

Keith Butler
Narrator

Amy Rieger
Interviewer

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Bemidji, Minnesota

AR: I guess we'll start out briefly then with your background, like when you were born.

KB: I was born in North Dakota in October 1935.

AR: How long were you in North Dakota.

KB: We moved here in June of '38.

AR: Was there any particular reason why your parents chose to move to this region?

KB: Yes. The Depression and the dry years in particular hit North Dakota and the prairie very hard and basically my dad went bankrupt farming in North Dakota. In fact, when he left North Dakota, he had an old, old truck, and a neighbor had an old truck, and my mom's brother, Herbert, drove Dad's truck. And they loaded the two of them and left in the middle of the night because the bank had a lien against everything that my dad owned and all he could salvage was two truckloads and he brought a team or horses and a couple of cows and a few household goods and a little bit of machinery – what they could get on those two old trucks – and came to Minnesota. His dad, my grandpa, lived here at Itasca. He lived in the town of Mallard. Have you come across the town of Mallard?

AR: I've come across it briefly. I know where it was generally located and it's not there anymore.

KB: Right. It's a ghost town now. It was on the shores between Mallard Lake and Robinson Lake in Itasca Township. The railroad, the _____ railroad, ran a spur out from Shevlin area. Actually the spur was between Shevlin and Salaway. The track went out to Itasca through Mallard into what is now Itasca Park, on the east side of Squaw Lake, and it basically ended at the south end of Squaw Lake in Itasca Park. And the train backed all the way down, and they loaded logs from Squaw Lake and it went across the southeast end of Long (?) Lake. Some of the pilings are still in the two lakes, that are associated with the railroad. Mallard was a town on that railroad spur. When I was in college in the 60's I did a study of Mallard and Itasca Township. At that time Mallard was the biggest town in Clearwater county. In fact, Mallard probably would have become the county seat

had it not been in south end of the county and had the railroad been a more permanent fixture. As soon as the railroad, as soon as the logging was done, the railroad was picked up and the town died. My grandpa had the post office for a time in Mallard, he ran a harness shop, that was his main occupation. He was a harness maker and he ran a harness shop in the town of Mallard. Basically my dad's family was here at Itasca. His sister lived just east of Mallard and his brother Frank lived in section 26 of Itasca Township. We moved onto Uncle Frank's farm in section 26 in June of '38. I was two and a half years old and basically I've been associated with the Itasca area ever since.

AR: What was your grandfather's name?

KB: Encoh. E-N-C-O-H, I think, Griggs.

AR: What were your parents' names?

KB: My mom's name was Phoebe Fix, that was her maiden name. My dad's name was William Harrison Butler. Incidentally, grandma and grandpa are buried there at Itasca and so are my mom and dad. So I'm the third generation of Butlers that have lived there. And my son lives there and his children, so we're into the fifth generation of Butlers that have lived at Itasca. There aren't many have done that. Just a few families around that are in their fifth generation. Usually the kids leave.

AR: That's wonderful. Do you remember anything from when you first came to the area when you were that young? Do you have any memories? It must have been a little bit of a shock coming from the North Dakota prairies to the big, huge trees, even as a child.

KB: I don't have a lot of recollections about that adjustment. My mother had a terrible time adjusting to the trees. She was very claustrophobic. Just wanted to push those trees away, because she had been born in the prairie and raised in the prairie. But later in life she learned to love the trees and they learned to love Itasca Park very much and they passed that on to us kids. Some of my first memories about Itasca – I was very young, but we had an old '29 Chevy. We had more horses than we did vehicles. I can remember my brother and I and my sister taking the horse and buggy down to Lake Itasca to go swimming. We did not have plumbing in our home. After haying we would take the horses and go down and take a bath in the lake. But that's some of my first memories. I can remember Teddy Wegmann – he died in '41, so I would have been six years old – my memories are very limited. I remember being afraid of him.

AR: I've heard that before!

KB: Maybe it was just a thing that our parents did more than he was a fearful person. I'm not sure he was all that fearful. He was just old and grouchy. Probably we'll all be! But I can remember Teddy Wegmann. I remember him sitting on the step and going down to the park and going down to his store.

AR: Can you describe a little bit the activities of your parents in the early years?

KB: I think holidays, not vacations, were much more important. They were a real family time. They were looked forward to because everybody worked and worked so hard and so much that we looked forward to the holidays so they became special. I think parents tried to make them special. Coming and going was a lot more difficult and there wasn't a lot of it, so when a holiday came it was a very special time. Not only family-wise, but I think community-wise. I think some of the – we always went to Itasca for picnics for those holidays. I can remember the 4th of July, for example, being such an important time. We never started to hay until the day after the fourth, so that was not only a family time and happy time and holiday time, but when it was the last day of fun and play before we started to hay. I can remember being down at the park for holidays and other families, the Lingeren (?) family would be there around their table. And the Thompson family. All the families in the community were down there around their table having their picnic and their celebration. I remember as a child, I must have been 7,8,9,10 years old, right after chores in the morning, mother would always have some boxes ready to go to the picnic and they would take me down. We didn't have food on this first trip, just things. We'd put the tablecloth on the table and put some boxes on the table and I'd sit on the table. So we'd claim our table. We always had our favorite spot. That was one of the things I did, was go down and reserve the table because the park filled up. It was very full.

Whenever we got company we would go to the park. It was a park that we would show off to the company. Now you get company and you go to town or the mall or you take company and to somewhere else. We always went to the park because it was close and it was really great. Lot of trees. A lot of our company came out of North Dakota and the trees were what _____.

