

**FRED KERR – JULY 21, 1988**

LW: You moved from Salem to Northville when you were four years old?

FK: Right. I lived in Salem right across the street from Fred Wheeler's grocery store.

LW: Do you remember what your house looked like?

FK: No, I don't. There was a big red barn right next to it and the kids used to play between the house and the red barn. Other than that, I don't remember.

LW: Then you moved to Northville and you lived on Yerkes Street.

FK: Right. I lived on Yerkes at 321 and it was a three-story house with an inside bathroom and a pump in the back yard.

LW: Well, then that was a fairly modern house.

FK: Yes. It had electricity, too. One bulb in each room.

LW: Did you move here so you could go to school?

FK: No. There was no employment in Salem. Dad was a harness maker. The car was coming in and that did away with horses. He set up two repairs shops on Center Street. He didn't make any money at that and finally he got a job with Ford, riding the streetcar to Wayne every day.

LW: Now was that the streetcar that was the trolley that went into Plymouth?

FK: Right. You had to go through Plymouth to get to Wayne.

FK: When Ford started the plant in Northville he got transferred to Northville and he worked there for the rest of his working time. He had a stroke at 68 and that put an end to his working career.

LW: Do you remember when you moved to Northville?

FK: No

LW: What is your first recollection of going to school?

FK: Walking to school with the other kids from Bealtown. We all walked together and going past the corner church and the old Yerkes house, there was an apple orchard there. When apples were just coming out, the object was to have an apple fight. Throw apples at each other.

LW: Did Mr. Yerkes do anything?

FK: Nobody bothered us. They didn't care. The thing that impressed me in grade school... it was about the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Evidently I did something that I got switched for. That was a good switch around the bare legs.

LW: Did you wear knickers?

FK: Knickers, yeah. Short pants, so it was on bare legs. One time the cemetery, right across Cady Street was where the big boys used to go to smoke. They'd leave the high school and go over there to smoke and set behind the tombstone or something and they had to go right passed the grade school. Of course the principal and the superintendent and everybody knew they were over there. One day the superintendent, he'd gone over to get a couple of them. This was Selfridge, the superintendent of the high school. He had one in each hand by the nape of the neck. From the cemetery back to the high school, he'd take a step and he'd kick one, then he'd take another step and he'd kick the other all the way back to the high school.

LW: Who were some of your best friends in grade school?

FK: Ned Jenod and Ted Cavelle, Frank Hinchman, and there was one from Walled Lake. I cannot recall his name.

LW: Then grade school here took kids from ...

FK: All over. This was the central school for the whole area. We had them from Novi, part of Salem, and Walled Lake, South Lyon and all the farmers that lived around here probably from Pontiac Trail to Lyon Township, Pontiac Trail north to Walled Lake. Some of Walled Lake must've gone to Farmington instead of here.

LW: Did you graduate from grade school?

FK: There wasn't any graduation. You just went right on and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade started in the big school. They had all the grades in another school.

LW: Do you remember any of your teachers in high school?

FK: Yes, Mrs. Hoig. I think she was the eighth grade teacher. She was very good. Haas was the Latin teacher. Jacobson was the science teacher. Zeny Larkins was the superintendent. She didn't teach. Faye Babbitt. Of course Amerman was the principal.

LW: When you got to high school, did you become active in school activities? Did they have clubs or just sports?

FK: Sports and they had some clubs but I never had time to join the clubs and that because working in the drug store, I worked every night from five o'clock, six o'clock until ten o'clock, 'til they closed the joint.

LW: Northville Drugs, better known as Stewart's, where was that located?

FK: Right where it is now. Right there across from the theatre.

LW: Now you had to sweep the alley too?

FK: Sure did. Sweep the alley and clean it up.

LW: Who was the owner?

FK: L.C. Stewart. He had a first druggist who was Tom Murdock.

LW: You tell a story about eating candy in the store.

