, we had a lot of fun and we had a lot of success with them.

Rykken: We're trying to kind of get a sense of the 60's, you were kind of in the end of it.

Hansen: Yes, I was in the end of it, but there was still a lot of carry-over.

Rykken: I'm interested in how musical styles from the 60's were affecting what you did. Were they having an impact?

Hansen: Yes, because, there always was the classical side, the historical side that the students needed to be exposed to, needed to know, and so we did a lot of sacred music, and that is part of teaching them about the history of music. But we always did some of the contemporary stuff. It was a lot different, we were doing Bert Bacharach, and those types of things.

Rykken: More of what you might call the light...

Hansen: The Pop, the light Pop, the beginning of it, because that was a period when there was starting to be more and more of that available to schools, prior to that there was not a lot of that whole pop quote unquote literature. Prior to that as far as I can remember everything was pretty much sacred and secular, as far as choral music goes, and it all kind of fit under that classical thing, regardless if it was sacred or secular, but then there started to grow more of that Pop stuff. Then you started to get into the very early stages of what is now show choirs.

Rykken: Now show choirs is something that you didn't deal with.

Hansen: I only had two.

Rykken: Is there a reason for that?

Hansen: There were a couple of reasons, it is certainly not something that I did not feel capable of directing, but I absolutely have a passion for the medieval the renaissance. That's kind of where I took that road, eventually developing the madrigal dinner. It's good literature, and it was also something that made Black River unique. Because everybody around us, especially in this area of the state, does show choirs, and they go into it big, major, major, this is called show choir heaven around here, and it kept us unique. Actually, ultimately it kept us unique in the state as far as the madrigal dinner and that stuff that we did at the high school level.

Rykken: When did you do the first madrigal dinner?

Hansen: 1973

Rykken: Okay, and that's something that continued until you retired. Was that something unique to Black River?

Hansen: Oh very definitely. Not the madrigals, because there were madrigals back with Verna Keefe even, and Margaret had Madrigals, but putting them in the dinner format, that was different. And the actual idea for a madrigal dinner came from Joanne Doherty, she had been to one over in Stevens Point.

Rykken: Those were a tremendous amount of work, they were a huge production, if I remember I went to a few of them, I didn't go all the time.

Hansen: It was like doing a musical, except you created it yourself.

Rykken: The other thing that you did, and I'm asking to know if this is something you inherited, or something you did yourself, and that is the Variety Show.

Hansen: That was my creation.

Rykken: And when did you first do that?

Hansen: 1971.

Rykken: You must have scoped this out a little bit first, and then gradually started. You did the musicals right away, and some of this other stuff came a little bit later.

Hansen: Well I saw that it was another performance venue and another experience for the kids, it was different from the musical, and different from the choral thing, and I always had a belief that public education does a great deal to stifle creativity in students. You know, line up with the thought, don't dare vary from the thought, and that goes back to when I was in high school and I would interpret something different from the teacher, and I would get squashed because of it, and that was very frustrating for me. And I also have a basic belief that anybody can get up in front of others, and do some kind of performance. Well, we started out just doing different things and that, but ultimately it ended up being part of the curriculum, and all students were required to at least audition with something, whether it was a solo and an ensemble thing. It was meant to teach them how to communicate and discover something about themselves, some type of talent that they had that they could use to entertain others. A lot of them didn't like having to do it, but ultimately it did. I can remember some kids that were very shy, and after a Variety Show, it was like oh my heavens where did this person come from? I just always loved watching my students succeed and be creative and come up with these things.

Rykken: The Variety Show, I saw a number of those, in doing I the way you were doing it, you took the risk, and you knew that there were going to be some of them that wouldn't be very good. Right?

Hansen: Correct.

Rykken: You kind of had to live with that when it happened.

Hansen: Right and that's why we did the screening thing, I mean we didn't just let anything perform.

Rykken: What I'm saying is that you gave kids that maybe weren't top-notch, polished people a chance to be up front, which I remember some people would sometimes question them. It was sort of a teaching thing going on there. A couple of other things I want to ask you before we get too far off here, the name Verna Keefe has come up in some of research quite a bit.

Hansen: She's an institution.

Rykken: What is your impression of her and did you know her?

Hansen: I only knew Verna a little bit because she was quite elderly when I came to town, I was to her house a couple of times and then she passed away, so I really did not know her I know her more by reputation. I know that she had huge choirs, she would just go into the study halls and just grab people, she wouldn't even give the guys, anybody an option, she would just go in and grab them, haul them out of there and say, you're going to sing, period. Then the other story is that Verna taught everything, and the Police around town would just close their eyes when Verna was teaching, because she was always driving like a bat, always speeding from school to school.

Rykken: It's just interesting in a small town, these people come in and they're not from here, and we've all experienced this as teachers here, and they leave a mark for about a generation, and Verna, I think Verna was associated with the school before the.... It was interesting because I didn't realize that she had a career that went way back, even into the depression years.

Hansen: Oh yeah, and I think she's a hometown gal. I think she was.

Rykken: Area at least.

Hansen: At least area, because I think her brother and his wife settled in here too. Rykken: It's just the kind of legacy that she left with people of that era, when you talk to them they really hold her in high regard.

Hansen: Oh yes, definitely.

Rykken: Why did you end up staying here as long as you did? Because you're another one of that group of teachers who came in and basically gave a full career here, never left.

Hansen: Well, it's not that my wife and I didn't think about leaving, but, here you are, in a school, you come in, you build a program, you invest a lot of time, a lot of hours in it and you get tremendous community support for what you're doing and you see the growth. It was a good place to teach, it was a nice community, it was accessible to other towns. I had the opportunity to leave a few times, and we really tossed and turned as to whether we wanted to leave or not.

Rykken: What kind of opportunities did you have?

Hansen: Well, bigger schools, and one thing too, I was tempted at one point to leave, just to be going to a bigger school that had a theater, instead of a hole in the wall at the end of a gym. That got real tiring, that got very tiring.

Rykken: But you had the theatre here for the last how many years of your career? Hansen: Well, for 11 years, and I was part of that whole thing, and talk about wonderful.

Rykken: That must have been just unbelievable.

Hansen: Oh it was.

Rykken: The first time you were able to do a play there.

Hansen: Oh, the first time I heard it was going up!

Rykken: What's the first play you did there?

Hansen: We did Fiddler on the Roof, because it's Lidy Lunda's favorite musical.

Rykken: That makes sense. For the last eleven years, it seemed like there were more kids getting involved with the whole idea of the workings of a theatre.

Hansen: Oh yeah, we had a regular theatre staff, in order to help run the theatre we needed to have a theatre staff.

Rykken: And that is something that has continued today.

Hansen: Yes.

Rykken: Those kids are really devoted to that.

Hansen: Oh yeah, and the students that I had too, the students I had were very devoted, very, very knowledgeable. They knew everything backwards and forward, they knew some things better than I did.

Rykken: Everybody that's been in teaching for a very long time, you have students that go on, and you can see your influence in them. Did you have students that went on to do dramatic performance, singing performance?

Hansen: Yes, I had a Ho-Chunk student who has a degree, Joey Brownthunder, who has a degree in theater and Native American studies from University of Minnesota. He's in two movies. I don't really know where he is now, but he was in two movies. Rykken: What year would he have been doing them?

Hansen: I can't really even remember. I really can't, I think Joey was a Senior when my daughter was a second-grader. Because, we did Sound of Music that fall and Joey was Captain Von Trop, we had a Ho-Chunk playing an Austrian.

Rykken: Were you involved with Boy Ladden?

Hansen: No that was before me.

Rykken: Cause he went on to be kinda big didn't he, artistically.

Hansen: John Capper at one point did own his own theatre company as far as set construction, and all that type of stuff. Luther Salvesson a former student of mine is now the tech director at Chan Hesson dinner theatre complex.

Rykkken: He's been there a while.

Hansen: He's been there a long time. Marlene Meyer, Dave Meyer's sister lives down in the Chicago area, she has a degree in performance, although she works a different job she has performed regularly with the Chicago symphony as a soloist, and performed at Carnegie Hall with the Chicago symphony, and that.

Rykkken: What was she like as a student here?

Hansen: Oh just wild, she was a shy one until a variety show, and all of a sudden it came out of her and her mom and dad, her dad felt like crawling under the chair the night he saw her.

Rykkken: Cause she had a great sense of humour.

Hansen: Oh yes, and the audience was just in tears, and they couldn't believe, cause they had never seen this side of her before.

Rykkken: Because she was a real personality if I remember.

Hansen: Oh yeah, but before that she was just a shy...but then your own daughter, Katy, is a recording artist, I've had several that have done it both as a profession and as a side-profession, kind of, like Katy is doing now.

Rykkken: And you have all kinds of people around town, involved in music, you must see them, and that's interesting too, when you work somewhere for a long time.

Hansen: Oh yeah, because a lot of the people in the singing organizations and that around town are former students, I mean it's hard not to run into former students anymore.

Rykkken: When I think just about our church group, Carolyn Burge, she was Carolyn Deemer, and she is a wonderful musician.

Hansen: Oh yeah, and she does a lot, she does a lot of music work.

Rykkken: She takes on all these different instruments, and it's really interesting. I mean that must be gratifying for you.

Hansen: Yeah, that they're still continuing with things, and there's a lot of current teachers who are former students who have done a lot of performing with Falls Players, and they also perform in some other music organizations in town, and it does, it makes you feel good to see that they're continuing and willing to continue with some of these things, they still have an interest.

Rykkken: That's the big payoff.

Hansen: Well it is, music is a lifetime activity.

Rykkken: You went through what I always call the change, You started when the world was more traditional, and then the latter 70's.

Hansen: Oh yeah, the hippie period.

Rykken: How did that affect the school, or how did it affect your job?

Hansen: You learned to accept more, I mean I've always been left of center anyhow. I've always been much more progressive in my thought than many people prefer, but yeah we went through the whole hippie period with long hair and that type of stuff. Obviously, I'm not opposed to that, I mean we went through a period when a lot of kids were experimenting and that kind of stuff. We had the streakers, all of that stuff.

Rykken: All of the cultural influences.

Hansen: All of the cultural influences were felt in school.

Rykken: Did students become harder to handle because of that?

Hansen: You just adapted, as a teacher, you have to constantly adapt. If you don't adapt to the way you deliver and approach students you're going to die a quick death. If you stay in this very traditional mold and never adapt, it's a death, it is.

Rykken: Were there some basic things that never changed with students, the whole time you taught?

Hansen: The students who really took music to the heart, that never changed. There was a dedication there, there was a passion there, there was a passion for music, for theatre, for performing.

Rykken: And that was the same at the end as it was at the beginning?

Hansen: Right, there was a sense of comradery, just like an athletic team. I mean, a music ensemble is no different than an athletic team, you need to work together, and if you develop that, yes did I have students who were just in there for the grade and the credit? Yes. But there was always that core that was the glue to hold it all together. And the Parents support, and the kids' willingness to give up their time, that didn't change. It didn't change, it doesn't matter what decade you're talking about, it didn't change. Because they went through all kinds of hope and that stuff in order to be part of what I did, and also to be part of their athletic program, and work or whatever. Did that mean that I had confrontations with coaches, teachers, employers? Oh you bet, but I never backed down, cause it was for the kids and that's what we're here for.

Rykken: When you look back at that, what was it 31 years?

Hansen: 32 and a half.

Rykken: 32 and a half, do you have any regrets, anything that stands out, or anything that you would have liked to have done that you didn't in terms of musical education? Or did you pretty much do what you set out to do?

Hansen: No, I don't think I have any regrets. I mean we did a lot of wonderful things, I think. And we had a lot of fun, and that's what's it's all about. I feel very self-conscious saying I, I, I, and that stuff. But I really don't have any regrets.

Rykken: What's it like to be retired? From that profession, I know you are still very busy, but how would you describe that?

Hansen: I miss some things.

Rykken: What do you miss?

Hansen: I miss the ability to put choirs together to do Christmas music, I miss madrigal music, and I miss doing the variety shows. I am fortunately still able to direct, and I do a lot of directing.

Rykken: Is this with the church?

Hansen: Well, no, I mean yeah, I do the music at the church, I'm the liturgist and that type of stuff, and I'm on staff there, but it's not the same. Because it's all volunteer adults and it's a very small group. I don't get to do that, it's there, the craving is there to do that type of stuff, and I still hear beautiful music and I miss that part of it. Cause I really did enjoy making music with my kids. I do not miss doing the madrigal dinners, that was then, because it was a lot of work for my wife, and myself and others. I mean, I don't miss the work part, as far as doing it for the public. But it was another period of my life, and I've switched now, you know, am I still active, yeah. I'm involved in a dance theater group, and right now I'm working on four different productions. So I'm directing a lot, choreographing, designing, so I'm still doing that.

Rykken: What do you see as the role of music in a Black River type town, what's the role?

Hansen: It doesn't matter what town it is Paul, music makes a person, it's one of the things that makes a person human. It makes them a being. There's a statement that music is a universal language, it's a way of connecting with people from all around the world, and it's a lifetime thing. Music uses, and it's documented, music uses higher though processes. As far as education goes, it's an important part of creating well-rounded students. Just as athletics is. I have always said, I don't care, you can have the most brilliant students go through, they can get straight A's, but in my mind they are not a truly well-rounded person unless they have some of the other activities, whether it be athletics, whether it be any of the arts. That makes you a human being.

Rykken: It's such an interesting thing in a public high school, to kind of keep the idea of fine arts alive.

Hansen: And it's getting harder and harder, I mean, musically, the state of Wisconsin is struggling. I'm very involved with the State Music Association, and last year, our Solo & Ensemble festival, large group thing, we had almost a quarter of a million students involved. We have the largest music program in the United States, in Wisconsin. It's larger than the Texas Athletic association. But it's getting harder and harder, because of things that are being done within the school. Because of the pressures now of "No Child Left Behind", all the testing, and that type of stuff, a lot of places, music is looked at something as kind of extra. Thank Heavens, Wisconsin has the State statutes, that require it to be part of the curriculum. And that really does help, but understandably, districts are looking at ways to cut music, and art, and all of this type of thing.

Rykken: Music at the high school level, is it more about education or performing?

Hansen: It should be a 50/50 proposition, and it depends on what school you go into. Yes, did we do a lot of different types of performances? Yeah we did, we did a lot of concerts, we did a lot of performances over the course of the year, but the music was used to educate the students and the public. And if a person were to go back and look at the types of concerts I would do, they would see that the different concerts emphasized different aspects of things. We did not

do pop music all year, there was a concert designated for that, the Awards concert was a different kind of music, and that type of thing.

Rykken: As you said that I was just curious if you could tell us the Pop music that you would have done in '69, '70, versus Pop music you did at the end.

Hansen: Oh heavens that would be hard to remember, the brain doesn't remember all that stuff anymore Paul!

Rykken: Carpenters music?

