

BERNIE TRAVNIKAR

Interview by Lois Myers
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TOPICS:

Depression
Law Enforcement
Land Development
Second World War

Transcription by John W. Weigel
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Q: This is Monday, June the 26th, 1995. It's a very hot day. We do need rain. The city of Madison Heights is celebrating our fortieth year as a city. Today I am taping an interview with Bernie Travnikar. He has lived in this area since 77 years. Okay, Bernie. [Tape recorder turned off and on] Bernie, would you like to tell me about when you came out here, you and your family?

A: Well, we moved into Royal Oak Township in 1918 with my father, mother, and my brothers and sisters at that time, and I was born in Detroit, and I was about 3 years old when we moved into Royal Oak Township.

Q: Boy, that's great. That's a long time, isn't it?

A: Yes, it is.

Q: What did your dad do, like for a living, you know?

A: Well, at that time my dad did work for Ford Motor Company, and in 1930 something, in the thirties there, thirty-one, thirty-two, the Depression was just coming out, the Depression, he got laid off, and he had about...I think he had about fifteen years there with Ford's. And then he started into the cattle business on our farm, on Dequindre between 11 and 12. There was two farms, our farm and that other farm, and that's all there was on the east side or the west side of Dequindre. And we got into the cattle business, and then about 1934, Ford Motor Company sent my dad a...a telegram or notice if he would come back to work. My dad made the remark, I can remember at that time saying, "Well, Ford gave me that a couple or three years ago. I don't need Ford today." We got into big cattle business.

Q: Well good. Is that the cattle that used to be across 11 Mile Road from De...from Madison Heights now? Was it kind of in Warren at that time?

A: Well, we had...we lived on...naturally on this side, on the west side, which is Royal Oak Township. On the other side, on the east side, was Warren.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: I think it was called Warren Township. And we did rent a hundred and twenty acres of cattle ground, cattle pasture, and we farmed everything on this side about half a mile of Royal Oak Township, which from our home to 11 Mile we had into mostly large grains, like corn and feed for the cattle.

Q: Gee, that's great. And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: Well, actually I did have four brothers and two sisters. One died at the age of one year, so...

Q: One boy or girl?

A: One boy, yes. And so there was three brothers...three...which I still have the three brothers, but my two sisters have passed away since.

Q: I knew Bernice really well, but who...what was your other sister's name?

A: The other one ...the other sister was Jenny. She was older than me. She was the oldest one. Bernice was second oldest, and I was the oldest of the boys.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Yeah.

Q: I didn't...I didn't realize Bernice was that old.

A: Yeah. So...and today the Travnikar family is whittled down. There was a large, large family between here and out of state, Pennsylvania, Cleveland, and as of now—I wish I didn't have the...the honor—but I'm the oldest Travnikar living.

Q: Well, I don't know, that might be a good idea, you'd be the boss for a while anyway, can't you?

A: Yeah. [Tape recorder turned off and on]

Q: All right, where did you go to school, Bernie?

A: I went to school, actually, where I would have...what at that time was Madison High School, I graduated from that high school in 1934. And then [inaudible]

Q: Did your brothers and sister go there too?

A: Yes. All my brothers and sisters...well, all but the oldest one, which was Jenny.

Q: Uh huh.

A: She did not graduate from the Madison High School. But the rest of us did, because Jenny was born in Yugoslavia...

Q: Oh.

A: ...in Europe, and she came here when she was sixteen years of age. She had a certain amount of schooling but did not graduate from high school.

Q: Uh-huh. Did she come over when your dad and mother did?

A: No, no. Because she was, like I say, sixteen years old, and she was a baby when my dad and mother left Europe, but they had grand...their parents were living and

they said if they would take her away from them, they would shorten their lives. So they left her over there, and then they got to a point where it was a problem getting her over here. Well, eventually, they did get her over, when she hardly turned sixteen, because that time—I don't know how the laws are today, but—if she wasn't here by the age of sixteen, she could not become automatically a citizen under my dad's citizenship.

Q: Oh.

A: So they really had to do some fancy work there to get her in here before she was sixteen so that she did get that citizenship under my dad. That's...that's...it was...it was one of those laws. I don't know if it's still that way.

