

JIM MCHALE

Interview by Lois Myers
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TOPICS:

Governor "Soapy" Williams
Land Development
Incorporation of Madison Heights

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Q: ...95. We're at the Senior Citizens Center, and I'm talkin' to Jim McHale, and he's gonna share some of his mem'ries of the city with us. Thank you. Jim, how long have you lived in Madison Heights, and where did you move from to come here?

A: Oh...

Q: Plus a little bit about your life in city.

A: Okay. I've lived in Madison Heights for forty-eight years. I originally came here from Pennsylvania and wound up 1946 livin' in Baseline, Michigan, until 1948, when I bought my house in Royal Oak Township, at the time. 26034 Palmer. I can still remember the address. Right off of Lincoln.

Q: Who were your neighbors?

A: Well, there was a people by the name a... Jim White was my next-door neighbor. Stan Weiss w... I was the first one in on the block, Stan Weiss was the second one in on the block. So we were neighbors there and we only stayed there for... oh, I think it was two years. I got married and... I got married in 1956, then I had to move out. And I live on Dartmouth now, 28606 Dartmouth. But I remember a lot about the old Royal Oak Township days. Like Jack's Auction.

Q: Right.

A: And the lumberyard that used to be over here on Twelve Mile and John R. And it was a lumberyard down here right across from Jack's Auction.

Q: Didja ever go square dancing over at the Jack's Auction?

A: No, I missed the square dancing.

Q: I used to go there. I even danced with Soapy Williams.

A: Oh, is that right?

Q: Yup. Yup.

A: Yeah.

Q: He used to come there... 'lection. That's why he got elected so many times. He'd come out and dance with all the ladies, you know. Go ahead.

A: He was a good guy. A good Democrat [inaudible].

Q: Yeah. Yeah, right.

A: Yeah, I remember that, yeah. And I...right now I'm on the Senior Advisory Board up at the Center and I come up to the Center every day. It's like a second home. And I'm just...feel so glad to be a part of Madison Heights. And I think we've got one of the greatest cities, one of the best places around. We've got the cleanest and the safest streets, I think, in wintertime and, with the snow removal. We've got great garbage pickup, grass pickup. It's just a great city.

Q: It sure is a lot different than Royal Oak. When you live here and go into Royal Oak, it...

A: Oh yes, yes. And like the good old days, I remember...I had two friends of mine, when I first moved out here, and they had the big ditches that used to run...

Q: Oh yeah.

A: ...on Eight Mile Road up. And my buddies used to drive me home once in a while, and they'd say to me, "How did you ever wind up livin' out here in the country?" And...and I said, "This isn't the country." And you know what's surprising? Both of them fellas wound up livin' in Madison Heights.

Q: No kidding.

A: They both wound up buyin' houses out here. In fact, one lived on Karam Drive and one lived on Venoy over here?

Q: Who were they?

A: Well, they're both passed away now.

Q: Oh.

A: One was a gentlemen by the name of Norm Pranger and the other one was Chuck Follmer. And great friends of mine. It was funny how we all wound up out here.

Q: In'n [sic] that the truth? Yeah.

A: We used to say, "Man, you...you live way out in the country." But I can remember the good old days. We used to park three blocks away and then walk down to the house.

Q: Carry the groceries in. I...

A: Carry the groceries in.

Q: ...did the same thing.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: You know the first morning that we got up I was scared to death. We had a horse and a cow out in our back yard.

A: That hadda be somethin', yeah.

Q: When we were the first house on that block.

A: Mmhmm.

Q: You know, and...

A: You were here long way before me...

Q: Yeah.

A: ...the 30s, but...

Q: I guess maybe before you's born.

A: Yes. 1927.

Q: Well ten years after you's born.

A: Yeah.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: But...yeah, I've lived here for forty-eight years, and I...I love every minute of it.

Q: All right, tell me about the Red Run Drain. You seen that change.

A: Yeah, we always used to see the old Red Run, big ditches runnin' down through there and all that and how it's all covered up. And we got our golf course and...it's just...just great changes. Just great changes in our city. From a two lanes to a four lanes, right? Goin' down John R right now.

Q: Well, it was two lanes...

A: Two lanes, yes.

Q: ...there for a while.

A: That's what I'm sayin', from two lanes to four lanes, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Big change. Big change. [Inaudible].

Q: All for the better.

A: Yup. No K-Marts, no nuthin' over here when I lived out here.

Q: Well I'm sure. Absolutely.

A: The Old Green Lantern was an old green place. Remember when we always used to sit up there?

Q: Yup. Was the pool hall down by Eleven Mile and John R? Sunset Inn they called it?

A: Uh, I don't know when that was built there.

Q: No, it was here when I came here...

A: Was it? [Inaudible].

Q: ...but I mean was it here when you...

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: ...were here?

A: Uh huh.

Q: They used to...

A: Yeah, it was what the high school was down there too...

Q: Yeah.

A: ...right across from the new fire station down there.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: That was Madison High School.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Yeah.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did your kids go to school there? No?

A: No, my kids wound up goin' to St. Dennis, to Bishop Holy.

Q: Oh, uh huh.

A: Yeah.

Q: You met a lot of new people down here, just comin' down here, didncha?