Hansen: We sang anything that we had available right away from the publishers, because of copyrights and all that type of stuff, but oh you bet we jumped on that stuff. And of course then by the end, we were doing a lot of stuff, I mean, we did Queen, we did Bohemian Rhapsody, and the kids just had a blast doing that. We did a lot of contemporary stuff.

Rykken: And something I forgot about earlier, but you did quite a bit of travel over the years. Where did you take kids?

Hansen: I mainly traveled with the Madrigal singers, and we went to New York City, we went to Washington D.C., we went to New York City two times or three times. Then we also did some other trips with Madrigal, just as kind of a reward for their efforts during December, which was a marathon. Then we had the opportunity to go to Disney World, as part of Magic Music Days, and that's when I took the Chamber Choir the first time, and it was a tremendous experience for the kids. Some people would say yeah, you're just going on vacation, but no, it was a lot of prep for us, cause we had to put together a half an hour show, and basically what we did down there was show-choir. But I used the whole choir and we did that twice, we did that two different times and it was just a wonderful experience. And it was just strictly performance, we weren't being judged, I have never liked that type of thing, whenever I went with Madrigal to New York it was always kind of a competition or festival, and you're always rated and all that type of stuff, and I've been a judge for Solo & Ensemble, for 26 years, and that type of stuff, so there is a rating type thing, but I have never gotten into the whole thing of choirs being judged and all that type of stuff, and I do it! I mean, I do it, it's a way of earning some extra money and that type of stuff, and there are schools, and it was also quite honestly this school, really pushed, we want your choirs out being judged, because they wanted to use it as a means of evaluating staff. Which is not what it's all about, it's not what music is about, music is not meant to be judged.

Rykken: And that's such a big part of that show choir.

Hansen: Oh you bet!

Rykken: Yeah, that's intense.

Hansen: Oh, much, much more so than any of the others even.

Rykken: When you first came here, did you take students on trips?

Hansen: No.

Rykken: Field trips?

Hansen: Oh yeah, we always did field trips.

Rykken: Where did you go then?

Hansen: Oh, we would just go to hear a concert here and there, I would take kids up to, like to Eau Claire to hear the Vienna Boys choir. We did those type of things, and we did like little things, like one year there was a new festival down at the La Crosse Center, we were down in La Crosse at the old Mary E. Sawyer, and we went down as part of that thing, it was a Christmas concert type thing, so we did some of those things, and then eventually I moved into taking students to see touring companies and musicals.

Rykken: We were talking about that the other day, I was talking to someone who's been in teaching a long time, and just the comment was made that traveling with kids is much different today than it was a generation ago. When you really felt like you were taking them out of their comfort zone and into a new world that they haven't seen before, and now kids have seen so much that it's not as big a deal.

Hansen: But I remember our first big trip, when we wanted to go to New York with the Madrigal.

Rykken: Do you remember what year?

Hansen: No, school board turned us down, because they were advised that the philosophy at that point in the upper administration was that there is nothing to see outside of Jackson County. I had a group of parents that got angry and they took it completely out of my hands, went right back to the school board.

Rykken: Wasn't there, going back again to the late '60's, in Black River, wasn't it not unusual for them to take students from here up to the Guthrie?

Hansen: Yes, and that was never me, I didn't do the Guthrie so much, but that was an annual trip.

Rykken: But that's an interesting kind of, at that time that was taking kids really, some of those kids probably hadn't been outside of Jackson County.

Hansen: Right, this is true, because at that point in time, economically this county was a lot different, has it improved? Yes it's improved, there's a lot more money around. But back then....

Rykken: It was a depressed area.

Hansen: It was a very depressed area. I mean, I had college loans that got written off because I was teaching, and the first musical we did, which you were in, I was just talking the other to some of the people, we went out in the country and tore down a barn! A barn built out of oak, to have lumber to build the set for Oliver.

Rykken: I actually kind of remember that.

Hansen: And Dan Scholze, and Dennis Possitery were the first ones who built my set. Rykken: Dennis Possitery, was he a student?

Hansen: Yep. Dan Scholze was not, but he was in carpentry and that type of stuff, but they built the first set. And I was really in trouble after that first show, cause we had this turn table, that I put wheels on and they broke and they put a groove in the stage. And that's probably still

there, yep it's still there. But everyone always knew where the center of the stage was! I always pushed the envelope, I always pushed the envelope. I always kept people on their toes.

Rykken: You worked with lots of different people here, and I'm not asking you to name any names, but what stands out with you about teachers that you worked with over the years, and I'm assuming that sometimes that was good and sometimes that was not, but overall it was pretty nice.

Hansen: I worked with some really wonderful teachers over the years, some really dedicated teachers.

Rykken: What did you see change with teachers over the years while you were here? Hansen: Well, we've talked about this.

Rykken: Yeah I'm just curious as to your impression of them as you got older.

Hansen: Well, I was, there are a lot of us now who are retired who were of a different breed. We were there and a lot of us never taught anywhere else, the music faculty! The last one to retire from the one group of us, the initial group, was Axel. But, Margaret Severson was here forever, never taught anywhere else. Dick Camlek never taught anywhere else. Axel Dressler never taught anywhere else. I never taught anywhere else.

Rykken: How do you explain that?

Hansen: The community, the community, the support from the community, I would have to say that, I mean, that's what kept us here. I mean look at the support we got, and look at the things we were able to accomplish.

Rykken: When you say support do you mean just the...

Hansen: Financial, moral support.

Rykken: They tell you great job and pump you up for the next one. Which is kind of a neat thing, it's just interesting because that generation, your generation, like you said you were the first boomers, many of those people stayed where they went a long time, and that doesn't seem to be the case now.

Hansen: No, and you and I have talked about that, it's a whole different breed of cat, and I don't want to sound like I'm the old man, but it is. If you check anywhere, you will find, industry, anywhere, it's a whole different mindset with this generation of quote unquote professionals.

Rykken: Because of people staying, there was a tremendous amount of stability and time to build programs, you weren't switching, going a different philosophy. Now you must have had the current band director as a student.

Hansen: Oh, Barb LeRoy is a madrigal singer alumni, she was very integral in my program.

Rykken: That must be very interesting.

Hansen: Oh it is, and of course Troy Tande, Troy Tande performed in my variety shows, he was never in choir, although he sings absolutely wonderfully.

Rykken: Yes, wonderful musician.

Hansen: Yes, but no Barb was very active, and the group she graduated with, oh.

Rykken: And Barb brings a lot of that energy.

Hansen: Oh she's got tremendous energy.

Rykken: I know the band has increased in size, which is interesting to watch.

Hansen: Different approaches.

Rykken: Yeah, different approaches, and she seems like she's real excited about music education, whenever I talk to her. Is there anything else that you want to add, we've talked for almost an hour, is there anything you would like to say that you didn't get a chance to say? About your time here?

Hansen: I guess, also what we didn't talk about was the support of the administration, and I think that made a difference too. It varied off and on, from time to time and that type of stuff, and that doesn't mean I did not have to get in and have some real down and dirty fights sometimes to get what I wanted for the students, and to do what I wanted. But I would have to say all the way through, I worked, the majority of the direct administrators I worked for, I had a good working relationship with. Norm Crens, but then I had his daughter in class, and going to Roger, I had Roger's son in class, who was very active, and he was very supportive. Roseanne, was very supportive, of course. Did I get everything I wanted? No, but we were able to be honest with each other and that, and even at the District Administrative level there was always support there for music.

Rykken: And Melvin Schmalberg was Superintendent when you came so he would have hired you.

Hansen: Yep.

Rykken: And you mentioned that he came up to kind of watch you teach.

Hansen: Yep, he watched me and the next day I had a contract, a whole different way of....

Rykken: And that's an interesting story, because with the interviews we've done now, this is our fourth year, and we've heard that story more than once.

Hansen: I never met Norm Crens, until it was time for me to teach, and the first day I taught here, I couldn't teach because they were putting carpeting in my room, and I wore that out in about four years.

Rykken: And they weren't hiring by committee.

Hansen: Nope they weren't hiring by committee.

Rykken: The Superintendent kind of called the shots there, and that was kind of different too. That's changed a lot.

Hansen: Yeah, considerably!

Rykken: Yeah, so well we thank you for your time.

Hansen: Okay.

Richard Camlek
November 11, 2004
Falls History Project Interview
Interviewer: Kirsten A. Bjerke

KB: What is your name?

RC: I am Richard Camlek.

KB: When and where were you born?

RC: I was born in Leana Wisconsin; it is north of Green Bay, in Oconto County, August 8th 1945.

KB: Did you grow up there?

RC: Yes, I was a graduate of Coleman High School, and I graduated from High School in 1963.

KB: And then you went on to college?

RC: I did, yes.

KB: Where did you go?

RC: I went to University of Wisconsin Superior, I was there from 1963 through 1967.

KB: What did you major in there?

RC: I was an instrumental music major and I have a geography minor.

KB: Did you have any early influences, any people that shaped your musical ability or inclination?

RC: Yes, very much so, my parents were quite influential, and they played a lot of folk instruments and they would take us to, my brother and I, take us to different dances, to different school functions that were going on musically. Of course my band director in high school was very influential, he had a heart disorder when, I believe I was a sophomore in high school and it gave me an opportunity that entire sophomore year to work with the junior high band in our school district, and I found that this is something I might enjoy doing as a livelihood, I don't know how many sophomores in high school have really established what they want to do as a career, but that gave me a first hand opportunity to do what I ended up doing for a career, the high school principal would come in and sit in a room and gosh I, it was at least four or five months, that three times a week I directed the junior high band in our school district while our band director was healing from, he had pretty severe heart attacks, the high school band at the time was taken over by a friend of mine who was a senior at the time, he too went on to become a successful music educator in the eastern part of the state, and his name is Don Valinte, and Mr. Valinte is still alive and he was a real influence, and there were a number of older people in the area that I grew up that played a lot of folk music and I think that's where I learned a lot of the old time, the polka's the waltzes, and a lot of those pieces, I've never seen printed but I remembered the, I think I have a decent enough ear and if I heard them once or twice, I think I could repeat them on my accordion I played, I started taking accordion lessons when I was eight years old, so yes, there were a number of people who were, like I'm sure you're finding, were very influential in my music pursuit. So I still have fond memories, like I hope you do, of my

early years, when I started, because those people are quite influential, you'll find as you get older.

KB: Your mother just passed away.

RC: Yes she did.

KB: Wasn't she an amazing piano...?

RC: No, no my mother was not a pianist, my mother played button accordion. But unfortunately I could, the piano accordion that I started playing, in and out is the same sound, a button accordion in and out are two different sounds, and once I got started playing piano accordion I couldn't make that adjustment, so I can play a little on it, but my Mother, she could play somewhere I have little tape-recordings that we did and my dad played harmonica some and those are fond memories.

KB: Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about the Noteables, when did that band actually form?

RC: I believe it was in the spring of 1969, and the original group was Mr. Chuck Knutson who was a piano teacher and a music teacher in the elementary schools in Black River, Al Perner who was the high school band director at the time in Black River, Neil Duxbury who was a retired telephone head, I believe he headed the phone company in Black River, played drums. Then I, the four of us joined, and I believe it was in the spring of 1969.

KB: How long was that group together? As that...

RC: As the Noteables we were together probably 20 plus years, Neil Duxbury passed away and Chuck Knutson moved to Colorado and then after that Al Perner's wife Millie played piano for us and then Dennis Ruda became the drummer, and I do have a picture here of that group, but that we played for probably ten years with that line-up, but the original, the Noteables we were probably in existence about twenty years.

KB: And the only thing that changed that was death and moving.

RC: Right, right it still, Al Perner was a very dear friend of mine, obviously a colleague in the music department and I don't know if I'm done grieving, tremendous musician, Al Perner made everybody around him a better musician, and yes I have college degrees but that type of music that we played you have to get in and do it and do it and do it, and having Al Perner kind of as my mentor it really really helped, because he just made everybody around him better, I think you're going to find that if you pursue music, there are those individuals who will make you sing or play better than you ever thought you were capable of doing, and he was one of those.

KB: Sounds like an amazing guy.

RC: He was.

KB: And then you know you hear the bad stories about kicking Dad out of band, but I think that was more in Dad's personality.

RC: I'll let you talk to your dad about that.

KB: How did you choose the name of your band?

RC: I think there was a contest if I recall correctly at Club 12, Club 12 is no longer in existence, but it was a supper club outside the east end of Black River and if I recall correctly we had a contest, and I can't recall who won the contest, but it was something like that, in like the summer of 1969, or early spring like I mentioned.

KB: That's a pretty interesting way to choose a name. About how old were you when the band started?

RC: I was 23 or 24.

KB: Alright so was this after college then?

RC: Yes.

KB: And you were all living in town?

RC: Yes, yes, if you want me to elaborate a bit on that, most of us had played, all of us had played with different groups at one time or another, and we just found each other through jamming if you will with different groups and we said, I think we can do this on our own, there were a number of bands like ours, you know trios or quartets or five piece at the time, certainly Elmo Johnson's band comes to mind, Art Rosenberg had a group for a number of years, people like Alvin Lee, some of these musicians from Black River had led their own groups from time to time, there was like a circuit that we played of supper clubs in the area, and of course weddings and anniversaries, and that type of thing, the music that we played you now the swing music, some jazz and quite a bit of old-time music was being performed by gosh, four or five bands from right here in the Black River Area itself, and we had all the work we wanted, you know every weekend, we would load up and get on the road, it was interesting, I'm glad I had the opportunity to live that because it was an interesting time, people danced a lot, and they don't do that that much, there are pockets where that still exists, I think the ethnic groups, where you have a strong say Polish or German, or I'm half Slovenian, Czechoslovakian areas still have pockets where the old time music is very popular, they have festivals, but this was a real conglomeration of people that just got together Friday and or Saturday night and they loved to dance, so we had a lot of employment.

KB: Where was the furthest gig that you did?

RC: Oh we did Minnesota, we would go as far east, well I'm from the Green Bay area a few times we ventured that far, but primarily it was about a hundred mile radius from Black River that we didn't have to travel a great distance because there were opportunities made available you know, within a hundred mile radius of Black River, and there are some real tales I could tell you, especially in the winter months when we would be traveling, and the roads were icy and snowy, just once we had to stay over night, I can remember it was, we played the Stevens Point Country Club and we come out and it was 42 degrees below zero. And we decided the safe thing to do that night was to find a motel, which we did and we stayed over night in Stevens Point, and of course there went all our profits from our playing, but we aired on a side of safety, but there were some real hellacious trips that we had where the snow and the ice, but that's what we contended with and we were a lot younger then, I was like I said in my twenties, I don't know if I'd care to do that right now.

KB: Did you guys ride up to your gigs in one car?

RC: Yes, we had a trailer made and then, here's a comical side light, Mr. Perner loved Buicks, and he had a Buick that the rust was eating away from the rear tire, so what he did unbeknowing to Neil Duxbury and I, he went in and he patched it with concrete, so we're down the freeway, and if I recall this was June or July, and I'm wondering what this residue is coming from, I'm in the backseat with the drummer and he started to laugh, and I thought why is he laughing this is I thought maybe his car is on fire, he said just like I told you, he patched it with concrete so that was a joke that we had for a number of years, that we were riding in a car that was patched with concrete and we wondered what they thought when they were demolishing that car and the big boom hit it and that cement was broken up. But yeah to answer your question we usually traveled and we had a great big Buick that Al Perner, Al had a number of Buicks, but big big Buick cars and the trailer to house the instruments.