AR: The last few years I've been at Grand Forks, so getting back to this area has been just wonderful. Would it be fair to say that you consider the park your own.

KB: Oh yes. Always have, and that's why I'm so fond of it today and we do so much for it and give so much back to it, because of the significance it's played in our childhood.

AR: So, your father farmed in the area. Were you educated right in Mallard?

KB: No. Section 26 was.... You see in those days, there were several elementary schools in a township. There was one at Mallard, one at Vern (?), and one at Itasca. Those are the three that are in my memory, In fact, the school in Mallard was moved at one time...I'm not sure where it was built. I think it was probably built in the town of Mallard, and Martin Bauke (?), who was kind of an influential fellow in that corner of the township, had a large family, and he led the effort to get the schoolhouse moved to a more central location. And they did in fact move it. They moved it in the middle of winter, they moved it on skids with horses, and they moved it. If I had a plat book in front of me I could give you locations. I'll have to get a plat book. There was Mallard school and Vern school and Itasca. We went to the Itasca school. I went through eight grades there at the country

school at Itasca. That would be a good topic to talk about, those old country schools, but I don't think we can get into that today.

End of first part of interview on July 29, 1993. End of tape 1, side 1.

Tape 1, side 2. Continuation of interview on August 6, 1993.

AR: We can just pick up where we left off, with your school days.

KB: Has anyone talked about school days yet?

AR: Not very much. Milo (Stillwell) did a little bit. He went to Lake Itasca School and had to walk three miles through the park to get to school in the morning. But as far as classroom activities and what have you, no.

KB: Well, one room schools were an interesting concept. Itasca School was just a one-room school. Some of them had two rooms, but Itasca was a one-room school. It was facing south and it had an entry way in the southeast corner and the southwest corner. It had two front doors. I think originally it was thought – in fact, I have a vague memory of the east entry and cloakroom was for the girls and the west one was for the boys. I think that's why it was designed that way. But as the school got smaller we all used the west one and the east one became a store room. In the area in between those was the stage. The front part of the school was elevated one step and that's where the teacher's desk was. She had some shelves and things up there. The rest of the building was one room. Younger grades sat on the east side and the older grades – then it went first grade and second grade and by the time you got to the west wall it was the eighth grade. And in the back it was one-half of the wall that was the library and there were probably five shelves on that wall, maybe 100 books, I don't remember. Then there was a water fountain, the crock water fountain was on the other side. The water cooler. And then in between was the old wood stove. It had a jacket around it so the kids couldn't touch the stove. That jacket used to get hot. I don't know if it got too hot to burn, but it was certainly too hot to keep your hand on it.

Everybody was involved in everything. When the first graders would go up to do their reading or words or numbers, of course the other kids could listen and watch. They're supposed to be doing their work, but it was very exposed and open. Kind of the open classroom concept that some of the schools are going back to now. Often the older kids would help the younger kids, help the teacher. When a teacher read a story, she read it to everybody, so the story had to be fitted so that the younger kids could understand it, the vocabulary, as well as the older kids. You always had a recess in the morning and one in the afternoon, and everybody carried their lunch. I can remember when hot lunches were first implemented. I must have been in about fifth or sixth grade when they brought the hot lunch concept in. I finished grade 8 in 1949, so that would have been probably right after the second World War.

The teacher, Tilly Sauer was the teacher much before my time, she's dead now. I don't know if you've come across the name Sauer. Ernie Sauer was one of the early homesteaders, this would have been his daughter-in-law. In fact, I think that's how Tilly met Bob, Bob Sauer, who she later married. Tilly stayed there, at one of the cabins or room and board at Sauers and she met Bob and they got married. She had to walk half a mile to the school. Of course she had to start the fire and carry the water and get the building ready for kids when they got there. Agnes Norhe was my first teacher, I don't know how you spell that, I think it's NORHE, she's still alive. She later married a Fred Seaver. They're both alive and still married today. She was my first grade teacher up through probably fifth grade, and then Mrs. Hemmerick, Mrs. Bill Hemmerick, she taught the rest of my years. I don't remember the teachers that followed after I left.

The school was finally discontinued sometime, I think, in the sixties. Alvin Katzenmeyer was on the school board. If you interview Alvin it might be interesting to know what year the school finally closed up. But in those years everybody walked to school except those parents who could haul their kids. In the later years, after I was gone, then they did have a school bus. It wasn't a bus. It was just a neighbor with a car and the parents had to pay for that, but he went around and hauled the kids to school. The only one I remember was Tommy Forbes, he's Viola Forbes husband. I think you're going to be interviewing Viola Forbes. Tommy drove the school bus. But all the years I attended we had to walk to and from school. One of those things that we talked about as kids, now that we've grown up, is the fact that most of the kids, not all of them, well, probably a little more than half of the kids, were farm kids. Then the rest of them probably came from Itasca Park. But out of the farm kids – in those days we only had one pair of shoes. The shoes we wore to school we wore at home to do chores. And we all had cows and pigs and horses and I can't imagine what the schoolhouse must have smelled like – it would have had to be from three and six, seven bigger boys that were involved in chores at home that would have had manure on their shoes. That was just something that was part of life and no one ever thought about it. I would just like to go back and spend one day back in the old school.

Every spring we had what we called "rainy day" (??) -- clean-up day. It was a big day and we would rake the schoolyard and parents would bring potluck food and we'd have a big picnic and we'd clean up the place. It was always something we looked forward to. We also had field days when we would have competitions. If I remember right, we even joined with the Vern School a few years and had some competitions between Itasca and Vern. Races and beanbag throw and all that kind of stuff. But the biggest point was the schoolhouse was the center of the community activity. Socials, Christmas programs, all the holidays. Mother's Day and all of the holidays. All kinds of basket socials and carnivals and things that we would have. School was the focus of the community. Parents would come, everybody would come, whether you had kids in school or not. It was a fun time. I remember one time during the war, World War II, we were in the school, they had a telephone.

A lot of the homes did not have telephones yet. We did not have a telephone in our home. But it was the old crank phone, when it was a short and long, or two long and three shorts, the old crank telephone hung on the west wall. I remember during the war we were at the school for some social function and the phone rang. It was the civil alert or civil defense. Somebody had spotted an airplane, of course, so there was a blackout. We had to turn off all the lights and we sat in the school for what seemed like hours. Pitch black. Nobody could do anything. We just sat there until the phone rang again and said it was okay to turn the lights back on. Obviously it wasn't even _____ in northern Minnesota.

Well, what else about the school? Outdoor toilets, there were two, one for girls and one for boys. That had a lot of interesting implications. Ernest Sauer gave the two acres to the school district to have the school built, and then when the school was discontinued the land was deeded back to the Sauer family. That was one of the conditions that he gave the land, that if it were every discontinued the land would go back to them. Amos Fultz bought the building. Amos is over at old Pine Center. He ended up with the building. I think it's still over at his place. The Mallard School was moved to Bagley, the building was moved to Bagley, Kenny Seese (?). Kenny Seese bought the Mallard school and moved it to Bagley and he used it as a storehouse. And I think it still stands. The Vern School, was moved to Bagley and is part now of the Minnesota Historical Society in Bagley.

AR: Bert was saying something about that because his wife taught at Mallard and [unclear]. How many students were at the school?

KB: Maximum I suppose there were probably 20 maximum. I think more average number would probably have been 13 to 15, somewhere in there. I do have a picture of the school, and that was probably at its height, and there's probably a little over 20 people in that picture. They were not large.

AR: No, I don't imagine. Just like "Little House on the Prairie!" (laughter)

KB: (laughing) Just like "Little House on the Prairie!"

AR: When you graduated could you go past sixth grade, or eighth grade?

KB: Eighth grade at Itasca, then we went to Bagley High School.

AR: By that time there was a school bus...

KB: Yep, a school bus. The school would have been situated in the southwest quarter of the northwest quarter of section 26, if it ever totally disappears. That's actually where the schoolhouse was. In the very southwest corner of the southwest quarter of the northwest quarter of section 26. The Vern School was up in section 11 in Itasca Township, and Mallard School, after [unclear] moved it, was in section 8. It actually would have been in

the southeast quarter of the northeast quarter of section 8 of Itasca Township. And I think they were the only three schools in Itasca Township.

AR: Those are the only names that I've heard at all. You've mentioned the Fowler name a couple of times, do you remember the resorts that were up there? The Arizona (??), Parkview or any of those when you were a child?

KB: I remember them all. Yep.

AR: Was it generally pretty busy up there or...

KB: As a kid they seemed terribly busy. There were people all around. Sauer's resort was called Pine Grove Resort. Technically I think most of the people would just call it the Sauer Resort. That was built up by Ernest Sauer, who homesteaded. The Parkview resort was over in section 36, and that was built up by August Snyder, and August Snyder was some relative of Wegmann. Bert can tell you about that. But yes, I remember the resorts very well. Dick Sauer, who is part of the third generation of Sauers. There was Ernest Sauer – have you talked about the Sauers at all?

AR: Briefly. Just personal contact with people.

KB: Well, Ernest Sauer was the homesteader. Then Robert Sauer was their only son, and Richard, or Dick, Sauer was my age, or one year older than me. So we were in high school together. I used to go down to the resort often because Dick and I were friends, we were buddies. Yeah, I remember the resorts.

AR: Do you remember having any contact with the clientele that frequented the resorts?

KB: Yeah. Yeah. The Sauer family and the Butler family were relatively close. And I remember Sauer having some guests from the city and Sauer would bring them over to our place because we had a farm and the city folk probably hadn't seen a farm or they had been raised on a farm and had _____ the farm and they wanted to come back to see the cows. I remember them bringing some of their guests over. I remember them having a relative, quite a distant relative, that came over from Germany after the war, and of course there was still a lot of anti-German feeling at that time. They brought those folks over to our place and talked about farming in the United States, and our country and their country. I remember that was quite the evening, because here were people who were on the other side in the war, they were sitting in our living room. As a kid it was kind of a scary deal; I thought they were going to attack me. (laughter) Then I remember going down and spending the night with Dick. I would go down there as boys and I'd stay overnight there and he'd stay overnight at our house. I remember the first movie camera that one of them had. They took a movie of Dick and I running across the yard and playing and then they showed it to us when they came back the following year or whenever. I remember seeing the movie of Dick and I playing and how impressed I was.

The cameras and some of the new technology of the day that we couldn't afford and we didn't have but tourists did have.

AR: You spoke a little bit about the anti-German feelings. Can you comment at all about the fact – I forgot who it was I was talking to -- they mentioned that they believe that Theodore Wegmann way back when he didn't have the post office anymore actually lost it because he was pro-German. Have you ever come across anything like that?

KB: No. I've always heard in visiting with the Sauers that Teddy had to go somewhere. You see, Ted had the post office, not first, but he had it early, then Johanna, his wife, took it over in about 1914, I think. I have the dates for that. Then they – it either became too much for Ted or something, and he asked Ernest Sauer to take it over. I think it was just for a time, with the intent that Ted or Johanna was going to get it back. But that never happened. Whether they didn't want it back. I've always heard from the Sauer point of view that they didn't want it back. But I never heard...it could have been. Teddy Wegmann was strong-minded enough. He was a very opinionated person, and if he had an opinion, I would understand that he would rub people the wrong way with his opinion if he were pro-German. That could have been a problem, but I never heard that.

AR: Have you ever heard anything about how he was maybe a ladies' man?

KB: Nope. I vaguely remember Teddy. He died in '41 and I would have only been six years old. And I don't remember his wife at all, although she lived for another three years. I don't remember her at all. It's just a little bit before my time, my memory.

AR: This may be right before your memory as well, in '38... do you remember any remembrances of the CCC?

KB: I don't remember of I remember the CCC, but people constantly talked about it and it's a fine line between do you remember the fact or are you just constantly reminded of it by a picture or talk. I can remember the camps and that was really before my time. I remember them working on some of the buildings in the park, particularly the bath house because I used the beach a lot. And I remember them working on it while we went swimming and we couldn't go near it and the logs would pile on us and our parents had us half scared to death. We couldn't go in it or near it. And incidentally, last time we talked we talked about going down to the park with horses and going swimming—the beach is not where it is today. At that time the beach was right at the southeast end of the museum. There are some steps going down. The steps are still in there. The swimming beach... there was a dock that went out and the launch came there and they would tie up at the dock and people could walk up to Wegmann's store and back and the beach was on either side of that dock. It was at the base of the steep hill. It wasn't the ideal place for a beach, although the lakeshore was nice. Then they moved it down to where it is today. I remember them telling us that they had broken glass and put the glass in there to keep the kids out of the old beach, to force us to... Now, I don't think they did that, I'm sure they didn't do that, but they told us they did and we were feared to go in there and we went

down to the new beach. I remember that being an adjustment. We never liked the new beach as well as the old beach.

AR: When they were working on the new beach house, do you remember having any contact at all with the CCC boys?

KB: No. We have some pictures of my sister Ruth who is now dead standing down by the beachhouse. Her picture was taken down there.

AR: Do you remember any talk, like your parents or other local residents, about their feelings about the CCC and their work in and around the park area?

KB: Everything that I remember was positive. I don't remember any negative from our family and the people we associated with. I don't recall any negative comments or feelings toward the CCC.

AR: I've never really heard anything negative either, I was just curious. Did you have a lot of occasion, besides going down to the swimming beach, to explore the park at all? Hiking down to Nicollet cabin or anywhere of that nature?

KB: Not as a child. I remember frequently going around the wilderness drive. We did not get out of the car and go off into the woods exploring. I can remember going and climbing the tower. In those days they used the tower not only for fire observation, but they used it for a PR thing. You could go up the tower and the ranger was there and he would talk about the park and things of the park. I remember Olaf Kwalbe (??) being one of the rangers that sat in the tower. So that we got off the beaten track a little bit. As a child I think I was on every one of the lakes fishing. On Mary Lake, Itasca, Elk and Squaw Lake. Course we always went down to the headwaters and the picnic area, but not exploring. I did that later. I did that later when I became a teenager, but not as a child.

AR: If you have any recollections – this isn't a controversy, just a conflicting picture that I've been getting -- a couple of people have mentioned that there was an actual POW camp up by Squaw Lake. We think they are getting that confused with the air force recuperation camp that was up there. Have you ever heard anything that there was a German POW camp up there?

KB: No. But Ben has all that information.

AR: Right, right.

KB: I remember when the air force camp was there. In fact, some of the officers lived at the Parkview Resort. Guy by the name of Mackenzie, and there daughter Harriet Mackenzie was a little older than I, must have been about three years older, in fact my brother dated her, I can remember them. They are the only ones I remember by name, but there must have been four or five of them that lived at the Parkview Resort. The public

was forbidden to go in there. They had a gate and I don't ever remember being in there. It was kind of a mystical thing, a mysterious thing, as to what was going on there. But I didn't hear anything about POWs. I remember when they had the fire, I remember seeing the fire and the light in the sky, and that was kind of the end of the camp after the fire.

AR: Ben has said that the only records he has is that there was an air force recuperation but no POWs. I just thought I'd bring it up since you're in the area. Do you remember when the Wegmann estate was settled and moved out of there.

KB: I remember it happening, but I knew nothing about it. I remember when the John Clark estate was settled. I don't know if you've come across the Clark name and Clark homestead. John Clark homesteaded, and Bert might get into this some, but John Clark homesteaded (pause). Well, part of his homestead was part of the parking lot for the headwaters building, the headwaters souvenir shop. That plantation out in front, that was the old John Clark field. He homesteaded on the west side of that field, and then he later moved down by the river. After John died first, no, I think she died first, I don't remember that, but when their land was sold it was sold at a public auction, and a Joe Mockford, who was the forest ranger at that time, bought it at that public auction. And we were under the impression, and by we I mean most of the Itasca community, were under the impression that Joe and his wife bought it to move in there, to live there. And nobody wanted to bid against him because they were so pleased. He was getting close to retirement and I think the community was pleased that he was buying a home in the area and was going to stay in the area. But he didn't keep it only for a short time because he bought it for the state.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

AR: ...the park and the connection with the community. Was there a lot of contact between the local residents who weren't employed in the park and forestry and the head of the park?

KB: Early on, and I don't know when the change happened, it probably happened in the sixties, it was a gradual change, but early on before that, I felt, and I know my family felt, that there were two distinct subcultures at Itasca. There were those that worked in the park for the park and those that did not. The people in the park had a lot of the conveniences a lot sooner than people outside the park, like running water and indoor bathrooms and electric lights and modern telephones and those kind of things. That all happened for the people in the park before it happened to those outside of the park. I think there was some anti-feeling, I don't know, some feeling on the part of all those outside of the park towards those that were in. But as the park started to grow and employed more of the people around the park...you know, at one time the park was run by two, three people, and then a couple of people, Walter Nelson, at the university and a couple more at the forestry station, so totally there was probably three, four, five, six, seven families in the park, and there kids went to the same school as we did and we had contact with them there. But there was definitely some feeling of jealousy and resentment.

But as the park started to employ more and more people, and they hired people from right outside the park, then that feeling went away. That doesn't exist today.

AR: Can you describe any of the park personnel that you came in contact with as a kid?

KB: Oh year. Walter Nelson was a manager at the biology station at Itasca for the university. Paul Nelson, their youngest son -- they had three sons, Robert, Curtis and Paul -- and Paul was my sister's age, so we were quite close. Walter had a cow, he had a cow that he milked and, in fact, I think they used my dad's bull to breed their cow. We were very close to the Nelsons. I remember Walter and my dad after the war, they sat in the living room talking one time and Walter finally got 10,000 miles out of a set of tires, and that was fantastic. You know the rubber during the war was so bad. And Walter always had foreign cars. Small, economy cars. He was the first one in the community to buy a small, economy car. There was a lot of teasing and talking about that. When his oldest son Robert, Bob Nelson, was a pilot in World War II, and he was shot down and he was killed in World War II. And I remember when the news came to the community that Robert was killed and it was just devastating on Nelsons. In fact, the last time that Robert was home on leave, Walter had a locket -- in the early days, some of the men wore lockets around their necks -- he had this locket or some kind of piece that hung around his neck, he gave that to Robert and hung it around his neck and told him to bring that home. Whether that ever came home or not, I don't know.

Andy Peterson was the park manager when I was a boy. Andy was kind of a grouch as I remember him and we used to tease him. We had an old '38 Dodge that used to backfire if you would turn the key on and off. If you would turn the key off and let it coast a bit and turn it on it would backfire just like a rifle shot. We used to go down there, dumb kids as we were, this was after I was a teenager, and we used to drive by the park headquarters and make that car backfire. Of course, he would come looking. He never did catch us. We never got in trouble over it. I remember Andy Peterson being kind of a grouch and we really teased him. I remember the first time park stickers were instigated. They were a dollar a piece and the controversy in the community. We weren't going to pay the dollar and how we did things to get around paying that dollar. I remember the forestry probably more than the university people or the park people.

Frank Pugh was the forest ranger and he had three daughters, Arnella, Lucy and Betty and we were all in high school together. Down there a lot. Frank Pugh loved Itasca Park. I remember a story about Frank...I mean, he knew individual trees. One time after a big windstorm he went around the park drive and two of his trees had blown over and a crew was behind him and they were coming. They found him sitting on the trees and he was crying.

Joe Mockford was there later and Vern Miller. They were all good people. They really were. But those were the names of the park people Of course at the park under Andy Peterson was Clarence Norbey and Eddie Helberg (?), basically those two guys ran the park. I don't think Clarence Norbey had any children, but Helbergs did and they were

in school together. Delores and Irma. An interesting thing that I remember, Clarence Norbey, who was a child when Mallard was in its boom – I don't know the Norbey history – but Clarence was a young boy when Mallard was booming and he was sliding down the hill in a sled or some contraption, and a stick, now I don't remember whether it went up his rectum or just off the side, it almost killed him. He survived that. In those days the surgeries that were involved; he survived that and lived to be an old man. Those are some of the people of the park that I remember.

AR: Where did you usually go if you had to get supplies or go into town or something? Park Rapids or Bemidji or...?

KB: We bought a lot of our supplies there at Itasca, that was our store. But when we went to town we usually went to Park Rapids, because our cream – you see we milked cows and you didn't sell milk in those days you sold cream, you separated the cream from the milk – and the cream went to Park Rapids so then we would more associate with Park Rapids because of that.

AR: So that was your connection, the cream.

KB: Yep. We were connected with Bagley in that that's where we went to high school and Bill would have started in high school. We graduated in '49 so he would have started in '45. So we had that connection with Bagley. But I remember most of our shopping being done in Park Rapids. We didn't go to town often. We went to town once a month, probably. I remember going to Bemidji once during the war and we had four flat tires going to Bemidji and coming home. Rubber was so bad you couldn't buy tires. And of course in those days you didn't have a spare. In those days you had a tire repair kit, and you had a flat, you got out, jacked the car up, took the wheel off, took the tire off, took the tube out and patched the tube. It was a tube that had a scraper on the top of it and you took the top off and scraped the tube where the hole was. Then there were patches and a little glue, a drip of glue. You put the glue on the inner tube and put the patch on and let it dry, then you take the pump and pump the tube up and see if it was still leaking. If not, you let the air out of it and put it back in the tire and put the tire back on and pump it all up again. It could take 45 minutes to an hour to change a tire, and we had four flat tires on that trip to Bemidji and back.

AR: That was a long trip!

KB: I remember coming to Bemidji and Pine Ridge, which is over here (points at map). We got to Pine Ridge and we were just about to Bemidji. Of course now the town is built up a mile outside of Pine Ridge.

AR: Can you comment at all about the political involvement of the community of Itasca, whether it was on the national scale during the war, comments about FDR, or the state activities in the park. Was there a lot of political activity in the area?

KB: As far as political parties, I don't remember that. We were Republican and proud of that, and Sauers and Nelsons were Democrats. It was always obvious or evident which political party you belonged to. Everybody knew the Linnngrens were Democrats, the Thompsons were Republicans. Everybody knew what the other family was. There were always discussions and arguments . I remember when Franklin Roosevelt died, mother came out and my dad and I were out cleaning the bar when the news came on the radio, and my dad said, "good." I don't remember a lot of political activity. The DFL party did meet and caucus like they do today, and the Republicans had a caucus. My dad wasn't really all that involved in politics. I think Pfeifers were, and Nelsons were more. We weren't.

AR: What were some of the other things that you did for fun around the park when you had time? I'm sure you were busy doing chores and such...

KB: It was the picnics, and we talked about that. Whenever we had company, we'd take them down and show them the trees and the headwaters. Those were the two main things, the headwaters and the trees. We had a lot of ties in North Dakota, and after we left there we had a lot of people that would come and visit. The trees were just magnificent for them. Dad was always proud of the trees. He hated the way the tourists drove, because you'd get behind somebody from North Dakota, we used to always used to rib the North Dakotans of that, if you were driving behind them, a lot of times they would just simply stop right in the middle of the road and all four doors would open and people would get out and look at the trees. They'd just block the road and didn't think anything about it. You know the road through the park was the only road through the area. Everybody had to go through the park. The cattle trucks, the wood trucks. Everybody had to go through the park. I can remember the hill right behind the county line in the park, Swindberg who is a cattle trucker in that area, the hill was real icy and he lost control of it and it started back down the hill on him, and it tipped over and some of the cattle got away. And one of those cows survived the winter. It got all the way up into the Itasca Township, just south of where Ed Thompson lived, and a cow and a calf survived the winter in the swamp down there. And in the spring, they went in there and corralled that cow and calf. But they never did amount to anything. You couldn't put any weight on them...they always remained skinny. He kept them for two or three years before, I don't know what he ever did with them.

AR: Do you happen to remember when they had the buffalo and the elk?

KB: Oh yeah. The buffalo, we used to go down and feed them and get them to charge the fence. They would actually charge us and run into the fence and we used to think that was great joy. Let me tell you a story about the elk. But what else can I say about the buffalo. I remember the buffalo and going to see them and our parents harping at us not to hang onto the wire, stand back from the fence, and I remember when they were discontinued. They were the last think discontinued, so they were there pretty recently. The biggest delight I remember from the buffalo was getting them to charge the fence. We thought that was great fun.

But I remember the elk, too. And the elk would get out and I don't remember where the pasture was, Bert can tell you where the pasture was. But the elk would get out, then the local farmers would get together, local people, and drive them, chase them, coral them, get them back into the fence. And then they would get out and farmers would get together and put them back in. And finally the farmers were getting very exasperated with it. I remember the big bull elk would go up to a haystack – we didn't have bales, we had loose hay – and they'd go up to a haystack and get their horns into that hay and they would carry several hundred pounds of hay away and scatter it. Then they'd pick the alfalfa out of it. The cows would feed on it and the bulls would go back in. Finally some of the farmers said, "hey, this has got to cease." I remember walking home from school, and we lived in section 26, so we had to walk in kind of a northeasterly direction, the old Coat Road that went from Itasca to Bemidji went through that area so we walked on the old Coat Road, through Sauer's land, and we came to what is now gravel road 108. And right where the old Coat Road intersects with 108, Sauer had cut a fire guard around his land, so if there ever was a fire, they'd have a chance of stopping it before it got into these big pine. The elk were feeding on the north end of that fire guard, and of course we three kids, Bill and Ardis and I, we were scared of these elk. So we crossed the road and crawled in the ditch on the north side of the road until we got past the fire guard, then we went up on the road again and walked home. I remember my dad then shooting one of those elk. He was really proud of his shot. He had a .250 Savage, which I don't know how many people will appreciate. But the farmers, the local rural people, lived off the land and they shot what deer they had to shoot to get through the winter. ?? They didn't waste any meat, if they needed meat they'd go out and shoot a deer. Dad shot one of those elk. If I remember right it was either 250 yards or 280 yards he shot with that .250 Savage. He shot it right in the heart and killed it, and of course it was huge. He went and got Karl Golzway (??). Karl and Adelaide to help can and take care of that meat. I can remember my mother and Adelaide being scared to death the game warden was going to come or the ranger was going to come and they were going to get in trouble. They sang hymns while they were canning that stupid meat. And I remember Sid Rommel (??) who very early was at the forestry station, I don't remember if Sid was before Frank Pugh or at the same time, but Sid Rommel came to our house one day as we were just ready to eat, and we were having elk. Dad had invited him to eat, and I'm sure he knew what he was eating and he really enjoyed it, in fact he asked for several helpings and ate some of that elk meat. Basically that's what happened to the elk. The local farmers shot them all. The park didn't want them anymore, and they didn't know how to get rid of them. And that's how they were gotten rid of.

AR: You've spoken a little bit about the deer. I was wondering about the controversy of allowing hunting in the park. Do you recall any of that?

KB: Oh yes, I have a picture at home, in fact you may be interested in that picture, the first year they opened the park, we always had a gang of hunters that came from the south. In fact, basically they were the Katzenmeyer gang, before Alvin moved into the area. I remember that year we had 18 hunters that came, and they had 13 deer by noon of the

third day and they had to quit shooting because they ran out of licenses. But I have a picture, and I'm on the picture as a child, I was maybe 8 or 10 years old, we had 13 deer hanging on that picture, and they were all big, adult deer. I remember the controversy. I didn't understand it at the time, but it was certainly needed. One of the Katzenmeyer boys was down by Bohall Lake and he had seven or eight deer walk by him, and he had three licenses, and he picked out the three biggest deer and shot them. They didn't even know enough to run because they'd never been shot at before. It was just like going out in the pasture and shooting cows.

AR: Reflecting a little bit about your life in and around the park, can you describe some of the overall changes and development that have occurred that strike you as either good or bad, or comment at all about the development of the park?

KB: As the park has gotten more visitors, it had to develop. It's been force to do some things just to accommodate the numbers. One of the things that has always bothered me in a negative sort of way, I never really understood why when somebody got into a new position, whether it was at the park or somebody in St. Paul, they would have to justify their position so they would do some study and make some change in the park. Then the next guy would come in a few years later and completely change the whole thing. Roads are an example. The road coming in the north entrance used to be where it is now. It comes to the 'T' and then it went along the picnic grounds, it didn't curve and go to the left up the hills they way it does now, it went (pointing to a map) you can see where the plantation is. Then they moved it to where it is now. Then somebody came along and they cut off that stretch of road and put in another piece of road so you didn't go where the culvert is or the 'T' is now, then somebody came and moved it back to where it was the second time. So when you walk through the park there are a lot of old roads. Roads have been changed. When you get back in and you think you're back in where nobody else has ever been, and you come across an old road. The same with buildings. Like Brower Inn. Brower Inn was built, somebody had the concept or vision for Brower Inn, and then it was built. Then it was kind of not used. Then it was used. Then it was discontinued. Now they're talking about whether they should tear it down or not. That part of the development of the park I see as very negative, and I think a lot of the community saw it as negative. "Nobody knows what they're doing," that kind of thing. And that's partly because there has never been a big overall plan for the park. You just follow the plan. They're putting that together now. But this is 1990. I think early on it would have been good if there'd been a plan for the park, but park managers positions early on were appointed by the governor and were at the whim of the governor, so maybe that was kind of inevitable.

I don't know how else to talk about that. I don't think I answered your question very well.

AR: Well, it wasn't a very answerable question. It was more of a reflection. I was just curious about some of the things you've seen. Can you explain, or comment on, how and why you've become so very interested in park history and the history of the area? Is it because you've lived here all your life? I think it's fabulous.

KB: Let's talk a little bit about my personal involvement at the park. As the park started to expand, and that was in my lifetime, the park has gone from being run by a manager and two people up to a crew of, I don't know what their staff currently is but it's large and should be larger. During my junior year in high school, in '52 and '53, then '53 and '54, I was hired to mow grass down at the biology station. Walter Nelson hired Larry Patton and myself and we mowed grass. We did have power mowers, but they were the old push mowers and there is a lot of grass down there. In those days there was a lot of pride associated with neatly mowed lawns. That was a city concept. The rich people in the city mowed their lawns and kept them immaculate and that crept into the world. Now we're questioning some of that. Why do we mow grass? Well, we mow grass because we've always mowed grass. So they're not mowing grass as much anymore. We took real pride – Walter Nelson insisted on a good job, it had to look nice. The lawns were just like carpets. I think that was the beginning of the installation of pride and probably pride on my part.

Then, you see, I graduated in the spring of '53, and that summer I mowed grass still. And then, I think it was in the fall of '53, Roy Hinrich, who was one of the loggers of the park. You must understand that logging at the park at that time, the last logging that was done in the park, was selective cut. Every tree was marked by a forest ranger. They only cut dead and diseased trees. Any limbs were burned to try to control disease. In the winter of '53, Roy Hinrich hired me to come work for him in the park. We had a crew of four.

Tape 2, side 2

KB: ... (mentions some hard to understand names) probably not very well educated, but I think he knew how to do it, this work in the woods. Alvin Katzenmeyer ran the chainsaw. He did most of the chainsaw work. ?? Troy? would burn the limbs. That was his job, to chop up those limbs to where they were a burnable size and start the fire and clean up. I was hired to skid because I was from the farm and we had horses and I skidded the logs to a landing. Roy Hinrich ran the camp and he and I loaded the logs onto the sled and he would haul them on over the skid roads to where he could put them on a landing and haul them on the truck and haul them to the mill. So I worked in the park. I was a member of one of the last crews that worked in the park. Now Pritchard had kind of the southern part of the park. He was doing the same kind of thing, the same kind of crew. Roy at that time had the north part of the park. I used to love to skid the logs. I had a team of Nellie and Kate. A big old mare and a lanky young one. The logs had to be skidded onto the skidway in such a way that there had to be a big log first. That went on the far side of the sled, and then one or two smaller logs in the middle, and I had to make that decision, whether I would put one or two small logs in the middle, and then a bigger log as the third or the fourth log. Then the second tier and the third tier. That was my involvement in the park. First was mowing grass and then was cutting trees. So I got into some areas of the park that very few people ever get into. I don't think that there is a section of the park that I have not been on. Then of course I went to college and left the area for a few years and came back. The very first job I had when I came back was a timber inventorier. They

were inventorying the area, including Itasca park. There were six of us who worked in three-two man crews. Paul Rundell, at the regional office now, was kind of in charge. I really counted it as a privilege at that time to be a part of the timber inventory crew that worked in the park. That kind of rekindled my interest in the park and we got, again, back into areas of the park that very few people get to. There are some beautiful areas in the park. That kind of started my historical interest in the park. I wanted to get some of this stuff down before it's lost forever. But that's kind of how it started and how it was fueled. I saw some of these old-timers getting old, so I do what you did, but I didn't record it, just took notes. But I interviewed several of these old people that are now dead.

AR: Thank goodness that you did. When did you and your wife begin doing the programs for the park?

KB: Just this year. But the park has always been a special place. When we dated, Lynette and I often went to the park and walked and picnicked and canoed. I remember going across the lake in a canoe before we were married. We went across to Elk?? Point before the path went out to Elk Point because logging I had become familiar with it and it's a pretty point. I remember we were across the lake and we were just starting across the boat landing when the launch came. Of course, in a canoe, I was a pretty inexperienced canoe person, and those big waves, and she was scared to death and obviously we survived it. I proposed to Lynette in the park. That was when I asked her to be my wife. So that was kind of special. We still go back to the spot. One of my favorite places in the park is on the east side of Elk Lake, where the Elk Springs are. You know that lake is basically fed by springs and small streams. There are some beautiful springs on the east side of Elk Lake and somebody, and I think it was the CCC, somebody had taken a log,, that was probably a hollow log, and split it down the middle so you in essence ended up with a trough. And they dug that into one of the main springs and then supported the end of it. So the log stuck out of the side of the hill and the water ran down the trough and off the end. That was in there for years. In fact, it was in there when Lynette and I dated. We used to go there and drink off the end of that log because the water was so cold and crystal clear. But it's a hill overlooking Elk Lake. There used to be a turnout there and you could drive through there, but they discontinued that now and it's been restored to the wild. That's one of my very favorite places in the park is that hillside. Very pretty and very few people even know it's there.

AR: What importance do you see connected with Itasca State Park? Obviously you and I are both interested in history, and we see a great importance in preserving its history. But what do you say to people who say 'big deal about the history of the park, I don't care now.'?

KB: I think it's one of the last places that a guy's going to be able to see... For example, over at Rollag, Rollag is a community east of Moorhead, they have fenced off an area that was the old trace, or the old Red River ox cart trail. You can see it. Only about 100 feet long, they've preserved it. There aren't many places in the state where they have fenced off a part of a trail and preserved it for people to see it as it was. In Itasca there is some of

that same opportunity because it's been protected. Outside of that, farmers have bulldozed and open land and changed the face of the earth. In Itasca Park, some of that is still available if it can be fenced off and noted. For example, the old Turnbull Road. Turnbull built the first road... now not alone, he had as some history book says a force of assistants to help him... some of that old Turnbull Road can still be found. And I think it should it be fenced off just like they did at Rollag and a sign put up that this is part of the old Turnbull road, built in 1882, before that is lost. So you can physically see what they did. They didn't have horses and slips. They had buckets and shovels. Green's cabin, he was one of the early homesteaders but didn't stay the required five years, you can still find the foundation of his cabin. Now why is that important? Well, for one thing it's important because of the size of the cabin. The foundation is 15 by 21. That's the size of a house. For people to appreciate that a man and his family could live in a building that inside's measurements were 14 by 20. You put two or three kids in there, and a stove and a table and a couple of bunk beds, to appreciate what those people went through. Wegmann's cabin was one of the larger ones. That was built a little later, about 10, 12 years later. I'm trying to find Turnbull's cabin. Finally found a map about a week ago that shows the site of Turnbull's cabin, but I haven't found it yet. But just to preserve the way it was. If we don't we're going to lose it forever.

AR: How did you become involved with the wagon train? I unfortunately missed it!

KB: We don't have time to talk about the wagon train... maybe that should be done next time. But as an overview, in '89 the two Dakotas and Montana had their centennial year. They all had wagon trains, I think South Dakota had three wagon trains, North Dakota had at least two, and Montana had a couple. I really wanted to go on the Montana one. But they limited the out-of-state registrations and I was just too late and couldn't get in. I went on one of the North Dakota ones. But I was really bummed out about that. This would have been in '88, planning for '89. Then Lynette just put it to me. She said, "If you want to have a wagon train, why don't you have one of your own?" And I said, "What for?" And she said, "Itasca's centennial is coming up in '91, and what a grand idea." That's how the idea was spawned. I talked to Cleve Stillwell, he was the first one I talked to outside of family, and he did think about it a little bit. And he said, "Why don't we go meet with the park?" And we meet. We went up and met with Merle and Bryce and the manager of Itasca park at that time. And Bryce and Merle were all for the idea, and I remember walking out of that meeting and Cleve saying, "I think we just took the bear by the tail." It came out of the idea that I wanted to go on a wagon train, and I lost out of going on the one I wanted to so we decided to have one of our own. That was in October of '88 when I went and talked to Cleve. Then I went on one of the North Dakota ones just for the experience, and it developed into the biggest event of the Minnesota parks centennial. We had 400 people involved and 50 on the wagons and 250 horses, 16 days. It was great. A two week birthday party.

AR: Is there anything else you'd like to add that I didn't cover that you think I should about the park or your history in the park?

KB: No, I don't think so. I think that covers it pretty well, unless you want to get more into the wagon train. But we have kind of left that. Later in '91 they buried that capsule that was going to be open in 100 years, we put this document (shows her something)...it's several pages, but it's really kind of a synopsis of the wagon train, so that has been recorded. I can't think of anything else that I can contribute.

Itasca State Park Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society