

Donald I. Arters

An Oral History



Don and wife Mary (late 1940's)

Can you tell me where you were born, and when you were born?

I was born January 11th, 1927 in Vineland, New Jersey.

What are your parent's names?

My father's name was Clarence and my mother's maiden name was Grace Jackson. Clarence Arters was my father so Grace Jackson would be my mother.

Were they born in this country?

Yea. Well, I imagine my mother was born in Jersey and my father was, he was born up in Hastings on the Hudson in New York. See my grandmother, she had, he was her first child. She married this plasterer from up there in Hastings on the Hudson, and he died, then she came back down to Philadelphia and then he had a step sister and a step brother that were born here in Pennsylvania.

Were there people that were born outside of the country?

As far back as I've ever known, everyone was born in this country.

Do you know how far that goes back? Do you know when the first immigrants on your side of the family came here?

No. No one ever, ever talked about them. According to my father, they go back to the Indians.

Your father was German?

Yea. His father was German.

My grandmother, his mother, they were just, what do you call them, you know the people? I forget what you call those people now, you know, English people like Americans. (laughs) You know they really didn't have any nationality cause where they were born, their forebears go back so far in this country they - like Chester County, Bucks County, they were all over this area but, as far as I know, they were here for quite awhile.

Ok, so maybe they might have been here when some of the earliest Germans or the Dutch came over. Is there any Dutch in there, is it just -

Well, on my mother's side they're German, like the Yardley's. Everything that I know, it's only second hand I've heard. They're all - You can see my mother was 25 or so when I was born. Everything - As far as I know, they were all born here, at least maybe two generations before my father. Now for my mother, I don't know. She always said that she was related to the Yardley's in some way. Not her, her mother. She was Pennsylvania Dutch, my maternal grandmother was Pennsylvania Dutch.

And the Yardley's, they founded the town of Yardley in Bucks County.

Yea. He was a doctor, Dr. Yardley.

Do you know anything about that story?

I don't know too much about it. I was living here in Pennsylvania. My grandmother lived in Vineland and I never got to see her. She was bedridden as far back as I can remember so I never really did talk to her that much. My mother never said too much so really I don't know. Well, I only know from on my father's side, stuff that he told me.

What did your father do?

When I was born, he was a butcher, but he was a chef. He went to sea as a cook, you know, the Merchant Marines? He was a cook but then he became a chef. That's why he could be a meat cutter 'cause he had to learn meat cutting to be a chef. He had uncles that were meat cutters with the Acme Markets, I don't know what they were in those days, and he had one uncle which had his own butcher shop in Germantown. This uncle owned a farm up in Bucks County, Eureka, and when things were really bad during the depression, we lived there on this farm. My father sort of looked out for it and I think he worked weekends with his uncle. I don't know how long we lived in Yardley, maybe a couple years. Of course I imagine I was around four years old when we moved from Yardley back down to Philadelphia. So.

So how long were you in Vineland?

In Vineland, I don't know. I couldn't have been there too long. But I wouldn't even know 'cause, I'm just figuring, I think I was around four, between four and five, I imagine, when we left Bucks County. I can remember things that happened on the farm. You know like I - it was just my sister and me - and stuff like the time my sister hit me over the head with the shovel. I can remember my mother. You know the only water she could get was from the pump. We were out in the back of the house and she's trying to get this rag cold and ring that bell, you know the old farm bell? I think I still hear it ringing. She was pulling on that bell and trying to pump the water to get somebody to come up to help her.

How old was your sister at the time?

She was about a year and a half younger than me I guess. She couldn't have been more than well say she was three years old. I don't know what, it couldn't have been a regular shovel I don't imagine. I just know it was a shovel cause that's what my mother said.

Why did she hit you?

She was just - at that time she was just, rambunctious. She was always into some sort of trouble.

Did you do something to make her angry?

Probably, I don't know.

But that's one of the things I remember.

Were you seriously hurt?

Well, I don't know. They never - I never had any medical attention as far as I know. Another thing I remember, my father had a Model T Ford. I got my fingers stuck in the door - shut the door on my fingers, and I can remember this was just before we moved, I imagine. I remember sitting on the front - on the stoop outside with a sling-like. I guess I was around four or five then. That sticks out in my mind.

So you lived on this farm; that was during the depression and then you moved from there down to Philadelphia?

Yes.

What do you remember from the depression?

I was young, but I remember moving a lot, I can remember that. We - you know, instead of paying rent, I guess they just packed up and moved.

So your dad didn't have steady work?

No. Well, he was an alcoholic too. When he didn't go to sea, he went to sea, he drank and I guess there wasn't too much work for Merchant - I guess there wasn't too much shipping going on either. I can remember one time my mother sent me to the store she gave me a dime, I imagine, to get a loaf of bread. I'm in that store I got the loaf of bread and there was this kid there and he was my age I guess and we got in a scuffle over the loaf of bread and we started fighting and I was trying to hold onto that bread 'cause I didn't want to lose that bread fighting this kid. We went outside and there was a guy outside said, "Hey there kid, I'll hold that bread for you." At least the guy was good enough to hold the bread for me.

While you fought the kid?

Yea. (Laughs) I can still remember that guy saying, "Yea, give me that bread." At first I thought maybe I better not, he might take the bread, but he was willing to hold it while I fought the kid. See, I used to get in a lot of fights because I was always the new kid in the neighborhood.

So they'd pick on you because you were the new guy?

Yea. And then when we lived - the house we lived in that time, there was a bakery down at the corner and every Monday I guess it was, they used to throw their old crates out, you know, egg crates and stuff like that and all the kids in the neighborhood had to go down there and get a shot at a box or two to take home cause everybody had coal burning stoves. Your parents sent you down there to get what wood you could; everybody was fighting over those boxes. You know to cook food or whatever. Yea, there was a lot of things. I don't remember too much but when I was about eight years old I guess it was, I had an uncle, my father's brother-in-law, he was a career army doctor. He was a colonel in the Army and he was the surgeon general of the hospital out in Columbus, Ohio at the army base there. So I went out for a summer. I stayed out there for a summer and you know the things that go on. They did a lot of entertaining, things like that. (laughs) I was lost the first time I sat down to eat dinner with all the silverware and stuff and - but anyhow, yea, I got used to it for that summer. And then, in the meantime, my parents had moved when I went home. A friend of my aunt's was coming from Illinois to Philadelphia. Her and her husband, they took me they brought me home so I wouldn't have to ride the train. Like I went out by myself on the train and I got home and that's when I saw this place, like I said, a cold water, **no** water flat. After living out there for the summer and then coming to this place, no water - my mother wanted to cook - we had to get an aluminum tub take it to the houses in back of us, fill it up, bring the water back and carry it up to the second floor. If she wanted hot water, she had to heat it. The people where we got the water from - it was the railroad was there - they were all black people - the whole neighborhood - and we had to go get water from these people. I guess the real estate agent gave them compensation for us getting our water there.

Where was this exactly? This is in Philadelphia, right?

Philadelphia - 51st and Lancaster.

Were you sharing the house?

Yea, it was a house but they made it - I think it was a three story house. But there were - it was broken up into - there were three different families living there.

And there was no working water in the house?

I don't know, maybe the other people had water you know - I don't know how it worked out, maybe they just - when the guy made an extra apartment or something, it didn't have any water.

What year was that?

Well, say, maybe about '35, maybe I was around 8 - yea, born in '27 - yea, say around 1935.

What was the makeup of the neighborhood in terms of the ethnicity? Were there a lot of different ethnic groups?

There was no - The only black people were on Marion Avenue. On Lancaster Avenue, where we lived there was a park guard - after the place we lived in, there were all single homes, single family homes. There was a park guard, they were Italian - I mean Irish. See, they were mostly Irish on that block. The park guard - Like there's one guy, Walters. Yea I'd say they were mostly Irish on that block. Now from 51st down, it was all Italian neighborhood, down around 49th and Lancaster. Well it's still, you'd say from 49th Street, it's an Italian neighborhood. All those Italian people would say, "Where are you from?" You'd say, "From 49th Street." "Oh, oh you're a friend of his." That's the way that worked. I wasn't too happy going there, in that place after being out there in Columbus.

You have brothers and sisters - Can you tell me a little about them at this time and how you fit in with all your brothers and sisters?

Well, my sister, she came after me. She lived with the aunt, you know her husband was the doctor in the army. Eventually they adopted her.

Her name?

My sister Helen. Well see when I was eight, that summer, she was already living with them so she had started living with them I guess that year sometime.

Why was she adopted? What was the situation surrounding that?

Don: Well, they didn't have any children. Well, they wanted - When it came time for me to go home, they wanted me to stay but my aunt was starting talking about ballet lessons and dancing -

For you?

Yea, look, yea, you know, dancing lessons and stuff. So that didn't appeal to me but they wanted me to stay too, but anyhow, I went back and then I had my brother Frank, he was after Helen and then my brother Bill. Frank, Bill and then I had two sisters, Mary and Judy. Judy and Mary. I guess about maybe that Fall, Well I went back at the end of summer sorta - anyhow my uncle got transferred to Ft. Snelling out in Minnesota and they took my brother Bill with them. He stayed out there for awhile but he didn't like it either. He came home. They wanted to keep him along with Helen. They wanted someone else to go with Helen. I didn't want to go then he went. [laughs]

What was the situation with your parents that they let your sister go permanently? Was she formally adopted by them?