Q: I don't know either.

A: No, but...

Q: I don't know. I know that it is a law now that...

A: But...but the big deal about bringing her over at that time and...

Q: Bernie, you've been very active in here. Tell us about some of the things you've been into, like...

A: Well...

Q: [Such as?] what your work...what your work was in.

A: Okay, like I say, I did graduate in 1934 and things weren't too good at the time. We were just coming out of the Depression, you might say, and I was one of those guys that said I would never work in a factory, you know? Big deal, see? Some friend of my dad's said, one day, "I want you to come down to my shop." He was a kind of a supervisor at L.A. Young's, and it was not the spring and wire, it was a place where we made golf balls, golf clubs and assembled skis. So I went down there one morning with him and lined up around the building about a block or so, and I thought, "Well, how am I ever going to get a job here? I've never seen the inside of a shop." Well, anyway, I waited a couple hours. They put me to work. I worked there for a...well about, I don't know, four or five years, and then I had a good job there, real good job. Made good money, for...for those days. But union work was coming in, and the owner of the shop made a statement, "If you bring the union in here, I will close the shop up!" Well, they didn't believe that. Well, he closed the shop out, and I was offered a job. He moved into Grand Rapids, and at that time—I shouldn't talk like this, I'm a former farm boy—but he says, "I can hire these farm boys up..up here for about half the wages I'm paying you guys." So they were going to cut my wages, plus I would be living away from home, and have to pay board and room out there, so I decided not to go with him.

And then I got a job with Dodge Truck people and the Chrysler people, and then I worked there until I got on the police department of Royal Oak Township.

Q: Bernie, weren't you one of their original three?

A: Yes. When I got...when I got on there, there was a chief and three patrolmen. We had, at that time, an area which is...this area, which is not as nice now, plus an area over on 8 Mile and Wyoming, which was part of Royal Oak Township at that time. So we had...sometime we would get a call at 14 Mile and Dequindre to 8 Mile and Wyoming, which was a long shot across.

Q: Right.

A: But that's the way things were, and there were only three men on the department, plus the chief.

Q: Who was there that you...you...?

A: Paul Myatt, Lloyd Chambers, and myself, and then of course Judge...well I say "judge", I should say Chief Smith. He become judge later on...

Q: Yeah.

A: ...in our city. Well, I stayed on there until...Well, first of all, I was a...a patrolman for eight years, and then the last three years I was a detective. I was the first detective that the police department had at that time. We...what we did in 1950, we had put on the ballot for civil service, and the people approved it. And we did get civil service in, and that's the first time we had civil service. Before that, all these policemen that came on, or police officers, were political appointments, and it wasn't too good.

Q: That's right.

A: So by getting civil service in, we had protection of the civil service laws, and then I was the first one to take an examination under civil service, and that was for detective. And I did come out top man on...on that, and then I stayed on there for three years as a detective. And I finally left the police department in 1954. I was on the police department, and also owned traffic or trucking and leas...or landscaping at the time. Well, in 1954 I got into the cocktail lounge business, which was Bernie's Cocktails...Cocktails in Madison Heights. And I operated that from 1954 to 1966. In 1966 I sold out, and I got into Dequindre Hardware Sale...Dequindre and Sporting Good Sales on Dequindre. I stayed there for a couple years. Then I got into the hall business, which is Timberland Hall. It's still in...there today, and I...I...I was involved in that for a short time. Actually, I owned the building, but I didn't like the business because of the food business. I knew the liquor business. I did not know the food business. So when the kim...I

