

Interviewer: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)

Interviewee: Robert (Bob) Hodge (BH)

Date: Tuesday, June 20, 2021

Place: Hodge residence, Biddeford Maine

*NMS: Today is Tuesday, July 20th, 2021. My name is Nicole Morin-Scribner. I am the interviewer. Today I have the honor of interviewing Robert Hodge, or do you go by Bob?*

BH: Bob, usually.

*NMS: Ok. So, we'll go by Bob.*

*We are conducting this interview at Bob's home in Biddeford. I usually start this interview at the beginning and ask you to tell me what year and where were you born?*

BH: I was born in Biddeford in 1931, October. I've lived all my life in Biddeford, 7 different locations. I married a local girl. My birth, I didn't know much about. I lived on State Street when I was very young, so I don't remember at all.

When I was five years old, we moved to Pool Road. It was not far from the skating rinks, if you are familiar with that area, south of Clifford Park. This was my home until I got married. We moved to one across the street. I loved it because it was next to the woods. I spent every moment I could outside.

The winters were pretty interesting. There was a lot of snow. I developed an interest in skating, at the skating rinks. I used to skate at the Silver Skates because it was cheaper to skate there than the other one. The Westbrook Skating Rink started in 19 twenty something. If you ever notice it, probably not now because it's all grown up, but when I was growing up, they had these toboggan runs besides that. The toboggans were very familiar piece in the 1930's until it kind of died out. As I grew up, I lived across the street. In back of the house was a gully.

Further than that was a place we called Stone Crusher. I'm going to back track. If you are familiar with Pool Street, you know where the flower shop is. The name is Curro's [Greenhouse and Garden]. I worked for the father years and years. Before that, there was a house and in front was the company that owned a quarry. The road was built to go around a small cemetery, which dated back to the 1700's. There are probably about 30 to 40 stones there. I lived next door to that. You'd follow that road around until you get to what we called the Stone Crusher. The Stone Crusher was a big, huge building in the woods that crushed stones. Particularly in the summer, we could hear the whistle blow when they blew up part of the rock formation. They would drill into a rock, blew it up and crushed it into pieces. It was a huge structure. It was mostly timbers and metal. They would break the rocks down. That was interesting to me as a boy. I was 5-6 years old and heard the "booms" and saw the dust. I would get there. My parents didn't mind, I guess. It was about 2-3 hundred yards into the woods and then into the pathway.

Interesting enough, that pathway continued to a place called Second Base. Have you ever heard of second base? It's a ball field in the woods. It was built by either the CCC during the 1930's or I'm trying to think of the other organization [Note: The WPA – which in 1939 was renamed the Work Projects Administration – employed mostly unskilled men to carry out public works infrastructure projects.] It was part of (President Franklin D.) Roosevelt's program to help young people. They built a field mind you. They excavated a field, they put up a backstop and everything there. It was kind of interesting for me, even though I was only 5-6-7 years old. It was a ballpark. It had a back stop and everything in the woods. You could get there by car. It was kind of rocky. This was my background. In the spring of the year, in the summer I would roam the area which is the south part of Clifford Park. You are familiar with Clifford Park, I'm sure. I would spend time there alone and sometimes with friends.

There was also a ski trail that was built by the CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps. Some time in the 1930's, I don't know when, I discovered the trail. It started at the very top of Clifford Park, the highest point. It would wind its way down and come right near the cemetery. If you got thinking about that, I had the skating rinks to get busy with, I skated. I skied a lot. Toe straps of course. From when I was 6 to about 11 years old. That background gave me an interest in the outside. I would spend time outside alone and sometimes I would walk with my father.

My father didn't speak any French. He didn't like the French, but he married a French girl from Canada. I'll come to the story about that later on. He was from

England. He came here after World War I. He fought in the war, and he got wounded. He was bitter in some ways, but he was a good man.

This is where I spent my youth, skating until eventually I grew up to be big enough to join the hockey club. I played some hockey. More interesting, I played baseball. I loved to play baseball.

I was not big in high school. I was a freshman at 12 years old. The nuns, the crazy nuns I call them. I was in the first grade and a bunch of us, all of a sudden, found ourselves in the third grade. I went back to school and instead of being in the second grade, I came home and told my mother, "I'm in the third grade." She said, "You can't be in the third grade." She grabbed my hand and walked right down to the school and found out I was in the third grade. There was a bunch of us. Not just myself. Then I skipped the fifth grade. I would up with the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. Skipping two years, all of a sudden, I'm in the eighth grade and I'm lost. I don't belong there. I'm small, tiny. I'll show you some pictures. I was really small (laughter). I grew eventually. That's the background of where I lived for all my young life until I got married.

I worked for Nick Curro, way back when I was about 13 or 14. Beyond that as I go forward with my age, I have proof that I played baseball. Eventually baseball kind of died. Then we had all of these leagues forming in softball after World War II (1947-48-49). Then I played softball.

In high school, when I got to St. Louis, of course I was only 12 years old. I was small. I think I was the smallest kid in my class. When I was there, everyone was bigger than I was (laughter). There were probably a couple that were close. I didn't play sports because I was considered too small. I wasn't particularly happy the first two years. Then I got some subjects like Physics, American History, Chemistry and those kinds of things and I really improved.

I wanted to be first in the class. There was a competition. There was a guy who was a nice fellow, Mark (can't remember his last name right now Note: Collette) who came out with a final grade of 94.2. I had a grade of 94.1. I was not the top of the class. I was posted to do the Salutatorian welcoming. To do that, it was in French. I told my father, "I'm going to be welcoming the class, people and the parents." He said, "I'm not going to go. I don't like French." We never spoke French at home, never, except when he was in the mills. When he was working. We spoke with my mother in French. I had a small family, only one older brother. That's all there was. In those days families were 3, 4, 5 and 6 and more. There was a guy who I think came from a family of 12 or something like that. I went back and told the Brother and said, "I can't be the salutatorian because my father will not come to the graduation." He said, "It's ok. We'll move out and appoint someone else." That's why I was not the salutatorian. I was not the valedictorian by one tenth of a point and I was so damn mad. But that's ok.

From there, growing up I worked at different jobs. When I graduated from St. Louis, I thought I would go to college. I loved physics and chemistry and I aced everything there. Not bragging, it's the truth. I even have the records. I told my

parents, “I want to go to college.” They were shocked. They looked at me and said, “Bobby. You don’t go to college.” They had a limited education. My father I think had third grade in England. My mother, I’m not quite sure what she had. They said, “You go to work.” So, I went to work for a carpenter because I had been working for him. There was a house next door to me that was being renovated and he hired me to do general work, cleanup and bust walls. I went to work as a carpenter. I worked that summer.

At the end of the summer there was a guy across the street by the name of Joseph Letellier, plumbing. Joe had a stepson who was going to college. He said, “Do you want to come to work for me and learn the trade?” I said, “Great.” I wasn’t learning anything in carpentry. I went to work for him. I was learning quite a lot about plumbing. The following spring of 1949, things fell apart. We had some kind of slump in the economy all over the country. It was a recession more than a depression. He said, “My son is coming back from college, and I don’t have enough work for you.” So, that was it.

By that time, I was still 16 and I couldn’t find any work. I picked blueberries, I sold them. I worked a little bit part-time across the street. When I started working, my parents expected me to pay \$15 a week for board and room. That was par I guess in those days. I was disappointed that I didn’t go to college. I was disappointed that my parents weren’t enthused about that. They thought I had enough education having gone to high school. But I was too young. I didn’t know much of anything. I just kind of rolled along. I did work when I could find work. I couldn’t find any work in the shops that hired at 18 because of laws. Then finally

in the fall of that year, 1949, I got a job working at the Kesslen Shoe Shop. I did day work. When I could do piece work, I made some money. I had to pay the driver to get there. I had to pay my parents \$15. I did that for about a year.

One day I was walking to the McArthur Library in Biddeford. I used to go there on Saturday. My grandparents lived adjacent to the park. In fact, their land was bordering the park. I would go see my grandparents and have lunch with them on Saturday. They wanted me to go. It wasn't that far, a couple hundred yards. They would give me a dime. I don't know why they gave me a dime. Sometimes I helped them in the fields because they had a fairly big garden. I would go spend the 10 cents in City Theater to see the movies.

I used to go to the library. That one day I met a Boy Scout Executive Commissioner. I was a boy scout for a while back when I was about 11 to 13 years old. He used to take me skiing because I loved to go skiing. I didn't have any money. I didn't have a car. I didn't even know how to drive. We used to go different places. We even went to Mt. Washington and ski when I was 16, down the ravine. By then we had bindings on our skis. I loved skiing. I could ski all of the time. That was my favorite winter sport. Hockey and skating were secondary to that. So anyways he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm working in the shoe shop." He said, "You are smart enough to do something better than that." I said, "Well, my parents don't want me to go to college. I got no guidance at St. Louis." Back in those days, they didn't have any kind of vocational counseling. You graduated and that's it. If you were the son of somebody that owned a business or a doctor, those people automatically went to college. The rest of us

went to work. He said to me, “Did you ever think about becoming a teacher?” I said, “No. Not really.” He said, “Why don’t you go to Gorham State Teachers’ College? It’s pretty cheap out there.”

I didn’t think much about it. I parted my ways. Later that summer, I wrote to the President of the college. It was not a big college back then. It took quite a while and then he sent a letter back asking for my ranks. He said, “You attended what kind of school?” I said, “A Catholic school.” The guy was a die-hard Protestant. He didn’t like Catholics. I didn’t know until about a week before school started that I was accepted. My father was against that. He was against me going to college. I took the clothing that I had. I walked to Saco on North Street and bummed a ride. Back in those days you could thumb rides and you’d get rides. I wound up at the college. I stood there in line to process the entrance. You couldn’t stay there because in those days it was all a girl’s dorm. They had a list of places in town where you could go live for \$4 or something like that. I had a little of money I had saved. I knew I could probably find work in Gorham. I did find a large place where you raise plants, I forget the name of it. I worked there. So, I lived there.

My parents were good people. I’d bum a ride home on the weekend. They accepted me back for the weekends, but I didn’t pay any board and room (laughter). I did that for three years until I got to learn how to drive when I was 20 years old. I was old. Everybody else had learned to drive. From there I had bought a car for \$125. I drove to the school, back and forth. Then I did my student teaching in the town of Scarborough. Then I graduated.



When I graduated, I saw they posted the signs for Biddeford. I thought I could teach at Biddeford. The opening pay in Biddeford was \$1900.

My girlfriend lived about a half mile from me, on Lafayette Street, which connects to Pool Street. Her mother was a relative of the Goulet family that lived further down on Cleaves Street. I got to know Nancy. It was like a childhood sweetheart; you could call it that. I knew her from the age of 16 or 17. We started to go steady, go to the movies. It was time for us to get married. When I told my mother I was going to get married, she started crying. She always wanted me to become a priest. She had money. She inherited money from my grandmother. She would have paid anything for me to go to school. She had told me that beforehand. I had told her, "No. I'm not made out to become a priest. Maybe a father of some children later on, but not a priest." She was very much opposed to marriage. My older brother never married until both my mother and father were dead. He got married at the age of 50 (laughter). He stayed home all the time.

That summer when I graduated, I said, "How am I going to get enough money to furnish a wedding and so forth?" Someone said, "Why don't you check Cushman Baking Company?" I don't know if you ever heard of that, probably not. It's a baking company that comes out of Portland. It's defunct now. They sold very good pastries and breads of all kinds. They said, "You could make money, Bob." I said, "Really?" So, I applied and was hired. He said, "Where do you live?" I said, "I live in Biddeford." He said, "Well, you have to pay for a truck, \$4 a day. We provide you the truck and then you have to buy the goods. We charge you after

you bought the goods, you can only return breads. Certain items you can't return pies, cakes and things like that." He gave me a route in Wells, Wells Beach. I went there and I did extremely well because there was a clientele from Sanford that owned cottages on the beach. A lot of them came from Quebec and stayed there for the summer. Labonne would come with them, and I walked up there and speak French with them. I made sales. The guy that was a supervisor said, "I want to go and travel with you. You're making double the sales that ever occurred on this route. I want to know what you are doing." I said, "OK." He hopped in with me and when he got to Wells Beach, he knew why I was doing well. I was speaking their language. They loved me. So, I made far more money than I would have ever made teaching. They wanted me to stay in the company. By that time, I had gotten a job and said, "Coming back to Biddeford. I can't live on \$1900." I was married. My wife might get pregnant right away. She was working in the mills. But she didn't work two months after we got married. Then she was expecting. She was sick, had to quit and never went back. She never worked again. She became a mother of four children.

We got married. August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1954. We got married at St. Andre's Church, in French. My father didn't know what was going on, but he was there. He was polite. My mother cried during the whole ceremony. My father kept saying, "Marian, that's enough. Marian, that's enough." I never forgot that day. It was kind of a sad day. Can you imagine, your mother's crying over you getting married.

Prior to that, I had gotten a job teaching in Alfred. That was strange because I had interviewed with the superintendent at the college, back in April. He liked my credentials. I came out one of the top ten in the college. It was a small class. We were about 125 in all that graduated that year, 1954. I got interviewed and he was very interested. "Do you like sports?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Good. You will be coaching boys and girls baseball and basketball. It was a small school. Basketball I wasn't too keen about, but I knew the basics. I knew I could play the game if I wanted to. He said, "I'm going to recommend you to the school committee." The school committee was three people. He came back to the college, and I saw him, and he said, "They rejected you." My grades were excellent, my student teaching was A+. Everything was fine. I enjoyed teaching. I didn't think I would the first year, but I stuck it out. I said, "Why?" He said, "Because down below when you had a choice on the application blank of preferred religion, you wrote Catholic." There had never been a Catholic teacher in Alfred Maine until I came there. I said, "Why? I'm not going to be teaching religion. I'm going to be teaching the subjects I'm hired for: math and science." He said, "Well, they want you to sign an affidavit that you will not teach about the Pope and the Catholics. If you do, you'll be fired on the moment." I thought that was very strange for the public school to do that. But I did. I signed it.

I spent seven and a half years there. But it was too much. I was a full-time teacher. I taught all the way through, all day. There were no breaks. I would go out with the kids. I loved the outdoors. At recess, we went out all together. They were not big classes. The biggest class I think was about 23-24. Back in those days, that was considered a small class. I think I had some classes that were 17 or

18 during the 7 years. I coached baseball in the spring of the year. I coached softball for girls. Later on, I coached basketball. I coached sports and I was busy.

Meanwhile, we were living in Biddeford. A child comes along a year after we were married, in September of the following year. Then two years later, another child comes out, a boy. It was getting pretty hectic. I was not spending much time at home. I'd leave early in the morning. I even drove a school bus in Alfred to make extra money. I said, "I can't keep this going."

I had joined the Army Reserves back when I was in college so that I would get money out of that. It was an outfit in 871<sup>st</sup> ordinance, heavy maintenance. I joined that to make some money. I nearly got sent to Korea. They mobilized us, sent us to Camp Devens then shipped us to San Francisco. The war ended so I didn't see any action. That was it.

I finally said, "I can't keep this up." We had flag football leagues that we performed with in Sanford. Touch football with a flag. I coached that. Every day I was involved with something. I said, "I can't keep this up." I heard that Biddeford was building a new high school and would vacate the high school on Alfred Street. That would become a junior high. I applied for the job. There was a guy by the name of Larrabee, who was the superintendent. He was in cahoots with the mayor [Note: Mayor Louis "Papa" Lausier]. He kept the taxes low, and the schools were terrible.

It's funny how things happen. I went for an interview. I was expanding the house. We had to get out of the rent because the oldest was very active. More like me but worse. He was hyper. Nancy had a hard time with it. We said, "We need to get our own house." We finally were able to get a house. We borrowed money. It was hard. I had to borrow from my brother who had stocks. We borrowed at 5%. No one wanted to loan me any money. I had enough for a down payment. I had saved \$1,000 because I had been working summers at the beaches and made more money there than I was teaching. It was a great deal. I couldn't get a loan. I went to Pepperell Savings, I went to First National Bank, I went to Biddeford Savings Bank. They said, "You are a risk to us. You are the only worker. Your wife is a homemaker. You're only earning so much money. You're earning only \$4,000. You can barely make ends meet. You have to work summers." So, I couldn't get a loan. My brother, at 5%, gave me the loan so that I could buy that house on the Alfred Road. You know where the Biddeford Crossing is? I had a house there, a small house. The upstairs was not opened up. I moved there in the winter. It was the day before Christmas, 1959. Eventually about two years later, we were expecting the third child. I busted the ceiling, put a stairwell in and finished the upstairs. I had some skills in carpentry, enough to make a go of it. I'm not sure if it was really perfect but...(laughter).

Coming back to how come I came to Biddeford, the superintendent had six towns: Alfred; Limerick; Waterboro and a couple of others. He would go around every year and see us in the spring of the year. He said, "What would you like for a salary?" I said, "I'm coaching two sports, boys and girls. I'm busy. I have no breaks during the day. I go eat with the kids. I go out with the kids. I just don't go

home with them. That's all I don't do. I am with them all the time." I was earning \$4,300 that year. I said, "I need to get \$5,000." He said, "Oh, I don't know about that."

Another thing came up. The University of New Hampshire was doing some work with beaming of French programs. We were like 60 air miles from the University of New Hampshire. Someone, I don't know who, contacted me and asked if I could speak French. I said, "Of course, I do. I had 10 years of French. I can write and speak French." He said, "Would you be interested in teaching French?" I said, "Sure." I told the superintendent about it. He said, "You are on your own." We got a television donated and put it in the middle of the room. Using rabbit ears, we caught the beam. We had French 3 days a week and I taught French to the kids. The kids loved it because they mostly all went to Sanford High School. Alfred High School closed a couple of years before I got there. That was another thing I was doing. He came back to me and said, "I talked to the School Board, and they can only give you \$100 extra." I said, "Listen, I'm coaching these sports, I teach all day, I'm teaching French and now I'm the principal of this building." I didn't do much as principal except send in reports to Augusta. That's about all I did. There was no discipline. He said, "That's all we can do for you." I really felt cheated.

When the notice came in that very spring that they were going to hire a new Junior High Principal, I applied for the job. I went there to get an application on a weekday during spring vacation. I was all dressed up dirty. I had just finished cleaning the upstairs. Larrabee was a friend of Lausier. You may have heard of

Lausier, the mayor. He said, "Who's there?" He asked my name. I said, "Robert Hodge." "Have him come in." I said, "I'm not appropriately attired to be interviewed." He said, "Come on in. You're English?" I said, "Yes. My father is from England." He said, "What about your mother?" I said, "Canada." "Your grandparents?" "Turgeon." "Oh. Turgeon. I've heard of the name. Lausier calls them great Democrats." He listened to me. He opened the drawer and said, "See how many applications I have for that job?" There may have been maybe a dozen, maybe more. I don't know. I'm kind of cocky. I said, "I don't think any of them are qualified. I qualify. I've done everything. I've taught French and all the subjects. I've taught all of the junior high stuff, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade stuff. I coach. What more do you want?" He said, "I don't know about that." So, he let me go. He called me for a second interview, and I got hired after that. So, I came to Biddeford. He said, "What do you want for a salary?" I said, "\$5,000." He said, "We can't pay that for you. We'll give you \$4,700 and if you prove yourself, we'll give you the \$5,000." By Christmastime, he wrote me a letter that said, "Congratulations. You are now promoted to \$5,000 a year."

Up to that point, it was interesting. I got to love Biddeford. I was of course a native of Biddeford. I knew a lot of people. I spoke French and English. Some people spoke strictly French because they were from Canada and didn't speak the language. I had an edge in some ways since I was bi-lingual. We had grades 5-6-7-8 in that building. I think there were about 500-600 kids. It was a big building. There was no assistant. I was full-time. Sometimes, I couldn't get a substitute and had to teach. If the Superintendent would call and say, "I want to speak to Mr. Hodge." They would say, "He's teaching now." He'd respond, "Well

tell him to get a sub.” They said, “He can’t find any so he’s teaching.” (laughter) So, he would drive down to come and see me sometimes.

Then, I matured, and I grew. We had a fourth child in the spring of 1961. I came to Biddeford in 1961. That year, we had our fourth child. A funny thing happened. I was in the Reserves. By then I had the rank of Sergeant First Class. “E Gads.” I was supposed to go to camp. I said, “When?” They said, “The last week of August, first week of September.” When we met in Saco. I told the captain (or Major), “I have a new job.” He said, “You’ve got to go.” I said, “If I write a letter to you, will you consider it?” He said, “No.” He denied it. He said, “You’ve got to go.” I said, “My wife is expecting. We have no water in the house. We have a problem with the well. I have to haul water. We did it for years until we had enough water to get a deep well. He said, “No. I can’t let you go.” (I was teaching classes.) That was the reason that I was teaching some classes every other week on Saturday and Sunday. My wife was crying. She said, “You were gone last summer when I had my third child and now you are going to be gone again. You can’t do that.” This is the day before we had phones. I didn’t have a phone. I wrote a letter to Margaret Chase Smith. She was on the Armed Forces Committee. She was a very powerful lady. About a month after I wrote the letter while we are in formation I hear, “Sergeant Hodge, front and center.” I go front and center, rigid. “Sergeant Hodge, you are hereby dismissed. Get out of here. Pick up your things and leave. You are dispatched.” Everybody looked around and said, “What the hell happened?” I knew that something had happened because he wouldn’t have done that. He must have been told, “Let this guy go. We are not at war. It’s



not the end of the world. You can get somebody else to teach his class.” I was able to be home for the birth of our fourth child.

Four boys. I have some papers. [Note: shows picture of four boys when young]. My cousin from England took these pictures and I didn’t know about it because I was working that summer. My youngest one, we lost him, at the age of 25. He was brilliant. This kid was smarter than all the rest of the kids. They all went to college eventually. The oldest one went into the Navy after he graduated from Biddeford High. I was kind of glad because I didn’t know if I had the money to send him to college. But anyways, he went to college. The second one went two years later. They all went to college. This one here served in the Navy then he moved to California. We helped him by sending him checks periodically. He had the GI bill, so it was OK.

This one here [note: indicating youngest one in the picture] was brilliant. He was going to St. Joseph’s Grammar School. By then the last two went to St. James’ Grammar School. I didn’t want them to transfer to the public school because it sometimes creates an issue. He was extremely intelligent. I knew he was very smart because as a boy he had one of these Etch-a-Sketch. Do you know what they look like? He’d shake it and he’d keep building things. He would do unbelievable things. I could barely make a square. He could do pictures. He’d do everything. I said, “This kid is smart.” By the time he was about 8 years old, I was assembling a small library bench with partitions. I was looking at the instructions. He was not more than 8 years old, and he said, “Dad, this is how it goes.” He could see how it was going to be built. He was extremely bright.

When he was at St. Joseph's, he started to disturb the classes. When he was in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade, he was getting to be a problem. He would get his work all done right away. I got him aside and said, "Listen, David. You have to behave." They decided they wanted to test him. They tested him and he came out with an IQ of 160. [Note: 140 to 160 is highly intelligent. 160+ is genius]. I said, "Oh my God."

When it came for him to go to high school, Biddeford High (of course, St. Louis was closed back then) he picked general courses. I said, "No, no. You aren't going to pick general course. You will pick college course." He said, "Dad. I don't want to do what you do. You are studying every night. You are correcting papers every night. You are trying to get your master's degree and beyond." I said, "David, I know you can do the work that needs to be done on a college course, an AP [note: Advanced Placement] course. You are going to take AP courses." He said, "I'm not going to college." I said, "That's fine. Don't go to college. That will be a help for me. Don't go to college. Maybe you'll go in the trades." He took AP and never brought a book home, never, and he was always on the honor roll. I said, "When do you do your work?" He said, "On the bus coming home or in study hall. Whenever I have a chance, I do my work." He was an extremely bright kid.

He went to Maine Maritime Academy the Merchant Marines. He went up to the college on the coast, I can't recall the name now. He graduated high in the class and went into the Merchant Marines as an officer and marine engineer. The marine

business went down. They were hiring foreign people. He had trouble finding work.

His brother had come on a visit and was heading back to California. So, he went to California. He was interviewed and went to work for the Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. He was an inspector of plants: mostly oil, gas and some atomic plants, because he had the background when he started at Maine Maritime. He did everything. He was smart. He passed all of the tests over there. He would fly to different places in California, Nevada. He was cleared to test.

He was a skier. He was the best skier in our family. I taught him how to ski. He lived across the Golden Gate Bridge. Have you ever been to San Francisco? No, well, it's a very nice place to go to. He lived across the Golden Gate Bridge in a small town. He would get up at 2 o'clock in the morning and pick up a couple of friends that were skiers in San Francisco and drive to right near the lake. Heavenly Valley was the ski place. It was a 6-hour drive to get there. He would drive there with his two male friends, ski all day and drive back. They did that for about a year, not full year, wintertime primarily. The last time he dropped them off in San Francisco. He crossed the Golden Gate Bridge about 2:30 in the morning, fell asleep, hit an abutment and was killed instantly. 25 years old. It was tough to accept that.

He was such a brilliant kid. He could paint. He could do anything. His brother was playing the sax. He said, "Let me try that." He'd play the tune on the sax. He just had that ability. The only thing that he had trouble with was language. He had

to take French and Spanish. When he took French, he did OK. But that was his only subject that he really had to work at. So, it was tough. That was very difficult.

I can tell you a lot about the things I've done. When I was in Alfred, the kids there were good kids. I said to them one day, "Wouldn't you like to go to Boston and see the Old Constitution, the Bunker Hill Monument, the Freedom Trail and the Boston Museum?" They said, "Yeah." I told the Superintendent, "I'd like to take this class." There was about 20 of us. The parents agreed. I said, "I want to show these kids what it is to leave the town of Alfred and see another part of the world. We got together and raised some money. We took a caravan of cars, and we went to the USS Constitution. We studied about that. We went to the Bunker Hill Monument. We went to the Old North Church, the Old North Trail. We wound up eating in town. We then went to the Museum of Science. They enjoyed that. I remember that it was something that was not done usually by school kids.

When I came to Biddeford, I think it was the second year, I told the teachers, "You know what. We have to take these kids out of this environment. All they think of is Biddeford. They have never gone anywhere." I said, "We've got to go somewhere. We've got to do something exciting." I told the Superintendent, "You've got to raise money. We are not going to support that." So, we raised money. We had five school buses full of 40-42 kids. We did this for three or four years until I picked up the ninth grade. When it was the freshman class, it became a "déjà vu" type of thing and it didn't work out. We stopped doing that. But they had been thrilled.

I had some of the parents who would refuse to let them go. They had to get an ok from them to make sure that they had approved of this trip. I would go to the parents' home and say, "This is a chance of a lifetime. These kids haven't even gone to Portland, Maine. They've been stuck in Biddeford and Saco. Let's do something with them. Let's go and learn something." So, we did exactly what I did when I was teaching in Alfred. It was an enjoyable thing.

There was another thing I did that was different back in those days. The winters were still pretty good. There was a ski place south of us, Mount Agamenticus. There was a ski area with a rope tow and a T bar. I said, "I wonder if they would do something for the kids to learn how to ski. They said, "OK. We'll look into that." They called back and said, "For \$2 dollars we can give them the boots, skis and the poles. We'll make sure the bindings fit. We'll give them a half hour class and then they can ski for an hour free after that. All of this for \$2. I thought that was a deal. All we had to do was get buses to get them there. We started and had one bus filled up. We went skiing there. I had not skied since I had gotten married, and skiing was out of the question. Kids came along. We went sliding and tobogganing but didn't go to any ski place because it was too much money. The kids would go there for \$2. A lot of girls would go. I thought, "I wonder why girls are going more than boys?" Well, they were doing babysitting and earning money. Boys were not doing babysitting. So, there were more girls that went. They enjoyed themselves. They learned how to ski. We would go probably once a week, as long as conditions were OK. Big A. Mount Agamenticus. It is just south of us in York. We did this about 5-6 years. I took kids from St. Joseph's School

who wanted to do this. They came over as they were not that far away. We took them along with us. It was an interesting thing. Then, the weather patterns changed, and they were getting a lot of rain. It was facing the ocean, probably not more than 4 air miles away. Eventually we had to stop doing that. But we did some weekend skiing. We took trips. I did all of this on a volunteer basis. My kids, who were old enough, went along too.

I'm tired of talking. I'm doing all of the talking. (laughter)

*NMS: Well, this is telling your story. What I'm going to ask you to do is to back up a little bit. First of all, you said you were born in Biddeford. Were you born at home or born at a hospital?*

BH: I was born at home.

*NMS: Do you know if it was midwife? A doctor? Did they ever tell you the story?*

BH: It was a doctor, from what I was told. I don't remember that. (laughter)

*NMS: You don't? I want to find out a bit more about your parents. That sounds like it's a very interesting story. You said your father came from England. How old was he when he came from England?*

BH: A funny thing about it is he came here before the war. He was 16 years old. He had an uncle who was some kind of a boss in the Pepperell mills. My father

came from a family of 10 in Ashton-Under-Lyne, which is not far from Manchester. I've been there. I saw where he was born and where he lived. The father died at 50 years old of lead poisoning. He worked for the Manchester Guardian [Note: newspaper]. He was the linotyper. He had to handle all of the little pieces [made of lead]. Back then it was not done automatically like it's done now. He died of poisoning at the age of 50. With 10 kids in the family, there was no welfare programs for them. He was one of the older ones. So, they shipped him off and he came here. He lived with his uncle. I forget his name. It was not Hodge. It was another name. His uncle agreed to take him on, and he worked in the mills. I'm not sure what he did back then. He did that until the war broke out.

He was born in 1897 so he came here when he was 15 or 16. The war broke out soon after that. You know how young people are. There was a bunch of guys who were English who had immigrated here. There was a Canadian recruiter for the Canadian forces. Back then, they were very allied with the British. They were still part of the Commonwealth. He was in Portland. They went to talk to them. He gave a speech about joining up. "Join up and come beat the Boche" [Note: slang or contemptuous term used to refer to a German, especially a German soldier in World War I or II]. He was 17 or 18 by then, I think. So, he joined the army. He got stuck in Quebec. This is funny. Because he and 3 or 4 others spoke only English and didn't understand French, they couldn't take the orders. It was a French unit. The orders were given in French. The speeches were given in French. They were stuck in Quebec City taking care of the horses, cleaning the manure and all that. I guess they got tired of doing that. One day they said, "We didn't come here to clean horse manure. We came here to fight the Boche." "Oh, you want to

fight the Boche?" They put them on the next boat and shipped them to England. They trained in England. Then, he was in the war among the Canadian forces which was allied closely with the British. He got wounded twice in the town of Ypres, Belgium. They had a tough time.

He came back to Biddeford after the war. Things were bad in England, and he had a contract. He came back and was re-hired in the mills. He worked his way up to become a loom fixer. He never wanted me to go work in the mills. It's funny. He never wanted me to work in the mills. "You can do anything else." He didn't want me to go to college. "Don't come in the mills." He considered it a sweat shop. The weave rooms were kept moist so that the cotton could function. He became a loom fixer which apparently is one of the better jobs back then. None of that exists today. It's all gone.

Then, he started courting my mother. She was a Turgeon. They lived on Pool Street, not far from and adjoining Clifford Park area. They got married in 1921. It was strange because he had to become a Catholic to do that. He was with the Church of England, Methodist, I think. But I don't think he really practiced a religion. Enough that he was allowed to get married as a Catholic. I never recall going to church with him. He said he would go to St. Mary's because it was English. He didn't go to St. Andre's because it was French, or St. Joseph's for that matter. We lived in St. Andre's Parish. Back then, it was divided. St. Andre's over here. St. Joseph's over there. St. Mary's could be anywhere. They took all of the Irish people in. I never heard my mother and father argue or anything about religion. There was never, never talk about that.



We didn't speak French while my father was in the house. But we spoke with my mother, because she was French and encouraged me to keep speaking French. My brother went to public schools. I never knew why. I'm surmising that my father insisted that we go to public schools. When I came along, my mother must have said, "Listen, you had your way. We are going to send this kid to St. Andre's School." That's how come I ended up at St. Andre's and then St. Louis.

My father was a quiet man. I used to walk in the woods with him in Clifford Park directly where the road was aligned with the old cemetery. I used to go in that old cemetery when I was a kid and look at all of the stones. Over the years, it got vandalized. It's sad. I used to remember the names and read the stories of their lives. Some of them had been buried there since the late 1700's. It was a small cemetery. I think I already told you about that. I would go walk with him through the woods. Sometimes, we'd wind up on West Street, which would probably be a couple of miles anyway. We never hardly talked. We just walked. He was a quiet man. He didn't say much of anything. He was a good person. Even during the Depression years, when he wasn't working much, he did all kinds of things to make sure we had the food that we needed. Some people were struggling.

My mother actually wound up in the public schools. It's strange because my grandfather Turgeon who lived right there on Pool Street near the park wanted to make sure that she could speak fluent English. To do that, he took her out of St. Andre's and sent her to Emery School. She actually wound up graduating from Emery School.

*NMS: Now, she was born in Quebec? In Victoriaville? So, she spoke French.*

BH: Yes. Fluent French.

*NMS: How did it get communicated to you that you don't speak French around your father? Do you know why he was so against speaking French?*

BH: I think that developed primarily in the mills. There were a lot of French people working in the mills. Some English, but primarily French. Every time that he would hear them talking, he had that suspicion that they were talking about him. He got to hate that. I can understand that to a certain degree. It's probably kind of insulting that if you and I were speaking French and somebody was around who didn't understand, to keep them out of the conversation. I think it developed there. He never said that but I'm guessing that it where it came from. A funny thing about it, whenever it was Christmastime, le Réveillon [Note: traditional French family gathering, often after Midnight Mass] or those kinds of things we did visiting with my grandparents, he never, ever went to see his in-laws. Even though it was an easy walking distance, I would go with my mother and my brother to visit my grandparents. He never went. He never said why, and we never asked why. That's kind of a sad situation. I guess through the years, he didn't like them. He never said anything against them. When we always went to see the grandparents as part of our New Year's traditional gathering [Note: it is a French-Canadian tradition to celebrate New Year's Day], he would go to Boston on the train. He would go see a hockey game or something like that. It was strange.

*NMS: Did he have a relationship with his family back in England?*

BH: Oh yes. When they got married. That's something I'm glad you mentioned. His mother was extremely poor. He would send part of his wages, I guess on a monthly basis, to help her. She still had a lot of children back at home and they were struggling. It was Depression time. In the early 1930's. I was told that is what he did. My brother was 6 years older than I was and he told me.

But he mellowed later in life. When my children would go, he would try to say some words in French to them. I didn't say anything. I let them go. He would say to the kids, "Parle moi en français" [Translation: Speak to me in French]. Our kids would all learn French, of course. We lived in that type of a background.

Eventually of course, except for the oldest one. He was just an unbelievable kid. He went in the Navy, and they ended up on an island in the Mediterranean, a Greek island. He was there for a year and learned Greek. I didn't pay much attention to that. Many years later when our son, the one that we lost, was working in California, we flew to California and rented a car. We spent time with our youngest son. Dana, at that time was living in a small town outside of San Francisco. He was a motorcycle driver. He would drive across the country, can you imagine, to visit us. He said, "I want you to take a trip with me. We'll go across to Vancouver. There was an old train line. It was an old, old locomotive with smoke belching. It was antique. It rode through the forest for about 10 miles and stopped at a little village. He wanted us to go there. We said, "Ok. We'll go." We hopped up on the

train. We got to the little village, got out and it was time to eat. He said, "I want to eat over there at that Greek restaurant." When the waitress comes over, he speaks in Greek. I said, "It sounds like all Greek to me." He said, "It is Dad. It is Greek." The waitress said, "I don't speak Greek." He said, "Have the cook come over." Here they are, chanting in Greek. I said, "Dana, you should have become a translator." He could learn languages. I didn't know he had that ability. When he writes letters, he writes them in French sometimes. Years after he went to school. He's living in Colorado now. He got married. We went to the wedding in Chicago. He married a girl who was born into a family that the Harrah's hotel chain. I knew that wasn't going to work. That family had a villa in Mexico. They owned a villa on Lake Michigan. It was money. We went to the reception. I remember the mother who said, "My daughter married a sailor boy from Maine." I thought, "This isn't going to work." It didn't. She was a nice girl. She already had a master's degree and was working on her doctorate in Electrical Engineering. She was smart. I met her. She said, "I can't live the way Dana lived." Dana didn't mind living poorly. He was used to struggling. He could do that. They got divorced. He never married again. He had some girlfriends. He will now be 65 in September. So, we don't see him much now. We talk on the phone or communicate by letters.

The second one, Steve, is retired and lives in Wells. He married a girl from Waltham, Massachusetts. They made money. He had Crohn's Disease when he was young. He had a tough time. He had several operations and had part of his gut removed. He struggled but he's done well. Now he's retired. He's 64. We have two grandchildren. I have a picture of them.

The third one, Brian, is a bright kid. His dissertation is right there. He said, “Dad, I finished what you started.” I started on my doctorate, but my wife said, “I think that’s enough. It’s time for you to stop studying.” So, I did. He is a Registrar at Florida Atlantic University. I never heard of the place. He was here back on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May. He helped me work outside. He never married. He had some girlfriends but he’s not the marrying kind, I guess.

David, the last one, was going to get married. He was 25.

The second one got married and had a boy and girl. The boy got married about three years ago. About a month ago, his wife after three years of marriage, had twins, a boy and a girl. They are now about a month old. So, we are great-grandparents finally.

I worked for the church a lot. I was involved with the (I’m trying to think of the name now) for six years. I got a bunch of awards if you want to look at them later on. I put them all hanging on the wall in the garage.

For the first 25 years of my life, I was a member of St. Andre’s Parish. I was a crusader in the lower grades and later, played baseball, the softball when I was 14-18 years old. From the age of 26 until current, I have been a parishioner of St. Joseph’s Church, where I was a lector from 1970 to 1989.

After I retired from being Superintendent in Biddeford, I took (with Nancy) a trip of 23 days through much of Europe. After that I took it easy until January of 1992. I did part time work in the Saco School System as Business Manager, and I started part time work at Saint Joseph College where I was primarily monitoring Student Teachers. By the next year, I also filled in as Superintendent of Saco Schools for about 4 months. By early 1993, I became a full Assistant Professor, teaching full time, which I continued through 1999.

The Catholic Diocesan School Board contacted me when I was the principal at the Junior High. They asked me if I wanted to serve. I said, "Yes. I'll serve." I served there for six years. The last two years, I became the Chair of the Committee. There were 7 or 8 of us. The Catholic schools were closing like mad. The nuns were disappearing. The Brothers were disappearing. I told Monsignor Murphy, who was guiding us in some way, when I became Chair I said, "Listen. The Bishop's Campaign takes money, and some money comes back. If you really want Catholic schools to continue, we have to take half of that Bishop's Campaign and put it into the schools." In this case here, it would have been St. Andre's, St. Mary's and St. Joseph's. At that time, these were all still functioning. They voted unanimously, of course. We were on the Diocesan School Board for Catholic schools. Monsignor Murphy was a friend. He said, "I'll take this to the Bishop." Well, it got turned down. Eventually, I guess 5% of the collections would go towards the schools. That's a long way from 50%.

Before I became Superintendent, I worked as an Assistant Superintendent. I had worked first in Curriculum. I recommended Sara-Jane Poli to take over my job.

She took over my job because Andy Frechette was Superintendent. He had a bad heart and he wanted me to become certified as a Superintendent in case something happened. Something did happen too. He was a great guy. I learned how to become a Superintendent from that guy. That's what I did during that time.

I joined the School Business Professional Organization. I became President of that organization. I have the plaques if you want to look at them later on. I'm speaking too much.

There was another professional thing that I did. We had an organization in the county of the superintendents. I eventually became Chair of that county. I did different things when I was in that position.

When I worked for the school department in the central office and they wanted me to get out of working with the teachers, I lost a lot of interest. Then it got interesting because there were a lot of federal programs that were going on. I wrote federal grants for speech therapy and for remedial reading. I got a van so that they could go to the parochial schools. They had to keep the van off the grounds, on the street, and get the kids to come into the van. I did things of that nature as well as public relations. Then, Andy got sick, and I took over the superintendency for him. I could have become superintendent at that time but my second son, Steve, who had Crohn's disease, nearly died. He was in the Boston Children's Hospital for about two months. He was struggling. He was a sophomore in high school. When the job was offered to me, I said, "I can't take it because I'm gone weekends and my mind is not really with the school

department.” So, I was late becoming superintendent. I was Assistant Superintendent for a long time. I didn’t become Superintendent until 1987, after a guy by the name of Bill O’Neil was Superintendent. He was a funny guy.

I did it only for a short time, not quite fully five years. During those five years, I had promised way back when the Kennedy School was built. Ray Kenneally was Superintendent then, for about two years. He said, “We are going to build a school, Bob. Can you serve with me on the committee?” Except for the Superintendent, I was the only other person. I was the Principal of the Junior High at that time. I served on the committee with him. That school, can you imagine, was built for \$349,000. The acquisition of the land, a 16-room building, and he gave me the responsibility of filling up the whole school with desks, materials for the All-Purpose Room, cooking and everything else. I learned a lot. I learned how to cope with Augusta. To get school buildings, you’ve got to be able to set the tone and write up the requirements. I learned a lot.

Fast forward 20 years, 2 schools were built when I was Superintendent. The Middle School, which now is no longer the middle school. I think it’s now an intermediate school. The other school was a primary school. They were done. The first one that was built, I went back and forth to Augusta to plead my case. I said, “We need a bigger school than what you are authorizing because the parochial schools are closing and impacting the enrollment rate.” They didn’t listen. The second one came a year later. It’s unusual to have two public buildings because in that time it went by how rich a community was. If a community was fairly rich, you had to pay more of the school. In this case, it was a 40% local and



60 % from the State. That school was built for 4.1 million. The primary school, which was much bigger, that was built for 6.3 million. You can imagine how much times have changed from a \$349,000 to now today when they redid the high school and rebuilt the middle school, it was millions and millions. It's unbelievable.

I almost forgot about my involvement with our bus fleet and subsequent changes. In 1986, I got wind that the Public Works Department was developing a new site for equipment etc. to be located on Hill Street Extension. At that time, I was Assistant Superintendent, but in charge of our budget. I saw a great possibility that with Board approval and funding, we could add 2 "Bays" for repair of our buses. We could also relocate our 20 buses from the High School parking lot to that location, for refueling, maintenance etc. This would provide better safety and ability to start our busses in the cold weather. It would also provide a place for the Bus Dispatcher, with appropriate bathrooms for the Bus drivers. I pointed out that I was already thinking of a planned new Middle School nearby, adding to the JFK school only a quarter of a mile away. By 1988, the new school was under way and as Superintendent, I negotiated the largest Primary school to be built in 1990 in this state. By the time I retired in late 1991 our entire primary, middle school system etc. was being served by the nearby bus facilities. Then about 8 or so years later, a fabulous new Middle School was built on adjacent property to our original Middle school, which became the Intermediate School. This coordination, saved untold expenditures for expediting busing, field trips etc. all in one concentration. I have always been proud of our teamwork, cooperation from the State Department of Schools for funding etc.

*NMS: In your career in the school systems, what did you find was the most rewarding?*

BH: Working with the kids. When you teach junior high, that's a precarious age. You are always raising hell or doing something wrong. I could tell you many stories that would take the rest of the afternoon. But I enjoyed working with the kids. When I first came, we were in afternoon sessions because the high school wasn't quite ready. The senior high came to school in the morning until Christmas vacation. They had an institution called you had to go to behavior. It wasn't called behavior. I forget what it was called... detention. The teachers were responsible for that after school. I said, "Listen. You are excused from that. I'll take it over." We started school at noon and ended at five. By the time that October, November rolled around, it was dark. Those kids who had misbehaved had to stay after. I would work with those kids. Those were the kids that needed the most attention. Most of them were misbehaving because the parents had some problems. I would work with them, and I found that very rewarding. When kids got to be a problem in the school, and you do have problems in the junior high.

It was entirely different environment from Alfred, which was considered a country school. The kids wanted to be in school. That was the social center, at the school. Biddeford, now they had pool rooms and bowling alleys. They had downtown Biddeford. It was a different situation. I knew I expected that. I knew that kind of aura was there. So, I would work with the kids. We had a Truant Officer. Sometimes the Truant Officer would say, "I can't talk to these parents because they are French." I would go with him and sit down with the parents and explain the

situation. I thought I was kind of a social worker sometimes. I think that kind of work really interested me.

When I became Assistant Superintendent, it was interesting, but I lost some of that touch with the kids. I missed that. I missed the days of teaching. I saw the need. I needed to earn more money to help the kids go to college. They all went to college of course and to do that I had to climb the ranks. There was that or become a salesman for a book company. They wanted me to go up north and sell to the French in Aroostook County. I said, "I'll be gone too many days. I couldn't do that. That's the reason I went that way. I think I did OK. As Superintendent we moved things. We had to close the old junior high on Alfred Street. That was a terrible situation because there are no grounds there. Emery School was archaic. I explained to the School Board that it was not meeting the requirements of safety. It was too much money to put into these schools. I got somebody to help me out find out how much it would cost to rehab the Emery School and the junior high. It was just outlandish, so we ended up building new schools. I can say to you that I always enjoyed more working with kids. I enjoyed the other work because of the end product. It also gave me a chance to work with School Board members and try to develop a more cohesive approach.

After I retired in 1991, I didn't do anything for several months. I traveled throughout Europe. Nancy and I had the means then. I retired at 60, which was the full retirement age from the State. It was not a big amount of money, but I knew that I could do other things.

I could work as a Business Manager, and I did in the Saco School System for a few years. After that, I became Superintendent there for about three months because somebody was fired, and I took over the Superintendency. At the same time, I was teaching at St. Joseph's College. That didn't pay much but it was something I was interested in doing because it was trying to get people interested in teaching that were qualified to teach. Since student teaching, I'd go to the different schools and monitor the teachers.

I always missed the contact with students. Even when I was the principal at the junior high, I got into the classroom from time to time. I always enjoyed that, especially with kids who had trouble in school.

*NMS: Have you seen changes in the student body over the years, in the composition of the student body?*

BH: Times have changed of course. It's a different age now then it was back then. I get a kick out of students that I've had at the old junior high, from the years 1961 to 1970 when you can call it that I was promoted to Curriculum Coordinator. I always wanted to be something else in life and I ended up being a teacher instead. I miss the contact as I told you before. Some of these people still remember me. Just last week I was at Hannaford as I do all of the shopping now. I heard, "Hey, Mr. Hodge, do you remember me?" I look at them. The last time I saw them they were 14 years old. Now they are 60 years old. I said, "No. I don't (laughter)." They tell me their name. I try to recall. Some I remember better than others. Some of them still recognize me. That's kind of an interesting thing. I see that every

now and then. Someone will walk over to me. I was at Market Basket one day. I'm in line cashing out. Someone comes over and says, "You're Mr. Hodge." When they say, "Mister", you know that it goes way back. They don't call me Bob. They call me Mr. Hodge. I still have that contact in one way. I see that every now and then. I see the former teachers occasionally, who taught when I was at the junior high. We had a bond. Never forgot.

I talk too much.

*NMS: One of the things I like to ask people is their experience or what they remember of some major things that occurred. For example, you mentioned something about the Great Depression. You were living during that time. What is your recollection of how you experienced that?*

BH: I remember the Great Depression. I remember the Civilian Conservation Corps and the other corps that built the sidewalk on Pool Street. It was right in front of our house. I used to go out there and talk to them. They were young men who were not from around here for the most part. I also remember the food lines downtown. My father would occasionally go, not that often. He was very frugal with his money. I don't think we had any food shortages like some families did that we knew about. We had a garden, of course. Everybody had a garden back then. I think that impacted me and I never forgot the Depression. I read a lot of stories about the Depression. I'm sure you have too. It was a tough time in America. It affected every community in this country. I remember the lines

downtown. It was near City Hall, I think. I didn't participate in that because we had food, enough to get by.

My mother never worked. Yes, she did. When I was out of high school, she sold hats. She liked to sell hats downtown. There's no more hat shop down in Biddeford. There were two hat shops back then.

*NMS: Another one, that I think you would have been a teenager at the time, was the big fire in 1947?*

BH: Oh. I remember that. I was a senior in high school. They closed the senior class down. They sent us with Indian tanks. You carry them on your back, and you can squirt water. What we did is they sent us to nearby towns that had burnt. The forest had burnt. We were there squirting water on the stumps that were still smoldering (laughter). The thing we loved the most is the Red Cross was there with coffee and donuts. When you are 15 years old, you are always hungry. I was always hungry. I've never been big, but I was always hungry.

The fires I remember very well. I remember the smoke. When we walked to school, we always walked to St. Louis from where I lived on Pool Street, sometimes we'd get a whiff as it was close to Biddeford. That I remember and of course we saw the newspapers and the places that burned down like Bar Harbor and other places. I kept clippings of all those things, and I've since thrown everything away. I got rid of them. That's what I remember most from my childhood.

*NMS: What about the JFK assassination in 1963? I think you would have been a principal at the time? Do you remember what that was like?*

BH: I remember the day that Kennedy got shot. I was in my office. It was a nice warm day. It was in November; I can't remember the date now. My wife called me and said, "President Kennedy just got shot." We had a TV on the Alfred Road with rabbit ears because we didn't have cable.

That house by the way, we sold it because after we lost our son. Nancy couldn't live there anymore. We had enough money then for this new house and we moved out of there. That house we sold for \$112,000. That house was sold to the developers for \$650,000. They tore the house down. Anyways, I digress.

That day I announced it on the PA system, "This is a very sad day. We've lost our President." I can't remember what day of the week it was but think the next day schools were closed. It was a terrible time.

*NMS: In terms of Vietnam, where again, you were in the school system during that and during the draft, were you affected by seeing some of the students being drafted? Or them talking about their friends?*

BH: It was a terrible war. I had some students I had in Biddeford who died in that war. I was, of course, too old at that time to serve. I was in the Reserves through that period of time. I was nearly involved with the Korean War. I stayed in the

Reserves until 1961. The Vietnam War was ongoing but not really a hot issue. It was a terrible time for America. I remember students from the junior high who were old kids. They had a broken home, and I would say to them, "Join the service. You'll get an education out of that. You'll probably have a chance at a better life." So, I helped some of them. But some of them I regretted because one of them died in Vietnam. It's tough to take when you see a kid you knew and consulted with and helped and then they died in Vietnam. It was a terrible time.

*NMS: Where you went to St. Louis what was your perspective when you heard about St. Louis closing?*

BH: That's something else. The Bishop's Campaign started in 1969. As I told you, I had served on the Diocesan School Board, and I was still on the board, I think. They wanted volunteers to go talk to different people to raise money for the Bishop's Campaign. Boy, did we get a beating if we went to a house who had students at the high school, and it was closing. They said, "The Bishop wants to raise money. Why doesn't he help St. Louis High?" I belonged to the St. Louis High Alumni for all of those years. We had reunions. In fact, I have some crazy pictures. I've always been close. We have reunions of my class of 1948. We had a 25<sup>th</sup> reunion, a 50<sup>th</sup> reunion, a 60<sup>th</sup> reunion and even a 70<sup>th</sup> reunion. That's it. Our class was 30, in think, when we graduated from St. Louis. I have a lot of fond memories of course. We had great football teams. I didn't play football, but I cheered for them. I love all sports, no matter what. It was hard to get it across that they couldn't keep on with the many expenses and they had to go to lay teachers, which was too expensive, apparently. I remember when I went there, the parish of



St. Andre's would foot the bill. In 1947, they were talking at St. Louis to enlarge the school, because they were growing. The principal of the school took me aside. I was a senior. He said, "We heard a rumor that St. Andre wanted to build a high school (for boys and girls, separate of course), because it was still prosperous." I said, "I've heard of it, but nothing has come of it." They were worried that they would lose the stream of money coming from St. Andre's. I don't think my parents ever paid any tuition to go to St. Louis High from day one. So, St. Andre's Church pitched in, and I can't recall exactly how much that was. That was a surprise. I told the principal because he was worried along with those people who were responsible to build this larger school. They built it and the girls started to attend there. It was a good thing I thought. They were using the old Birch Street School, which was an old public school. It was a terrible place. (laughter) That was a sad day. It created some really hurt feelings with people that just couldn't understand the economics of the whole thing. "Why did it have to close? Why did this have to happen? Why didn't the bishop come to the rescue?" Those are some of the unanswered questions to this day as to why they didn't support the school. It was a thriving school. It was a good academic school. The only thing I can say is that when I went there, there was nothing at the end of the year when you were a senior as far as guidance. There was no guidance at all. You either were connected or had parents who already went to college or were a lawyer, doctor, business owner or whatever. The rest of us just went to work. It didn't matter because my mother and father said, "No. You are going to work Bobby. It's time to start paying room and board over here." That was the feeling of it.

*NMS: Talking about closures, how does it feel to be living through seeing St. Andre's Church close?*

BH: (sigh) I love St. Andre's because I used to act in plays. I have information. Here's one of them in the first grade. (laughter)

*NMS: I'll have to take a picture of that.*

BH: I'm the first one on that side. A funny thing about it is in the play we learned to sing in Latin. We were 7 years old. The nun would walk around, come close to me and say, "Robert. Tu chantes très mal. Chante pas. Seulement rouvre ta bouche mais pas de son." [Translation: Robert. You sing very badly. Don't sing. Just open your mouth but don't make any sounds.] That was a killer. Seven years old and you're told you can't sing. So, I didn't sing. I always kept that. It appeared in the local papers years later. Somebody sent it in. If you want to take a picture of that. [proceeds to show me other pictures and clippings]

*NMS: I'm going to take pictures of these once we are finished with the interview.*

BH: You already have that one, the wedding picture. This is when I was in the first grade. My first gift. My parents at Christmastime gave me a wagon.  
(laughter)

*NMS: That is cute.*

BH: Later on, I built a lot of model airplanes.

*NMS: I don't know that I've ever seen pictures this size before.*

BH: We have tons of pictures, of the gardens especially. We started the gardens and took pictures every year. We had tours here. These are the papers. We can take a quick look at them. That's a picture of my wife. There were tours and they wrote about our gardens. This is from the Courier newspaper. This is a picture of the fountain.

Most of the pictures in the last 20 or 30 years always involve my wife. We toured Europe. We went to the Middle East. Probably the most inspiring trip was to Jerusalem, to Israel. From there, we went into Egypt. We did Greece, Italy. We did all of the countries. That was primarily when I was working at St. Joseph's College. We took a couple of trips before that when my cousins came here and stayed for a few weeks. Then we visited London and France.

*NMS: When we are speaking about things that happened in history, we are living through something pretty big in world history right now. How has the COVID pandemic affected you?*

BH: My wife got sick. She has an aortic aneurism from which she could die within a day if it burst. That's not what causing her any pain. Her pain is primarily from arthritis in her hips and joints. The peak of it occurred two months before the pandemic started in March, two years ago. She always loved to go out on Saturday

night and go eat at 99 Restaurant or places like that. I did too. We could afford it because we were at that stage of the game. That's what she misses the most. It became a different world. For her, being trapped here and knowing that everybody else was trapped, didn't seem that bad. I stopped going to church, of course. I had to become the sole person who went out to get food. It didn't matter an awful lot to her. She knew it was bad. But when it came to get the inoculation, we got them at Walmart.

She uses a rollator [note: walker] in the house. I have a hard time. I need to help get her down a couple of steps into the garage, then get her into the car. She suffers. She can't lift her legs. She suffers a lot.

We've never been back out to eat. Even now that we could go out, we don't because she can't now. We've been out for the inoculation. We've been out to see different doctors like at the Spine Center. Since she got sick, I think we've been out 7 or 8 times but all to deal with medical issues. She's not getting any help. It's just one of those tough situations. The pandemic did not affect her that much because she knew everybody else could not go out. We missed seeing people that we knew when we'd go out to eat. She has family, one of them has died. We haven't seen them. They are dispersed somewhat. It's a different situation. I can live with that. I am so busy trying to keep the house clean. I do all of the cleaning now. I do all of the errands. The outside, well, it's gone. I do what I can, not much. It's a different world for us.

I'm glad that we're on the fringe of getting rid of this damn thing. It's terrible.

*NMS: In looking to start wrapping this up, Biddeford has gone through a lot of changes. What is your perspective of where we are now?*

BH: When I was a kid, growing up and when we were married, we'd go downtown. We had the 5 and 10 stores: Kresge's, Newberry's, Woolworths. There was a downtown. We'd love to go downtown. We could buy something pretty cheap. The downtown changed dramatically. All of that went away. But we are going through a renewal now.

The mayor sends me messages. He says, "Has Nicole contacted you yet?" I said, "I don't know Nicole. She hasn't contacted me yet." But he would send me messages. I had him as a student at the old junior high, way, way back in the 1960's. Nice guy. Smart guy, Alan [note: Casavant]. He became a teacher too. He taught at Biddeford High School.

The pandemic has not affected me like it affected some other people. Simply because of my situation. I'm here and this is where I belong with my wife to help her. We eat together. She doesn't dress up. She dresses up in her nightgown and bathrobe and she always liked to dress up. It's hard on her.

*NMS: It's a hard stage to go through.*

*The question I usually like to end on is, "What is something that you'd want to make sure that people take away from hearing your story?"*

BH: That's a hard question. (laughter) I don't know. At my age, I'll be 90 in October, if I live to 90. It's to say, what was it like way back then when I was growing up. The ski trail that probably nobody knows about. A few kids that I got interested in skiing remembers as they are deceased now. Nobody would know about the ski trail. Nobody would know about "second base". I have stories about being at second base. I was on many different teams, baseball and softball and we played at second base. One of these mention [note: newspaper clipping] that the game was held at second base. When I mention "second base", people look at me funny. "What's second base?" Its all grown up. We went there a long time after I got married. I went with some of my sons through the woods from my father's house on Pool Street. I couldn't actually find it. It's all grown up. Big trees. Time changes everything. It was near the Westbrook Skating Rink, the Westbrook Falls. We could hear the falls when we played the games.

That's something and then the stone crusher. When I mention stone crusher, they don't know what I'm talking about. I'm sorry I don't remember the name of the company. I think it was an Italian family in Biddeford that owned that. They sold rocks for roads. Of course, that all came to end in World War II. When that broke, I don't think they functioned after 1941. I know that it closed along with the road. Then young people started to go that way and there would be drinking, causing all kinds of problems.

Also, Unfortunately the cemetery took a beating. People broke and took off with the tombstones from what I understand. It was a sad time.

I see a change downtown in Biddeford, which is now great. It's unbelievable what Biddeford has done. It's like a rebirth. When you looked at the mills, back when they had all closed. Oh my God. My father had worked there for like 40 years. He never wanted me to work in the mills. Funny huh? He didn't want me to go to college. He didn't want me to go work in the mills. I never did. My brother went to work for Saco Lowell Shops.

I'm proud of Biddeford now. They've come up, like raised from the ashes. When Biddeford got rid of the burning place [note: MERC -Maine Energy Recovery Co. trash incinerator]. That was terrible. They would say, "It's a dump town."

When I was teaching at St. Joseph's College, I taught some kids from up in Aroostook County. They were French names, great kids, hard working kids. They would say, "Where do you live Mr. Hodge?" "I live in Biddeford." "Oh, Biddeford. We went there. We took a trip there with some friends from the college. All we remember was a place where we got a great pizza." I said, "It must have been Alex." They said, "Yup. Alex Pizza." That's all they remembered about Biddeford. That was back then.

Now, I don't go downtown very often. I don't have reason for it. I go to City Hall to register my car. But I did go recently. Nancy said, "You love Chinese food." Tin Buffet closed. It never opened back up after [note: the closures during COVID]. We used to eat there occasionally. So, I said, "What about Happy Dragon? Is it still functioning?" They still do. I went down and got a meal down there. It's interesting to see that they had a separate entrance just for takeout. That

came about because of the pandemic, I think. You could see, it was packed with cars. Downtown gets packed with cars. I can't believe it. It's hard to find a spot to park. They have all of these small little restaurants.

It's a big change. For me, its huge. It was a great place to grow up when I was a kid. Even when I got married. Then I saw it slowly deteriorate. Then the mills became passé, and it deteriorated more. No one wanted to go downtown. There was nothing to go downtown for. Maybe the library and City Hall. That was about it. I used to go to City Theater to see the plays. I enjoyed that. It's been a roller coaster type of thing. It was great when I was growing up, then slowly decayed and within the last ten years, I've got to give credit to the leadership in Biddeford. The current Superintendent is a smart guy too. He's doing a great job, taking over even Saco, for crying out loud. Unbelievable, huh?

*NMS: I thank you so much STOP AT 1:47:56*