KB: What instruments did you all play?

RC: With the Band? Well okay, Chuck Knutson originally and then Millie Perner, they were our keyboard players and then Neil Duxbury and Dennis Ruda respectively were our drummers, and Al Perner played the trombone, and he played Tuba, and I played Accordion, Clarinet, Saxophone and Flugelhorn. So we had, we could go with that combination, we could do, of course with the old time I play accordion, and then you know like the swing stuff I would play saxophone, clarinet or flugelhorn, and Al, an excellent trombonist. I have some tapes, like we did just like what you're doing now, and just let it run, and you know no fancy sound, and if I must say they're not too bad, if we'd a had a sound engineer I think and if we wanted to we could have sold some recordings, but that wasn't important to us.

KB: You all had outside occupations, how did that interfere with your performance or didn't it at all?

RC: Our jobs always came first, our school jobs, and we just didn't book anything if there were concerts or parades or something that went on, we just didn't book, but that didn't happen very often, I can recall one instance where I had to be late and we played at the Green Meadow Supper Club which was outside of Blair, it's no longer in existence, and I let a kid and I think it's the last time I did this, I let a kid use my saxophone and I get to the job and I told them I would be late, I'd be about fifteen minutes late, I unpacked my horn in a great hurry and the first number I played, I blew and nothing came out, and I looked down and here this kid had stuffed a drum stick down in my saxophone, and I guess you learn by mistakes, and for a whole bunch of reasons that was the last time I ever let anybody use my own personal instruments, they are expensive as you well know, instruments are expensive, and that taught me a great lesson, how embarrassing here I was on a band stand and you know, you blow and nothing happens, so I excused myself from the band stand, went in the back, found what the problem was and then came back, but no, to get back again to your question, no we avoided conflicts, our job was music education for the two of us, and then Neil was retired, and Millie she gave piano lessons, but and then worked in her home as a housewife, but no, we didn't really have any conflicts, I can probably say that originally the income almost equated what we were making teaching and it was, and we didn't make that much money teaching, not that they make that much money today relatively, but the pay was good and we had like I said a lot of work, we could have played during the week but that was you know almost forbidden because you know we had to sleep, so we played primarily Friday Saturday Sunday afternoons.

KB: When did you find time to practice?

RC: You would pretty much learn the stuff right on the spot, countless times we'd just sight read it, and that's an important, I think, attribute to have as a musician, you know what I'm talking about when I say chops, we had good chops, we played a lot and that will keep your chops up where you're able to do that and if you've got the chops the spots on the page that's kind of secondary, because you improvise a lot out of that anyway, but no we had good chops. I'm one of those that I don't have the luxury, I never did, where I can put the horn under the bed and pick it up a month later and sound good, I can't do that, maybe there are, I doubt, but maybe there are people that have that luxury, I'm not one of them, and I have to practice, the notes came, but the embrasure you have to keep that up. But no, we had good chops.

KB: How did people approach you for the jobs?

RC: Originally it was mostly by word of mouth, they came and heard us somewhere at some of these venues, as I mentioned earlier whether it's a supper club or a wedding, or anniversary and then they had themselves a birthday or a wedding or an anniversary, or something going on and so they would call us, and we had business cards printed and it was a lot of word of mouth that got around, people said here's a band that can play both swing and old-time and do a good job in both genres, and there are bands that will just play old-time or just play swing, or just play rock or just play country, and we crossed over you know with our switching of instruments and we were able to do that and switch into different areas. Yeah we, like I said earlier, I think we could have played at least three if not five nights a week, but for a whole bunch of reasons we chose not to and we usually limited to one or two or three at the max per week.

KB: What musical groups influenced your music, just the bands of the time?

RC: Yeah, I can't speak for the others, but I can speak for myself I was certainly influenced, like clarinet by the clarinetist of the swing era, Benny Goodman certainly comes to mind, I was a fan of Pete Fountain, a Dixieland clarinetist, Louis Armstrong I think had an influence on all of us, I think I can speak for the piano and drum and Al Perner, and I mean we did a lot of stuff that is still popular today, I think the stuff of Duke Ellington and from that big band era, we would take what worked for our group and make it go, with the four of us. Old-time we had a lot of the Dutchmen groups from New Alum, we could kind of emulate their style, but I'm half Slovenian, my ancestry and we could play Frankie Yancovich style, and we could do that, and you know they were influential in what we did. The rock thing, we did Beatles stuff, you know that came, Blood Sweat & Tears, we'd do some of those that were kind of the more popular pieces that they recorded, those were some of the influences, just off the top of my head that I can give you.

KB: So did you change with the times, did you add?

RC: Oh yeah, I can remember Tie A Yellow Ribbon, of course during the Vietnam Era of course yeah, we did you know Tony Orlando and Dawn, we did that kind of stuff, and we tried to keep current I would say, probably through the middle 1980's. I've played with a lot of groups since then, in reference to the Noteables, but certainly, the hot tune of the week if you will, we'd try and do it.

KB: How did you get your music?

RC: They have fake books which have the lead line and the chord symbol and the words, and it's up to the musicians to improvise around that, and we had, and I have to this day, you know

boxes of fake books. I think a lot of us were blessed, if we could hear it a couple of times, it was right up here, and then we would make arrangements, Al Perner or I or somebody would write out a rough draft, I don't think we ever played any of the pieces the same way twice, I think if you asked me to do that I would be hard pressed to play them exactly the same way twice, I don't like to do that, for that style of music, that's why I like Jazz, or like the old-time, you can put your own expression into it. We tried to keep up with the pop stuff, and would write out some, or buy a sheet, sheet music if we couldn't find it in the fake book, fake books were I think for a while, we weren't supposed to have them, but everybody had them it was one of those goodness gracious you'd go bankrupt trying to buy, in those days you know two three dollars is for an individual piece of music, we could buy these thick fake books that had 600 tunes for forty bucks, or something and then we'd make from that fake sheet our own arrangement, and some of those we called head arrangements, that we just knew what to do.

KB: I didn't know fake books had that many songs in them.

RC: Yeah, well I can show you, I have them, I use them, every once in a while somebody will, I play with a different group now, we call ourselves Sentimental Journey, and between the four of us, somebody will have the tune, there's bazillions of tunes out there, and we're not a rock band, I should clarify, but if it's a swing tune, or an old time tune, or a show tune, somebody in the group will know it, and we'll work on it and we'll play it.

KB: Did you play with any other groups, like in today's world you see where they play with other bands, did you do that?

RC: I would get called periodically, Elmo Johnson's band was in existence then, and once in a while his regular sax/clarinet player couldn't play and he would call me to play, I mentioned earlier, I grew up North of Green Bay, and there would be some bands that their clarinet/sax player would not be able to make it so I'd get a call and, I should tell you a time the band has made a number of CD's, Norm DemBrowski and the Happy Notes, it's a polish band from Steven's Point, and my brother still does play trumpet with them periodically and they're clarinet/sax player couldn't make it for some reason, and I think we'd played at Dance Land Ballroom in Green Bay, I said yeah I would go and so I drove from Black River to Green Bay and I got the book, and the book for the Bb instruments were in four five and six sharps respectfully and I looked at that and thought, oh my what did I get myself into, but as you well know, there's patterns to it, and I got there early enough I got there about an hour early and I went in the back room and I just started blowing scales in four five six sharps until I got, we know, I mean I knew them, but those are things we don't see every day of the week, and the reason for that was cause there's usually a concertina, and they were in, they make them in different keys, but this particular band had their instrument in the key of C, and those keys like D, for them, becomes E for us, it's a step up if you will for the Bb instrument, they the concertina players, are similar to guitar players, feel comfortable with D and A and E, and those weird keys for those of us that blow a horn, so I'll never forget that job, and I though what did I get into, because it wasn't my regular gig if you will, there was another time, I don't know where these guys are from, I want to say they're from Minnesota, but they called, and it was like two trumpets and a tuba, a drum, an accordion and they wanted that I play Tenor Sax, and I'm familiar with that set-up for old-time band and I'm waiting for the book, the library of music if you will, there was no book, no library, no music, they had head arrangements, now you know if you're playing lead you can find that and I can find the second harmony, well I was expected to play the third harmony and that's kind of tricky but I found it, it's a, I don't after, there's a certain

groove that you get into, but those are some experiences, when you asked me did I play with others groups, and yeah I played with a lot of other groups, but sometimes you don't know what you're getting into and those were two experiences that I just sat back and thought about what do I have to do here, and we pulled it off, you know you can pull it off. Yeah, there were just fine, still are, fine musicians around the area, I think Black River is, has been a real haven for good musicianship and hopefully your generation I know is carrying it on with Community Band, you have to know the tunes, you have to know, you know the swing stuff I feel comfortable with and the old-time, if you know the style then the keys don't really make that much difference, I've played pieces where this band will play them in one key and this in another, and if you just get set in your ways it could get real troublesome, you have to be able to go with the flow if you will and play them in different keys, play them in different styles, German polka is going to be different than the Polish polka is going to be different than the Cleveland or the Slovenian polka, they're different styles, but I know those styles, and so people call and they know I know the style and so it works out.

KB: So did you learn a lot of your music theory in college or did you have just an innate understanding of that?

RC: I'm smiling and grinning, I think I had a much better ear before I went to college, I could just, I did it, I didn't think, it's like a young child if they're two three four years old learning a foreign language, they don't think they just do it. And I just did it, when I got to college there was a time especially for about a year and a half I think they really screwed my ear up, because then I started thinking about it. We had to think about it in order to do it the way they wanted us to do it, and every once in a while I'll fall into that trap, if I'm up on stage, playing in a jazz band and there's no music, and I start thinking about it, my pet line is I'm in trouble, I'm in trouble because you know how fast it'll go and I could just do it, if I start, and don't get me wrong, you have to know your chord progressions, you have to know where the piece is headed, you have to know the direction you're going, but you can over think yourself right into having very bad things happen, and that's happened to all of us, if anybody that's improvised in the Jazz genre tells you that he or she has never had that happen to him, he or she has never played very much, because it's happened to the very best of them. But, if you know the tune, it just kind of comes.

KB: How did it feel to be in a group that achieved something, is that just...?

RC: I don't know if we, fame is tough to describe I think there are people in the area that still remember us, and I'm not an egotist I never get hung up on that, but I get my kicks out of looking out at the audience and seeing the people have a good time, I think a gift that we share that should be shared with others, I can give you some real tangibles to that when I play with another group, we go to the nursing homes and to look out at the audience and these people are mouthing the words to the song, you know you've touched them, you know, they can remember that song being played fifty years ago at somebody's birthday, and they'll come up to you and they'll say I haven't heard that piece for fifty years, and thank you for playing that, and that's where I get my jollies out of it. You can look at the expression of the people in the audience that's reward enough.

KB: Does music still inspire your life, I mean you're obviously still in bands, so it is the major part of your life?

RC: Oh it's a real important part of I think it's hard to put a value, but I always thought that family is very very important, and I was blessed that it was my occupation and love, music were two and the same, I don't know how many people can say that, when I was in college I worked three or four years in a furniture factory and probably disliking every day of it. I worked thirty-three years teaching here in Black River, and never once, and I can honestly say, that I hate going to work, I would get up in the morning and say I have a big day in front of me, we have a parade or a concert or this or that, and you know this is going to be nice when this is done, I don't think there are too many people who can say that they did that for thirty-three years, and I was pretty blessed because it was a love, and then obviously it was my occupation, and hopefully I was able to transcend that to other people, I'm blessed and I feel very happy about that. And it's still music, as you well know, Community Band is always will be, important to me and I play with another group, our Sentimental Journey group now, we don't play every weekend like we used to, we play maybe once a month, and we're comfortable with that I think we could play more if we so choose, but we have families and a number of grandkids and that's an important part. I don't see how it, I don't know I can't imagine music out of my life, it would be, I just can't imagine life without that, for me it wouldn't be life, it's an important part, but I do a lot of other things, I jog, I've done that for twenty or thirty years, I hunt and fish a lot, I make no bones about that in retirement, working here I've been subbing quite a bit this week at the high school and I kid them that deer hunting is coming up so don't call me to sub now, because I'm gonna be done with that until deer season is done with, but I hope that I gave students that I had the pleasure of teaching for thirty-three years that appreciation and love for the art form, because, your dad had an article in the paper, I don't know how many sixty-year-old football players there are running around out there, but you know from community band there are a number of us that we're still able to play and enjoy it and I don't think you ever say well I am here and this is the best I am ever going to be, I keep on striving for something, about a month or two ago I did something with Beth Hellman in town, an excellent vocalist, and that clarinet part was very, very challenging, you know so you practice, and I know I mentioned earlier I don't have that luxury where I can put the horn under the bed and pick it up a month later and sound like I want to sound, I have standards that I want to sound like, it's something I think you can do until your dying day if your chops hold up.

KB: How did your wife deal with you going off to all these gigs, did she come and visit?

RC: Yeah, my wife likes music, my wife is one of the best dancers I know, and I am not a good dancer because I was always playing, but she has a great love of music, I should tell you something about my wife, we have a little family band, a polka band, that we put together for our kids when they were married, all of our kids weddings we played our family polka band, we played about an hour, and I couldn't for a number of reasons, find a drummer, so I taught my wife how to play the drums, so my wife is a very good old-time-she won't tell you that, good old-time band drummer, and I've got it on tape and recordings, that we did family, so yeah she loves it and she, I would say probably comes to 95% of the gigs you know sometimes it's not always possible, or we're playing far off and we get home late at night she'd rather go to bed at a decent hour, and I think that's important that you have a spouse that understands that's part of you, that's not gonna change, she knew that before she married me, she came to enough gigs, and said hey this is the way it is and it's not going to change and she knew that. But no, there is no problem there.

KB: When did you two get married?

RC: 1985. Well, a brother of mine, your dad and maybe your mother too know my brother, he's a high school principal now, he was a band director, plays trumpet, and my two sons, one plays trumpet one plays saxophone, and I play all different instruments, and then Mr. Dressler he would come and play bass at some of the gigs, and then like I said we couldn't find a drummer, so I taught my wife to, so.

KB: I'd like to switch over and ask you some questions about your longevity here at the high school; did you work with Verna Keefe at all?