made an agreement with the partner I had that if things would go well I would get out of the business, and he would take it over, which he did. And we set a lease deal on it, and he was leasing the building from me from there on in. Well, anyway, in 1969 to 1975 I opened up another cocktail lounge, which the Red Run Inn, and operated that for...whatever...nine...nine years, I guess. And then I sold that out, and that was...that was the extent of my, actually, business ventures. But in 1975, which I...I knew I turned sixty in May, I sold out in February because I made my wife a promise that I would not carry a lunchbox or punch a time card when I was sixty years of age. So it was kind of a goal I had set and I met it. I met that goal. She kind of used to remind me once in a while, and I...I thought, "Well, I'm going to do it." Well, anyhow, in 196...75, the Madison National Bank, they wanted me on the board of directors. I told them at earlier dates that I could not handle it because I had all the business I could handle on my own, so I wouldn't accept the appointment over the...the election of the...to get on the...on the board. Well, when they heard I was getting out of business, they got on me right away, and they had an election in April, and I was elected to the board. Well, I...my...my wife said...why...why...why are you doing this now? I said, "Well, I want to learn the banking business." I said, "I'll do it for one year." Well, the thing was, I stayed on there for eighteen years. And I am still on as a community relations director of the Madison Bank today, but I'm not a director in that sense, as I was before making decisions of the operation of the bank. I also served five years on the Martin Place Hospital, which...which was a...which is Oakland General Hospital today in our town. I...I served on various boards in the township, in the city. I'm a past president of Metropolitan Club, past president of Good Fellows, past president of [Arnold and Association?]. Also past vice-president of Michigan Licensed Beverage Association. I was also a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Kiwanis Club, and I served on the Civil Service Commission for twenty-one continuous years. They wouldn't let me off of that because, going back to my knowledge of the civil service, which I was very active in bringing civil service into the area, I knew the [inaudible] very well, and was a pretty good man, I guess, to have on civil service.

Q: Aren't you still on that?

A: No, I...I finally give that up because I...I had too many other things. I couldn't...like I say, if I couldn't perform and...and be right there, I wouldn't...I wouldn't accept it, so I finally told them I...I've got to get off of there, because I had other things pushing pretty hard for me and I gave it up after twenty-one years.

Q: So you served your term, didn't it?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Bernie, do you remember when Dequindre was paved or...what did it look like when you first remember it?

A: Well, Dequindre was strictly a dirt road, not gravel. They never had gravel on that road. In 1928 they paved it, 2 lane paved road, and that's the first time that we could actually say that we could come into our place all time of the year because there were so many times my dad had to park his car at...at half a mile away on 11 Mile and Dequindre, because, like I say, it was strictly dirt, and no gravel, and it was hard to come through.

Q: Was any other roads around here paved?

A: Well, 11 Mile Road was paved before Dequindre was. John R was paved. It was strictly two-lane. 11 Mile Road had a bad situation. They had a ditch on...on one side of it that was so large that people would mistake, on nasty nights, that they couldn't see, they thought it was another lane of highway, and they'd take the ditch. And I...I was on the police department at the time, and many people would say, "Well, I thought that was a road!" and it was just water or ice over the ditch.

Q: Were you on the police department the night the lady fell in there (she lost an eye)? Do you remember that?

A: Well, I can't really recall that particular incident because there was so...

Q: Yes, so many of them.

A: So many of them that we had. We had that, that was a bad situation, that ditch, and then of course another bad deal we had was the Red Run. That was a big, open, so-called...whatever you want to call it, ditch or whatever...

Q: Yeah.

A: I did at one time...we got a call there, like about five o'clock in the morning, and it was really cold, cold morning, and there was a couple standing on the bridge at...on John R, with...with the open ditch down below, and the first thing I ask them...their car was in this ditch...I ask them if they had anybody else with them, and they said no, they didn't have anybody, but they were just practically freezing, you know, and they...they didn't make much sense, so I call the ambulance and took them to...to the Royal Oak Hospital, which we didn't have Beaumont at that time, we didn't have Oakland General, we didn't have...Royal Oak was a big...that was a big hospital. Well, I called a wrecker to get this car out of...out of the Red Run drain there, and when they did...dump the car up, kids' things through the...pulled out of the car, little toys, milk bottles and whatever, and I got kind of worried about it, and I called the hospital, and I said, "Will you ask these people if they had anybody else in the car with them?" By this time I guess they...whatever...they came to, and they said yes, they had a baby in the car. And they didn't know what happened to that. Well, it wasn't in the car, so what happened to it? Well, naturally, in the drain. Well what we did,

which people don't believe, we had a drowning in town, which, they said, where would you have a drowning in the Madison Heights area? Well it happened there. We started dragging for this baby with rowboats; we had helicopters flying above, and we went on this all day long. I...I came home about three different times, changed clothes because if you get wet, and the thing was a mess to...to work in.