A: Oh, just great people down here. Just great. We got a great center, great staff, with Jimmy and Lee and all the drivers, Mary Ann and all them.

Q: You know something else?

A: [Inaudible].

Q: Pete Connors can never be replaced. I don't...I don't care who they get, they can never replace that man.

A: No, he's doin' a great job. Great job.

Q: Yeah, it's just...amazing what he does.

A: Mmhmm.

Q: And how qu...but he does it, you know.

A: Yup. The city's got a lot to be proud of.

Q: Your kids...

A: It really has.

Q: ...play ball over there at the parks?

A: No, well they used to play at Rosie's Park.

Q: Oh really?

A: At little Rosie's Park.

Q: Yeah.

A: And...and over here at the school, back over here, back of the incinerator.

Q: Page [Middle School].

A: Page, yup.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What did ya think of the incinerator?

A: Well in a way, I was glad it's closed. I...I'm glad to see that closed.

Q: I think everybody was, really.

A: Yeah.

Q: Although I don't owe it, a lot of problems now where they...were goin' through, but...

A: I...yeah.

Q: We had to do it.

A: Well, look how we went from noise and garbage to what we got today. It's...it's amazing what...what changes that you've seen over the years.

Q: Oh, was John R paved when you came out here?

A: No.

Q: Tell us about that.

A: No...no what can I say? I tell ya, we used to...I...I was afraid to see the rain and the...and the mud come, 'cause I c...I could never get out. There's a lot of days I couldn't get to work 'cause my car got stuck right there, and I just leave it sit there.

Q: We had the same thing...

A: Yeah.

Q: ...over where I lived. I lived on Hales. I still do.

A: Yes...oh yeah. I deliver meals over there. Hales?

Q: Hales.

A: Yeah.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Right off of Twelve? Down towards Eleven?

Q: I live north of 'leven.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yuh.

A: Yup.

[Tape turned off and on]

A: Oh we have our mayors of Madison Heights. We had Monte Gerald, Bill Hoffman [sic]...

Q: Smith.

A: Smith. Well now that must have been...was that before me?

Q: Uh uh.

A: Wasn't it?

Q: No, [inaudible] you was here before the city. We didn't have a mayor until little George Horkey was a supervisor.

A: Yeah. No, I meant mayor still.

Q: Yeah, I know. No, Smith was in there. He lived over on Darlene and the niece is somewhere over in that area.

A: Well, see I wasn't payin' too much at...in 1948 I was twenty-one years old.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: I just got out of the Navy, and I didn't even, you know...

Q: And more'n you do, I think about the politics [inaudible].

A: I don't even think about the politics.

Q: Yeah.

[Tape turned off and on].

Q: You got any questions you want to ask?

A: Yes. I...I...I would like to know is...how did we ever get connected with Royal Oak Township that was on the other side of Woodward when I first moved out here?

Q: Oh, you don't realize...oh, we were all Royal Oak, Hazel Park, the whole bunch was in Royal Oak Township. And as each one would become a city, they would annex from it. And everybody had become a city except East Royal Oak Township and West Royal Oak Township. So we were known as the east side and they were known as the west side.

A: Oh, okay.

Q: And that's why...and then...when we became a city, of course we annexed and that left them as Royal Oak Township now. But the argument on the...from the two sides, it was t...quite a bit of arguments on whether...

A: Mmhmm. Oh.

Q: ...we should become a city at the time or not. Was...Mr. Horkey said that they should have let them become city first because they were going to c...become Victory City. Is...let them become a city first, and then we got all the equipment and we can be fairly with them, but if they get all the equipment, they might not be fairly with us, which they weren't. You know, we had to go after...we really had to dig in, because they didn't just up and divide it according to the situation. But that's how we became part of them.

A: [Inaudible] I was always wonderin' about that.

Q: Do you remember when the Fire Department had...they used to go over there when there was a fire?

A: Yeah. Yeah. Well, this part I couldn't figure out was our tax money goin'...

Q: Yeah.

A: But they still kept...they're still today Royal Oak Township, aren't they?

Q: Oh yeah.

A: [Inaudible]. Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Oh yeah.

A: And we're Madison Heights.

Q: Yeah.

A: Well that answers my questions. I never could figure that one out.

Q: No?

A: I knew there was a Royal Oak and a Hazel Park.

Q: Not only are you tellin' sumpin' ...some news that some people don't know, but you're learnin' a little too, huh?

A: Yes, I'm learnin' a little too, yes.

Q: That worked for me the other day. Bernie Travnikar came over and he's going to do a taping, but we just got to talkin' about old times, and I got a history lesson like I've never heard before. Bernie is older'n I am, and he came out here when he was three years old, so he...he knows a lot more than I do, you know?

A: Yeah.

Q: But it's been a...it's been a wonderful experience, and I...even like this, I think it's great, you know? You got anything else you want to talk...?

A: No, that's...I think that's about it.

Q: Okay, well I want to thank you and tell you I really appreciate you givin' me the time and God bless you, and...

A: Ah, God bless you.

Q: ...I wish you the best in everything, okay?

A: God bless you.

Q: You want to hear it back?

A: Why sure!

Q: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW