

Ed and Kay Gilman
Narrators

James E. Fogerty
Interviewer

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The Gilmans' home, Fifty Lakes, Minnesota

JF: Well let's just start today by talking about—as you know when we were up here last week, talking with you both about it, you mentioned that you were both born in Chicago. So, tell me a little bit about when you first came to Minnesota. Since we are doing two of you we'll do one at a time and I'll ask you one at a time.

EG: You asked me how we first came to Minnesota. Well, that was long before we came here. I came to Minnesota when I was about twelve or thirteen years old, which would be sixty some years ago—sixty-two, sixty-three years ago.

JF: Was that on a fishing trip?

EG: I come up on a fishing trip on the Mesabi Iron Range up at Pengilly. And then I made several trips fishing all the way across northern Minnesota. Then after the war—well I got married before the war, then we come up here after the war and we were looking for a place and we found this and we bought it, and we moved up the following year.

JF: Tell me what made you though—I mean you lived in Chicago, you both lived in Chicago—what made you want to come and stay up here?

EG: Well, if you've seen Chicago, you'll know why. That's no place to be, it's a good place to be from. The element and everything there, and it has steadily gotten worse.

KG: And the pollution. There was a lot of pollution even those days in Chicago. There were a lot of factories there and you can get up in the morning and just smell the pollution in the air. And he always loved to fish and he said he'd just love the quiet country.

JF: So did you come up here and actually settle before the war?

EG: No, after the war, right after the war. See I worked about eight, nine months after the war and then we bought this place, made the deal and then the following year then we moved up here.

JF: How did you happen to find this place?

EF: A friend of ours had been here before the war and he'd come up here when he was a youngster, with his father. He was coming up on a vacation and said, "Well this is a nice place" and we come up here.

JF: And so you found this property and—

EG: This property was for sale and so we—

JF: This was about when, 19—

KG: '46.

JF: Oh, '46 and you had just gotten out of the army?

EG: I'd worked about eight, nine months after I'd gotten out of the army and we come up on our vacation and we found this place was for sale and made a down payment and came back in the fall and closed the deal.

JF: What did you think about this, Kay?

KG: Well, it was quite a challenge for me. My family; my sisters, my mother and dad, and his family and all our friends lived in Illinois and it was kind of a scary feeling, and of course a problem of a child going to school. They did have a school locally then, a country school. But then we heard they had school buses transporting children. And then, the idea of church too, there's no local Catholic church in the area, so I said, oh no, is this really something out in the woods.

JF: Where was the nearest Catholic Church at that time?

KG: Crosby and Pine River. And, we went to Crosby though. The road was better going to Crosby. So we go to Crosby every Sunday, rain or shine, snow or snow storms.

JF: When you came up here the first time and looked at the land were there already cabins up here?

EG: Oh yes.

JF: Tell me a little bit what the resort was like at that time. Were they being operated as a resort at that time?

EG: It was being operated as a resort. We were the third owners of this place. The Hardys, and then the Freemans, and then Scotts and then us. But there were two other resorts on the lake, you know. But they went out of business first, and now there are no resorts on the lake.

JF: So there were how many cabins when you bought it.

EG: Seven, weren't there?

KG: Seven cabins, and we had a lot of people from Iowa that would come and a few from Nebraska, and then we brought a lot of the Chicago people in, the Illinois people, and a few from Missouri and Kansas were coming. I think we had a few people from South Dakota and North Dakota, Indiana.

JF: Were the cabins pretty much full all summer? When did the season start?

EG: Well, we were very fortunate, but our season would start real early. It started at the opening of the fishing season, but generally we would have people in before that. And the fishermen would be up, and we were pretty full all summer until Labor Day and we would have fishermen up all fall, coming up to go fishing. We had people in—sometimes we could stay open for deer hunting too.

KG: We'd even get weekend business, from down in the Cities, and we'd encourage it because sometimes you would just take them for two or three days, but they'd come back, and they'd be repeat people, they'd stay a week.

JF: Was that in the summer too, Kay?

KG: Yes, even in the summer if we had openings, we'd take them for a weekend.

JF: Back in the '40's when your normal guest, if there is such a thing, how long would they come for?

EG: A lot of the people from the Minneapolis area would come up for Friday night till Sunday afternoon. But from out-of-state they would come for three or four days on a holiday; Decoration Day or the 4th of July, and the rest of the time they would come up for anywhere from one to two weeks and we had some stay all summer.

KG: And then we'd have people like from Iowa—they were farmers—they'd come in the spring and then they'd come back in August after their crops were in. Then they'd come back again for fall fishing. They weren't wealthy, but they loved to fish and loved to eat fish, so they'd be repeat business for us too, about three times a year.

JF: So you inherited the clientele, but you brought new people with you.

KG: Yes.

EG: We brought a lot of new people in.

JF: How did you bring those people in?

EG: Just friends of ours and word of mouth, and we advertised some with the sports shows and we had our own resort association here and we belonged to that.

KG: We had an Emily-Outing Vacationland Association and we belonged to that. And even Fifty Lakes had a little local organization, so that helped, but word or mouth was about the best. Friends would tell friends and they'd have a good time. And then after we were established, the children would come. After that the grandchildren would come.

JF: When you first started out what was the price for a week at a resort?

EG: \$25-\$35 a week.

KG: And that included a boat.

EG: And you made more money then than you do today.

KG: We were here two and a half years and had no electricity. So like I told you, I had to wash the clothes in the garage and the barn and hang my clothes outside. And then we had ice refrigerators—ice boxes, and he hauled ice every year, and every day.

EG: Like I said, we'd cut ice in the winter time and we'd pack it in the ice house, and we'd pack it with saw dust, and then the people would keep their fish on the ice in the sawdust and in the fall we'd have to clean everything out and start all over again.