Well, since she lived there for awhile before she was formally adopted. By that time, things were really getting pretty bad. My father, he was really starting to go south - drinking and everything. He'd go to sea for awhile then he'd come home and he wouldn't have any damn money. This was after the war started. One time he got a ship out of Philadelphia and they went down through the canal over to China with a load of stuff - I don't know or somewhere. Anyhow, he come back - they got off the ship out on the west coast - he spent all his money - he had to ride the rails to get home and then he told my mother they paid him in Chinese money and it wasn't any good. (laughs) I remember **that** story. So, he came home without a dime after all that time. He went down through the (Panama) Canal, over to the Middle East or wherever he went and came back. Sometimes his brother, my uncle Earl, would go with him too. Well, I guess it was a week to week thing. You could never depend on him for anything.

They got divorced, right?

Don: This was after this stuff happened, later after things that had happened that I didn't know anything about. It happened during the war. See my father went to sea. Then they started - everybody going to sea had to get ID's, you know, to get fingerprinted and everything, so when they took his fingerprints, (laughs) he had escaped jail out in Iowa I think it was. He was only a kid. I don't know what he was doing in Iowa really. Well, he was in the Army for awhile too when he was a kid but anyhow, him and this other guy, they stole a car and they were on this prison farm - it was like an honor system I guess, and he just walked away. He was a kid. Now this is back in - we're getting up to like say '43 or '42, '43. They finally catch up with him through trying to get his ID for the merchant service so they had a big - he had a trial and everything. They had people - everybody was for him, you know they called it the Jean Valjean case. It was all written up in all the papers. In fact, probably I'm not sure the exact dates, you could probably get it down at the Inquirer's, back wherever they keep their back files, but he had everybody in his favor; everybody was donating stuff and everything, so just before his trial came up, he was out in the park with a bunch of guys, they used to call them the

Valley Gang. These guys used to hang out in Fairmount Park, out 52nd and Parkside, and it started to rain, they got in a tree, the tree got hit with lightning (laughs) and somebody called the cops or something to see if anybody was hurt and then they found out who he was. Then that ruined it. When his trial came up, they sent him back out to Iowa, and we might of did better while he was out there cause my mother was probably getting relief. She might have been getting welfare or relief or something cause he was in jail - and I don't - Well, that had to be '43 when that happened and that disenchanted me on the whole damn situation cause everybody always knew what was in the paper. The teacher's in school used to ask me about it. You know I was -

It was a big story?

Yea, it was, but I got tired of hearing about it. Anyhow, that's why I decided I wanted to get out of Philadelphia. That's when I decided I'd join the Navy. I joined the Navy in - I guess it was November of '44 is when I left. I had to get a birth certificate from Vineland. Yea, I had to get - this is not the one but I had to get one. My mother signed for me so I guess she figured that's the best thing for me [laughs].

What do you remember about your schooling, about your education as a kid?

Well, not too much. I guess I was angry. See, when I first went to school, I guess I was in second grade, maybe first grade or something, but one day I must have copied my homework wrong in my copybook. It was a math question. So I copied it wrong but I did it and did it right. When the teacher asked for an answer the next day, I gave her the answer I had and she said, "That's wrong." And I said, "It's not wrong. I've got it right here you know." I got in a squabble with the teacher then she finally decided she'd look at the book and said, "Well, that's not the right problem." But the way she acted with me and all that just sort of turned me off on teachers. I was never satisfied with school after that day with that teacher.

Did you drop out at an early age?

I tried it after I was 16. I tried it for one, for a semester. I went back but then when I was 17, I joined the Navy. I dropped out of school completely to go into the Navy. But I took a semester off or half a semester and went to a machine - I was going to a school where you learn to be a machinist. My father was in jail then and my mother - well I was more or less the second bread winner there. If I made any money, I had to give it to the welfare people, and my mother got sick. She had to go in a nursing home for a week or maybe a month. They sent a woman there to stay there and whatever money I got, I had to give to them. I worked after school, well, I was going to that machine shop school then, and I guess it was after school - I was working weekends or whatever, but it was the whole thing. In fact, just a couple of years ago we were talking, my sister and brother Bill, they said, "We used to think you were our father" they told me. Cause I had to be there. They used to fight over who got the biggest piece of cake and stuff like that and I had to be the arbitrator.

Do you think now that had something to do, even when you were little, why you didn't stay out where it would have been easier for you, why you came back? Did you want to help your mother?

Could have been in the back of my mind. But if I had wanted to help my mother, I would have never went in the Navy. I would have stayed there and tried to bring some money into the house. I really don't know but the more I think about it, it was just, I just was angry at everybody for my father. I remember one time my father - I don't even think I was going to school yet, he invited his aunt and uncle down to West Philly. They lived on 56th Street then, they lived near where we lived. He invited them up for Thanksgiving. He was working at Buds then (coughs)

Bud's is the steel plant, right?

Yea, making body parts for Fords. Anyhow, that Thursday morning, my mother woke me up. She says, "You got to get out to your Aunt Jewel and tell them we're not having dinner today. Your father, he never did come home." He must have left work Wednesday, spent his money and never did come home 'cause he was going to cook Thanksgiving dinner and stuff like that. I had to go down and tell them that we're not having anything and I don't know, maybe we didn't even eat that day, who the hell knows? You know its stuff just keeps building up. It's what you know (pause), cause I was the oldest I guess it bothered me more than any of them. Cause my brothers and sisters, they were never, they all did alright, never got in any trouble. Like one time, we were living down there, Lancaster Avenue, but the year before, I was going to school up at 58th & Media, the Anna School and they never changed me. So time to go back to school, I went up there, I just had to walk. Then I got in a fight up there one day and had to go down the principal and then I don't know where he found out, maybe it's on my records where I lived. He says, "You don't even belong in this school." He says, "You get your mother up here." So they transferred me back down to Heston School at 54th and Lansdale Avenue which was right up the street from where I lived (laughs) and that didn't bother me but stuff like that was happening all the time. Always getting into some kind of trouble.

Was it the moving around so much - did you have the same group of friends or was it difficult for you to have a close group of friends?

Yea, in the beginning but once I moved - well I never had any really close friends til I moved down to Stiles Street, you know in West Philly there, you know at 51st and Stiles and that's not too far from where we did live on Lancaster Avenue, but I knew a lot of the people in that neighborhood from going to Heston School when I started going there. In fact, the people next door, they went there, the girls, and that's when I started getting all my close friends at that time.

How old were you?

Sixteen.

What did you do with your leisure time? What did you do for fun when you were about that age, when you were a teenager?

(Laughs) Well, not really anything important. I know the house we lived on Stiles Street, we had a long backyard so we decided we were going to build a bunk out there so we'd have a place to hang but across 51st Street, there were a bunch of garages. Behind that, this contractor had his yard. And we went back there and stole all his, not all, we stole scaffold boards and whatever lumber we could find to paint the shed and then we were figuring how we're going to get a roof for it and there was a place up on Lancaster Avenue. They, I forget the name of the place, they used to make wax products and stuff but they had a brand new tarp out there with some other stuff and we had to go by there going home from school – yea, we were in high school and we're looking at that and we never realized how big that damn tarp was. We said, "well let's take that, that'll make a big roof" and man, we were struggling, you know we had to get that tarp underneath this chain link fence and nobody ever saw us I guess, and I don't know how long it took us to get that thing and run it down to the thing but man, we put that on that bunk and that bunk was there for, was there when I left.

I wanted to get to your life in the Navy, if that's alright.

Yea, sure, oh, yea.

Alright, so you're seventeen and it was pretty much your home situation and your anger at what was going on with your father that drove you to do that?

Right.

Do you remember what your feelings were when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Well, you know, I don't know whether I was seventeen then or not, well whatever. No, you know like everybody else we're angry, that something like that could really happen, the way it happened. You know, just the way they snuck up on us and everything. Well nobody really liked the Orientals anyhow and then, when something like that - no, you had anger but there was nothing that we could do, like I figured what could I do? You know - You were angry, I listened to other people talk. People say, "Ah the war ain't going to last long, it'll be over in a couple months."

The people that I heard talking would say, "Ah this won't last long." Started out they were wrong. All us kids ended up in it you know.

Why the Navy? Why did you want to go in the Navy?

Maybe because my father always went to sea but that's all I ever wanted to do, go in the Navy. I don't know why, maybe from hearing all these stories about my father, you know, places he's been and all that.

That's even more adventurous maybe?

Yea, it just seemed more fun than going in the damn Army. Sleeping in the mud (laughs) and stuff the way you used to see in the movies.

Do you think you'd have gone in the Navy if it weren't for the war? Do you think it's something you would have done?

I probably would have.

So it wasn't -

A patriotic thing you mean?

Was there a sense of obligation because the country was at war and -

Probably, part of it yea. Part of it was that.

So when you joined, where was your training? Where did you go for that?

Bainbridge, Maryland. Well that was a training center they built when the war started and then they started getting an influx of inductees and enlistees.

I guess your father wasn't in the picture but what did your mother think about your going in the Navy and making that decision?

I don't know. She didn't seem to say. I don't know. I guess maybe she figured it was the best thing for me. I don't really know, she never said anything against it. When I asked her to sign, she signed. I don't know. She might have thought a lot but she just never. Actually, I had to do a lot of the stuff that she would do like when she was in that nursing home. Well, I guess she figured maybe she wanted me to get out of the environment I was in being stuck the way I was, I don't know. I really don't know what her rationale was, and signing, I didn't get any arguments.

Did your brothers pretty much pick up the slack after you left?

Well, they did, they helped out, yea. Oh yea, they were good but they both joined the service too, you know, when the Korean War was on -

They went in the Army. I guess they wanted to get away too, probably. In them days, I guess it was the only way out, go in the service.

What kind of training did you receive actually? What were you trained to do?