RC: I know who Verna Keefe was, and Verna is a real legacy, has left a real legacy in Black River, excellent piano teacher, that's how I got to know Verna primarily, when I was first starting I would go to Verna and ask her who were these students that she had that would be capable of accompanying Class C or B solos, usually the A solos I would have Mr. Knutson or an adult play those accompaniments, but yeah quite a gal. She would, in my first couple years she would say, Dick you be strict with those kids now, and which I think your dad and mom will tell you, I, we had to have, my old line was, we had to have law and order in the classroom, otherwise I'd go fishing and you could stay home and watch Ding-Dong school on Television, and there was that respect I think I had for the students, they respected me, we're here to have a good time but the job needs to be done, and Verna was one of those that was here before I came on board, and she said, this is what you should do and I listened to her, I think it's important for somebody young to listen to the old people that have been in the trenches, because Verna had a lot of wisdom, she knew the school district well, she knew the parents and the students well, if I had a question about some student I often times would go talk to Verna, and she knew the background and she would tell me why that particular student maybe was struggling, some stuff shaking at home that maybe I wasn't aware of, no excellent lady, excellent music educator.

KB: When did you start working here?

RC: In August of 1967.

KB: Did you work anywhere in between college and here?

RC: When I graduated from college it was in the spring of '67, I worked that summer at a Band Camp in Superior, and I was, the city of Superior had a music program, I think it was through their city that we did concerts a couple times a week, but this was the job that I came to, regular job if you will.

KB: Did you have any other choices?

RC: Yeah I interviewed a number of jobs in Minnesota, I picked Black River because I didn't want to initially go too close to where I grew up, I think that's a bad policy, that's my bias, and I thought I'm about two hundred miles from the Green Bay area, this would be a good place and I mentioned I like to hunt and fish a lot, and where I grew up was good hunting and fishing I was going to be in Black River for a couple of years and then I was going to move to the Green Bay area, well I've been here almost forty years, and have no regrets, you know I would have gone if I didn't like it here. It's a great place to raise a family and the people are real supportive of the music programs, whether that's school or community band as you well know, or other areas, it's a very musical town.

KB: What did you teach when you first got here?

RC: I had instrumental music, grades 5 through 9 in those days.

KB: And that changed a little bit?

RC: That changed because they went then to the middle school concept which was 6 through 8 which it is at present, and then the numbers just started getting to where it was almost prohibitive to have five grades that I would be responsible for, so we made a decision somewhere I think in the 1970's that instead of starting the students in fifth grade, we would start students on a band instrument in sixth grade, when they were starting their middle school experience and so I had for most of those years, close to two hundred kids, in the three different bands, we'd had sixth grade or beginning band, seventh and eighth grade band. But at the very outset I was responsible for grades 5 through 9. And like I said, somewhere in the 1970's, they went to a four-year high school, and then we went to the three-year middle school.

KB: When did you add in a Jazz Band and a Polka Band?

RC: I think I did that my second year here, as you well know, and your mom and dad can attest, those are two areas as I alluded to earlier that I enjoy, I think it was my second year here in the fall of 1968 that I said some of you may call it old fogies music, but I like polkas and they thought well yeah, that's kind of cool, and so we did the polka band all the years after that and I had the Jazz band and they thought that was pretty cool. There weren't that many schools, colleges that were doing jazz in the 60's, I think, I did a masters program at Winona, and Winona had one of the first Jazz programs in the United States, and so I thought this is something I need to start in those days at the junior high. I and the kids were real receptive to it and it caught on, and it was a good problem to have I would have more kids trying out than you could have I mean you can't really have a Jazz Band of 50 some kids, but I tried to give everybody a chance, you know I'd explain to them when we had ninth graders, well if you were in seventh and eighth grade and you didn't make it this year, you're certainly going to be eligible to try again, and they did and I think most of the kids that wanted to had a chance in their years with me to perform in Jazz Band.

KB: I know the High School here in the '70's had a Dixieland Band, did you incorporate that into Jazz Band or did you...?

RC: We didn't, Mr. Perner was more with the Dixieland Band, I did some, but middle school the concept was, some of the kids their embasure's weren't developed enough for them to go one person on a part, and that Dixieland gets pretty, with the three horns up front, you've got a trombone and clarinet or saxophone and trumpet and you've got to have pretty good chops and I think the High School kids it's a genre they do better in than the middle school kids, so for that reason, that was Mr. Perner's thing that he did, and then for reasons I just decided that middle school kids embasure's just aren't ready for some of the, well your Dad and I and Diane Kujak you know that's some pretty tough stuff to go, and you've got to have good chops, so I stayed away from that, the Dixieland at the middle school for those reasons.

KB: Who was your predecessor in the band program?

RC: Les Miwa was here I think your Mom and Dad met Les while your dad was stationed in Hawaii, and Les left a good program here, he was here I believe three years before I came, and I have communication with him, it was like five six years ago he called me from Hawaii, but he

left a good program for a young rookie fresh out of college to inherit and I tip my hat to him because he built a good program for me to step into.

KB: You were at the Middle School from 67...

RC: '67 through 2000 I retired in 2000.

KB: And then Mr. Troy Tande took over.

RC: Yeah and I am real happy, both Mrs. LeRoy and Troy Tande were both former students of Mr. Dressler and myself, and Mr. Perner and so that makes us real proud, and they're doing fine work, I give it to the young folks to carry the torch.

KB: Who else was teaching here at the time, I know Mr. Perner.

RC: When I started in 1967, Gavin Upton was the band director at the high school, and Gavin was '67 and '68 and then Al Perner came on from '68 to about '82 or '83, and then Mr. Ruda was there and then Mr. Dressler and now Mrs. LeRoy, Mr. Hansen was in the vocal area, and at the middle school Margaret Severson and I worked together for a long time, and then Mrs. Severson, the present principal at Gebhardt was the choral director, and she and I worked together at the middle school, those were, to go back into the '60's and early '70's, Sherry Sajak-Bach was the choral director at the middle school, and some of those people at the top of my head I can remember their names. KB: So would you say that we've had a real quick turn-over with the teachers in the music program or have they been staying?

RC: Well, if you look at Mr. Dressler, Mr. Hansen and I, we I think we got together one time and we said there were a hundred years together with the three of us, that may be unusual nowadays, and I've only been out, this is only my fifth year since I've been retired and Troy Tande is here and I would hope they would stay, but I guess that is up to them, whether it's economic or other reasons people move on I don't know, but like I mentioned earlier, Black River was always supportive, and a great place to teach music.

KB: Did you notice an increase in students, or a decrease over the years.

RC: Oh yeah, as I alluded to earlier, it was a good problem to have, there were more kids getting into the program and for me to be responsible for five grades would have been prohibitive, you just can't do justice to that, I always thought somewhere if I had a hundred, in middle school I'm speaking because I believe it differs in high school, a hundred and fifty to two-hundred students was about the max that I could accommodate, and in a small town like Black River, you are their instructor, these kids aren't taking private lessons, or 99% of them aren't, and you become their instructor, if they're going to learn anything it's you, and if you get beyond that, you're not doing anybody any good, yourself as a teacher probably go insane after a while, but I had a methodology that I could handle between 150 and 200 kids. You know you were in the program, if he or she wanted to be there, and he or she was willing to work at it, and if they could get along with the large group, it's a different class as you well know than any other class, there was a place for them, we didn't have any bench warmers in Band, nobody sat on the sidelines, everybody was able to participate, so I would hope that everybody who wanted to had a chance, for a number of reasons some just couldn't play a particular instrument, I would suggest something other, and most of the time it worked out. Yeah there was a growth, and I think still is. Although your scheduling conflicts that you may have now differ than when I was on board as a teacher, but there is a lot of different ways to work with different schedules, and

I'm not knocking a four-period day, nor am I advocating a seven or eight period day, I think there's different plusses and minuses to both methods, and kids were willing to work and get along with everybody there was always a place in band for them.

KB: Before you started teaching, did you have any expectations as to what it would be like.

RC: As I mentioned earlier in the interview, I had a real tangible with my sophomore year of high school, I knew what junior high kids were all about, and I look back on that and I think what a valuable opportunity that was for me, yeah you go through the formality of the college courses and of course, student-teaching, which kind of gives you an idea, but I knew what the actual trenches were, I had been there, and it's one thing to sit back and philosophize and talk music education 101 or whatever, it's a completely different thing to get in the trenches I knew about taking slips to the office and taking lunch count and all these other things they don't tell you about in music school, I was well aware of that, and as I mentioned, when I was a sophomore I'd try and get those things done, ordering of music, at least I didn't have that great an education formally in college, I knew what I had to do when I came on board teaching in Black River, some of those what you call trivial things may be real important if you don't order music, your not going to have anything to play. The music repair, I was able to learn kind of hook and crook when I was in high school, not major stuff but little things that would go amuck and I learned how to do that so that certainly helped.

KB: How did you get chosen to direct your band as a sophomore?

RC: Oh boy, I think my band director, Mr. Valiny suggested the two of us, if I recall and then, were there any people that were interested and I was one of those that was obviously interested in it, so I think we had an interview with the principal, if I recall correctly, I think it was something like that, that was a long time ago! But I think it was a format something like I just described, those that were interested, and then we met with Mr. Valiny before he had his surgery and then met with the principal, that's how it worked.

KB: Is there anything you would like me to ask you?

RC: I was just, it was just interesting last night, I was compiling some of the things for the presentation and I came across, I played my accordion for a New Year's Eve dance when I was ten years old, and my mother and dad must have had me do this and just last night I found it again, I was ten years old and I made four dollars, well, four dollars to any ten year old today is certainly worth something, and this was New Year's Eve 1955, and New Year's Day 1956, this ten year old had four dollars, and I think gasoline at the time was probably about 18 cents a gallon, so you can do the math, that was a lot of money, and I thought that was kind of interesting, I was playing and my parents obviously had to be there, but playing when your ten years old.

KB: That's very cool.

RC: I thought it was, and I shudder to think what I must have sounded like, but they must have liked it, I can remember numerous occasions we would go to, they would have what they called turkey shoots and chicken shoots, where you would practice with your .22 and hit a target and the best marksman they would usually give them, he or she a frozen turkey if they won the prize so that's where their name came into being, turkey shoots and we'd do those on Sunday afternoon, and I would play my accordion at these turkey shoots and they would give you all

kinds of candy bars, and I'm sure that's why I have so many fillings in my teeth to this day, you know when you're ten eleven years old, you'll pig out on all the pop and candy, but yeah that, that's when I was a real little youngster I can remember those.

KB: Well, is there anything you'd want to add or say?

RC: Well, I just hope that I've inspired the former students that I had, when I retired I received letters, I have a stack in my basement from former students, expressing that what we did as a music faculty to enrich their lives and in education you don't know if you're really touching anybody, it's not like you're a carpenter and you build a house and you can see this house going up in three four five months, in education it oftentimes goes thirty forty fifty years after the fact and I have former students that are in their fifties, and they tell me, when I retired they wrote letters, I see them on the street or in a store, they're still very active in music, and I take pride in that, that's still something I'm very proud about, I hope the legacy of Black River's fine musicians continues, and I thank you for asking me to do this.

KB: Thank you for coming. How is retirement going by the way?

RC: My joke is I highly recommend it, I couldn't see well when I came out of college and instead of checking the retirement box I checked the work box, but no retirement is great and I have the luxury of both worlds, as you know I sub usually a day or two a week, although this week it's four days, and that's gonna change next week cause I have to get ready for deer hunting, I love kids that's why I still sub and so it's the best of both worlds, retirement is good, I have a lot of grandkids so I spend time with them.

KB: Do you miss all the stress?

RC: None, I do not miss the meetings, and I think stress is kind of relative, you could be mowing grass and if you want to make it a stressful job you'll make it a stressful job, it's how you handle it, and I had the luxury, and you were in the program, when I was on, I was on and I could go home and I think it's my hunting and fishing and jogging that just a switch would go on and I could forget about it, now not everybody has that luxury and that's something that I had.

Margaret Severson
December 17, 2004
Falls History Project Interview
Interviewer: Kirsten A. Bjerke

KB: What is your name?

MS: My name is Margaret Severson.

KB: When and where were you born?

MS: I was born in Hartford Wisconsin, in 1938 on July 4th.

KB: Where did you grow up at?

MS: I grew up in Hartford Wisconsin.

KB: Where did you go to college?

MS: I went to college at Superior, I believe it was called Superior State, but by the time-four years- it was called University of Wisconsin at Superior I believe.

KB: And what years was that?

MS: That was from 1956 to 1960, I graduated in '60.

KB: Why did you choose music as a career?

MS: Well I had a music teacher that suggested that I might go into music and she had gone to Superior so that was why I went to school at Superior and she said I thought I should go, and I never regretted it, I had always wanted to go into medicine, but I've never regretted going into music, because I worked several summers at a mental hospital, so I got my chance to be with patients and people, and I loved that too, but I knew I made the right choice.

KB: Did you have any early influences, were your parents?

MS: Oh yes, very much so, my parents were both musical, I grew up in a family that at holiday time we all gathered round the piano and sang, and I had, and they would sing in parts, I had four uncles and when they all got together they made beautiful music, and their wives and all of the kids, we all had a wonderful time. Most of them sang in church choirs, and we were in children programs as I was growing up in church, that was all an important part of my life, I learned how to read music sitting on my Father's lap in church and he would put his finger under the words and the notes, and that's how I learned how to read music.

KB: So did you start out in choir or in Band or both?

MS: Oh it was definitely singing, definitely vocal music, and then my other start would have been piano and then I had to beg to play an instrument, but when that came on, I think we were able to take an instrument in seventh grade, and I started out on trumpet, and it was wonderful, and I love trumpet but then I switched over, I wanted to take the French horn and my band director allowed me to do that when I was a junior in high school, when I was an eighth grader I had gotten pretty good I guess because the high school band instructor asked me to play as an eighth grader in the Senior High School band, and wouldn't you know it, the day of music contest, large group contest, I was in bed with a childhood disease, I think it was chicken-pox or

something like that, it was just awful, so I didn't get to go to contest, but I got to do the spring concert.

KB: So was it your choir director who?

MS: Yes, my high school choir director, actually we became good friends then, she never allowed that when we were in class, but we became very good friends, after I went to school, and just kept up our friendship, first it was a family friendship, my folks and then well, then I married and then our husbands were in the same choice of fields, English and World History, so we've been friends for a long time.

KB: When did you start teaching here in Black River?

MS: In 1960, the year I graduated from college.

KB: So this was the first..?

MS: This is the first and only place I have ever taught. And I've never regretted that either.

KB: How long did you work here?

MS: Oh boy, well, I worked here, I have to think when we were married, '65 I guess we were married and I worked full-time then, then I worked a year after we were married and then was pregnant with my first child and then when that happened I stopped teaching for six years I think while I had my kids and then I went back half-time as an elementary teacher, when I first came I had the high school and that was 9th grade through 12th, and I had the first sixth grades, 1 through 6 at the town school, at the city school they called it, and Verna Keefe had the outlying schools and then there were two of us, and then I taught part-time for a while and then they built the new middle school and I had done some subbing and decided, I told my husband if they ever offer me a job full-time I would like to take it, and so I got to do that, I got to teach middle school kids for the first time actually, I had never taught seventh or eighth grade, I always had through 6 and then 9 through 12.

KB: So when did you actually retire?