JF: You had an ice-cutting machine and everything that you needed for that?

EG: I didn't, but I would help on the crew that cut ice, but there were different ones—it was a business for them. They would go out on the ice and cut the ice and load it on the truck with a conveyor and we would all pack it in the icehouse.

KG: In the first two winters when we went away we had to get our ice cut before we left—I mean we'd have to arrange to have it done so that ice would be there in the spring for us.

JF: Did you go back to Chicago during those first two winters?

KG: Those first two winters.

JF: And then you decided to move up?

EG: Yeah, we stayed as our family started growing.

KG: He got his job back and I worked for the Pepsident factory.

JF: And you worked during the winter?

EG: Oh yes, I worked at the Western Electric.

JF: That must have been quite a decision to move up here full-time.

EG: No, really it wasn't. I had no problem at all making my mind up.

KG: He didn't like going back to Chicago. But I did because then I'd see my folks and my friends and relatives, and it was a change.

JF: What was the first winter like up here?

KG: The first winter was rough. We didn't have our wood supply cut. He said, "There's time, there's time." And I said, "But it's getting close." October was a beautiful month. We had some guests in the one cabin and they stayed for deer season. October 4th was beautiful. November 4th we had a snowstorm that stayed—we had about eleven inches of snow and no wood supply. We had to buy wood for our fuel that first winter.

EG: We were snowed in up here for about a week and a half.

JF: I bet this was a dirt road.

KG: Yes, it was a dirt road for about seven years.

EG: It's been rebuilt several times. The first year we come in we had to go all the way around Outing because the hill down there was impassable. So we had to drive around Outing and come in from the north.

KG: And that was an experience.

JF: What did you do during the winter when you weren't running the resort?

EG: I drove school bus and I would do carpenter work and any kind of work that was available, I'd grab it.

KG: He did some trapping, one year he tried, and then he did some logging, and then after that we bought some timber from the state and he logged the trees for the new house that we built, so all the logs, all the timber, most of the timber that went into that house he cut. He didn't even have a chain saw.

EG: I cut most of it by hand with a Swede saw. Also I cut my hand with the Swede saw—a strong

back and a weak mind [laughter].

JF: I want each of you to tell me what was a normal day, let's say, during the resort season? What was a normal day for you like? Take me through a day, when you get up in the morning, how does it go, a normal day in the summer?

EG: I wouldn't say there is such a thing as a normal day, I'd get up in the morning, have breakfast. Before breakfast somebody would be at your door for minnows. You'd get up and give them their minnows and grab a bite to eat and cut grass and haul wood, haul ice to the cabins, haul garbage.

KG: And you'd have to visit.

EG: Visit with each one, you know. Then you had to take somebody fishing in the evening for a little while, and—

JF: Did you do guiding fishing?

EG: Not guiding, but I would take my guests fishing and of course I'd give them the fish.

KG: It was free guide service, but you see this was an asset because people like that, especially people from Illinois. He would drop everything and take them fishing, and they'd look forward to that.

JF: These were all housekeeping cabins?

KG: Yes.

JF: So people did their own?

KG: Except the early years, I did some cooking for the deer hunters, because we had a few deer hunters in, so then I would prepare meals and their box lunches.

JF: You didn't do that for your summer visitors though?

KG: No, no just—well, for this elderly couple. He was a scout for the Cleveland Indians, Slaptica, Mr. and Mrs. Slaptica from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They liked to have one big meal so they'd eat right with us.

JF: Come up to your house.

KG: Yes, they'd eat with us.

EG: All fall, and then he'd stay until we had to close up, it was snowing too much, and then he'd

leave. We almost had to kick him out.

JF: Where were they from?

EG and KG: Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

KG: Once a week, see we didn't have any plumbing inside—once a week they'd rent a hotel room in Brainerd—the Holiday Inn wasn't there yet—to take their bath. Of course they took sponge baths during the week.

JF: So they were up here all season.

KG: No, all fall.

EG: After the baseball season ended he'd come up and stay till we wouldn't let him stay any longer.

KG: They would stay—they loved to mushroom pick, pick mushrooms. We were loaded on the island grounds, because there were trees, and we cut some trees so there were stumps and that creates good mushroom picking. Then he liked to go hunting and fall fishing and tullibee netting. See, there were tullibeets in this lake, and then Ed would smoke them. He did that for many years. We would send them to our guests too. They're delicious fish, smoked.

JF: You did that sort of as a gratis favor.

KG: Right.

EG: Sure, that was public relations, and the people all liked it and they still ask me about the smoked fish—when are you going to smoke for them, and I say, no more. I don't get any more.

KG: But it promoted good will.

JF: Did you ever think, as the years went by, about opening a lodge or having meals or doing anything like this to expand your service? Did you ever think about it?

KG: I don't think so, because this was enough work for us, because I did all my own work, my own linens, and when the children got older they helped.

JF: Tell me what an average day would be like for you, Kay, if there was such a thing?

KG: It was very busy. I'd wake up in the morning and, of course, after the children came closer and closer, we had six children. I just about had to wash clothes every day: diapers, linens, and, of course, the children helped too.

If he was out tour guiding, I'd have to get the minnows, and visit with the people, call them in for coffee, and they liked that. And we always tried to make the people feel at home. Sometimes we'd get some people from Iowa and they'd be grouchy, you know. "Are the fish biting?" "They're not biting? I said, "They will, they will." Or if it was raining, "Does it rain here all the time?" I said, "No, the sun will be out."

We'd treat the people like they're important. They like that. And sometimes we'd get some people, and we thought they wouldn't come back the next year. They'd come back the next year and say, "We had a great time last year."

EG: They'd tell us what a great time they had.

KG: "The fishing was so good," and I thought we'd never see them again. But I think it's making them feel at home, and important. That this was their vacation, we'd treat them like guests. If they were farmers or if they were from the Cities, or wherever they were from.