Q: It was like a sewer, wasn't it?

A: Yes. Yeah.

Q: An open sewer?

A: Bad, bad, bad. Well, anyway, we...we had big hooks we were dragging with, and this started about six, seven o'clock in the morning, and went on all day 'til probably about five o'clock the next evening, and everybody in town at that time...we were supposed to find this baby. Nobody else. We got to find him, and I know we had to do it, so we...we worked on it. Well, it happened that time that our former chief, which was Joe Sloan, finally did hook the baby, and it was underneath the cavity of the...of the drain, and the baby was about a year old. So that was the thing that we kind of talked about different times. People couldn't imagine a drowning in Madison Heights.

Q: Now, Bernie, you said "Joe Sloan". Did you mean he...the fire department?

A: Yes.

Q: He was the chief of the fire department?

A: [inaudible] the chief of the fire department, yeah.

Q: Okay, okay. They were in on it too.

A: I don't...I'm not certain whether he was chief at the time, but he was...

Q: He was chief later, anyway.

A: [inaudible] chief of the fire department.

Q: You know I remember that, now that you mentioned it.

A: Yeah.

Q: I forgot about it.

A: It was a...it was a...it was a bad...bad situation. Well, of course, other things we had, so many things, that I.I...I...I made this remark to a lot of people; I read

articles in the paper today. There isn't a thing that I read in the paper that I have not witnessed.

Q: I'll bet so.

A: We've had...in those days we've had, naturally, shootings, we had knifings, we had cuttings. Of course we had, like I said, we had this area, we had the West Eight Mile Road area, and we had, well, people...one time a guy hung himself in a tree. I had to go up there and cut the rope down, drop him to the ground. Carbon monoxide in garages was common. At one time I had a car that was in a ditch at Ten and a Half Mile and Dequindre, and that was in the afternoon, and as I stopped and checked it out, it was a young woman in this car, and she was passed out. So I thought, well I don't know what's wrong, so I go out. I called for a...for a...for a wrecker, and she finally came to, and got sent off to the hospital. But again when the car was brought out of the ditch, the trunk lid flew up. There she had a hose hooked from the trunk into the back window of the car inside and of course I knew it was carbon monoxide. So I quick called this gal and asked her a few questions. Well, underneath I found a note in the car. She had said...whatever...give her all her date of birth and date of death. She put that onto that date, 'cause [inaudible] she was going. Well it all turned out like this, that after it all was over with, I made a point to meet with her. And I wanted to know, I said, "You know, I'm not looking for any big deal here," but I said I would like to know just what...what took place. I says well up until this point that you passed out. She said, well she just drove. Everything was fine, everything was pleasant. She'd just slip away, no problem at all. So I found out then that it was very easy to go by carbon monoxide. It's an easy way to go.

Q: Oh, jeez.

A: Well, anyway, family trouble brought it...brought it about, and she was pregnant. She had finally had a baby boy and named him after me.

Q: [Laughter] So you had a little Bernie running around there?

A: [Inaudible] I thought, well, what else? Of course people...you know how people...

Q: Oh, that's all right. [It doesn't bother me?] I think it's kind of cute.

A: Well, anyway, like I say, then we had...I had experience like...also we had cases of, you might say, suicide and murder at the same time. One case where a husband shot his wife, and then...then shot himself. Those are hard to take. But at...but at the time, you just had to...there was nobody else to do it, the police department had to do it. And we...we did our job, but, you know, they were working down there for two or three days after...after it all settled down, and then you get to thinking about it, and you wonder what was it all about.

Q: Bernie, do you remember the fire that they had, I think it was over on Farnum at Tuckers'? It seems to me like..the name comes to me somewhere, some way?

A: What was that?

Q: Tuckers? Do you know any Tuckers that lived over there?

A: Yeah, well Dave Tucker was on the fire department.

Q: Okay. Wait a minute, it wasn't his house, was it?

A: I don't remember. I don't think it was. It was right by Tuckers', so [inaudible]

Q: Yeah, it was by there, but there was a lady.

A: ...but I don't know the particulars. I was not on that deal.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: But I knew that it happened in that area and Dave Tucker was on the fire department.

Q: Oh, my husband was a volunteer at that time...

A: Yes, I read, yeah...

Q: ...and he brought that little baby that got burnt to death...

A: Okay.

Q: and do you know something, he couldn't sleep...

A: I know.

Q: ... he couldn't eat, he'd throw up, he was just...

A: Well, this is what I'm saying. As tough as you think police officers are, I...I don't care how tough you think you are, after a couple days, particularly if it comes to...like Bill was saying about the baby...

Q: Right.

A: That...that...that...that really hits you, it hits home. It's...it's hard to accept. But we had...we had some real bad deals, and another thing at that time, you know, we didn't have facilities like they have today. The police department and the fire department were like one. We...I...I...I come closer to death on the police department...I mean on the fire department than I did on the police department.

Joe Sloan had me by my hand. We were crawling across the floor in a smoke area, where they said there was kids in there. We tried to get in there to get the kids out. One thing saved me when I got out. There was a fence up in the backyard, and I hung on that fence. [Inaudible] thick or I would pass out, and I was about to pass out because the smoke got me. So that...that was a common thing in those days. We had to assist each other, this department was too small, you know, and the only thing that was good about the whole thing, like if we had a bad kind of radio call, a police call, and if it was of a...a serious nature, you never saw so many police officers answer that call, because at that time it was common if Royal Oak heard it, Hazel Park heard it or Warren heard it, they'd all emerge on the scene.

Q: Everybody helped.

A: And everybody would say, "I never thought we had such a large police department!" They didn't realize they came from all...we all did. That was...that was part of our...our...our...the only way we could do it, you know.

Q: You know, Bernie, what you're saying now, that makes me...I...I just have so much respect for police officers. I always have. I don't think the parents teach the children enough respect for them.

A: No.

Q: Because nobody, unless they've been through that, like I was with the fire department, with Bill, knows what those guys really go through. It...

A: Well...

Q: ...it's terrible.

A: This is true, Lois. These people don't...you know, the papers, they don't get all this stuff, they read what they read in the papers, but you happen to have it first-hand because...

Q: Right.

A: ...you take the...the volunteers at that time. Without volunteers, this town would have been in big trouble.

Q: I know.

A: Because you couldn't afford to put on that many firemen, but we had some very good volunteer people on there.

Q: Right.

A: And without that, it'd have been...it'd have been a bad, bad deal. And...and another thing, Lois, I'm not critical of it, but today the equipment, the facilities they have are much better for protection with these people. Those days, like I say, the policemen, the firemen were at a real risk every time they went someplace up there, because they did not have the...the proper equipment.

Q: Yeah. And it was hard to get to you. There was no phones or anything in our area.

A: No, no. That's another thing.

Q: It was bad.

A: It was talking about not getting...going back to the old days now, I started on with a...with a...we had one car, no radio, no heater. We would have to drive by the police station. If the light was on, we'd go in to see what the call was about, then we'd go on our call.

Q: Right. No kidding. I remember that.

A: We eventually got a one-way radio, and during the war years, to operate a two-way radio, you had to have a federal communications license. And that was kind of hard to get. One night, one time three of us went down, and I happened to pass it. Well, that's fine. But they were bad on us at that time because of the war years. If you didn't have that federal communications license, you couldn't operate that radio. The only way you could get away with it, the man that didn't have a license, if he had somebody in the car with him that did have a license, that he could operate the radio because by voice they couldn't prove that...that...that it wasn't the licensed man that answered the call. But they would set us up. They would call and have us meet them at a certain location, and of course we answered the call, "We'll be there." Well if they caught the guy in the car without a license, because he's answering this call, naturally he answered it, if he was alone, then they would penalize him. So it was tough in that way. Another thing which was really hard on us, we did not have heaters in the car. Well, cold days, what did we do? Put a kerosene lamp in...lamp in on the back seat. Between the back seat and front seat, just to get little bit of whatever, from the kerosene lantern. But you know what else we got?

Q: Carbon monoxide?

A: We smelled like kerosene. No, we smelled like kerosene the rest of the day...

Q: Oh, okay.

A: ...in our uniforms.

Q: Okay.

A: That was not an ideal...

Q: You're lucky that's the worst thing that happened to you with a...with a heater in the car.