MS: Oh boy, this is our eleventh year of retirement, so what is that? '93? Yeah, this is 2004, and this is our eleventh year not teaching, and I married an older man, but it was a foregone conclusion that when he retired I did, because I couldn't stand the thought of getting out of bed in the morning and having him still in it. That's the truth.

KB: you mentioned Verna Keefe, can you tell me anything you know about her?

MS: Well yeah, and it's not much. She was the music teacher in town before they hired me, she was phenomenal, she did everything, but I think because I wasn't here, I don't know how it was decided, if Verna went to the school board and said, okay, I don't want to have that heavy load, or they told her, but she for years was the vocal music in Black River Falls along with a Mr. Gritzman who taught the band and orchestra, Black River was known for it's music of every kind, and quality music from what I understand, there has been and still is a lot of talent in this town, it's phenomenal, I think. And Verna was the vocal music teacher at the high school and at the elementary school, the city school, and I replaced her and then she went out and did the country schools, and we had a lot of country schools when I first came here, and country schools included Gebhardt at that time, but we didn't have Hixton school then yet, they were a

school by themselves, but we had, oh a lot of the little ones that have closed, and I suppose Squaw Creek was one, and a lot of little country schools and she went into all those.

KB: So did she just work part-time?

MS: No, that was a full-time job, even driving around to all those little schools was a full-time job.

KB: I know Mr. Rykken mentioned that he thought she came to work here in the '20's.

MS: Well she was a native, she was born and raised here, and never married, and her father, I'm not sure about this, but I think her father had a furniture store and funeral home, and it just so happens that that was what my father did also, in the town that I grew up in, in Hartford. But Verna never married, and she lived in what would have been her folk's home, right across from Third Street School, on the corner, and I believe it's where the Austen's live now, that have the, Shirley has the antique store. That was Verna Keefe's home and for years she had the whole bottom floor which was massive, and she let rooms out upstairs and she had a lot of the new young men that would come in to teach here at Black River stayed at Verna Keefe's house, and that included like the high school teachers because that was the high school right across from where she lived so, like Jerry Bjerke first came here, the Chem/Physics teacher he stayed there, Oli Bade, he stayed there when he came here and there were others too, but those two came to my mind.

KB: Can you tell me about her character any?

MS: Her character? Yes, I heard and this is all you know, she was strict very strict, along with another wonderful teacher we had at the elementary school, her name was Ippy Herd, Filipa Herd, and they called her Ippy, and she was something else and I got to know her and teaching with her, and very strict but had a heart of gold, and I'm sure that was true of Verna also, she wanted what she wanted, when she wanted it. Everybody was a lady or a gentleman when they were around Verna because I think she just called for it, didn't expect any less, and back in those days it was a different time in our social life when teachers were respected just because they were teachers, and she was always a maiden lady and I think that was expected too of, that we treated them, and older maiden lady with respect, and there were several of those when I first came to Black River. She got what she wanted from the kids, and if you couldn't sing she, this is what I heard, she would pull their hair, higher, higher, she would try to get what she wanted like that, and that's just stories I heard from some kids that had trouble singing. She had them all from first grade through high school, she knew which ones could sing and I'm sure she encouraged the ones to sing to go on into high school music, and the ones who couldn't she didn't.

KB: Why did you choose Black River to teach? Coming from Superior, that's quite a ways.

MS: Well, see Hartford is in the southern part of the state, well by that time, when I was going to be a sophomore in college my folks moved to Juneau Wisconsin which was about twenty-five miles to the west of Hartford, twenty-five thirty miles, because my uncles and my dad had bought a new funeral home and my family had two girls and we were both in college so it would be easiest for my family to move so they moved to Juneau and which my mo and dad always thought that was a good move after they got over there, anyway, so when I was a sophomore in college my folks moved to Juneau, and what was your question again, oh why did I choose

Black River. Well, after I graduated from college in 1960 I had a very good friend who was married during the school year, she was Hawaiian and she always called herself, she was our number three daughter, my folk's number three daughter because she would always come home with me for holidays, and she was married and she was afraid to tell me she was married, because she didn't think I liked her husband, which I did, and anyway she had a baby and she became ill with a staphylococcus infection and was put in the hospital, I believe the last week of school or something like that so being Hawaiian, I just I had to take care of that baby, and I told my folk's that they should come up and get my things but, and I had moved to an apartment my last year, but I had to stay in Superior because I had to take care of Carey Scott the baby because Maisie was in the hospital. So I did that, and Maisie's husband Glen moved out of the apartment and I moved in, like Quonset huts upstairs I mean that's the kind of apartments this schooling had at that time and I took care of the baby, now I had always loved babies when I was growing up, but I hadn't seen a baby for a long time, and it was, I didn't even know how to make formula, all I knew was that I had to take care of this baby and so I did. And my folks took my stuff back to their place, so it got to be August and I would talk to my folks and my mom said, Margaret don't you think it's time that you should think about a job for this fall? And I thought yeah, well I ought to, but you know I was terribly busy bringing up this little boy, and so I started to look, I had looked at, and I told the people in placement offices that the furthest south I would come would be to like Black River Falls, because I loved being up north where there were more trees than people, and so there was a job opening in Black River Falls, and I used Maisie's husband's car to drive down to Black River Falls and it was August, and I interviewed here and I can remember I drove down in shorts and I stopped at the Tastee Freeze and changed my clothes in the bathroom, to put a dress on cause it was a hot summer day, and I went in for my interview, and I can remember just walking around the town, and of course this was when the school building was in the old red brick that was torn down, where, what is standing there now, I can't remember, well, it's gone, but that was where the school district office was, upstairs I think it was, and it was all exciting, and I do remember coming in on Highway 12 saying to myself, I came up to the top of the hill and I saw this little town nestled in there, and I remember thinking, now Margaret someday all this could be yours. And that's what it became, my town, and that's how I interviewed and I got the job and that's how I got here, it was my mother saying, don't you think it's time you think about a job. And that was close enough to Superior I could drive down and check out Black River and they could check me out, and there was another job on the other side of the state, Antigo or something like that, I checked that out, but I got the Black River job and I was happy.

KB: What did you teach?

MS: General music at the elementary level grades one through six, which was general music, and then I had all the high school choruses, which was the girls chorus and the mixed chorus, and of course that was in, we had those classes in the basement of Third Street School, I did change something though. The music teacher was always supposed to carry her stuff around in her basket or box and go into the schoolrooms of Third Street school, up and down the steps, well I thought I wanted the children to come down to the music room and so I know I changed that, and the first thing I always taught the children, the little ones, was, all we had was big old folding chairs, which we still have in the school district today, I know that too, and the first thing I always taught them was they could not put their hands behind them because when they did that the chair would fall down and they would get their fingers crossed, so that was the first lesson they had in music class every year, not to put their hands behind them, and I had to do that for a

long time, even in middle school and the kids would come in that had been in country schools, way back when we didn't have the solid chairs that we have now, I just had to remind kids not to put their hands behind them just to make that chair go back.

KB: You had just a girls choir and then a mixed, how come you didn't have a guys choir or...?

MS: Well, there wasn't anything set up like that when I came here, they had time in the vocal music schedule for girls chorus and mixed chorus and that was that. Another think I recall that I did, the second year I was here, I couldn't do it the first year, I begged to have the first musical ever in this school, but I had to beg to get it, because it had never been done before and I wanted to do it for a Spree de cor to get the kids to have a good feeling about themselves, about singing together, getting the boys, more boys, I never had trouble, I had plenty of boys, but to have them have a good feeling about chorus, now there are a lot more boys that sing because it's the age of the guitar and boys singing with the guitar, that really helped vocal music, down through the years, since I came here, boys sing more. And I think it's because of the guitar, which is wonderful and now it's not looked down upon by the boys, I think that sense of maturity that was a good thing, where I suppose the boys that don't have to have something to bother other boys with will still pull that chestnut out and say something sissy about boys singing, well of course we all know it takes a real man to sing. But a boys chorus was never in the plan. We had girls chorus and mixed chorus.

KB: Did the girls chorus just eventually not be?

MS: Yeah, right, I think we had mixed chorus even when we came up to the new school here, we still had mixed chorus it was a lot of time the girls couldn't get everything into their schedule, and I can't remember, ooh golly, I can't remember when the girls chorus left, maybe I had a girls chorus all the way through when I was teaching, and I think that's true, I think maybe Larry Hansen is the one who switched that around and got more choruses going, and talked to the, got more time for vocal music, I think that's probably what happened and I had the girls chorus all the way through.

KB: So you replaced Verna Keefe, and you were replaced by Larry Hansen?

MS: No, I believe that I was replaced by, Shirley Hagen, and I know Shirley taught here for maybe two years, two years, and then Larry came, and then Shirley married John Radtke who was a Black River boy and Shirley Hagen was Dick Hagen's sister, and Dick Hagen was a long time art teacher here, Dick was also a former student of mine, but then he came back to teach here too, Carol Olsen was a former student of mine, Marla Erickson who taught here for a while in the orchestra program, she was also a former student of mine, she came back to teach, I'm just trying to think if there is anyone else, but Black River has always been amazing to me, because there are so many professional people that come back to this town to be involved in their chosen profession, I think that is just wonderful for a town, there are not enough small towns where people want to come back to and live their adult lives in a town that have grown up in a town, but people in Black River do. That's says a lot for a town I think, I really do, now I'm getting all lost on the right questions or whatever.

KB: So it was you and...

MS: I think Shirley Hagen took my place for two years and then I think Larry.

KB: But then you worked in the middle school too, until 93.

MS: I never taught at the middle school until I came back to teach after my kids were grown and when we had the middle school, I substituted when we had a junior high school, and we were down in the Third Street school, and the north side of the building was all junior high school. The elementary was over in the Third Street school and then part of, well for a while sixth grade was out at Hixton, I don't know just exactly where everybody was, but I know that the seventh and eighth graders were, no, seven eight and nine, that's right, were in the old what is now the Third Street elementary, and the seventh and eighth graders, when we had high school over there, the seventh and eighth graders had that north hall, the seventh grade had one floor the eighth grade had another I believe, we have utilized every room in this school district, every broom closet practically a school room, you've always made it work, and it's the teachers who've made it work, when you had a broom closet to teach out of you made it work, tough to say that.

KB: So you substituted at the junior high and then you worked at the middle school after it was built for a few years.

MS: Yes, and then I was the first vocal music teacher at the new middle school, that was wonderful, I loved that.

KB: Then who came after you in the middle school?

MS: Well her name was Shelly Schmidt, but it didn't take her long to become Shelly Severson, so Mrs. Severson was followed by Mrs. Severson, I think that within two years, and Shelly was wonderful, I was so happy that she got my job, cause I just was, all those kids were my kids, when my students were my students, they were all my kids and I became very attached to them and when I left I was you know, who's going to take care of my kids and so I wanted to meet the person and I was thrilled to death that the school board had hired Shelly because I knew that my kids were in good hands when she came to town, and she told me that she had just gotten done writing to all the music companies to please send the music to Ms. Schmidt and Larry asked her to marry her and she became Mrs. Severson, so that's how that goes.

KB: Were you involved in any co-curricular activities? Like were you the head of this... MS: Like cheerleaders or something like that? No, I think with music that's because I had my class time with my chorus one hour a day, but anything, anything that I wanted to do extra, because in the morning I was at the elementary school and in the afternoon I was at the high school, but I had students so, or I couldn't get at my students, very little time that I had during the day except for that one hour that I could see my kids, yeah I once in a while I could get a student, but I couldn't get a whole group of them, so I could get them after school, after supper actually, we had madrigal rehearsals, when I started the madrigals and that was all done after supper, and the kids would come back in, even the kids that would come in from Millston, they came in, after supper, and you know still we had football or basketball practice and then they'd go home and come back in for madrigal practice.

KB: So was madrigal in place before you came?

MS: Oh no, I started the madrigal.

KB: So what were the madrigals like when you started them and were the kids really excited to do this?

MS: Oh yeah, I explained them, that it wasn't a small choir because madrigal singing isn't a small choir, madrigal singing should be directed from within the group, that's what I learned, I was in a madrigal in high school because my music teacher from Superior had been in madrigal work so she started a madrigal in Hartford, so I thought well that's what you're supposed to do and it was really before the age of jazz choirs, and I love the madrigal music, so I started a madrigal group, and madrigals are to be directed by the people within the group, like when I was in high school I was one of the madrigal leaders and then a big bass who would stand next to me, who stood next to me was also a leader and it's eye contact and you're just constantly watching each other, put the smile on your face and singing your part and doing whatever but you're lead from within the group, you close your mouth at the same time, you breath at the same time your part does, it's select singers singing select music. We didn't have costumes or anything like that when I was here, but I know we had many many starred firsts, and I was proud of my kids.

KB: So you didn't do like a big Madrigal Dinner?

MS: We never did a Madrigal Dinner, that Larry started.

KB: But you did start the madrigal choir.

MS: Yep.

KB: How did the popular music of the day affect what you taught?

MS: The popular music of the day, I don't think it affected me, a great deal, I mean I can't even remember the music in the early 1960's, if any of that was appropriate for choral music, I really don't recall that, I selected, I don't think we sang anything from popular music at that time because I don't think there was anything that was particularly appropriate, I think we did maybe Mary Poppins, for the little kids, you know stuff like that, that came out in the '60's I think, but I really can't think of any at the high school level, well the first musical that we did in the high school was Brigadoon, and then second one was Anything Goes and then we did the Macado, Gilbert and Sullivan I don't know if that was yeah we did Gilbert and Sullivan I think, at the high school, and we also did Babes in Toyland, that was one we did at the new school, we did the Macado, we did Babes and Toyland in the new school up here, I get a little mixed up because I know I did an easier arrangement of the Macado one year when I was teaching middle school down at the old middle school, when we were down in the old middle school we did the Macado, I did probably one of the first musicals at the middle school level, and it was the Macado.

KB: Now you said you did Anything Goes, did you happen to go to our production of Anything Goes? Two years ago, that the high school put on.

MS: Yes, I believe I did.

KB: Was that the same version of Anything Goes?

MS: Blow Gabriel Blow.

KB: When we did ours we got a little bit of negative feedback from the community saying it was a little racy.

MS: Well if there was anything that I thought was racy in it back then I took it out. I didn't, we have never used the word of the Lord, I would have taken that out, or any four letter words that I

didn't think was applicable for high school kids or for anyone really. So anything that was too racy I just took out, it wasn't necessary, so I never had any problem with that.

KB: I was just wondering because you would think in the 60's they would be even more....

MS: Well, yeah, but I just, to avoid that I never did it. And that is a little bit, Reno Sweeney was, I depicted her as a nicer person than she probably was supposed to be, you just take the best side of it and you take the racier stuff out and that's fine because there's awfully good music from that show too. And that was it, I had wonderful people playing wonderful parts. Mary O'Brien who is the director of volunteers up at the hospital now, she was Reno Sweeney when we did that, she did an excellent job, I had wonderful kids.

KB: Did you have an orchestra then?