You know in boot camp, they give you training, a little bit of this and a little bit of that, like how to handle the shells for the big guns, how to shoot the small guns. It's all mostly seamanship - in boot camp and, when I got out of boot camp, they sent me to signalman's school. That was my first big mistake I ever made, when I went to signalman's school. That was a Class "A" school but then I got disgusted there so I. You had to learn the

Morse Code. You had the lights and then you had to know a lot of stuff about what's in the logs and all you know like a quarter master, you more or less run the ship. You're always up on the bridge, if you're a signalman, that's where they are, up on the bridge. They're into all the running of a ship but anyhow so I saw I wanted to get out of there so.

Why didn't you like that?

I don't know. Probably, my reaction from my hatred for school.

So you still had that reaction?

Yea. I'll tell you they sent us back over to OGU, that's "Outgoing Unit", you go over there then they ship you wherever they're going to ship you.

When you left Maryland, where did you go from there?

I went down to Norfolk. I was only there three or four days when I was on a ship on my way to Pearl, Pearl Harbor.

What kind of ship were you on?

Oh, that was an APA. We weren't members of ship's company, we were just being transported -

So you just got transported from Norfolk to Pearl?

Right.

And you went through the canal?

Yes that's like when I was telling Bill about when I had that fight, we had boxing matches on there (laughs) - down in the compartment we were, they had Seabees on one side and we were on the other side. I signed up then this Seabee comes over, he says, "Hey, Arters. You know it looks like it's you and me" and then he's telling me, "I was almost lightweight champ up in New England." He says he's almost the champ. I looked at him and his face looked like everybody had beat on him. (laughs) He was older, he was **a lot** older than me, well maybe two, three years, so I fought him, and I won and then the next day the winner got two cartons of cigarettes and the loser got one and the officer wanted to give me the one carton. I says, "No, I get two." He says, "Why, you're the winner?" (Laughs) He didn't believe I was the winner. That was my biggest purse, a dollar. Fifty cents a carton and I got two cartons. But that's it, then I got to Pearl then we got to go do orientation again, screening again and this one guy said, "What the hell?" he says, "You know I can send you to radar operator's school. You know it's only a couple of weeks. At least you'll be a strike in for radar man. You won't be just being a seaman waiting for an opening in third class petty officer." Well no, at the time I think I was still only seaman second. So I says, "Alright" so they sent me up Camp Kaneohe up in the hills there. It was a marine base but they had radar school there, so I went there. After I

got done, I came back down and was waiting for assignment. They called me this one day and told me they were going to take me out to my ship. That's when I got on that LCI, they took me out there. It was back there in the harbor where the Arizona was and, in fact, it might have been tied up to the fantail of the Arizona because all the spaces were taken up around there and I seen this ship, **aw man**, it had got hit at Iwo. It took a shell right in the bow. I didn't know it but later, that's where my battle station was going to be where there was a twin forty there on top of it but it knocked a hole in there. That's where the magazine was too. An LCI, it was an LCIG. A regular LCI, they had to go down the sides - They took those ramps out and put rocket launchers on the port and starboard side, electric rocket launchers cause everybody on there were ship's company and when I saw that ship, well it wasn't painted yet, they were still working on it. I said, "**holy crap!**" You know an LCI's not that big anyhow. I said, "Where the hell am I going to go on that thing?" but we got it cleaned up and so we went from Pearl, well we didn't go straight out to Japan. We went all over like Guam, Saipan, you know, all around. It took us awhile. We finally ended up one day (pause) we had a boatswain second. Well anyhow he said, "Hey Arters, come here, you and this other guy." He said, "Look, we gotta get that number," we were painting the ship here and there, He said, "We gotta get that number on there. We're leaving tomorrow" and that's when I found out that's where we were going, to Japan.

About when were you assigned to this LCI, was that '43 or '44?

It was around August, 1944. It was before Harry dropped the bomb, you know around that time. You know when he dropped that bomb at Hiroshima? Around that time.

Where were you when that happened?

I think we were up in Saipan when they dropped that bomb if I remember right.

You said you were at Guam and Saipan. What kind of action did you see? Did you see combat or -

No, no everything was just well, Guam and Saipan were both secured, I think, when we went there.

Were you part of a battle group?

Yea, LCI group 8. Well see this is when they were building that armada to get ready to invade Japan. That's why there was all kinds of ships up there in Guam, Saipan. There were other islands too. They were by Saipan, the Marianna's, those islands. They were building up, getting ready for that big push, the invasion. That's why all these ships were up there. That's why we were there. They had everything, any kind of ship you wanted, it was there.

Did those ships have names or did they not warrant a name, the LCI's -

Just a number, LCIG 450. Yes. See it was LCIG Group 8. There were eight ships in our group and I mean it was good duty for me cause at the time you weren't supposed to be on that radar screen for more than two hours but we only had the radar man and another guy and me so you weren't supposed to be on for more than a half an hour on the scope but we had to stand on a two hour watch. When we were out at sea, we had to stand a two hour watch at a time cause that was the only way - when we were out at night time, you weren't allowed running lights or anything. That's the only way we kept track of where we were. We decided to keep track of the ship ahead of us. That was our job as the radar man and so while we were, any time we went out to sea, we didn't have nothing to do all day except that two hours at night but when we were going into Japan, I remember this night. I guess that's when we were going into Tokyo Bay but there was a typhoon that came up. Well we're still out at sea and, **aw man**, it really got bad. I was standing radar watch, you know it's a metal deck. I was sitting in a ward room chair, you know, a regular chair they had in the ward room - slides back and forth on that metal deck. Them swells that come in, you go up and then come down and slide and the guy's up on the bridge giving me hell. He says, "I want a fix every minute." I said, "I'm trying." I don't know who it was but I got into an argument with him. I said, "I'm doing the best that I can" but that two hours, that was long. That was a **bad** night.

It was a typhoon, I guess. It's somewhere in the records about the weather that night and then we got into Tokyo Bay and they started giving liberties in Kusika and Yokohama. Then they were going to open up Tokyo for liberties and they had to send SP's up there so all us amphibs like the LCI's, LSM's, we used to carry the liberty parties up the bay, up the harbor, you know, wherever the ships couldn't go up the harbor and so then they sent us up there. We tied up right outside. We could walk into Tokyo right outside and feed the SP's, they could sleep there so that's why we got so much time in Tokyo but all you had to do was walk right in, yea, on the Ginza.

You think you might have been in Saipan when they dropped the bombs?

Yea, Saipan.

Did anyone have an inkling about what was going to happen or did that come as a surprise to you?

Well to us it did, I don't know whether anyone - I mean you know well Guam and Cypan, that's where all these B29's I guess all the bombers took off from when they were bombing Tokyo. You know they bombed Tokyo **every** night. These planes would be taking off all night long but the plane that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. That took off from Tinian - that was another island there. I can't tell you what month, the weather's always the same out there. You can't tell winter from summer but that's where we were, in there, in around there. I don't know why they kept moving us back and forth, I don't know. You were at Saipan and all of a sudden you had to go back over to Guam. I don't know what the idea was.

We had to rendezvous when we were going into Tokyo Bay. We had to rendezvous at sea. Everything was still under war time conditions and they were supposed to drop a

thing - I imagine they were supposed to drop it on your ship, you know, a package with your orders and everything cause we had to have a guy ready to go into the ocean to get it if they missed the ship. That was night time too but that's how we got our orders. Nothing was sent over the air or anything, just drop them on your ship.

Now you basically - were you - I'm not too sure what the role of those ships were. They were amphibian, right?

Right. The regular LCI's, they would transport just from the fleet into the shore. That's why it was so tough on ours. Ship's company was supposed to be 23 men on an LCI, I think, and then the rest of the stuff was when you had the troops, they had a place to put them. But ours, I think we had 70, 75 men in ship's company cause we had those rockets. We were like being on a sub. We were really crowded.

What was the role of those ships and of your group in the war effort?

The one I was on? The LCIG? You had to go in before the invasion. They would fire these rockets in there to soften up - they had planes going in. They had ships from the fleet lobbing in bathtubs whatever they were shooting in-

We'd have been the front line. We'd have been in first. We'd have been in there before the troops probably 'cause we had to soften them up -

That's how they got hit at Iwo. They got hit right up on the bow. Well, like I said later on when I got my battle station on there, that's when we had a twin 40 right on the bow and that was my battle station there. There was two 40 millimeters. I was with the gunners mate. The gunners mate was an Indian. He was "Afraid of Bear". He had a thing from the paper that he had cut out. He had more horses than any Indian in Montana. He carried that around with him. He was proud of that. He owned more horses than any Indian in Montana.

How many horses did he have?

I don't know. I just looked at the headline. But he was a nice guy. He got - I don't know what ship he was on before that LCI but he got hit, he got hit in the rear end. He got hit in the ass, I don't know how. That's how he got a Purple Heart.

Do you remember hearing about the surrender of Germany and what your reaction was?

That happened a lot longer. It was quite a difference in time between the two. I don't know where I was.

Do you remember your reaction?

Well, we were happy, yea. Well we knew we were never going into the Atlantic anyhow.

Was that something when you were first given your orders when you got out of boot camp, was that something that was even an option or were they putting all their efforts into the Pacific at that point, do you think?

No, I guess they were still sending the ships to the Atlantic, but most everyone probably ended up in the Pacific, yea at that time. They still needed people in the Atlantic

I don't know if I asked you this before when you were over in the Pacific, what your rank was and what your job was?

When I first went, I was a seaman first class, you know, a striker. I was going for a radar man. Well I didn't make third class petty officer until I was on my way back I guess. Say Seaman First, Seaman First Class

My duties in port, we were just like janitors really, if there was any painting to be done or stuff like that, and just whatever had to be done. Whenever you went somewhere to tie up like special sea detail, you know all the seamen had to be there. While we were out at sea, all's I did was I stood a two hour radar watch. During the war, we didn't have any running lights or anything and that's the only way they kept track of the ship ahead of us. You know we had eight ships in our group, LCI's. Well, see actually, you were only supposed to be on the radar scope for a half hour but we didn't have enough people for that so we stood a two hour watch. The other 22 hours belonged to us. We had 135 feet from one end to the other end if you wanted to take a walk. (laughs)

But see we were an LCIG. We were made into a gunboat. Did you ever see any pictures of an LCI where the guys go down either side? Well, where those ramps were, they took them out of there and they put rockets on there, rocket launchers - electric rocket launchers. You know they made gunboats out of them - it was the same nomenclature as the other one when it came out of the ship or wherever they build them, it might have been, gonna be or could be either way, but they were made just gunboats. They were designated for that. You had to go in there before the troops went in, you know to sort of soften up the resistance.

We would have went in the day before, maybe two days, it all depends and you just keep throwing all that flack ammunition in there, all that stuff in there to try and get some sort of beachhead established you know with the - And, you had so many, like you had the big ships, the battleships and all they're out, cripes you probably can't even see them. They're lobbing shells in. You know them things and like they're like throwing a Volkswagen or something in there, some of the shells they fired -

And then the rest of them like the LST's, the LSM's and all the others, they came in with the invasion. They were the ones that brought the mechanized equipment in. They had the bow doors and then they had the LCVP's, well you saw those small boats.

They used to bring troops in from an APA or some of the larger ships. I remember just so many different types of equipment and ships and all, that would have been horrendous, the size of that armada, 'cause they had, they had bases in Saipan, Guam, the Gilbert Islands. Everywhere over there they had these things being built up, these troops that were going to go in there. They had them coming from everywhere so it was going to be plenty of people. Plenty of ships. Plenty of fire power.

So the war in the Pacific ends -

Right, when Harry dropped that bomb, everybody just sort of relaxed for a day or two.

Do you remember what the next period of days was like after that happened?

Well, they knew they were planning on going in there anyhow so we were just getting things - well we had painted our ship so this one day, you know we had a first class boatswain, he ran all the deck hands and all that stuff. He come over, he says "Arters, you and this other guy, we got to paint the number on the one side of the ship" cause they had covered it, "cause we're going to leave. We've got to do it tomorrow, we're leaving the day after" or maybe we had to do it that day, it was a rush job to get the number on there. That's when we knew we were gone. We had to get that number painted on there. That was from the flag ship, "Get your number on." So then we knew, things were coming to an end. And then so we left there. When we did leave, we started in there and they still didn't give you any orders. Now the flag ship, they were going to drop the orders to them, you know from a plane 'cause they had all the other - we all had to stand by, all the other ships had to stand by in case something happened to whatever they dropped with the orders in. Maybe a guy could dive in from your ship or whoever but they didn't have any problem. I guess they just hit the target. So much going on you don't know really what is going on. So they got their orders and the next day, well no, we got our orders when we were out at sea. Nothing was done where anybody could intercept anything or anything so then, when we got - now see, I'm not sure exactly where we were. We were, it was dark, at night time and we hit this typhoon. I don't know whether we were in the Sea of Japan or I'm not sure where we were but it was terrible, terrible weather. And you know I was on the radar scope and that guy wanted a fix every minute of the ship ahead and it was impossible because it's a metal deck for one thing and we didn't have any CIC room or anything like that. We just had the radar and where our mess hall was really. And they took a chair out of the ward room, that's metal, and you hit one of these swells, takes you up, you come down, it's a flat bottom boat. You know what that's like when that hits and I'd be sliding all over the place. I couldn't stay in front of the - that's how bad it was, I couldn't stay in front of the scope and then I was getting flack from the guys up on the bridge. I'm getting in arguments with them but there was no other way. It's still under wartime conditions, no running lights, so that's the only way they could keep track of the ship ahead of them.

When my two hours were up that night, it was pure heaven for me 'cause it was hard to believe. Well, first of all, the ship's only 135 feet long and you hit these swells and we must have went up pretty high (laughs) the way we came down. I thought a couple of times there, I thought the ship was just going to fall apart.

And then it cleared up. The next day we woke up we were (pause) I guess Tokyo Bay is so damn big, we might have been in there. We were there in the bay but we didn't know where we were. Then they were starting to ship everybody to different areas, to weigh anchor, and then the day of the - they were going to sign the thing -

The surrender?

Yea. Everybody had to get lined up. Well, we couldn't all be where they were signing but in that area, around. Everybody had to line up, everybody had to be on the rail in the uniform of the day. It was dungarees and skivvies (laughs) and the old man, he put on there "Everybody, please clean shivvies." You had to have a clean skivvies shirt. Then you had to have a clean, white hat too. But that's the way it looked, the whole bay, everybody's standing there in skivvies. It's hard to believe how much equipment and how many people were there.

But anyhow that got done. Then we hung around for a day or two then they started opening up liberty, and all us amphibious ships, we had to take the liberty party, like the fleet, they didn't come up into the harbor or anything up there, they stayed out in the bay and we had to bring the liberty parties up to the harbor or wherever we were going. Like they were going to Yukasuka we used to call it, Yukustica, or Yokihama, you know wherever you were going we took the guys there for liberty.

That's what we were, taxis. Then when they opened up liberty in Japan in Tokyo they were going to send the SP's up there where everybody was going to disembark to go into Tokyo so they sent us up there to stay there to feed the shore patrol, (coughs) excuse me, and when they had a place to sleep so we were tied up, we were right outside of a finger pier. We were right outside. We could walk right into Tokyo any time we wanted.

That's where we stayed. And then I told you about when they up and had like a USO thing or something, the Japanese, you know, not Geisha girls, well serving girls, anyhow you bought a ticket and they brought you out a quart of beer with a chaser glass and sit there and poured it for you until you drank it. And the first day they took a picture for the paper, Japanese papers, and there was a soldier, sailor and marine and I was the sailor they picked.

And the girl that took our picture with me, she tells everybody they used to call me baby. After awhile they started calling me baby. Well my hair was cut real short, maybe it was, I guess it was because I was young. (laughs) I was 18, yea. But then they opened another one, and some of them girls, they knew you from this one and so I knew a lot of them girls and one day we were walking down the Ginza. My buddy and me and I hear somebody hollering "Baby." It was this girl and so we're walking down in Ginza. And all these GI's and everybody they were looking around and looking at us. One guy says

“Where’d you get them at?” You didn’t see anybody fraternizing outside of any, you know - just in the open like that.

So, I don’t know how long we stayed there. Man, we’d go into Japan, you know, Tokyo any time we wanted to.

What was Japan like at that time? What were the people like? They just lost the war and you were there - Did you encounter any animosity from them?

No and man, I was surprised myself about how really - They wanted to extend their friendship to you. If they had anything, they would give it to you. They used to say “Presento”, something if, none of them had anything really. Well they used to come down at night and watch our movie like we were tied up to a finger pier and they’d get on that pier and watch our movie and whatever they’d want to, if they wanted to buy something, like they had some really good watches and cameras and stuff that they’d barter with you for, like they wanted cigarettes or soap and candy were the main things they wanted. Face soap, man they went crazy over soap. I guess they stopped making it during the war, I don’t know. But no they were really, really nice, them people. We didn’t have any trouble at all that I can - I never encountered any. Any of my friends never did. They were very nice.

And how long did you stay in Japan after the war ended?

Oh, it wasn’t too long. I’m still not sure, maybe was maybe a month, month and a half, something like that. Well they sent us back down out into the bay I guess they had better accommodations for the SP’s by then. We were there about a month, month and a half after the treaty was signed then we got sent back over to Saipan and from Saipan we went about our duties and then, I don’t know how long we were in Saipan and then we got transferred. I forget how many of us got transferred to an LSM cause we had to start taking supplies so you know little islands that they had taken. You know service, had our people there, we had to take supplies to them. There was one island, Marcus Island I think it was, it was just big enough for one plane to take off, you know a bomber, but anyhow they had these Air Force guys, they were putting them in there. We had to take them supplies. There was nothing there, no trees. We were tying up to the Island – radar couldn’t pick the island up. (laughs) That’s how it was and all they had was these underground tunnels and everything all these GI cans where they stayed. A lot of empty sake bottles under there.

Did the Japanese make those tunnels?

Yea, they must have had a small garrison there, whatever. Yea like I say just a small, one plane. That’s probably why it was there. If one plane got in trouble and had to land, it would be there, whatever. I don’t know what its main purpose was, that island, but they just kept bypassing it until they finally had to do something, take it over.

Is there anything else that you wanted to point out about the time in Japan after the war or what you remember, maybe some happy times there?

Well, what I remember most about the third maybe third, fourth time I went into Japan after we were tied up I mean everything was bombed you know there was a lot of devastation and we were walking down the Ginza I walked You've seen pictures of the Ginza It's like Market Street downtown, now. But it was a big street, you could see it was a big shopping center and all but there was this one building, I looked over there, here there were these two Japanese with a bamboo ladder, a makeshift scaffold and they're climbing up and down the ladder with a [] cement and stuff I don't know what they were patching up and I told one of my buddies, I said "Man, it's going to take them years, if they're going to do stuff like that." I said, "Hey, they'll never get this place ready." But five years or so later, you know I was watching TV one night and that's the first time it hit me they were showing how they had brought the Ginza back. It was unbelievable! When I saw that, I couldn't believe it, especially after I had seen these Japanese guys with their bamboo ladders and all trying to patch up. But they really did a quick job. They did a lot of work. They had motorcycles there. They have like a sidecar in the rear. They ran on steam, a little pile of wood. I told people about that, they didn't believe it. I said, "Did you see those steam motorcycles?" I guess that was it. They didn't have any. No, I'll tell you, the people were really nice for somebody just, well, they started the war, they didn't have anything to be angry about. They were very good.

Did you ever ask them about that? Why are you people so nice to us?

Well, no, it was hard like some languages you can communicate with the people but with the Japanese, you know it was hard. Some people would talk to you. Some people knew a little English and they'd tell you certain things but that way, I never asked anyone what their thoughts were on it.

Do you think they thought about the fact that they were the aggressors?

And then after what they saw what happened to the people in Hiroshima and they figured maybe the same thing could have happened to them, get hit with that bomb, the atomic bomb. That was another thing that might have scared them, kept them a little sober. That's just the thoughts of that.

Did you think that was I mean, at the time, did you think that was the right thing to do, drop the bombs?

Well, yea, well we never had too much to think about I mean for us, we thought it was because it saved us a lot of fighting and you know. Well, everybody I guess everybody had their own thought you know. Well, we knew it wasn't the **right** thing to do. I guess even Truman knew that but it had to be done. There was no other way. They weren't going to back down.

Is there anything that from your personal perspective that you think people should know about the war, that maybe they don't know or that is overlooked?

Well I mean you see like I said the people were nice. Now they probably themselves didn't want to get involved in the war to begin with. That's one thing. I don't think it was a very popular decision although I don't know really. I mean the thing that I thought was the most prominent thing was the way that they the Japanese themselves came out of it by all the help and like McArthur and everything making sure that everything went along according to some sort of plan. You know it didn't take them too long before they were grinding out cars, and like I said that Ginza, things that I never - I couldn't believe it when I saw that. Like one day we got a train going from Tokyo, we just took a ride on it. You could go for miles and nothing. The only thing maybe you'd see a chimney standing here - just everything was bombed out. They just really bombed the whole, 'cause those planes used to take off **every night** from Saipan and Guam, those bombers, **every night** and just keep going, bomb the hell out of that area. I mean it was a **big** area. So I guess they had a head start on rebuilding cause they didn't have any cleaning up to do.

Did you make any important friends during the war? Stay friends with anybody?

Well, yea, for a while. It's like everything else. You get home, you write, you stay keep in touch but eventually the last time I saw anybody was oh maybe it must have been over 20 years ago. The LSM I was on, they had a reunion up in New Jersey and that's the last time I seen any of the people that I was in with during the war.

No one on my ship, either one, was from Philadelphia. The closest one was a guy who lived in Brooklyn. I don't know, most of them were up in New England, there were a couple outside of Boston. One guy I was pretty close with, he lived down New Orleans. There just didn't seem to be anybody from anyone that was close enough for me to really keep in touch with so that's it. Those things just die out.

Is there anything you would have done differently if you could have?

Yea, I think I would have stayed in school (laughs). I think that's what I would have done, stayed in school but see about the only thing I could have changed. I just wasn't prepared for you know I wasn't prepared for, it was something that I well I just didn't think too much about it really. See when I first went down to enlist they were having a drive on they wanted combat air crewmen so you know the guys in the enlistment office, they asked me if I wanted to sign up as a combat air crewman. I figured that would be a pretty good job but I couldn't pass the physical for that - had something to do with my eyesight. Couldn't see, whatever it was cause I had passed everything and that guy says, "Wait a minute, don't go anywhere. We're waiting for these other results" I guess they double checked it and he said, "No, we can't use you." I don't know where that would have been any better or not but no, if I'd have thought, I'd have got more education. Plus you know like well see, most everyone that was in there that I was always about well those two ships, I was probably the youngest guy both times. You know they were all ahead of me. They had more education than I had and 'cause most of them were drafted anyhow you know. So I was at a disadvantage always, really.

I got stuck with all the crap like one time out in Tokyo Bay, there was a ship out there like a coast guard cutter, well it wasn't as big as a cutter but I guess a coast guard ship and there was no one on the ship, the ship was just there and the old man, he wanted to go send some guys on there to see if there was anything we could get for the souvenirs or anything so who the hell gets stuck jumping over from my ship to that ship, you know nobody there to take the lines so you have to have somebody over there to take the lines so they can moor them up to there so they get me. I'm the youngest guy. You know you're coming in on a ship, you gotta jump and make sure you don't miss anything (laughs) and stuff like that, I used to get stuck with all that kind of stuff.

What do you think might have been a mistake by the Navy during that time?

Well the only mistakes that I know of, I read and saw, I saw them but I didn't think anything, how they stacked all the battlewagons in the harbor back there and stuff like that and it was an invitation to get the fleet wiped out really. Well I thought they did a pretty good job the way they did the island hopping, just working their way up the chain, knock out the islands. I thought they did a good job. I guess they did, they probably made a lot of mistakes

You had a lot of "down" time on those ships and a kind of a lot of leisure time. What did you do with all that time?

There wasn't too much to do, play cards. I mean when you're out at sea, you mean? There's nothing to do but play cards, or read, that's about it. You know, like I said, it's only 135 feet long.

You can't take - Like say there might be somewhere especially over Guam, a place like that you could go swimming off the LSM you go swimming off the bow door you know put the bow doors down. That's the only other thing you could do, go swimming.

Did you find out about what was going on in other places during the war? Were you informed about what was going on in Europe for example or what was going on in the rest of the Pacific?

Yea, we used to get the press releases, well I don't know what you would call them but yea they'd send them through. I mean I don't know how up to date they were or whatever but we knew pretty well I mean some guys, all the 'right hand' rates you know, quartermaster, signalmen, all those guys that were up on the bridge all the time, they used to get all this information and they were the ones that knew everything and if you were in tight with one of those guys, you could learn a lot. They'd tell you what was going on.

How did you stay in touch with your family? Did you write a lot of letters?

Write letters, yea.

About how often would you hear from them?

Maybe well sometimes, well it all depends on how many people were writing to you, you know sometimes you could get a letter every day or every couple if you had enough people writing to you. Like my mother, maybe I'd only hear from her once a week and I guess they didn't hear from me that much either cause that was one thing I hated to do.

But they used to check up on you. They had a guy aboard ship wanted to know if you were writing home and all that. They tried to make sure that you kept in touch with people back home. Some guys used to get a lot of mail you know. They liked to write and they had a lot of people who were writing to them.

Was there anything you really looked forward to hearing about? Was there any information you wanted to get from home in particular?

Not really. Well that the situation at home everything you know it wasn't a perfect home life back home. There were things I'd like to see change but there wasn't anything I could do.

Like the situation with your mother and father? Did you ever communicate with your father during this time?

Once in a while, with a letter that's all. See after they sent him back to Iowa, that's the only way we could get in touch with him. Get a letter once in awhile. When he wrote a letter, he wrote a letter. He could write and all. He was pretty intelligent but I guess he just, I don't know, he didn't have the incentive.

When did your service time end? What was that like?

Yea, well that's it. See, came back, when we came back, we were out on the west coast for awhile, I think for maybe about six months. We came back to Terminal Island, San Pedro, that's where we came back. We were there for awhile then they decided they wanted to decommission the LSM. We started decommissioning it and we got it mostly done and then they said "Well, we're going to take it down to San Diego so they had to tow us down to San Diego and finish it up down there. We were down San Diego for awhile. I guess they didn't have nothing else to do, they didn't know what to do with us, all these guys. But anyhow they were getting things done like starting to decommission ships and stuff like that.

The engineer, the boiler makers and all them guys, they were decommissioning the engine room. I mean and so for us other guys, there wasn't much for us to do. You had liberty. Well, I was third class then and I had open gangway. You know usually you get liberty port and starboard. You had liberty if you were port one day and then the next day starboard gets it. You get it every other day but we never this radio man and me we never had to put our liberty card back in the box. We just kept it.

What did you think of being there? Did you like San Diego?

Oh, yea, it was great. Well it was good too even when we were up in San Pedro, up around L.A., there were so many places to go. Go to Hollywood, go to Long Beach. Oh we used to go to Hollywood a lot. I don't know whether - Can't even think of the name of that place where they used to have dances. I forget now. There were so many things to do. You'd get on, there was a train, you'd get on and you went from L.A. down the coast you know, all along, a lot of resorts towns and all. Yea, Long Beach, we used to go to Long Beach. There was plenty to do.

Did you like L.A.? Like going there?

Well not L.A. itself but -

Hollywood?

Yea. Like all the area around there. Some places in L.A. were alright. There was one guy, we had a cook on that ship I think he was still getting supplies for regular ships company I don't know why it was but maybe by that time we had 20 some guys and he's getting maybe less than 20 but anyhow he got in with this guy who had a taproom out over in L.A. and he used to sell him supplies while he was getting supplies delivered and the guy came right up in along side the ship and picked the stuff up. So this one night, he asks me, "Hey, Don, do you want to go on liberty? Want to go in with me?" I forget the guy's name. I said "No" I ain't got money. You needed money to take the ferry over to the mainland like. He said, "What the hell you worried about?" You ain't got two pounds of butter?" He says, "Here you are, we'll take these in, sell them to some old lady and get enough to go into L.A." (laughs)

So you took in butter?

Yea. We sold, we had to go hit a lady up and ask if she wanted to buy a pound of butter. (laughs) Get enough to get a ticket to go to L.A. He was something, that guy though, he was a wheeler dealer. Selling out all the - but it was good cause we had open gangway he didn't have to cook. He'd say "You guys, when you come back from liberty, you want to bring out a couple steaks, eggs," he said "Whatever you want to do, get what you want" he says, "Just clean up the mess. That's all." So we'd come back from liberty, if we wanted to eat steak and eggs, we had a pretty good life for awhile. And then they sent us back to the east coast. They gave us a 30 day leave which I wish they hadn't I wish they had just sent us back and discharged us and gave us the money for that 30 days. But anyhow, they gave us 30 days leave and then we went back after the 30 days was up, I went down the Navy yard, then they sent us down to Bainbridge and discharged us. That was it. The end of my career.

Did you think of about re-upping at that point?

Well I thought about it a lot you know. In fact, the one time, this was I don't know I guess it was Easter time, this guy from New York, this radio man, if you signed up for a year, you know extend your tour another year, I forget how much they gave you. I think

they gave you \$200.00. I think it was \$200.00 and you got a 30 day leave and he wanted to do that and so we went down to the yeoman and this yeoman, he was from Shamokin, this guy, and he hated the Navy. We told him what we wanted to so. He says, “**No**, I’m not getting you no damn papers.” He wouldn’t do it, he wouldn’t get us the papers. He wouldn’t get us nothing to sign up.

So you were thinking about it and he -

No, he wasn’t going to do it. He didn’t like it. He said, “Nah, I’m not letting you guys do that.” He was only maybe a year or two older than us. He was dead set on it. He said, “No, sir. If you want to go do it, go someplace else. I ain’t doing it for you.” (laughs) Boy. So he saved me that year.

Was that kind of the last that you thought about it or did you ever think about it again?

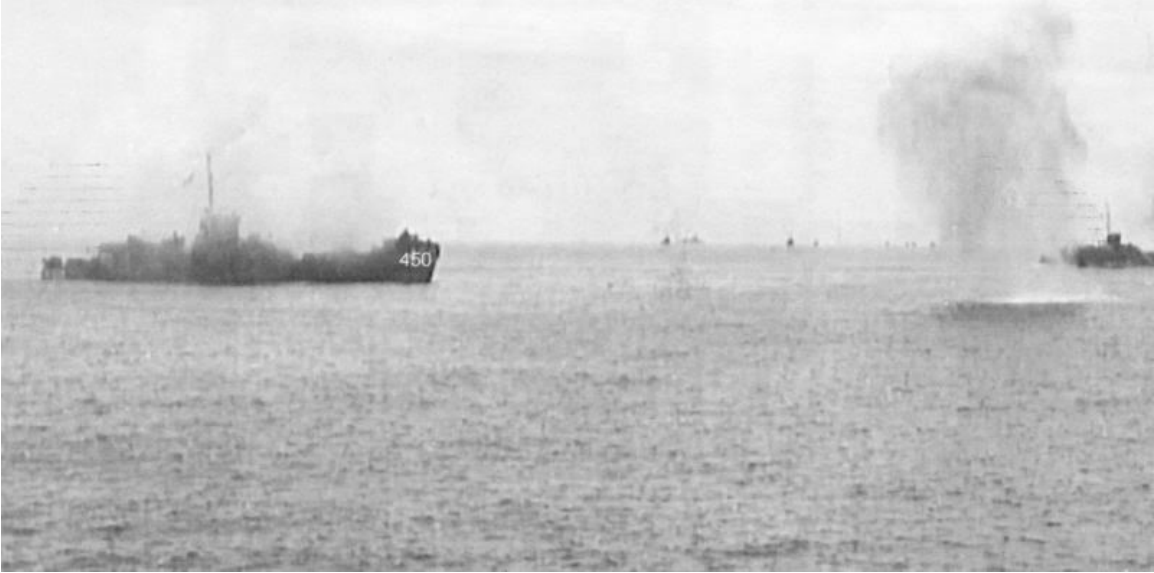
Well, no, we never, we just gave up on it. We weren’t going to get anywhere with him. We didn’t know where the hell we’d well I guess we could have gone anywhere probably. But that guy from Brooklyn, he wanted a home. He wanted to go home bad for, he wanted to get home for Easter.

And that was the only way like if you were running out of under ware or anything, we had to buy our own, but in the Navy, you get a quarterly allotment. You need another pair of pants or under ware or stuff you got to buy your own cause you got that money in your pay, a quarterly allotment like but you couldn’t buy anything unless you shipped over. If you wanted to, like they knew we were getting out so if we wanted to go buy under ware or something, NOT. “Where are you, where you at, are you a reserve?” No, if you’re enlistment is going to go on awhile, yea we’ll let you buy all you want and that’s another reason (laughs) he wanted to ship over so he could get a couple pair of under ware.

They sent us back to here, gave me my 30 days, sent me to Bainbridge, well sent me down the Navy yard and from there we went down Bainbridge. That’s where I took my “boots” at Bainbridge, Maryland. You know the naval base there. They built it during the war just for training, boot camp training. So I went there, got discharged. I think they gave us \$200.00 when we got discharged -\$200.00 bonus – and came home. Started looking for a job.

Do you remember anything being different? Do you remember sensing anything being different about being back?

Well, yea, you were a little more experienced. You saw things differently than when you went away. When you went away, you just accepted everything as it came, you know. Yea, when you came home, well you were matured a little bit more. It was a tough time too because it was hard to get a job. Everybody’s looking for work and you don’t have any experience, you know, just what you had in the Navy and that’s not going to be any good to you. And the guys who had experience before they went in, they were getting, well a lot of them, they had to give them their jobs back like if you got drafted so it was tough getting a job.



LCI(G) 450 at Iwo Jima -1945



After Iwo Jima, with visible signs of damage.



The Ginza, Tokyo – Summer, 1945

Did you live with your mother when you got back?

Yea. Out in West Philadelphia. Well, see, she had gotten married to while I was in. Anyhow, when I got out, maybe she's been married about maybe six months. She married somebody that was - She worked for the Acme, warehouse, and it was somebody that worked there with her. It was who she married. Well, she was divorced then anyhow (pause) so you just start banging around. Go from job to job. They'd give you a job and maybe you'd work there a month or two and you'd get laid off.

What were you doing? What kind of jobs did you have?

Well, the first job I got was with my stepfather. He wasn't working for Acme anymore. He was working at this foundry, making small lamp parts and all. Got a job there just parts for lamps junk, stuff parts for lamps and then you had to put them on a wheel, clean them up and stuff like that, doing stuff like that, assembling them. But then that ran out. Then I went to work in another place, they were making hot water heaters. It was just labor work really.

Could you have taken part in the GI bill?

Oh, sure I could have but see that's it, I - my dad. If I had finished high school to go to college you know, whatever, had to make up enough credits that you needed. They paid for that. They'd even give you living expenses and everything. You know really they took care of you. But you know I was just so messed up. (pause) Yep, well then I (laughs) (pause) Well that's how finally I ended up laying bricks.

How did that happen?

Well, Mary's brother, everybody, that's all they were doing. They all laid bricks. Like I got a job in the bakery. That didn't last long. See, in the meantime, I had gotten married.

I had met Mary when I was about 13, I guess. I had known her for, ever since I moved into that neighborhood. I guess I had to be 13, maybe I wasn't that old. I guess I was in sixth grade or something like that.

And where were you living at that time?

It was West Philadelphia. Around 51st and Girard. Stiles Street, 51st and Girard.

Well Mary, they lived on 51st Street and Stiles Street was a little street that ran into it and I never knew her before that. One of her girlfriends I knew, lived next door to where we moved. She was in my room in school so I knew her. But I didn't know anyone else in that neighborhood but maybe a couple of people that were going to the same school.

So were you just friends with her when you were in school? Did you date before you left for the war?

Nah. I might have gone to parties with her, stuff like that. I couldn't have. Oh, yea, that's right, yea I could have. I'm getting mixed up. Yea, maybe I did go to parties or whatever. We used to go I know every Thursday we used to bag school and go down the Earl whenever they changed the show you know the Earl had stage shows then.

Where was that?

Eleventh and Market. They had movies and stage shows. We used to see some good people like Frank Sinatra and Louie Prima. They brought some good people down. Yea it was inexpensive. We'd go Thursday afternoons, that's when the new shows came in. It was a matinee, was cheap. Nobody ever did catch on I guess. We were always out on a Thursday.

Did you communicate with her during the war did you write to her and all?

Yea, I wrote to her during the war.

Was there an expectation of marriage?

No, I don't think it was that serious then. Might have been. I know to her mother it was. (laughs) I think it was about the third time I went over there to take Mary out and she said, "Well, it's the thirda time you been here. Whatta you gonna do?" That's when I should of got on my horse and left town. (laughs) Like I'll never forget yea she caught me by surprise. Who the hell (laughs) thought she was going to come out with that?

They were all Italians?

Yea.

What was the make up of that neighborhood, was that an Italian neighborhood?

Yea.

And what was your mother doing there?

She got a place, a house to live in. She had to take whatever she could get 'cause she wanted to get out of that other place. Well, see, maybe she was on welfare then at that time and they used to pay you, give you rent money. Well I don't really know too much about the finances 'cause it just didn't interest me. I know a lot of times if I had a few dollars if I made a few bucks shoveling snow, or cutting grass or doing something, I'd give it to her.



Mary (DiBatista) Arters

So when did you get married? How did that happen?

It just sort of evolved. Well let's see (pause) I don't even think - We got married in October I guess it was and I had gotten out in July, that's how quick it happened.

What year was it?

Let's see - '46, yea. Yea, '46 it was.

Can you tell me about her family? What were they like to you?

They were all nice, they were all good to me. Her mother, she'd give you the shirt off her back. None of them gave me any problems. See Joe, he was my foreman, you know her brother Joe. Ercole, her other brother, he worked there. There were a lot of people from the neighborhood working there that I knew.

How many siblings did she have?

Five I guess it was. Let's see (pause) yea, five.

Did you get along with all of them pretty well?

Yea.

They got you a job brick laying where they worked?

Yea, when I got laid off from the bakery, it's June, Ercole actually, he's the one that pushed it. That's how it was, give it a shot, anyhow. He asked Joe, Joe asked the contractor. See with construction work, there was no such thing as filling out an application. This or that - you hit the guy up for a job, you get hired, you fill out the W2 or whatever it was for your deductions and that was it, no book work, nothing. They gave you quite a job. Right after the war, they were going crazy for brick layers 'cause they had all these houses they wanted to build. You'd quit a job here with this guy and go across the street and hit the other guy up and get another job (laughs) same day, don't even lose an hour. That's how they needed men bad. In fact there was a couple contractors, they were sending over to Italy to bring people over here to work as bricklayers for them. Send them a ticket, a few bucks and come on over. They'd go up to New York and meet them and bring them down, put them to work. Well things were really booming then at certain things, certain areas. Then the auto industry started to take off.

Did you like doing the brick work?

Yea. When I was younger, I didn't mind it at all. It was good. Yea, I liked it. Then you get older and all the units started getting bigger, no more bricks hardly, well there were

still a lot of bricks you know like the new stuff, E. P. Henry stuff and all. Some of that stuff's pretty heavy. Well, blocks were always heavy.

Did you ever think about doing something else?

No. I never did really. (Pause) Well I couldn't really due to the fact that I had health insurance and everything was all tied up. If I went somewhere else, I'd have had to get all new health insurance and I was just sort of tied to it.

So when did you get a house with Mary?

I lived with my mother-in-law for, let's see, I guess I lived there for a year with them maybe. Bunny was born there. After Bunny was born we lived there for awhile. See that's another thing, I was stuck with my mother too. She asked me if I could buy a home with my GI mortgage, I think it was 4 % or something so I bought this big house. It was a three story house. I think it was only nine thousand dollars, a three story house, and lived there for awhile and then I bought a new home up in the Northeast, right off the Boulevard, but Mary, she didn't like it up there.

When did you move up there?

I guess Gracie was a baby, a young kid. So that's - she was only a baby.

You didn't stay up there because Mary didn't like it?

Yea, she wanted to be back down West Philly with her family.

So how long were you in the Northeast at that time?

I guess we were about a year or so, I'm not even sure. Well, say a year.

And then you moved back down to the old neighborhood -

To Southwest Philly. Stayed down there for a long while. That was a nice place down there and then again one neighborhood went bad -

So what were some of the things that happened in that area during that time, obviously there was a lot a racial tension going on in the city? When did you notice that neighborhood change and when did you notice that things were starting to go bad?

Well, the kids, they were getting in fights going back and forth to school. They were going to catholic school and they had to go past the public school and they would get in fights with those kids. They were mostly all black, the public school kids.

Did they all go to the same schools?

Yea, well, down there they went to the catholic school, MBS, they went to Most Blessed Sacrament, then from there they went to West Catholic, Donald and Bunny and them and then after we moved up here they all went to the catholic high schools up here. Things were just starting and then finally a black family moved in next to us. I think he was like a foster parent or something but he used to be beating the kids and everything. My kids were getting all upset over that and you know they'd be hollering in the window at them so I figured it's time to get out of here.

What were some of the things that happened after King was shot? Was that at its worst around that time?

Well, it got a little bad but really it didn't seem to get as bad as I thought it would get. It seems (pause) most of the problem was with the hardliners some of them people they were just looking for some sort of excuse you know to make trouble. No, it wasn't too bad I mean it's no where near like what it is now a days, down there in the city.

Were there riots, I know there were some riots in the city. Is that anything that happened near you?

No. Most of the riots were down in the middle in the center, in inner city sort of. You know the high schools were well the majority was black students. Well where all the problems started, center city. Where we were in southwest Philly, the schools were still fairly white. Wherever the riots were, usually it wasn't in a white neighborhood. It was just spontaneous things.

You have a big family, you have eleven kids.

Right.

Was that something you decided to have with Mary? Did you ever sit down and say "well how many kids do you want to have?" or did it just kind of happen that way?

It just happened that way. Well you know she was Catholic and she didn't want to use birth control and stuff like that but no we never planned on having a big family like that. Never.

Was that something that you're having more and more kids was that ever kind of stressful?

Oh, yea. Yea, it was tough especially in those years, Mary wasn't working then either. (pause) Yea, it was tough especially the way construction work is, you know you lost a lot of time with the weather. I made good money but it was still a lot of stressful times.

After we moved up into the northeast, that's when she went to work for the Philadelphia School District. She was working in the junior high school there as a custodial aide. Then things got better 'cause she had her own health and welfare, her own pension. Things got, she made pretty good money. Well, it helped out a whole lot. And then she

continued working until she got cancer, then that was it, she couldn't work any more. That's why I retired when I was 62 because things were getting, I was losing too much time. Most of the kids were working but I couldn't just keep taking all this time off so I figured I'll just retire and that way sometimes it would be twice a week I'd take her somewhere, twice this week, once this week, you know you can't keep taking all that time off from work.

How was that, what kind of challenges did you have then, you're both working and you've got eleven kids?

Well most of the kids were fairly well self reliant. Let's see when we moved there, well Bunny wasn't living home, that's when she was in nursing school. Once she went to nursing school, she never lived home again. Bunny was in nursing school, Donald, he was coming and going, I don't know where he was. Sometimes he'd be home, sometimes he wasn't. Then Debbie, she lived there, I guess afterward she got a place of her own. They were starting to go little by little (pause.) I don't know, things just evolved. It's so hard to explain. You're going along in one way then all of a sudden it's going a different way. Instead of coming in, they're going out.

What do you think the most challenging thing was of being the father of eleven through all that time?

Control was a tough one. You know you're trying to control them all and then trying to see that they all get treated as close as possible to the same. Like that some don't get more than others and trying to do what you can for them. Well some of them need more time than others need; need more help with their lessons. It's hard that's their lot trying to find out which one needs it the most. (pause) It's just trying to run everything on an even keel. Do what you can, give one what they had to have and make sure if somebody else needs something that they can get it. Yep. It wasn't easy but the kids were good that way too they weren't demanding like some kids are. If you gave one kid something like if another one needed it I'd try to do it but they wouldn't come and demand it, you know what I mean? I guess they sort of realized just what the situation was too and they didn't ask for more than you could really do for them and they took care of each other, you know helped out that way too. Everybody sort of pitched in like helping with homework, things that they didn't know or Mary or me didn't know but the older ones could tell them. Yea, they were all good that way.

How would you describe your role versus Mary's - How in terms of your parenting style?

She was like the whats- its name? The ram rod. She sort of ran everything. She had one idea of the way things were supposed to go and that's they way she tried to do it.

Did you just kind of go along with that or did you ever fight about it?

Yea, No. We never had too many arguments over that cause she was always I mean she wasn't unfair with the kids. You know what I mean, she was always fair. She just she had different - Well (pause) she was raised a different way than I was raised. Her way

there was always family first and I never had much family like you know the way my father was and everything. That was the hardest part trying to get the kids to sort of bond, you know work as a family, live as a family.

I guess the older ones worked together sort of and the younger ones just followed suit. They saw that the older ones took care of the ones below them, then the ones below them would take care of the young ones and they knew that somebody would be there to help them.

Were there any really difficult times that stand out?

Oh yea, we had a lot of bad times. (pause) We had trouble with money when she was in nursing school, bills, prescription bills, that trouble with her. That didn't go on too long though. (pause) That was our first really "smack in the face" that one. So there's always something, with eleven kids there's always something. Like Billy, he's always getting married or getting engaged or he'd be engaged to a couple people at the same time. Well, married, that one girl came I guess it was when he was going to marry Charlene. She came over with an engagement ring. She said, "Here, give this to Billy, tel him I'll never bother him again." You know, stuff like that. He was always involved with something. But all told though, there wasn't too many problems. Not too many at all. Oh, there were problems yea, but nothing that couldn't be you know worked out.

What were the holidays like?

There was always a big thing. This is from Mary's side. Italians, you know holidays are always special. You know like Ash Wednesday the day before Ash Wednesday was always carnival they always wanted raviolis and have a big thing carnival. And then the holidays well it always came down to a meal. Any holiday, they wanted a special meal. It was always something to do **with** the family. Well that's from my in-laws. That's the way they operate.

You spent the holidays mostly with Mary's family? On the holidays did you see your family very much?

Oh, yea. I used to see my family holidays. When I first got married, on Sundays Mary's family they used to eat, my father-in-law, he had to eat twelve o'clock, he didn't care Saturday, Sunday or what. And they'd have a regular meal. We'd eat and then we'd go up my mother's and eat a regular meal. But that didn't last that long. But, no, holidays they were always something to look forward too.

Did you ever get tired of all the Italian food?

Nah I never really did cause I've always liked it (pause) I mean anymore I don't like it too much cause I sort of wore out of it but I always enjoyed it. Yep.

Were there ever any trips, big family trips – Did you ever do anything like that?

The whole family? Never that I can recall. We might have gone down the shore a couple times but that's, yea that was before we had **all** the kids though. We used to go to Atlantic City for a week. Maybe we had four or five kids then.

What did you and Mary ever do for fun? Did you ever have any down time where you could do something together?

Oh yea, we had, well I mean (pause) wouldn't be just us two. Maybe there'd be another couple or something with us. We never did too much just the two of us. We used to go like her brother, Ercole, and his wife. We used with them to go places like Florida, the mountains and things. And then a couple of her girlfriends that she went to school with the whole time she went to school and their husbands, well a couple of them were from the neighborhood. Yea, we used to do a lot of stuff. (pause) I mean we did what we could afford. We didn't do nothing exotic or anything like that.

We went on a cruise but then there were four of us, four couples I think, one, two, yea four of us, four couples, we went on a cruise. (pause) Let me see. (pause) Maybe we'd go out on a Saturday night, like something like that, like the weekend.

How much were Mary's family or your family involved with helping out with the family?

Well, when we were living with Mary's family, they naturally they were involved more cause my mother-in-law, she never left the house anyhow so we always had her but they were good and my sisters when my kids were first born my sisters used to take care of them like Bunny and Donald and Gracie and them. They took care of them. They baby sat a lot for us. I can remember Mary and me she used to like to go to a ball game once in awhile you know Shibe Park, stuff like that. Go to the movies.

You were talking earlier, I guess it's time to come back to when you found out that she got cancer. When did you find that out?

Well, she told me, first I heard she told me she had a lump she had to go back to the mall, you know that center there? I don't know her gynecologist or who but anyhow he told her to come back in six months that's when the whole thing started. Then she went, I don't know how the whole thing started that they found out that they made a mistake but then they took the x-ray, the biopsy and everything. Well the night I had to take her over to the surgeon, that's when he was going to tell her what the outcome was of the biopsy and everything. I took her over there, that's when he told her you know she's going to have to get operated on right away. I remember that night because I had just bought a Chevy, a S10, and I brought her home and I parked out front. We had a bunch of cars then like them people across the street and somebody came up and hit the damn truck. He had, remember those little Chevy Sprints? He had one of them. Drove my truck into his hatchback, that Sprint hatchback. I mean really, there wasn't too much damage. It happened, you know it had to happen on that night. The truck wasn't that old. I just bought it. So I remember that night. But then things started getting, you know, first it's not this serious then it's worse. Then when she did get operated on, they had to really

chop her up. They had to do a lot more cutting than they thought they would. But that was it. She never did get better.

Do you think there were mistakes made there with the diagnosis?

Yea, there were. Well, she sued them. A buddy of mine, Louie the cop, you heard me talk about Louie Damiani? He was in with the FOP, he was some kind of officer and all. He got their lawyer and he got him to take the case; take it, do the case. Whatever he gets he makes he makes. He didn't want any money up front or anything. I don't think he had too much experience with that kind of case. But anyhow, she did sue him, She got, I don't know how much money she got. She didn't get a whole lot. I know she got enough money to pay the house off, she put about five thousand on the house. She should have gotten way more than whatever she got if she had a different lawyer. But anyhow, that's what came out of that. She did sue him. They found out that they were wrong. The time she should have whoever read the biopsy, the mammogram or whatever, that's where the whole thing was. Instead of saying come back in six months, they should have sent her to a surgeon right then and there. You know, maybe it was more than six months before she got to a surgeon. It had a chance to do whatever cancer does, expands or well anyhow Dr. Files, that doctor we got over here now, he's the guy who said "You've got to get her away from them people" and he sent me over to a gynecologist, cancer doctor, Dr. Kennedy. She did a lot for her. She kept her going for maybe a year or two longer than she would have probably cause she did everything for her anything that came out or she really did all she could for her but it was too late then.

How else did that change your life? Did things change for you in other ways when that happened?

Oh, yea. Well first of all you know the kids are going to lose their mother, you're going to lose your wife. You know, things just aren't the same. It's hard to explain but there's always something waiting there for you it seems like. You know, that's all I (pause) I mean she used to want to do things, she'd want to go to Florida and stuff like that. Well, she did go, I mean she struggled a lot of times towards the end till she finally got physically she couldn't do it anymore. The last time she wanted to go, we were in the restaurant over at Georgine's and Mary was trying she was having a hard time getting going from Georgine's to the car and Maimie told her, she says, "you can't even make it to the car and you want to go to Florida?" That's when you started to realize just how things were going. But she did a lot you know with the way, I guess ten years is right. Kathy's probably right.

I'll tell you waiting for it to happen seemed to be worse than when it did happen. But I remember the day she did die, well all the family was here. She was in hospice care then. They told me don't call any doctors or anything, call us cause they knew there was nothing anybody could do. They didn't want to get her involved with a whole bunch of crap but the night before, I asked somebody about giving her last rites, she said, "Yea. Get him right away." So she got her last rites and then the whole family was just gathered around her there. You know she's taking her last breaths then you could just see she gave up, that was it. That's when it really hits you. He started it crying, but at least

one thing, she had the whole family with her, had them all. And they were all there to **be** with her. But it's a hard thing to describe, but like I say, waiting for it to happen is just as hard. You know like she'd get night time she'd go to bed. I didn't want to sleep with her in the bed with her because I was afraid I was going to hurt her. A lot of nights she didn't want to go to bed by herself. I guess she was afraid to go to bed by herself, she didn't know what would happen. It's, I mean, it's always there. It's **always** there.

When you think about her now, what kind of things do you think about?

Well, you sort of think of everything generally you know like you just take an overview of everything, the whole thing. From the start of the marriage, the kids, everything. (pause) You know when you think how she suffered, sometimes you try to think what she thought about it 'cause she never gave you any inkling of what she was thinking.

So she was really strong?

Yea. Yep.

Did you start studying art during that time? When did you start doing that?

Afterwards, yea. Well I joined the seniors. That's when I started. You know after she died and all they all got on me. "You know you gotta do something." So I joined and then I went to art class there. That was a big mistake you know, dropping that but -

Have you thought about picking that up again?

I do, well I think about it. Well maybe I can now (pause) I can't do the things I was doing. See I didn't realize how bad this damn thing was or you know how (pause) I thought I'd just get rid of the fluid and everything were going was going to be back the way it was.

Talking about your heart?

Yea. Especially with all the other stuff that's going on in there. You know bypasses. I remember the first damn angioplasty I had. You know I went down the airport to pick Gracie up and I thought it was the cold weather. I had this pain you know. And I'm walking all over, I forget how far away from the gate I had to park. I had to walk all the way up there, carry her suitcase down and then it was either the next day or two days later, I went to Dr. Files and I told him about it and he asked me, he said "Do me a favor, will you?" He said, "Get a stress test." And that's when they found out they had to give me angioplasty. And it's been from there on. That was a mess, that first angioplasty. (laughs) That's supposed to, they say an hour, an hour and a half or so. I was there I think it was six hours on that damn gurney and trying to break through to get that. And one of the doctors, I guess Dr. Strauss, he must have just been starting then cause I had one guy, I can't think of his name. He said, "You've got Dr. Strauss thinking. He thinks he's taken the wrong damn profession." (laughs) That's what I mean, I've got all that other junk and now I've got this shit. Maybe if I get that pacemaker, everything will be

all right. **Maybe.** See I could have had this, my heart could have been like this my whole damn life 'cause I never know when it jumps in or out that A-fib.

The first time anybody told me I had A-fib was Dr. Strouse told me when I was, I think I had a stent put in. You know they opened me up and put a stent in and you're on the monitor all the time and he told me, he said, "Maybe you can go home tomorrow." Then tomorrow he says "Naw," he says, "You're still not in rhythm, sinus rhythm." And he asked me, he said, "Don't you even feel that or anything?" That's the first I even thought about sinus rhythm. I could have had it for years wouldn't have done.

Do you have any regrets?

Yea, I do. That I wasted so much of my damn time you know that I could have been doing something to further my education even after, you know that's one of my biggest regrets is not doing anything to further my education. It would have helped me a whole lot probably. I guess I got other ones but right now I can't (pause) some of the stuff I did as a kid, I guess. I didn't take more pains into my school work instead of - screwing around (pause.) The other regret I have is that I couldn't do more for my family. I'd have liked to have done a lot more for them. And maybe if I did a little more towards my education, I could have helped them better. Yea, that was always one of my biggest regrets. Like a lot of times the kids well most of them had to spend their own money to go to school, you know college.

What do you think your biggest accomplishments have been?

Living to be 81 (laughs.) I kept the family together, tried to keep them so that they cared for each other. That was one of my goals. Remain a family, care as a family for each other and Mary's the one who really saw to it that they stayed with their education. She really pushed it. You know I did what I could but she was the "hard nose." I always remember that as soon as a kid went to school the first day, man, Mary would sit there waiting for them to come home to see what they had for homework (laughs). She got them the **very first** day, "What have you got for homework?" And that was it for the rest of their school life. She was tough that way. I wish I had been able to do a lot more for my family. I mean they don't seem to have any regrets. I guess they have a lot of regrets but they don't show it, you know, the kids.

Is there anything else that you'd want to share with your family? Anything you'd want to impart?

Well, you know I'm proud of them all, you know whatever they do, I'm proud of them and I think the same of them all; what I think of one, I think of the other. There's no favorites. They're all the family, you know they're all our kids. I just wish them the best of luck and you know sorry I couldn't give them more to get them started but I just hope they keep plugging away. What else can I do now? Yea, that's been a **big** regret, not being able to give them a lot of things that they should have had.

I guess, I (pause) said it all. I mean I just did what I did the best I could, I'll never know whether it's going to be enough.

What do you want to do now? What would you like to do that you haven't done maybe? Maybe do something again that you haven't done in awhile?

I'd like to do what I should have been doing all along, keeping in shape but I don't know if I can even get back in shape now or not. That's what I should have been doing. Let myself go. Maybe I'm going to go around there and start taking those art classes again. They have a new teacher now. The one that was there when I went, she died. (pause) I just got to learn not to let things go, to keep up on top of everything. That's one of my worst habits.