A: But then we finally got, like I say, we got, sure we did, eventually, get into radios and we got better cars, and again, you know Lois, today what. ...what disturbs me? We had a job to do then, and we did...we did pretty good work, I...I had...I had a lot of schooling and I only graduated from high school as far as my high school education, but I did go to the federal FBI schools, I went to state police schools, I had certificates of....like when I was a detective in fingerprinting, that I passed the course, and...so we...we did have a lot of training in that way, but today what bothers me is these people are trained so well and they, and luckily that they are, but our laws are...are kinda, I don't know how to say it, I hate to condemn certain people, certain whatever...our officers are paid good money, but the laws are so now that...that an officer has to stand there and wonder, can I do this or can I not do this? Am I going to be sued? Am I...a man can't perform his job. And it's a shame. And I know by...by what I'm hearing and what I'm seeing, and what I'm reading today, I could not be a police officer.

Q: Jim quit teaching for that same reason.

A: Yeah.

Q: But you know, some lady that was in Oklahoma, that was...when that had that bombing...

A: Yeah.

Q: Teacher said that it was a dirty shame that all those laws are in. She says, "I can't even put my arms around my little students and comfort them..."

A: No.

Q: "...because I might get sued."

A: Yeah.

Q: You know, and I know what you mean about...cra...crazy laws we have.

A: Yes. It's...it's...it's...it's got...something's got to, I mean something should happen, something, I don't know what...what will happen, how they could

get...but it's got to the point where I don't know, I hate to, I'd like to blame certain whatever, but I don't want to make the...

Q: Politicians.

A: Yeah, yeah. I hate to, hate to mention...

Q: I know, I know.

A: But it's not right.

Q: It isn't.

A: And we got good people, and...and they're well educated, most of our...most of our police officers have some, well, college education.

Q: Yeah.

A: They're well educated. But...but they almost have to have, they almost have to be an attorney to know if they can do this or not.

Q: Right.

A: You know.

Q: And that's a dirty rotten shame, isn't it?

A: My...my way of doing it was years ago, I would do it, and then ten minutes later I'd find out, well maybe I shouldn't have done it this way, but that's the way it was right then. I did it that way.

Q: And you did it because it had to be done at that time.

A: Yeah, right, yeah.

Q: Right.

A: But...but again, I didn't have to worry, Lois, because I used to have people tell me, well, we're going to sue you, you're going to get sued, and I said, well, stand in line, because the line was big...

Q: Right. Right.

A: ...and nothing happened. They'd come into courts, complain, and courts are...courts were very cooperative too. And the first thing the judge would say,

“No, no, no, not our police officers, they wouldn’t do that [laughter] because that’s the way you had to do it.

Q: Right. That’s the way you had to do it.

A: Sure. [Tape turned off and on]

Q: Bernie, when did you get married? I know you took time out for that, I remember.

A: Yeah. Well, I...I got married in 1942. I was being drafted and my wife, which was Margaret Huntzinger at that time, we were going together for a certain length of time, she says, “Why don’t we get married”? And I said, “Well, you know, I’m going into the service, and I don’t know whether we want to do that or not.” Plus, it was during Lent, which the Catholic people didn’t believe in at that...that time, getting married during Lent. Well, anyway, we find out that if we got married on St. Patrick’s Day, we could do it. It was...the deal there was that it didn’t take effect in...in religion, it didn’t matter. And particularly because I was being drafted. Well, also what happened, we had to report to the draft board if we were going to leave the...the state. Well, I made up my mind where we were going to Niagara Falls for our honeymoon, so I went up to the draft board and I informed them that I was going to get married and that I was going to leave the state regardless of whether they said yes or no. I said, “I’m...I’m being drafted,” I says, “so what...what else could you do to me? I says I...I...whatever you do to me...whatever the consequences I’ll stand when I get back, but I’m just letting you know that I am going to Niagara Falls. Well, as it happened, there was a gal there that I knew in...in the office, and she says, “You know, Bernie, I’m going to tell you something, we just got a deferment,” you know, “for you,” because I was working in a...in a Dodge truck that time [when we were?] building army equipment, and I was on supervision with the Chrysler people...

Q: Oh.

A: ...with the Chrysler people. And she said, “Do you know, you’re not being drafted, you’re getting a deferment.” She said, “I want you to tell you that so you have a good honeymoon, but,” she says, “don’t mention it because I’m not supposed to tell you this, you’ve got to get this from somebody else. Well, I did tell...naturally, I did tell my...Marge, at that time, what happened, that we were going to have a nice honeymoon and we don’t have to worry about the draft. So that’s what happened. Got...got married and went to Niagara Falls. Then we have a family in our...the other thing about it was we were married six years and no children. So I was making arrangements, which I had, like being on the police department, I had some connections, we were going to adopt. Well, we were going through a lot of paper... [tape recorder shut off and on] nothing wrong. But no children. So anyhow, at a point where I was just about ready to...to finalize this adoption deal, Marge...Marge becomes pregnant. And, anyway, Bernie, our

son, who was the eldest son who was born, and what was kind of nice about it, it was after six years of marriage, but there was four or five granddaughters that my dad and mother already had, but no grandsons.

Q: Oh boy.

A: So Bernie became the first grandson, so that really made things kind of, you know, happy for them.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And, of course, what happened, my dad's name was Bernard, my name is Bernard, and there's no other way that we could do it but name Bernie, my oldest son, Bernard, which he goes by Bernie. So there was three Bernards at that time.

Q: Good.

A: But, what had happened after that, we're talking six years of marriage, my first child, then six more years within a month's time, that one month difference, the second child was born.

Q: No kidding.

A: We don't know why, by those six years in a row, then we had William our...our...our second son. So Bernie married a girl by the name of Kathy Liggett, and they don't have any family. They're...they're in the same thing now. They don't know why, but no children. But, luckily as it happened, Bill, my youngest son, is married, and they do have two daughters, which are my granddaughters, and one is going to be twelve, one is going to be nine. So that's the extent of our immediate family, as...and Bill's wife's name is Linda. We've got a very nice family, a very close family, and then, the only sad thing about it, my wife passed away in 1994, April of 1994, and after fifty-two years of marriage. That was kind of, naturally, hard to take.

Q: And I know by experience.

A: But I am so fortunate I do have a real good family, always did have. My daughter in laws I consider as my daughters. They're that close to me.

Q: Right.

A: And the little granddaughters, well they take right after their mothers.

Q: They're a little closer, aren't they?

A: They come in and do my housework, they think they do, but I let them [inaudible, laughter] the little granddaughters.

Q: Right. Now once upon a time all your family, almost all your family lived on Dequindre.

A: Yes.

Q: But now they've moved around and...

A: Yes.

Q: ...scattered here and there like everybody else is, right?

A: Yeah. I would say yes. At that time, my...yes...my three brothers and the one sister, the older sister, and myself, of course, yeah [and all my folks?] we all lived on Dequindre.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And now I have a brother lives in California, and...

Q: Is that Freddy or is that Vladimir?

A: That...that's...that's Freddy, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Fred, yeah.

Q: He's the youngest, isn't he?

A: Yes, he's the youngest. And then my brother Dick, well he lives in the...in...between Clarkston and Ortonville area. He moved out there. And my other brother, Vladimir, he lives in Sterling Heights. So I'm only...the only Travnikar left in the city of Madison Heights.

Q: I'll be darned.

A: And I...they can't drive me out but [inaudible]

Q: You're planted here, eh?

A: [inaudible] I just...I just don't know anything else, and I feel, you know, Lois, I want to be able to go down the street and somebody say, "Hi Bernie," because

I...I want somebody to recognize me. I just feel that way. I don't...I don't want to be a stranger anywhere.

Q: You know something, everybody says to me, why don't you move? I'll move when I have to, Bernie!

A: Yeah, when I [inaudible].

Q: And so if...

A: [inaudible]

Q: ...if I have to.

A: And you know what Lois? Let me tell you something about that. I thought about that too.

Q: What's that?

A: Well, I don't know how to say this, but after I pass away, I'm going to be in this town for three more days, I think, because my funeral will be right here in the city of Madison Heights.

Q: Yeah, over at...

A: At the Swansons'.

Q: That's right. I'll be too. One of these days.

A: [Inaudible] Okay. So I mean even to that extent, I...I don't...I'm...I'm not going to...you know? I'm going to leave Madison Heights when they carry me out of here.

Q: Yeah. Well I know where I'll be buried, at the White Chapel, because that's where Bill is.

A: Yeah, okay.

Q: And so I know where I'll be, but I...I...

A: Yeah, well, I'll be in Holy Sepulchre.

Q: This is my home.

A: Yes.

Q: I've been here for many, many years. I...I know...I know you better than I know my relatives in the South.

A: Sure.

Q: Really I do.

A: That's right. I know.

Q: And it's...it's home.

A: Yeah.

Q: And I...I like people to know me, and I...I don't know...

A: Well, it's just a natural thing, Lois, because, and it's not only that, it...you know, there's a lot of people that lived in this town for quite a few years, but nobody knows who they are or what they are because they're not active, see? But you've been so active, it's...it's a different story, and it's been your life, and it's...it's like I'm talking about myself. I...I don't know. Maybe...maybe I should say I don't know anything else.

Q: No, well, you're still active. Tell me some of the boards you're on now.

A: Well, I'm still very active, yes. I...I'm on various boards in the city of Madison Heights right today. I'm on the Board of Review, which sometimes is good or bad.

Q: I was on that once, too. [Straightening 'em out?].

A: I was offered that a long time ago, Lois, but...

Q: Mmhmm.

A: ...I kind of hated to get on the Board of Review. In fact, the bank kind of frowned on me, because I was on the board of directors. They said, "You know, you're going to be on that Board of Review, and there's going to be some good customers come before you. They're good customers of the bank. How are you going to handle it?" I said, "I not going onto the Board of Review." So I...I...I kept putting it off. Well, finally, I...I did...I did accept the position. So I am on the Board of Review. I am on the Municipal Building Authority. I am on the EDC, which is the Economic Development Corporation, I'm also on the TIFA, which is the Tax Increment Finance Authority. And I'm also on the Competition Commission. So I'm serving on those boards right now. And, like I said earlier, and I'm with the bank yet. I don't want to take on anymore because I don't feel like I can handle it.

Q: Right.

A: And if I can't handle it properly, I will not accept it.

Q: Right. I don't blame you.

A: And I don't take it just to...just to say I'm on a certain...if I don't show up at a meeting, if I'm ten minutes late, they say something is wrong, because I'm that exact about...about being there and...and...and taking care of this.

Q: I wonder if that runs with people that's older like that, because that's...I'm the same way. If I'm going to be late, I'd rather be absent.

A: But you did that when you were younger, too, Lois.

Q: I know it.

A: So that...that...that...that don't just happen now. That... it's like we talked earlier. Some people just, I don't know why, you know they're going to be late.

Q: Yeah.

A: Why it is? I can excuse people for certain times. Anybody can have a problem. But why is it that the same people, same people just [inaudible]

Q: I know it, I know it, I know it.

A: Well I don't know, Lois. What else...if you have nothing else you would like to ask me...

Q: I'm trying to think, Bernie.

A: I know. Just...

Q: It's been great talking to you.

A: It...

Q: And I really appreciate you're giving us this, and I know it'll be treasured for years. I know it will be. I'm going to make me a copy if you don't mind.

A: No.

Q: For my kids.

A: I hope you do it.

Q: And...

A: I would like to have a copy of that too.

Q: Okay. I'll tell Bill Miles.

A: If we are all through, I would like to say one thing, Lois.

Q: What's still on our...you mean you want...oh, you want...

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: ...to put it on the tape? Okay.

A: You know, I know I'm getting a lot of credit for a lot of things here, but if I didn't have a lot of people helping me, supporting me, which they have, I would never be able to accomplish all the things that I have accomplished in this city. I had lot of support from the city people, from my good friends, like...like...like Bill and Lois Myers, and many, many other people, and I want to thank them all. And that's it for me, Lois.

Q: Well, thank you Bernie, and thank you for giving me this interview. A lot of people thought I couldn't get it. I did. I'm very proud of it, and I just wish you the best from now on, and God love you, okay?

A: Thank you very much, Lois.

END OF INTERVIEW.