JF: Did the guests do much mingling together while they were there?

EG: Oh, definitely. They would all get together. Then they would have parties. One fellow who is on the lake now, he used to come up and he remembers how they used to have gatherings and all get together. We talked about that the other night.

KG: We'd have a little picnic outdoors and had little potlucks.

JF: What was the day like in the wintertime, now when your guests were gone? What kind of maintenance did you have to do on cabins and things like that to keep things up? You probably had a hard time doing that during the summer when they were occupied.

EG: Oh yeah, well, as I said, I'd drive a school bus and come home and then I'd go to work. I'd work on the cabins, rebuilding cabins and we improved all the time because the cabins weren't modern or anything when we moved up here. So I had to modernize them, put plumbing in and running water and all that. And I'd work at that during the day and then I'd go out and work for other people too or go and work in the woods or do anything I could.

KG: And then in the winter I would do the curtains, all the curtains to the cabins so I wouldn't have to do that in the spring, so that was sort of something done ahead so I'd just have the windows to wash and the rest of the cabin cleaning to do and then I could hang the curtains fresh starched.

EG: She'd do all the painting in the place. I never painted.

KG: Freshen up the cabins. The boats, we had boats to be painted too in the spring. In the spring was a lot of maintenance, wooden boats.

JF: How early would you start that in the spring?

EG: As soon as the weather would break we would be working, April, May, whenever it got so we could work outside, we worked outside.

KG: In the fall the kids and I would rake all the leaves. We had a lot of trees there so it was a lot of leaves and in the spring again there was more leaves to rake. But the grounds always looked so pretty, we really had beautiful park-like grounds.

JF: How many acres did you have?

EG: Well, it was a government lot, which is forty acres, but there was twelve acres in the water, so it was actually twenty-eight acres here, twelve acres of it was in the bay. And then the state got a couple acres from me and—

KG: For the access.

JF: You talked a little bit about word of mouth advertising and sports shows. Tell me a little about as the years went by how you did recruit, I mean as people stopped coming, what did you do?

EG: Well, really, we had to do more advertising earlier than we did later. Later because we had a clientele that had been coming here for years and their families, and then they would tell their families, and then they were telling their friends, so actually we had less advertising to do in later years than we did at the start. As the youngsters would grow up and get married they would bring their families up, so we had such a backlog there.

KG: But we would advertise in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and the *Minneapolis Tribune* with a little ad in the paper.

JF: Like in the spring?

KG: Yes, uh huh, if we had openings, you know.

EG: But I think we had a really nice bunch of people as our guests. And I'm proud of one fact, that I think we only had a couple of bad debts and I only had to ask a couple of people to leave over all those years. I think that was a good record.

JF: Did you go to sports shows or did you send literature?

EG: No, I didn't go there, but we belonged to different associations that would advertise there.

KG: We did have brochures.

EG: They would take our brochures and put them out at the show.

JF: You think of resorts today having to offer all these sorts of stuff to people. What did people do when they came? Was it mainly fishing? What did they do when they brought their kids?

EG: Actually I think they had a better time than they do now and the kids would just have a ball, they would play in the water and they would swim and they would make friends. I think they had more fun then than what they have today.

KG: I think our children helped too, because our children helped entertain the other children. And I know there was one lady, when I would answer the letter I would put "Ed and Kay and children" and I would put the ages of my children. And this lady told me, she said, "That letter really told us to come to your resort." She said, "Your friendly letter, and adding the names of your children" and I used to worry about having the children, they were so close together, and were work, but the children really helped.

JF: Do you think that the kids as they grew up kind of thought of it as a job too, I mean that they were part of the whole thing too?

KG: Oh yes.

EG: Oh, sure. They still talk about it.

KG: Sometimes they would even complain. They'd say "Oh Mom, we can't take those kids." We'd say "It's our bread and butter. Just a few more days. Be nice to them and the days will go by fast."

EG: You know too, our kids were growing up and they'd make so many friends. They would go to the Cities and the kids in the city would talk about city life and our kids would come back and they'd say "Gee, they didn't think that was such a great life, all they did was stand around the corner and talk." They didn't think so much of that.

KG: And they made friends too. They made city friends like Carol's boys, Carol [Ryan Crawford] invited them over to their home, so they enjoyed that too. It was nice.

JF: Were there restaurants? Did people go out to eat? Did they travel to Brainerd or Crosby? What did they do on rainy days?

EG: There was any number of supper clubs and restaurants and different things to do right in the area. And then they would go to Brainerd on a rainy day and. there was always something to do. We would go out with them.

KG: They would play Bingo—there was a sports club that had bingo—and the local church, St Emily's would have bingo.

EG: [unclear because they were both talking at the same time.] The Sportsman's club, and used to help call bingo.

KG: Sometimes our whole resort would be playing bingo that night. And then I would go antiquing with the ladies. I'd take them to the different antique shops—that was something for them to do. And we'd go to the local bar in Fifty Lakes. We used to have characters that really frequented there and they got to be the local characters. And they'd have fishing contests, so that kind of stirred people up. And, of course in the early years we had no TV, but the people didn't miss TV. We had a couple of extra radios if the people didn't bring radios. I'd say "Do you want a radio?" They'd say "We don't even want to hear the news", but then some people like a radio for music.

JF: Then in later years did you get TVs in the cabins?

EG: Not in our cabins, we never furnished TV's.

KG: They'd bring their own later.

JF: Did the resort change much over the years? You mentioned making a lot of improvements. Did you consciously try to add things that would make it more attractive to people?

EG: You had to, to keep people coming. Anything we could do within reason we would do to build it up. Whatever improvements we could do that wouldn't be out of line in the cash outlay we would do.

KG: He built three new cabins, and they were nice when they were new. And then he had inside plumbing in there, and he put in a shower, we had a shower in each of the cabins, but this was a big shower for the ladies and the men's stall, that was outdoors.

JF: When did you put those things in? When did you get running water in the cabins, was that in the 50's or 60's.

KG: I'd say in the 50's.

EG: During the 50's I had running water in the cabins. After we had electricity then we—

KG: Not all, the log cabin on the hill didn't.

EG: No, not up there we didn't, but after we got electricity then I could put in running water and things.

JF: What kind of kitchen facilities were there in the cabins?

EG: Just housekeeping cabins, and there would be a sink and dishes, refrigerators, and a place you could cook and store the food.

KG: Stoves.

JF: Electric stove?

KG and EG: Gas stove.

KG: Then we had fuel oil for heat.

EG: The electricity was out at line cost plus your—if we'd wanted to have electric heaters in all the cabins we would have had such a heavy service coming in that it wouldn't be practical.

KG: The first few years we'd have little potbelly stoves and we'd have wood for fuel but after that one cabin burned we were kind of afraid the insurance wouldn't cover us. It was dangerous.

JF: Tell me about the fire.

KG: We had about four young boys from Illinois that came up, it was over the Fourth of July week, and the Fourth of July was on Saturday. So I had a lot of linens in there and extra bedding from the people before that because I had quite a few people in that cabin, so I didn't take all the blankets out. And it rained, so the boys started a fire in the morning and then they went out fishing. They went up the creek, so they had their car parked there and the [outboard] motor was on the porch—there was a screened-in porch. So it was about noon and a friend of ours came running to the house and she said "Kay, Kay, the cabin on the point is on fire." I said, "Oh, my gosh." I don't think he was home. You weren't home.

So we quick called—we had a local fire department here, but it went so fast. See, they had plywood varnished walls and then that little stove, and it just burned so fast. Well, the neighbor got the motor off the porch and got their car and drove in out and salvaged that, but nothing in the cabin was salvaged. An iron skillet was all there was left.

JF: It didn't spread to any other cabins did it?

EG and KG: No, no.

KG: It was set aside, but it was windy that day and we were kind of worried so the firemen came that day and they put the fire out.

JF: Did you have any other fires, or was that the only time?

KG: That was the only fire and it was sad because that was the first cabin that he modernized and

we'd only had it insured for \$450.00. We should have raised that after we had—the plumbing alone ran us more than that, so the people kind of kidded us—"Boy that's a good way to put a new cabin up" but how can you put a cabin up for \$450.00? And then the boys felt real bad when they came back from fishing.

JF: They must have been a little surprised.

KG: Oh, they were shocked. All their clothing and all their stuff and of course we said the neighbors saved the outboard motor, but their money and their clothing, so they felt bad, "well what did we do to you?" And we said, "Well, we're healthy, we'll make it, we got a little insurance on it, we'll build another one." So the next year they came back and they brought a few pots and pans for the cabin, but he built a nice cabin to replace it, and it's still there and the people that own it are adding on, remodeling it.

JF: You had seven, as you said, when you bought it. How many did you end up with?

EG: We only ended up with about six. We ended up with less because some of them had to be torn down.

JF: Did you keep them full all summer long?

EG: Yeah, we had a pretty business the whole summer.

KG: And then, of course, with his working he didn't want to put any—he thought about putting some—he could have, we had lands, and he thought of putting like duplex cabins, because a lot of people would come up with their guests. They wanted individual cabins, but still they wanted to be close together, but we never got around to it.

JF: Because he worked all summer.

EG: I worked at the resort there.

KG: And just raising a family kept us busy with six children.

JF: So the kids mowed the grass as they got older?

EG: Oh yes. But one was too smart, the grass would grow faster than he'd mow it.

JF: You said that when you started out it was about \$26 a week or so. How did the prices go up during the year? Tell me how they kind of—

EG: Well, after we had sold out, why we were only getting about \$40 or \$50 a week.

KG: No, \$90. I think \$90 was the highest we went.

EG: She took care of the bookwork. And then after we left he raised them to \$150, \$160, and \$175, and he was getting that.

EG: Now they're up to \$200-\$300.

JF: You sold in—?

KG: 1976.

JF: So tell me a little about your decision to sell.

KG: Well, I was getting arthritis in my legs and our home was up on a hill and I had to walk down the hill to the cabins and my legs would ache so, I said, "I just can't keep doing this, the arthritis is getting bad.

So the children, they weren't for it, they said, "Oh, no Mom, let's keep it." I said, "No, we'll just have to sell." So what I wanted to do, I wanted to sell it to some of our guests that were back because they had their guests, and it would have been sort of a family. And then one of my daughters was sort of interested, but he said I'd never get through working because I'd be right there.

So then this one fellow happened to come up fishing, and he came to rent a boat and I approached him and he said, "Gee, this is a lovely set-up here." He was staying on Fox Lake And I said, "Well the resort's for sale, we're thinking of selling, why don't you buy it?" And he said, "I can't buy it", he said, "I'm too young, I'm just finishing college, and I'm from Illinois" and I said, "Well you could hack it, and get a job as a teacher here." So I sort of sold him on it, so he came back with his wife and we sold it to him.

JF: It was a big decision.

EG: Not as long as we could stay in the area, I didn't mind. I didn't want to go back to Illinois, I would never go back there because I never regretted getting out of there and coming up here. It was a decision I never did regret.

KG: So the way we sold it, we kept some of the land. We kept the land all across. We kept some lakeshore, so then we sold a couple of plots on the lake and then this last year we sold three more lots on this end of the lake.

JF: So you didn't sell all of the cabins.

EG: We sold all of the resort part, but the rest of the land we kept. And then I subdivided some and we'd sell it and then built my house here where the state got the land to fill up for the public access

and then I built my house here that they took the land to fill from.

KG: And they were also a young couple so we helped them the first year run it as a resort and her father passed away and then I took over and helped so she can go to the funeral, and they only had it like two or three years. She didn't like the work. So he sold individual cabins.

JF: Do they still live there?

KG: No he got a job through my daughter as a teacher in Pine River. Bacchus at first, now Bacchus is consolidated with Pine River. So he is teaching in Pine River, and then his wife teaches at Head Start. But now last year his brother bought the house Ed built and he's going to really do a lot of improvements. His other brother, he was busy with a lot of other things. And some people that bought the resort, like this one guy from Nebraska, he's not here to keep the grounds up. If he'd hire somebody to keep the grounds up—it's kind of sad to see the grass grow high and the grounds not kept up.

JF: Why do you think they only were able to operate it for three years? Was it because it wasn't successful or was it that they just didn't like it?

EG: Well, two reasons. The resort was successful as far as that type of resort would go, but they didn't like the work and I don't think his personality was such that he mixed with the people the way he should. And there was no reason that he couldn't have made a go of it. As a teacher he had the whole summer off, he taught all winter. There's no reason they couldn't have made a go of it, but they just didn't. And he was going to get rich fast by subdividing the cabins and selling the cabins off and they had a lot of problems there because the land was not laid out for it to be broke up that way. He did it, but there were an awful lot of problems there by doing it that way.

JF: So by 1980 they had sold it.

EG: He had sold most of the cabins off to private parties. His father bought the cabin on the point and his uncle bought the cabin in the middle and he lived at the house there, and the last five or six years he's been renting the house out, and now he's sold it to his brother.

JF: Had your business been pretty stable right up to the time you sold it?

KG: Oh yes, it was.

JF: Did you notice changes though over the years, as the years went along in the people. Were you still getting the same kind of people you pretty much had?

EG: We were getting the same type of people, but yes, we noticed changes in the respect that, I shouldn't say this, but the women were demanding more. The fellows would come up and the roof could leak and the boat could leak, but if they could catch fish they were happy. But the women

began to want more and it was getting harder to keep up and keep everybody happy. Up until we sold we had a bunch, and people still visit us who used to be our guests at the resort.

KG: We used to have a big speed boat too, with a big motor and they would take the kids water skiing so we had that for an attraction, we had the canoe, and we had a fly for the little ones to go in the creek swimming, so it was a nice place for families with little children too. We would encourage that because it was such a safe place, the creek for the children to swim.

JF: Did you notice, you were mentioning the women demanding more, what kind of things were they wanting, did you notice?

EG: They wanted places where they could go out and have different entertainments and that there. It just began to, I always say they began to get the upper hand, and they were chronically unhappy. And I think they were happier when they didn't have the upper hand, I shouldn't say that, but that was my opinion.

KG: But then we did notice from our first years that we would have a lot of the farmers from Iowa would come up and they were very conservative. Of course they had a hard time right after the Depression with their farms, and they didn't spend much money, they'd bring everything with them. But then as their children came I think their salaries were higher, and they would spend more because it was their vacation, and they didn't mind if we did increase the rates, you know, if they wanted an extra boat and we'd charge them. Years ago we'd just let them have an extra boat, two boats for their cabin, and we never charged them.

EG: If we weren't using the boat we just told them to use it.

KG: But then later if they wanted an extra boat, we'd charge them. And they'd say that's fine and they'd pay it. But they'd want the best boats.

JF: Did you notice the kids wanting more attractions?

EG: That's right, that's what I mean. They wanted more attractions and that and more and more all the time.

KG: They'd go to Brainerd, Paul Bunyan, the attractions in Brainerd and Crosby and Cross Lake. But now they've got different attractions too. In Cross Lake, they have a big water slide.

JF: You mentioned that when you started there were two other resorts on the lake. What happened to them?

EG: Well the owners died in the one next to us and another fellow and I bought the place. We were going to make a baseball camp because he was a pitcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers at the time and then they moved to California and he stopped playing for them. And we got everything all set up,

but then we got out of that business there and it just operated for a couple of years as a baseball camp, but then he sold to different individuals. It's a nice place, but it's no longer a resort. The original owners of the resort, they both died off. And the other one, they just went out of business because he was working in the Cities and they only had four cabins and he had somebody else running it for him and this fellow, he went off and lived by himself in his own cabin instead of running the resort for him.

JF: It was just not economical.

EG: It wasn't feasible.

JF: You mentioned that you belonged to some resort associations. Tell me a little about that? What benefit do you think you got out of that?

EG: Well it was the Emily-Outing Association with the resorts at Fifty Lakes and Emily and Outing. We all formed an association and we would all pay annual dues and out of that they would [inaudible] how much money we had in our treasury, how many sports shows we would go to. We would send a representative there and he would represent all the resorts in our area, the members of the association. And if we picked up two, three, four, five new guests, why that would be good. And it would be usually places like Kansas City, Missouri or places that we wouldn't do much advertising and they were farther away.

KG: One year we got a gentleman, he was really a character, from Illinois. He wrote us a letter—he came on the train and we had to meet him—

EG: We had to meet him at the train station in Brainerd and—

KG: He was really a character. He said, "You'll know me, I got all my fishing tackle in a brown paper sack" and what else did he have—he had one suitcase and we put him in a cabin and then I fed him one day—we scared him, remember?

EG: Well, I heard somebody out in my truck.

KG: He took him out fishing.

EG: I took him out fishing and I was just getting ready for bed when I heard somebody out in my truck and looked out there. Here he was out there and I said, "You better not do that, you can get yourself in trouble." He thought he had lost a plug in there. Fishing plugs. He's one of the different people we have met over the years.

JF: Was this some guy who had found out about you through the association.

KG: Yes.

EG: He came to the Sports Show in Chicago.

JF: Did you notice competition between resorts or between areas of the state intensify as the years went by?

EG: I wouldn't say they intensified. I haven't noticed from one area of the state to the other yet I don't know. But in the local resorts I don't think it was—we cooperated pretty much. When we were full we would call somebody else.

KG: In our area. Sometimes we would lose people because once they got started with another lake they'd stay there, they wouldn't come back. And we would send people to a resort in Fox Lake, but they would never send people to us, they weren't as full as we were.

EG: But if we didn't send them they'd go to some other area out of here and—

KG: But there's one lady from our church, Lovelane, Mrs. Lovelane, Erma Mae. When she was full she would ask me if I had openings so that was very nice of her and I appreciated it.

Of course Cross Lake was bigger and they were advertising more at that time. And now they don't have too many of those small resorts there either, it's bigger, like Schreeders. What's it called?

EG: Boidlaws after her mother. And, she's still running it too, she's been there for quite a while.

JF: When did you notice—some of the resorts, particularly in the Brainerd area were smaller and over the years they got much, much bigger. Did you notice that happening, did you notice a bigger split between the resorts that were getting really big and those that were small.

EG: It came on gradually, but it came on, I think, due to the cost of operating, on taxes and insurance and all, and the cost of maintenance, and the smaller resorts couldn't compete, they had to go out. And they were breaking up and selling their places off to private parties, and the ones that were able to, like the ones on Gull and Madden's and such, they build up all the time and kept on getting bigger.

KG: They had more cabins.

EG: They were bigger to start with. And again, your situation, your set up has to be bigger. We were limited to our grounds, just how much bigger we could get. We were utilizing most of our lakeshore that we sold with our resort. Where along the road here, you couldn't use that.

JF: What do you think is the future of so-called Ma and Pa resorts in Minnesota today.

EG: Bleak.

JF: Bleak.

EG: That's what I would say, because of the cost of operation. Minnesota ties your hands behind you and then says, now go and make a living. I could not put a sign up. I had an awful time getting a sign up advertising my resort, on the highway. That's one thing. Number one, I couldn't get a sign up there. Instead of the Highway Department cooperating with us, Emily for years didn't have a sign pointing to Fifty Lakes, on Highway 61. And the cost of operation; taxes are way out of line for you to operate in a smaller resort.

KG: And you have to be a jack-of-all-trades. You have to be a carpenter, a plumber, and a good housekeeper to run a resort. You couldn't afford to hire help.

EG: And insurance is way out of line. Everybody wants to sue you for nothing.

KG: We never could afford liability insurance. A friend came and she said, "Do you have liability insurance?" and we said, "We can't afford it." She said, "What if somebody slips on that dock?" I said, "Well the Lord is with us, so far." [Laughter.]

EG: I forget what percentage of our gross, it was maybe 23-35% would go for taxes and insurance alone. We were way under-insured. We couldn't keep up. We couldn't have liability and everything you had to have to operate. It just wasn't on the books.

KG: But it was a good livelihood, and the children loved it, and the children, it was a good education for them because they made friends and they enjoyed the summers. They have fond memories too, like we do.

EG: It's a good way to raise a family.

JF: You said something interesting about the changes. Do you think people could come into Minnesota or Wisconsin any place the way you two did and start up a resort this small and make it stay?

EG: Not today. I don't think they could, I really don't. If fact, to start up a resort, the same would pertain to farming, the capital that you would have to have to start out from scratch would be such that you would be foolish to put it in there because you are going to have to work and it is going to cost you money, where you could put that capital in the bank and invest it in something else and get a much greater income from it than you would be by putting it in a resort or a farm.

KG: But there are people that want to get away, like people from California, they'd do anything to get away from the hustle and bustle of a big city, the crime, the violence and the pollution. This is like paradise.

EG: But they are coming here to live, not to make a living and run a resort. The point is, I don't think it's feasible at all.

KG: But it could be a sideline with something else.

EG: Well, the people that bought ours, they were both teachers, now that would have been an ideal situation.

JF: They just didn't like it.

EG: They didn't. She didn't like the work and all he wanted to do was fish. He didn't think this working all day and fishing half the night—that was out.

JF: I wonder if there are people who would do that who have this idea what it is like to run a resort and have no idea—

EG: Yes. That's only about 95% of the people.

KG: They used to tell us that. "You're lucky, you're on vacation all year on."

EG: "You're on vacation, how lucky can you be." But everybody has an idea that it's all fun and games, but, sure I live to fish and I'd fish in the evening for a couple of hours, but I wasn't fishing all day every day.

KG: And you have to like people because if you haven't got a working relationship with the people— [some type of interruption]

JF: Kay, you were talking a little while ago about the fact that it is a full-time job and the fact that even after the season ends, you not only have to like people, but you got to keep in touch with them after it's all over. Tell me a little about your Christmas letters and stuff like that too?

KG: Oh, I try to keep a long list of the old people that used to come and, of course, some of our guests bought places right on our lake, so they were our neighbors. They were our guests and then they were our neighbors.

JF: They liked it so well that they stayed.

KG: Yes, they stayed. And we helped the state out with that too, because they were Illinois people and then some people didn't just buy on Mitchell, they bought on Eagle. And, who else bought? Hasners bought, Miss Sweetly bought.

EG: Any number bought.

KG: At least six of our guests wanted to stay here and liked it. And they would come to visit us even after we sold the resort they would stop in.

JF: They probably still do.

KG: Oh yes. And now they stay on Fox Lake, they come back in the Fifty Lakes area, they still like this area because the lakes aren't as crowded as Cross Lake.

JF: Did you sometimes feel at the end of the summer like all your smile muscles were tired?

KG: We had a little rest after Labor Day we had a little rest and then the fall would come and then we would get the fall fishermen, the walleye fishermen. And I enjoyed fall because the bugs were gone and the weather was so beautiful. And then we'd have to start getting ready for tullibee netting and deer season and winter.

And of course the winters were sort of a time to write letters and be more with the children, with the family.

JF: Raising a family: this is a beautiful area, but also in the winter I imagine it can be pretty isolated. How did they get to school and everything?

EG: There was really no problem. You are not as isolated as much as you would think. When we first came here, Friday night we would run out "there's goes a car going by." But now so many people live here and are permanent residents. And, really, the school bus picks the kids up in the morning and brings them home in the evening, and they missed very few days of schooling all year.

KG: And we have mail service right at the door. So that's—

EG: We're really not as isolated as you might think.

JF: Where did your kids have to go when they went to school?

EG: Well, they started at Fifty Lakes. But then they closed that school. They only had up through sixth grade to start with. But after sixth grade they would have to go to Pine River or Mildred. Then they closed the school and all of them go to Pine River now.

JF: How long a bus ride is that?

EG: About twenty-five miles, one way.

KG: They had different social activities for the children at school. And they had a few friends that they were able to—Starks locally, they had horses so the kids went horseback riding and different school functions so the kids were busy.

EG: There was always something going on.

JF: Tell me, for you, both of you, what town around here is really the social center for people who live here in your area, where do you go? Your church is in Emily.

EG: No, we go to Cross Lake. You see Cross Lake is mostly a center now, and we do more of our business in Brainerd, which is our county seat, but we don't go to Brainerd too much, but if we do we go to Cross Lake or even to Fifty Lakes or something like that. And there is usually local doings going on and we will go to them.

JF: So Emily really isn't much of a place to go.

KG: No.

EG: Not for us much any more. It used to be.

JF: What about the 50's and 60's?

EG: Then we went more to Emily. We were connected more with Emily. We used to go to church in Emily.

KG: We helped start that church in Emily.

EG: Yes, that got started, and we belonged to Outing Association. We did go to Emily more years back than we do now.

KG: He started working in Cross Lake, for the Cross Lake Lumber Company.

EG: I worked for the Cross Lake Lumber Company.

KG: And we joined the church, our priest that was Emily went to Cross Lake, Father Foster, so then we went to Cross Lake.

JF: So that's really your social center.

EG: Yeah, that's more of our center now.

KG: I joined the women's group and then he joined The Knights of Columbus. So socially—

EG: We do more at Cross Lake than we are in Emily.

JF: And Brainerd has gotten so big now.

EG: Oh, Brainerd is—

KG: I don't know, Brainerd was never friendly turf to—Brainerd seemed more for Brainerd people.

EG: Brainerd, our business would be more in Brainerd, and the bank and the courthouse. Otherwise we only go there for shopping and things.

KG: We joined Brainerd one year, for the resort, and I don't think they sent us any business.

EG: We didn't get anything out of that.

KG: So we said, "They're going to fill Brainerd first, and what they have left over they'll send then to Fifty Lakes.

EG: They never had anything left over.

KG: We did have some deer hunters years ago, from Brainerd, they like the deer hunting here. Esser, from Esser Bar, he was one of their early deer hunters.

JF: Did you feel that the Brainerd association was more oriented to Gull and Pelican and Nisswa.

KG: I think so.

EG: Not even so much for Pelican as for Gull and Nisswa and that. They definitely were that way.

KG: Of course, I think there was competition then. The resort business was kind of new and they wanted their own area.

JF: That's what I was wondering a little earlier if there was [inaudible, but to the effect that there was competition in the different areas].

KG: Yes, there was competition, sure. Because even one older lady on Eagle Lake, that's a neighboring lake, she said something about are you full, and I said, "We've got some weekenders in."

She said, "Oh, we never bother with weekenders. I said, "We take them for a day or a week because out of that they'll come back again and that means something." Of course, we're on a road, but we're not like on a highway where you get these people, because we are three-and-a-half miles off the beaten path, you know.

JF: When did they pave Highway 136 out here?

EG: When we were building this place it wasn't paved. And in 1977, '78, they had to build a new bridge before they paved the road. So that was paved about a mile-and-a-half from the corner and then finished it up to the county line. That's about three miles north of here, is the county line.

JF: So all of the time you operated the resort it was a dirt road. And you never felt that was a disadvantage?

EG: Oh, no, I didn't.

KG: Some of the people used to say, "Oh do we have to go back in for a license of something?" So we carried fishing licenses, we had some soda pop, we carried a few groceries, you know, for their benefit, so they wouldn't have to go back in.

EG: We never made anything on the pop—the kids drank the profits.

JF: But that's interesting, because as time went along, did you carry a few more things?

KG: Yes, uh huh, uh huh. Some mosquito dope and some stuff for their benefits, you know.

EG: So they wouldn't have to go back in and pick things up.

KG: We'd even tell the owners and they didn't even bother with fishing licenses. See, with fishing licenses you had to buy a whole book at a time. That was like \$60-\$70. You had to buy the book in advance. And now I think they make a little more profit selling the licenses. I think they make \$2.00 or \$2.50 for the book.

JF: How much was available at that time in Fifty Lakes, was there very much, what was in Fifty Lakes in the 40's and 50's?

EG: Well, Fifty Lakes? When we came there was just a store on the corner, and that started in, I think, 1902 or something like that. Bob Dudley started that, and there was just a store here, and just a school across the street.

KG: Just a general store, and a little-bitty gas station.

EG: The gas station was just a little oil shed right in front and the gas pump and—

KG: But they did sell ice cream—

EG: But that was just at the store. There was just nothing else there. And, of course, when the school closed, why, then somebody put a Laundromat in there and a real estate office and then the village built the liquor store down the road from there, and the Sports Club—that building was built.

JF: Was there always a post office there?

EG: The Post Office used to be in the General Store and then it moved out of the store and it moved to a small building and then they moved it to the village hall, and they moved it back to the store, but with a new addition onto the store.

JF: What about when we were here two weeks ago and we had lunch at—

KG: The Barn.

JF: Tell me a little bit about that place.

EG: That was, a fellow by the name of Bob Dudley owned Fifty Lakes store and he used to have cattle in that barn—

KG: And that was a big field—

EG: And he would make ice cream from there and then he would sell the ice cream in the store. But when Bob sold out, he's died since then, and Howard Hogle bought the barn, he had the store and then when Howard Hogle come in, there was two or three owners in between Howard Hogle and Bob Dudley, then Howard developed Howard's Barn, and the golf course there, a nine hole golf course. And he tore some of the stanchions out and put a bar in there and you have the lunch room there and—

KG: And then he also built the gas station across the street.

JF: So he is kind of the entrepreneur around here.

KG: Oh, yes, and his wife is still living, Leona Hogle, and she ran the hamburgers there and then they sold it to Andersons and they're the ones that waited on us at The Barn. They're doing a good business—she's a good cook.

JF: So the little golf course there sort of attracts people from the resorts around here.

EG: Oh, definitely, see, years back people who come up here liked to play golf. They would go all the way over to Deerwood or the White Fish golf course over towards Ideal Corners. They would go there to play golf. But now there are two golf courses.

KG: But now there's one in Pine River too. There's one in Emily, Pine River, and Fifty Lakes.

JF: As you look back over your experience with the resort, would you do anything differently if you were building it up today or doing it, or are you pretty satisfied with the way it was.

EG: Well, I don't—if I had the capital and different things I would, but really with what we had to start with I think I was fortunate and pretty well satisfied, yes.

JF: You built a successful business and—

EG: And operated it and raised my family and didn't get rich, but we made a living and my kids are all—I don't think they were really hurt. They had a chance for an education—if they took it. If they didn't, why, there's nothing I could do about that.

KG: It was a lot of hard work for me but we enjoyed it. He enjoyed the fishing, we enjoyed the association with the people—outside of a few people that were lemons—most of the people were lovely—they were really nice people.

EG: And I'll say this, when we moved up here, there were quite a few of both her people and mine, they thought we were going to the end of the world, they thought we were crazy. We left our families and jobs and moved up here, but over the years they were envious and said "I wish we'd done the same," and that there.

KG: Now they are envious, and we even have some friends that bought in Florida and they said, "You made the smarter move, buying in Minnesota." And then I just got a letter from my sister the other day and she said "You were smart moving to Minnesota" she said "with all the pollution in Illinois." She has trouble breathing.

EG: The problems they have down there is terrible.

EG: And you get to spend the winters anyway—

KG: And anyhow, we are fortunate, we're able to go away for the winters and when we can we'll be happy to stay in Minnesota because—the people say to us "Well how can you stay in Minnesota when it's thirty below zero. Or even 30 above. Says, "You don't mind it, it's a dry cold." It's not that bad.

EG: When we go for the winter and go away and come back and get the paper from Tucson. We go to Mexico and get a paper from Tucson, and I come home and it gives temperatures all over. So I come back, "Oh, thirty below there in Minneapolis." there's one fellow from Utah and he says, "Thirty below zero, that ain't fit for man nor beast. [Laughter]

JF: But you lived through it.

EG: Why, the kids go to school in thirty below and think nothing of it.

KG: They stand out waiting for a bus in thirty below and the kids don't mind it.

JF: As you look back over thirty years can you think of anything, any events or people or anything, that stand out particularly for you, things that happened over the years at the resort or—

EG: There's so many of them that if I was an educated person who could write, I could write books about it, but really I just can't think of any one thing offhand.

KG: But we love Minnesota. Minnesota is really tops to us.

JF: You're loyal Minnesotans.

KG: Yes, even though we weren't born here we still love it.

JF: You've spent most of your lives here now.

KG: Yes, well, we're considered natives now, because more new people are moving in and the climate is—

EG: We should be on the Chamber of Commerce or something because I brag on us everywhere I go. It's been good to me.

KG: And, people complain about the bugs, we say, "Well the bugs are here just for a little while but, in the fall they go away and we can sleep in the summer-time without the air conditioning on with the sheets, you know. The summers make up for the winters, so we love Minnesota.

EG: The winters, I never minded the winters here, the severity of them. It's the length of them. Our winters are so long, but otherwise I don't mind it at all.

KG: And then after my surgery I was afraid I would slip, with hip surgery. So we said we better go, so if I slip I don't want to have hip surgery over again.

JF: But as I said you still have got all this beautiful—

KG: Oh yes, oh yes.

EG: But in the winter, if you look out, it looks like a Christmas post card. The trees will be, especially if you have a wet snow, just hanging on the trees and everything. You don't have to go out, you can sit tight. But you know, if you have to get out, like I used to have to get out every morning and drive, why that was a little rougher, but I don't know—

KG: We still like to shovel a little snow. We shovel a little. But I don't mind going out there and shoveling. We used to have a snow blower and we gave it to one of our daughters. But it's kind of exercise, it's good for you if you don't overdo it.

EG: I say that we're real fortunate, and I thank God for it because at my age how many people are able to do the things that I am and can do. I actually do—I enjoy my life, I enjoy everything I want. And so I think it's due to a large extent to the kind of life I've lived here.

JF: A good healthy outdoor life.

KG: Um hum, I think so.

EG: I have a brother who is eight years younger than me, and I'm telling you, he is in terrible shape. He looks at me and says, "Ed runs around like a high school kid. But I say I'm very fortunate and I thank God for that.

JF: Mr. and Mrs. Gilman, thank you very much for your time.

Minnesota Resort Industry Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society