MS: No, I just always used piano, I mean I was putting productions on in a hole in the wall in Third Street gym, I never had a theater and that's where we did everything, but it was the best we had so, that was it, and I liked it much better than, they put a hole in the wall in Forrest Street school too, but Third Street had a better, the acoustics were bad but I thought they were better than Forrest Street, so any time I did any work we went to Third Street school.

KB: What is your personal favorite musical style?

MS: Style of music, gee that's funny that you should ask me that, I was just thinking about that this morning, because someone asked me a long time ago, what is your favorite kind of music and my reply was I like all kinds of music, and that still has to be my answer because I do like a variety of music, I can't say that I'm a real fan of really twangy country music, but the untwangy country music is fine, I can appreciate that, I love Bach, that's baroque, Bach choral music is to me the epitome of fine choral music and I like it, I like even before, these are hard questions, I want to give you an example of a composer but I can't think of a composer, I like the, oh I can't think of the composer, but it would be like in the madrigal era where you have many parts and then they all come out, you know many many parts and then you all come out and then you are all singing the same chord at the end and it's beautiful, Telemann is another composer that I liked, his music, beautiful choral sound, I liked his music. But I also like popular music, I like a lot of the Broadway tunes that are good, qualify it, that are good, I don't particularly like raucous music, I like Blues, I like Jazz, I really like a variety, I don't like particularly modern music, I like my music to be harmonious rather than just noise, I like something melodic.

KB: Did you tend to teach a certain type of music?

MS: Tend to teach a certain type of music, well, now this would you're thinking the choral music in high school and middle school, well I like to teach something that had a challenge I didn't want to teach something that was real easy, because I wanted the kids to learn something, but I wanted them to be able to learn the music well so they would sound good and have a good musical experience, I liked to sing part music, my high school choirs always sang 4-part, SATB, soprano, alto, tenor, bass. My middle school choirs always sang 3-part, SAB, soprano, alto, baritone, because I thought that was important that they had that experience at middle school to go into the high school level when they have to sing 4, and even 6 and 8 part music depending on how good the group is, but that was important to me I think as a middle school teacher that I prepare my kids in the seventh and eighth grade to go into a harder level rather than singing unison or even two part. We would sing two part in the 6th grade choir that I started, when we

finally got to that point at middle school, I started a 6th grade choir because 6th grade over at the middle school was just general music class, and then, I can't remember, we started a 6th grade choir in my last years, I can't remember, but it's important that kids learn, and I think they can't learn part music if they don't sing part music, they aren't going to do it perfectly, but if they have the ability to learn it and try really hard. I'm not answering your question really on the spot but. Next question please.

KB: This one is more of a social one, where did you meet Vern?

MS: We both came to Black River in 1960 as single teachers, single new teachers, when I came to Black River there was five or six or seven male teachers and me. It was wonderful. The wonderful part was, and I was at the high school level and elementary, they treated me as a person, they'd say well Margaret we're going to the football game tonight want to come along, I'd say sure, now that was I thought, very nice of them, they could have just thought we don't want her to drag along, but they did, that was nice I was included like one of the boys, so I never missed a football game when I was here as a younger single teacher, because I thought it was very important because I had guys playing on the football field and I wanted them to know that I backed them in their football, and basketball, I never missed a basketball game, it was important that I should be there. Out of town games too. So we met that way, we both came to teach the same year.

KB: Is Vern originally from here?

MS: Vern is from Sun-Prairie, only miles from Hartford, we grew up miles apart, not very many miles apart from each other, but we had never met till we got here.

KB: And you guys are still married.

MS: Yes, still married, let's see 38 and a half years married I think we were married 38 years this summer, going on 39.

KB: Wow.

MS: Yeah, super isn't it? It's pretty phenomenal in this day and age I guess.

KB: That's a long time.

MS: Yeah it is, sitting there it is, as a high school student, I bet you think that's forever, I can remember sitting in that chair thinking those same thoughts.

KB: That's twice as old as I am.

MS: I cannot believe I am 66 years old and retired. I can't believe that, and it's hard to believe, your life goes by so quickly.

KB: Now you are retired but you are so active it's hard to even get a hold of you on the phone.

MS: I try to keep busy.

KB: You are still really involved in music, right?

MS: Well yes, with our wonderful community band that we have, and I just joined the Sweet Adelines last year, but due to several physical conditions I haven't been a very good member since I got back from Arizona. But that's going to get better.

KB: Aren't you involved in the church choir?

MS: I was involved, I directed our church choir, but I decided that it wasn't fair; I just decided it was time to quit, and that's what I did. And I had a wonderful church choir I just thought they were fantastic and I loved directing them because that's what I love to do, it was choral music at its best and I had just great people. It wasn't fair to them that I'd have them for half a year and have someone else, it just didn't work out, so the best thing for me to do was just not direct them, something new for me.

KB: Are you involved in a few other choral ensembles?

MS: In Arizona I belong to a band out there which is an awfully good band and I also sing in a community chorus out in Arizona which is a fantastic, and I sing in our church choir in Arizona, and that just happens to be directed by the man who is the community chorus director, who also went to school in Superior he was in school when my music teacher was there, and knew her, knew of her, so we knew several of the same people that we could talk about that were still there when I got to Superior, it was fun. Well Dick Camlek also went to Superior to music school, and we had a few teachers when I first came here that had gone to Superior, Mr. Huedeolyio he taught biology or something like that, and there are others that have gone, Mr. Neste, was a 6th grade teacher here for some years and he went to school in Superior.

KB: Is there anything else you would like to add to this?

MS: Add to this? Well I really ought to add my third child. I don't want my third child to go unnoticed. My third child is the Falls Players. I've always been interested in, and Vern, my husband too, in theatre, so one day I was walking home from church choir, and the lady across the street had seen 1776, out east, and she said Margaret we ought to do that for the centennial year, and I said oh good we'll do that, but that's what I'm going to revolve the community theatre group that I'd like to have here, and that was the inception that came in my head, because there is so much talent here. So we started the year before our first season, we took plays, we invited several people we knew were interested in theatre, we invited them into our living room and we started, we got a board of directors, and we got a name, we got a number, tax exempt, you know you did what you had to do. Vern and I had talked to Wisconsin arts people, and they told us how, they sent us books on how to start a theatre and we were in close contact with them, right now I can't remember his name this fellow, and that was a dream that came true. For the first year I did two plays, I'm Herbert from You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running, and then another one, there were two characters in that play and then three characters in the other and I can't remember the name of that one. But we prepared two plays and then we took those two plays around to organizations that would invite us in, homemakers' groups, Rotary, Lions, anybody that would want to have us come into their home, to do these plays to let them know about the Falls Players. And we did that for the first year and then we had our first season, the year of what was it '75, '76, or '76, '77. And the first season consisted of 3 plays, and that was the premise we'd been on until the last few years, when they took the middle play out, the children's play, because then they did the dinner play in January and then they had a harder time casting the children's play that was always done in February, so they still do three plays, but the Dinner Theatre has taken over that other one, I don't know what they're going to do this year, but they are doing a dinner theater, so it's been, that's my third child, but it all started with just that, well it started with, I wanted to start a group, the thought that, because I did take a community theatre class in summer school one summer and I always wanted to do it,

and then this gal said let's do 1776 and I said yeah. That's been a joy, just to watch that grow, it's been a real joy and that's my third joy, and my children they were little when we started this, they were always involved, you know rehearsals, they had to come and they had to be quiet, and they helped paint sets, they helped make the first flats we ever had, and they just loved it, I'd drag them everywhere. So I guess, I don't think there's anything else, it's been a wonderful, I love Black River I knew I made the right choice to come here. It's a wonderful town.

KB: Well thank you for your time, I'll let you get out of that chair there.

MS: Well that's not a problem.

Dick Deno
November 30, 2004
Falls History Project Interview
Interviewer: Kirsten A. Bjerke

Kirsten Bjerke: Alright, first question is a pretty easy one, what's your name?

Dick Deno: My name is Dick Deno.

KB: When and where were you born?

DD: I was born in 1946 at Black River Memorial Hospital here in Black River Falls, the hospital at that time was where the Bank of Melrose is now.

KB: Where did you grow up?

DD: I grew up about seven miles south of Black River near Fall Hall Glen in a little berg called Pine Hill.

KB: Where did you go to school then?

DD: We didn't have kindergarten back then, so I started school in the first grade, and I went my first seven years to the Pine Hill Country School, back in those days we had a whole series of country schools, little one room schools with seven or eight grades in them, and I went seven years there, and then because of music, because of being in band, my folks opted to have me come to town school, for 8th grade and then of course through high school here at Black River.

KB: Did you go to college?

DD: I have one total year of college; I did a semester at Kendel Junior College in Evanston, Illinois, basically because it was the thing to do and being a kind of a typical young man, you don't really know what your priorities are, whatever and somebody talked me into going there, so I went. I came back when my father developed some problems with his wrists, and we were farmers so he had to have help. Later on, long after that situation it was discovered that that was actually Carpel Tunnel syndrome, so I was off for a semester and a summer and then went to the tech school in La Crosse, at that time it was called Coleman Technical Institute, now it's Western Wisconsin Technical College.

KB: Did you have any early influences? Any people in your family, or neighbors that influenced your music?

DD: Right from the very beginning, my father. My father was a musician, he was a professional musician he played from the time he was a teenager in polka bands, and they played in Wisconsin and Minnesota, a lot in Minnesota, and Iowa, a little bit up in North Dakota a time or two, but primarily because you didn't have the money to travel and polka bands were very very popular, they played primarily in this general area. I would say Eau Claire to the Rapids to La Crosse to Winona, and in this area a lot of weddings and back in those days they had what they called barn dances, and people would build new barns on their farms and you would christen, so to speak, that barn by having a dance up in the hayloft before you ever put any hay in there or any cattle or anything and my Dad played a lot of that. He played accordion, he was self-

taught, he was a man with an eighth grade education and no formal music training. He played the accordion, he played the harmonica and he played the guitar. I recall from probably four years old or so of trying to follow and trying to be like my dad and wanting to go to the dances and be involved with music and I recall, and I'm kind of side-stepping if I carry on too much here, you tell me, but I remember when I was about five, we were very very poor, we didn't know it, you know, you didn't have anything to compare it to. But I remember one Christmas I got a little black plastic guitar with plastic strings on it, it was one of those that had a crank on the side and if you cranked that it would play a song, and you could never tune the plastic strings, they were just there, but I would take a wood chip from the wood box, because we burned wood on the farm and I would take a wood chip and I'd lay that on the neck of that guitar and try to pretend it was a steel guitar, obviously not making any recognizable note whatsoever, but I would do that and I never ever ever in my entire life, all the way up to today, have gone a day without music influencing me or helping me through a day or being part of my day, ever, since the time that I was very, very young and tried to emulate my father.

KB: When did your band form?

DD: My band was known as The Exiles, and we were the first rock and roll band to come out of Black River Falls, or Jackson County for that matter, and we started in, let's see, 1964, the summer of 1964. I graduated High School in '64, and the reason I got involved with it, I was asked by four other young men who were younger than I, they were a couple years younger than me and you know, you don't hang around with underclassmen for pete's sake, but I used to go on the spectator buses for Basketball, I played football and baseball, but I never played basketball, so I would go on the spectator buses, and on the way home on the spectator buses the kids would want me to sing, I didn't play a guitar or anything like that, but I'd sing and I'd sing everything from Beatles stuff to whatever, and talk about a one-man band, you know, nothing but you and your raspy voice singing some of this stuff, and that word got out that I was doing that then these guys came to me one day and said, we're forming a band, there's no other rock and roll band and we can maybe make a little money and you know we can do this and do that, and maybe write a song here and there, whatever the case might be, and we want you to be our singer. And I'm going, yeah right you know, I'm out of high school now I'm gonna be going to college, how are we gonna make this work? But we made it work, and we started probably just before graduation, I think about May of 1964, and we lasted for 5 years.

KB: So how did you choose the name the Exiles?

DD: This is very unique, and I'm glad you asked that question. We, the four gentlemen that were with me in this venture, were young men who at that time were sort of on the edge, maybe not the best of students. All of them came from pretty poor backgrounds, and no matter what we did when we started we were, they wanted to shut us down, they didn't want us to have this god-awful rock and roll band, and you know, heaven forbid that someone should have hair over their ears, and you'd look like a Beatle, and I'm telling you the truth now, I would venture to 4 out of every 5 times that we practiced, and we practiced a lot, cause we were new and we had to learn a lot of music before we could go out and make the music, 4 out of 5 times that we practiced, the police department would come and shut us down and tell us that we weren't allowed to play our music and so on and so forth, and we were kind of exiled, and from that, and we were going over different names. I recall, one of the names, I don't remember all of the choices that we were looking at, but one of them was Cary Dale and the Palisades you know cause back in those days it was always somebody and the somethings, we were looking at that

amongst other things, and all of a sudden we just all together one day said, what about the Exiles? These people in town, the big shots, the city fathers, don't want us to make music and we knew that if we were their sons we would be fine, but we weren't. I was a farm boy, and there were a lot of things back in those times where the farm kids were looked, people looked down their noses at us. The other four came from poor backgrounds and we didn't have the backing or a member from one of the more elite, and then so we were exiled, and that's where that name came from, that was a good question.

KB: Where did you practice that the cops would come?

DD: When they let us, one of the gentlemen lived down in the grove and they had this big garage, we used that garage, they'd back the car out and everything and we'd practice in that garage, and eventually when the mayor or whoever it was would give the order to the police officers to tell those kids they can't do this anymore, we don't want any long-haired rock and rollers in town, we worked a deal, we were able to shut the garage door, so we practiced a lot down in the grove here in Black River in a garage. We also practiced up behind what's now the Band-Box dry-cleaners up on North Water Street. Our Drummer lived there, and that was sort of kind of off the beaten path if you will, and so we used that garage, and that too had a door so when they'd come hollering around we'd tone it down a little and shut the door, but those were primarily where we practiced and occasionally we went out to the farm where I lived, but we didn't do that too often it was a lot easier just to store the equipment there, lock the garage up and tomorrow go back and practice some more, so that's where we did that.

KB: Who were the original members?

DD: The original and the final members were the same. We never ever changed anybody, the five of us started it, the five of us ended it. Phil Semke, who still lives here in rural Black River Falls area, actually Taylor. Greg Fleming, I've lost complete track of Greg, the last I knew he was in Eau Claire. Cary Brown, who's from here, about ready to retire from the railroad now. And a guy by the name of Dave Pica, was our drummer, and Dave is down in Prairie Du Chien, and still making music. There are only two of us, well no three of us that are still making music in some way or another, Dave still plays drums for a variety of groups, Phil owns a recording studio, and I do radio.

KB: What did everybody play?

DD: Okay, Phil Semke was the rhythm guitar player, Greg Fleming was the lead guitar player, Dave Pica was the drummer, and Cary Brown was the bass player, and I did all the vocals. And I did the booking, I took care of all the tech stuff, I'd book us find out what we needed for sound you know, we weren't very elaborate, but sometimes places were small and you didn't need as much as you had, and I took care of the booking and all that and I did all the vocals.

KB: So you were just out of high school, and how old were they, you said they were a couple years younger.

DD: They were about 16, and I was going on 18, and it caused a couple problems, because I at 18 could perform in bars, places that served alcohol, and they could not. So we walked a fine line a lot of nights, with that, once in a while we'd have a chaperone along, and we usually were able to slide by.

KB: What type of jobs did you play?

DD: Well, that's kind of interesting too, because we played everything from Homecoming dances to the out in the woods, knock down, drag 'em out, have a fight or two bar, to college clubs, we did stage shows, Mary Sawyer auditorium, a couple of the biggest thrills we ever had were, one of the biggest thrills we ever had was right here in the theater, when it was called the Falls theater in Black River, and we played a variety of places, but what happens over a period of time when you're staying together, like we did, and we were improving daily, we never just sat around on our laurels, we practiced in between playing, things like that and we kept up with the music of the '60's, we got better and better and we created almost a circuit. I knew that if I got on the phone and I called a place called the Mile Away Ballroom at Thorpe, that I could get probably six dates a year there, maybe nine, depending, I can't remember exactly but it might have been a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or a Friday, Saturday. Some of them we'd work Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, some we'd work Friday, Saturday, some Friday, Saturday, Sunday. So it just depended, but we had this list, there was the LBJ Ballroom in Mondovi and we were there time and time and time again. The Pines Ballroom north of Bloomer, New Auburn, Wisconsin. Everything you could think of in Soldiers Grove, Gays Mill, and Prairie Du Chien all over there, and so you create this little circuit and I knew that with a phone call of two that I could fill every weekend up that we wanted to fill and we did that.

KB: How did people contact you? You said that you could call different places, but did anybody ever call you and say...

DD: Oh yes, some of that was due to a man in La Crosse who is passed away now by the name of Lindy Shannon. Lindy Shannon was a radio personality, but Lindy was also a great promoter of local musicians and Lindy had a group of bands that he booked and without getting too technical here, back in those days, and still to this day to some degree, you had Union halls and non-union halls. And if your club was a union hall you had to have a union band in there. Well, we couldn't afford the extra money to be union so we were non-union, so we got all the other stuff around, which was more fun. And Lindy was a great influence in that, or a great help I should say in that he booked us several times, he'd call me up and say, Dick are you guys open on the 15th and the 16th, I've got a band that cancelled on me down in such-and-such a place, and if you'd help me out I'll help you out type of thing, so we'd help him out and then we'd get another booking or two from him, well if they liked us they'd give us a call back, but by and large, the initial contact that you had with a place was from me. I'd find out the name of your club and I'd call you and ask for the manager, and when I got the manager on I'd explain who we were and what we were up to and what we wanted to do and see what he had openings for and the truth of the matter is so many of the little bars that had music back then, really didn't care who they had as long as they had somebody, because the bar down the street had live music too, and when we started out, the promotion for us was live music, well eventually you got to the point where they used our name which meant that we had back time and time again and people would forward to us, it doesn't matter how good or bad you are, or what instrument you play, or how you sing, you will have your fans and those people will follow you, and so it was always kind of neat to know that, oh the Kickapoo Casino in Gays Mills Wisconsin would say The Exiles are here, or Starks in Prairie Du Chien, or the Checkerboard in Prairie Du Chien, and you earned that, but it all started with a phone call 99% of the time from me. And I would say that the last couple of years that we were together, 50% of the bookings were me contacting you, the other 50% was you contacting me.

KB: You guys were together five years, the other guys from the band graduated from high school, so then did they go off to college?

DD: No, no one went off to college, but the military and the Vietnam War is what broke our group up, the draft come in and snapped up a couple, and I don't even remember which ones it was, but I know that because of the Vietnam War and the fact that we had a military draft back then, I got drafted too, but they sent me home. The draft took one or two, and actually after about almost five years we were getting kind of tired of the road, we had traveled an awful lot of miles and we very, very, very rarely had any kind of an argument, or anything like that and if we did have it would be so silly, you know somebody bumped somebody in the leg with an amplifier so you snap on them a little bit, but by the time that the lights come on the stage and you were making music, all of that was forgotten and you went on, but the Vietnam War basically is what caused us, it wasn't anybody furthering their education, it was that.

KB: Did you start working at the radio station right away after you finished technical college?

DD: No, and actually I didn't finish technical college, I only went there one semester, and I went from there to Alice Chalmers manufacturing company in La Crosse as a metallurgist, until that place closed up, but I started in radio by accident, oh here you go, about 1969, I believe it was, something like that, '68. Our band had broken up, yeah

'68, I think it was, our band had broken up, I was in need of a job because Alice Chalmers Manufacturing closed, and a minister, of all people, came to me, a minister from La Crosse, and said, say you know I do that radio program on different radio stations around the area, I know you're looking for a job, you ever thought of getting into radio? I said, no, and he said, well you should. Back then the voice wasn't quite so raspy, it was fresh and new, and he said I have a friend over in Preston Minnesota, at KFIL radio by the name of Obey Borgen, and he said, Obey and I are complete opposites, but we're friends, and he said, I told Obey that you might be coming over, and so I went over and interviewed, and got a job selling advertising, creating commercials, and in my spare time, learning how to operate a board, a radio board and you know, do radio air work and I did little air work for him, but I did primarily selling, from there back to Black River, where I became sales manager of the local radio station here when it was located above the theater, one of about three times that I've worked for the local radio station, and I stayed there until it became a dead-end job, and went to do something else. Had a family on the way, things like that so you needed more money than the radio could provide so I went on to something else, but I never left the entertainment field, even though I left the microphone I still promoted certain entertainers that were friends of mine in the country music field that I had gained friendships with, and some of those friendships are still around today. And I would emcee shows for them, I would book shows, I would do nothing myself, no more singing no more nothing, but I would promote a show, book a show, emcee a show, and I did a lot of that, and eventually it led me back to radio at Neillsville, and I was there for five and a half years, and my wife and I decided to live a little dream that we had, and we moved to the Black Hills of South Dakota, where I managed a station out there, from there back to Whitehall radio station full time, come back to my senses and got back into law enforcement. I've either been law enforcement and radio, or radio and law enforcement, or both almost all my life, all except for the very first years with Alice Chalmers and things like that, after that it's been all law enforcement and radio or vice versa, for the most part and one will take me back to the other, and now that I'm getting to the point where it's time to start thinking about retiring, radio is secondary and I work with the State Department of Corrections and that's primary, and I do a

little booking and a little promoting here and there cause you can't walk away from it, and you will find that out even in High School, if all you ever did in High School was play one instrument for a couple of years in the band, you'll never be able to walk away from that totally.

KB: What musical groups influenced The Exiles music?

DD: Two almost opposite, two almost different era groups probably were the most, no actually three, three. Buddy Holly and the Crickets, primarily, Buddy Holly was killed in 1959, so it was some time after Buddy Holly that we were formed but a lot of Buddy Holly's music was simple and to the point, done with a small amount of instrumentation and the music was very, very good, it wasn't cheap or whatever you want to call it. But after that came the British Explosion, the British Invasion, the Beatles were very influential to us, but more than the Beatles was an American group that was probably the top of the line for the American groups at that time, Paul Revere and the Raiders. And Paul Revere and the Raiders, who still travel today, not with the same people, I think there's maybe only one left that travels anymore, but Paul Revere and the Raiders were probably the biggest influence to us because we liked their music, their music was good music for the kind of people that we were playing for, people that were say 14 to 22, 23, in that area, they were a choreographed group, instead of just standing up there playing and singing they did all the steps, and we did all the steps, and we would do that, it was very rare that in the '60's a white group was choreographed, the black groups, the Platters, the Drifters, the Coasters, people like that were the ones that were very choreographed, and people liked that but the rest of our rock and roll people never really dug into that and never thought that maybe this was something they should look into, except for Paul Revere and the Raiders. Now granted they didn't do things like the Platters would, like this kind of stuff, but they had their own style of doing it and it was extremely popular. And we followed that, so I would say from our looks and our demeanor, Paul Revere and the Raiders, from the music of the day would be the Beatles and maybe even the Dave Clark Five, we did some of their stuff, but rock 'n roll as a whole, would be Buddy Holly and the Crickets.

KB: So did you play a lot of other people's music?

DD: Oh yeah, we very rarely played any of our own, we only wrote a couple of songs, actually I wrote a couple of them, never had them published, but you played what was hot at the time and you played, there was always a song or two in your repertoire that would bring people out of their doldrums, and people are just sitting around, they don't look like they're having a good time and for whatever reason they're just kind of dull, you know, there was always a song or two that you could play that would get them up off their seats, out dancing and there you go again, you were hot again, and then at the right time, you could only do so many fast songs before you had to do something slow, because the guys would have to have a dance with their girl you know, and so you had to have one of those, maybe, in a normal set in my day, was you'd start at nine and you'd go to quarter to ten, take fifteen minutes, then go ten, go forty-five minutes, four forty-five minute sets, and in that forty-five minutes you would have to do one slow song, the second set, one slow song, the third set probably two, and the last set when everybody was all lovey-dovey and the night was about ready to be over, and very honestly in some cases the alcohol took over, mellowed people out, whatever it was, you'd probably do maybe three, so they could one more little cuddly dance with their girlfriend, and then you'd end your night, usually with back to backs of hot stuff, you know, hot stuff for that day, and end your night that way. But, you know, so you had to be kind of prepared, and all that.

KB: Did you ever play with any other groups?

DD: No, I never played with any other groups, some of the other guys did a little bit, and I really don't know, I see some of them every once in a while, I know Dave Pica, the drummer, has continued to this day to play with a variety of groups, and Phil Semke had a group called Catfish Walker, still does, and has played with some other groups as well. I heard that Greg Fleming just gave it up, and Cary Brown worked on the railroad, so he's gone five six days a week before he ever comes home so that pretty much eliminated him. We never, for the most part we didn't do anything with anyone else, we opened some shows and played with other groups, but we never combined or switched. We were the Exiles from the beginning to the end, and there was five of us, and it was the same five, we never added anybody we never subtracted anybody, we never replaced anybody.

KB: Did you open for any really big bands of the day?

DD: Mitch Rider and the Detroit Wheels, Devil with a Blue Dress On, we opened one time for Mitch Rider and the Detroit Wheels, and here we are in what, 2004, after all these years, Mitch Rider is still out there screaming that song every night, Devil with a Blue Dress On. We almost, and this doesn't really count, but I'll say it anyway, we were the backup to an opening for the Everly Brothers, in La Crosse. Because what they would when you had the big big powerful names in, you would have your opening group, the one that's going to front that show, and they would always have somebody else, just kind of setting in wait just in case, because what if all of a sudden two of the members of that opening group are ill and they can't get anyone to replace them, and oh my goodness, what's going on, and then the Everly Brothers are disrespected the show is in a sense, that one time Lindy Shannon called and wanted us to kind of be on Stand-by, so we gave up a night of playing to be on Stand-by for that and whoever was supposed to open opened and that was that.

KB: That really sucks, you could have opened for them.

DD: Well, that night I did get to go see them, I didn't get to meet them, but I got to see them, and they were probably 25 years old at the time so they were in the height of what became, just a marvelous career, you know. I think back and we really had built our own little empire so to speak, of places to play and the people, the faces were the same in these places that we played and so we knew that people liked us and that brings out the best in you, and we had built our own little empire to the point where if somebody would have said, Dick why don't you bring your group, and we're going to go on the road, and you're going to open for so-and-so for three months as we tour, it would have been a very hard decision to make, the stars in your eyes would have said, let's go, let's do it, the common sense would say, look we're turning our back on all these other people, we can make the same money doing this and we don't have to be away from our families, and all this kind of stuff, and I don't know what I would have done, that would have been a tough one. It could have happened too, it didn't, and in reality, I'm glad that it didn't. You know everything that I did musically, I wouldn't trade for anything in the world, I would trade the experience for anything in the world, but I wouldn't want my kids to go through it, cause I mean there was some pretty interesting nights, when a bouncer grabs some college guy and throws him up on stage cause they're having a problem out there, and there goes your drums and your drummer toppling over, and your driving down the road and you've got your trailer on the back and you kind of look in your rear-view mirror and there goes one of your tires going past you, you know and here you are, eight miles from where you're supposed to be,

broke down, if I can tell you this, I kind of get off on a tangent like this every once in a while, but if I can tell you this, the one year, I remember Christmas Eve was on a Saturday, don't know what year it was, but Christmas Eve was on a Saturday, and from the year before, from New Year's Eve the year before up until Christmas Eve, that year we had no nights off in a group of Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday. Once in a while we wouldn't be playing on Sunday, but we played every weekend, the only night that we ever had off on a weekend for that whole year was Christmas Eve, so we're back here in Black River, but Christmas Day, in the morning we had a ten or eleven o'clock private show up in Medford, Wisconsin, up toward Wausau and at eight o'clock at night at the Checkerboard in Prairie Du Chien, on the other end of the state,, that kind of louses up your Christmas a little bit, and that's why I wouldn't trade it, but I wouldn't want my kids to go through it.

KB: After the Exiles broke up did you ever like get with another band?

DD: You mean to try to get back together or anything?

KB: Yeah, just anything.

DD: Well, you know, even up till a couple three years ago, there's a couple of diehards in town that keep saying you guys have got to get back together, just for one time, do one show, when I quit that, I quit, and the only thing I've ever done musically, performing per se, is once in a while in years gone by, I pick up a guitar when you're at a household family party type thing and sing a few songs, I enjoyed it but I never enjoyed it enough to be out in the limelight anymore, I would prefer to be promoting something, I prefer to, I host bus tours down in Branson Missouri for a lot of country music things down there, I prefer to do that, I prefer to do this kind kind of stuff, you know let somebody else have the spotlight, I never really had the fire in the belly so to speak to get back out and perform as a general rule, yes there would be periods of time when you think, that's it I gotta go back out and entertain somebody, I have something in here that I want to entertain, but I don't, I would rather emcee a show for somebody. A couple of the guys, like I mentioned, have gone on and done other gigs with other groups, and I think just the two of us that when we quit we quit, and you know we didn't really jump from the frying pan to the fire so to speak, some of them continued on a little while longer, but you know we needed a break, four and a half years, almost five, in some pretty rough conditions sometimes, sometimes not, sometimes very nice conditions and people treated us well and things would go well for a while and then you'd have some problems and this didn't work and that didn't work and just about the time you thought you made a little money something broke down and then everything would go fine again, after a certain amount of time of that, you just need a break and we just took a break from that.

KB: Oh what was I going to ask, I'm losing my mind....

DD: May I say something? And maybe this will get you going on something else too, you know there's been music over the years, one in particular song that had a line in it that said, music is a universal language, and if you stop and think, just take a minute out of your day, stop and think about that very statement. I don't care if you're on the plains of Africa, if you're in the deepest darkest jungles of South America, if you're in war-torn Iraq, if you're in the arctic circle in an Inuit village up on some Awaputi Bay or someplace up there, or if you're here in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, music is an influence to your day, every single day, and you might be able to look me in the eye and say I didn't listen to the radio today, and I didn't play my C.D. player, but 9 chances in 10 you can remember, you either hummed something, maybe whistled

something, maybe heard someone else hum something that kind of caught your ear, commercial with music behind it, you know something like that, an opening to a T.V. show tonight, it's all music and every single person on the face of the earth relates to music, and in most cases from birth to death, because what does a mother do with a newborn baby, oftentimes, at least it's the stereotypical mother with the newborn baby, you sit and rock the baby and hum, or they're in the crib and they've got this thing that goes dingle dingle dingle, makes music to them and when they put you down, and when we're all down climbing that ladder that leads to nothing more than a hole in the ground, when they put you down they put you down with music. Birth to Death, we're influenced almost every day of our lives by music. And I believe something here that if the entire world would take a time out, if we could get the leaders of every nation and people like yourself and teachers and preachers and on and on and on, to take a time out for 6 months, whatever, and just sit back and take a look at what we got and let music influence a bit, because it will calm you and fire you up, it can do anything, it would be well worth the effort, unfortunately that's not going to happen so you and I as individuals have to allow music to influence us every day, and it does, if you stop and think about it, it does.

KB: Do you have any stories that you would like to tell?

DD: Oh I have stories that go on for ever and ever. I think some of the crazy things that happened to us, one of the good things that happened to us, let me tell you about the Falls Theater, this is the greatest time that I had in the years that I was part of the Exiles. Jerry Bears owned the Falls Theater and the old Falls Theater had a wide but very narrow stage, nobody had ever performed on it for years and years and years, and Jerry came to me one time and say hey, I've been thinking about some night after a football game up here of having you guys play down at the theater, and I'll charge you know, three bucks or whatever, and they'll get your show and then I'll do a midnight show, back in my day midnight shows were a lot of fun, double features that would start at ten eleven o'clock at night and that was a big deal, and I told him I said Jerry they don't allow us to play in town, because we were not allowed to play in town, not just to practice, eventually it evolved into not playing in town, for a while. And he said, I don't care, they don't pay my taxes, I own this theater and I run this theater, and I want you here, let's pick out a date. So we picked out a date, to make a long story short, and we set our equipment up on a Friday afternoon we went up to the ball game, it was advertised well that we were going to be there and we hadn't played in front of our local adults or kids in a long time, a long, long time, and yet people were always wanting us to, but they wouldn't let us. So here's this guy going out on a limb to do this, and we're thinking you know this will be great if they let us do this and don't come in and haul us off the stage, so we stayed up till the third quarter, when the third quarter was over we decided to come down to the theater and we go into Jerry's office and we put on our little blue suits and our little white turtlenecks that went with them and we get down to the stage get the instruments tuned up and you know in a few minutes the football game is over and whoever is going to be there will be there and then we'll play. I remember coming down trying to find a place to park down in front of the post office there, and the line was three people deep all the way down to Main Street and around the corner. And I remember distinctly saying to one of the guys I remember saying my god he must have a heck of a movie, because people are wanting to be there for this, so we parked over, somewhere around the post office, come over and when we hit the street, the five of us guys together, the place went nuts, the people, and they aren't letting anybody in, and they're all out there, and these adults, there were adults and that's what was really important to us, we knew we could entertain the kids, but we didn't

know what the adults would think of us, and it was the adults that told us we couldn't perform in Black River, so you're a little leery of that you know and as a teenager you're a little rebellious too you know, so you're kind of... But anyway, people were just screaming at us and Jerry come out and helped us get in, and they put us into his office and we thought, we're safe here, we're just going to get dressed and scurry ourselves down to the front of the stage, well they kept pushing on the doors and hitting the doors, and he finally to keep from having the doors broken had to start selling tickets and letting people in. Well that's wonderful except that in the lobby here's all these people you know, there's a lot of them had gotten to the seats you know, get to the front first, but there was a lot of them in the lobby and we're trying to get out of the office and get down there I lost a button on my shirt, one of the other guys had a pocket ripped off, and you know, you felt like Elvis felt in a much smaller way, but here it was, our hometown that had banned us from playing, and now were embracing us, the public was embracing us, and that caused the people who were trying to keep us out to lighten up, and all of a sudden some of them started coming to places that we played, and all of a sudden everybody was fine, but that was a marvelous story, because the theater if I remember correctly held 585 people, and it was sold out and it was much like today if you see on T.V. where they have a concert and all the people are standing right from the beginning, there's no such thing as a standing ovation today because people are standing from the beginning, and it was the same then and it wasn't just teenagers, it was adults and that was probably the most marvelous night. I already mentioned about the horrible traveling thing from Medford to Prairie Du Chien, doing those kind of things, I remember being in Schofield D.C. Everest High School up by Wausau, and we had to do a homecoming dance up there I think it was, and P.A. system didn't want to work, thankfully we're there early, so we can get things fixed up, and I won't mention any names, but one of the boys, we couldn't get this thing to work and he said I think that if I did a this, and I did a that and I put this thing over here and I did a that, I could make this thing work, I said where are we gonna get those parts, he said, just stay here I'll be back in a few minutes. And he left and a few minutes later, he took a screwdriver with him and he kind of worked his way through the school, the locks, and he got into whatever kind of rooms that he had to get into, they didn't have rooms like this back then but they had shops and things, and I suppose that's where he went and he got the parts that he needed and we got it fixed up and we had a great night, you know. I'll tell you a crazy one; you want to hear a crazy one? The Mile-Away Ballroom at Thorpe, now understand we're teenagers, a little rebellious and do crazy things that you would never do when you're an adult. We're driving in town, by a Laundromat, we're all set up and we're just killing time, there's a Laundromat and in the Laundromat are probably a half a dozen elderly people all sitting watching their laundry go round, you know, and we had some cherry bombs with us, and I don't know about Laundromats today but back then they had a thing called an extractor, and that's after you took the clothes out of the washer you put it in the extractor and it really got the moisture out so you had less drying time, so we tied, me and another guy tied two cherry bombs together, kind of snuck in there, kind of walked in and these gals all looked at us, we were strangers. We lit the cherry bombs, threw them in the extractor shut the top down so that the top wouldn't pop back up, the top was locked down, and boom! Blew the top off the extractor and if you can imagine several gals that are elderly, going as fast as they can to get out that back door, was I proud of that, no, does it make for a good story 40 years later, yes. It does, and we did some things like that, down at La Crosse at the old Mary E. Sawyer auditorium which is now owned by Western Wisconsin Technical College, we held the record for the third largest crowd for what they called the Saturday afternoon Pepsi Party, and Lindy Shannon, I mentioned him earlier, Lindy put on these Pepsi parties, Pepsi-Cola

sponsored it, and they'd bring a band in and they'd count all the tickets, and this went on for years, they did this several years, and we performed there once, we were asked to perform once and we held the, when it was all said and done, however many years it ran, the third largest crowd ever, we had some tremendous response here at the fair when we were very new and then ready to hang it up we performed at the fair and we were very well received there, the Clark County Fair, but our main area that we performed in, performed and goofed around in shall we say, was Gays Mills, Soldiers Grove, Prairie Du Chien, Thorpe, and Mondovi area, and there was some others too, Steven's Point had two college bars one was called the Bart Barn, and the other one was called the Poor House, and we would play at one of them for one weekend and then the next month we would play at the other, it was the same people owned both of them so it didn't matter, the money was going into the same wallet so he didn't have to try to outdo himself, but I remember doing that and playing for college crowds is rough, very very rough, because these are people that aren't kids anymore, they are but they aren't, they're trying to spread their wings a little bit, and show their independence, at least until later in the night when the spirits have taken over you better be on your toes and you'd better do a good job because they can be very critical and we enjoyed that, we enjoyed that very much. It was a marvelous experience and I remember down in Waukon Iowa one night, oh this was billed as the biggest thing since fried eggs and we were coming to the whatever the name of the place was in Waukon, Iowa, there was advertising in the radio and the newspaper and there was bills out all over the place you know, posters, and I think there was six people, but we did our show, four hours worth for six people, well we didn't know you know, we were booked for it that was one of them where they contacted us, they had not had a very good reputation there and parents wouldn't let their kids go, and so there were six people there, but we entertained them. We did some radio, we used to have we did a radio, I can't say a radio show, we did a radio show that wasn't a regularly scheduled radio show, but we did it four or five times for WPRE in Prairie Du Chien, we had a record made that never got released, never got pressed so there was only one copy and no one knows where it's at, and it what it was was the audio portion of a television taping in Rochester Minnesota, the strange this is, the Television Show, we had the disk and it was a song I remember the one side of it was a song called Fever, and there have been numerous groups ever to this day that have recorded that song and but anyway, we couldn't afford the money to have it pressed cause you usually had to have a thousand records pressed, and most everybody in this area went down to Stoddard, Wisconsin south of La Crosse to an outfit called Cooley Records, and Cooley Records, and down in Madison was Cooka Records, any of the groups from Western Wisconsin, one would go to Stoddard, one would go to Madison and we couldn't afford the thousand bucks to do it, or five hundred bucks, or whatever it was, to do it, and cause what they would do is they would press a thousand records you would get I think you got 500 of them so you could sell them at your shows, and the other 500 were put in music stores and distributed to juke boxes, and things like that that you didn't make any money off of, you don't even get any residuals off that kind of stuff so we couldn't afford to do it and never did it, I regret that, I regret not going to somebody, you know, your friendly banker and saying give me a thousand bucks, I'll pay 20 bucks a month on it or something, till it's paid off, cause if you could get your hands on those records you could sell them where we were most popular, and we knew we would have sold them, and now that one disk that was made is gone. No one knows where it's at, maybe someday it'll turn up somewhere, a mouse is probably eating it somewhere, I don't know, and I kind of showed you some of the photos from that day, from that era, those are gone, I think the only photos left, the only that I know of anyway, are the photos that I showed you. But, I'm proud of it, I embarrass

the daylights out of my kids about it you know, I don't look like the people today that are making music and a lot of the young people today don't appreciate yet the music that I made back then in the '60's. Someday it will all gel together and when everybody grows up, you know, they'll say that wasn't too bad, that wasn't too bad, and then there'll be another generation that does the same thing, and so on. I don't regret anything at all about doing it, and I think I've told you a couple of times I would do it again, but I wouldn't want my kids to ever do it, I wouldn't want to subject them to some of the things that you went through, I never got beat up or anything like that you know, playing in college venues and that you don't know what you're going to run into, I think the thing that if there is any regret of any kind it was that we could, for a long time, we could not influence the people here in Black River Falls, the people that were the, you know you have the anybodies and the nobodies and we couldn't influence the anybodies for a while and they wouldn't let us practice they wouldn't let us play, and kids would say to us, you know, why don't you play at the school? They have a dance every Friday night after the game, why don't you play at the school, but the school wouldn't hire us, eventually they did, eventually they did and we played here at Black River High School one time, in the five years we were together, we did play at what was the junior high, down at Third Street, and we played there a couple of times, then there was a place downtown called the Cellar, a police officer, one of the very police officers that had to shut us down decided, no, no, no, no, the kids want this and the kids need this and I'm a police officer and I don't want to have to deal with kids that are getting in trouble because they have nothing and he put the money up to create a recreation center and that was about at the time after the deal at the theater where there was staring to be a, well maybe they aren't that bad, and they're staying clean, you know, maybe we should have something to do with them, and so we played at the Cellar numerous times and I remember having to have people turned away, to come in, which was a double edged sword, it's really good that you drew enough people where the boss of the place has got to turn somebody away, but you hate to see somebody turned away, cause you want, when you're entertaining someone, I don't care if you're a soloist at the State Solo & Ensemble or you're part of the Jazz Band in the High School, or the Marching Band, whatever it is, when you're in that mood to entertain you want to entertain everybody that wants to be entertained and you hate to see people get turned away. They used to have a place up by New Auburn, called the Pines, Pine Point Lodge I think it was, Pines Ballroom I guess it was, and that started out, it wasn't because of us, but it started out as a bar, and an old dancehall, well a law enforcement officer up there basically said hey the kids have got nowhere to go, how can we take a place that's illegal for them to be and make it legal so that they can be influenced by the music that they want to hear, and have someplace to go, so they came up with an innovative way to cage basically, cage the bar off and everything and they had a caged roof over it so somebody couldn't throw a beer to a kid out on the floor and everything, and that law enforcement officer got everybody together, and the kids had a place again and there because of a need for something for the youngsters to do, the ones that were old enough to go sit in a bar and listen to a jukebox and do whatever they wanted to do, they were influenced by the music, the youngsters were influenced by the music. You know, if you look in your history books, and today's world with the computers and everything and you get online and start looking around there isn't a type of music that you could dream of that isn't already out there somewhere, in this world, and it's influencing people every single day, and let me turn the table just a little bit, are you influenced by music?

KB: Oh yeah.

DD: And how are you influenced by it?

KB: Well I'm involved in as much of it as I can be.

DD: Yep, and would you agree with me when I say that in some way music is a part of your life almost everyday, if not everyday, you know?

KB: Yes.

DD: And I think here in Black River Falls and in Jackson County, we've been fortunate over the years, we had some marvelous old-time bands, my dad was part of a couple of different ones, there was the Joe Divorak Orchestra that my dad played with, and Elmo Johnson, and Elmo's band has been marvelous and played everywhere, and maybe you didn't even know this but, the kind of music that Elmo played, Elmo was a musician in World War II, and back in World War II, and I think the Korean War as well, they would have a band that would travel around and entertain the troops, and he played in Saipan, and a matter of fact, Elmo Johnson and the Johnny Brass, is what we've always known him as here, but originally he was part of the Saipan Swing Masters, and they played on the island of Saipan and stuff during the War, and we've had, gosh I wouldn't want to try to name everybody because I know I'd leave some out, but if you think of the groups that have come out of here, we've had some marvelous, marvelous ones from Blue Grass to Rock and Roll to probably some of today's Rock and Roll, there's another type of music that I like and these people have awards all over the world and these are the Thundercloud Singers, it's Native American music, and that's been marvelous, and like coming here to the school and seeing the Jazz Band or the Concert Band, or the Choir, or the Marching Band at the ball games and things like that, but we're very fortunate here, and a lot of that has to do with our upbringing, the kind of area that we're in and the kind of life that we've all lived to some degree or another, a little more peaceful, and the teaching and instructors that we've had from the middle school on up to the high school here, very, very devoted people, and then you take somebody like yourself, and my daughter is another one and there is any number of them where you lock onto that music, when you lock onto that you might walk out of this school as a valedictorian and go and get yourself a degree and become something whatever, music is going to be with you all the time, and when times get tough and your sitting there studying in your dorm, and you know this is terrible I never thought that you know this kind of, chemistry would be this hard, you know, put a little music on in the background, chill out, it'll take care of you.

KB: I don't want to take up too much more of your time; it's been a really good interview.

DD: Thank you, it's been my pleasure, and I hope that you and I with this interview and those others that you've interviewed influence a few more people.