FK: Playing football and basketball, after practice I never had time to go home to eat dinner, so we'd eat ice cream and candy and anything else. Stewart, he'd let you eat anything you wanted. He caught me one day eating a handful of pecans and a handful of cherry-chocolates. He didn't say that I couldn't eat them. The only thing he asked was, "Couldn't you find something cheaper to eat? Do you have to eat the most expensive stuff we've got in the store?" Cherry-chocolates were five cents a piece and I think the pecans were 85 cents a pound. They used to make their own chocolate syrup in the store. Tom Murdock did that. You should've seen the tuba or burner gas grate. Of course it boiled over for a couple of years and nobody cleaned it up. They had a john in the back end and everybody's name that had worked for Stewart. He always hired high school kids. Their roll of honor was on the door in the john.

LW: This was in back end which is no longer there.

FK: No longer there. There was Jimmy Lee was working there. He was ahead of me and I think he's the one that left. He graduated. He left Stewart's and then I took his place.

LW: How were you paid?

FK: Fifteen cents an hour after you had worked there for a while. It wasn't like work, it was more of a fun place because in the winter time you didn't have anything to do, so you could read magazines.

LW: Did they have a soda fountain in there?

FK: They had a soda fountain and it used to be the policy on Saturday nights when all the farmers and everybody come to town and go to the show. Then after the show they all come in and eat ice cream or get a sundae. They had one family that come in and they'd all go to the show and you knew what they were going to get so you see them coming and you knew what they were going to be there so you started making the sundaes before they got there. When they got there, why it was all done. They were there every Saturday night.

LW: Why did the farmers come in to shop on a weekly basis?

FK: On Saturday, they'd come on a weekly basis and prior to this some of them were still coming in horse-drawn sleighs.

LW: What did the town look like?

FK: The drug store was there. That was the end of the buildings, the business district and then the houses started from there. One of the houses is still there.

LW: Oh, where the barber shop is?

FK: Next door. Going the other way, it went to Horton's Drug store, was on the corner of Center and Main. That vacant lot which is there now was there then. There was no hotel. It'd burned down. That was before my time. Then you had a small building. The only thing I remember it being was a real estate office. Then they had another building that was the fire hall. One fire engine in it.

LW: Fire engine? Horse-drawn?

FK: No. I don't remember the horse-drawn fire engine. From there on up to the corner of High Street, there were houses. Two or three houses then you got the big house which is now where City Hall

is. That was a big clapboard, two-story house with an iron rail fence around it, which all the kids used to try to walk on it.

LW: Did you ever walk on it?

FK: Yes.

LW: Did you fall off?

FK: Sure.

LW: Did you get hurt?

FK: No. Then right around the corner, there was a big chestnut tree and that's where the fights always started. If the grade school would fight, why, it was always away from the school so that teachers wouldn't get you but usually the big boys in high school, if they'd come out and the grade school kids were fighting, they'd stop them.

LW: This was on Main Street?

FK: On Main Street at Main and High, a block west of Center. I had a scrap one day and a friend of mine, a big boy, his name was Willy Lee but they called him Pinky Lee, lived (what is) now Mule town. He used to deliver milk by horse and wagon. He'd go in there at Horton Drug Store. He was good with the kids, too. He told Ned Jenod and myself, in the wintertime if we washed his face with snow, why, he'd give us an ice cream cone. So, we'd go in every once in a while and tell this Pinky Lee who worked there and tell him that we'd washed his face. Horton would ask him and he'd say 'yes' and we'd get an ice cream cone. They had a candy shop and ice cream that was connected to the drug store but next door just one door over, where the shoe shop is today, that was the ice cream part.

LW: Do you remember any big fires?

FK: Yes. They had a big fire when the furniture factory burned down. The first one that I remember is the big house out where you split Baseline and go into Griswold.

LW: The white house? Where Georgianna Chase lives now?

FK: The big white house. That burned down. It didn't burn up completely. They saved some of it but... of course everybody was there and I remember them pitching furniture out of the second story window, which didn't do the furniture any good. Then they had another fire when I was a kid out 8 Mile, I think, someplace. Three people were burned to death. I didn't see it. It was just hearsay. Went out there and saw the charred meat. You couldn't recognize them but they knew who they were.

LW: Across the street from the drug store, what were the buildings over there?

FK: They had the bank, and the theatre. Well, the theatre had burned down. I don't recall when that was.

LW: What about the Opera House?

FK: No, that was long gone.

LW: What about the ice rink?

FK: There wasn't any ice rink. We played hockey every night after school and all day Saturday and half of Sunday down at the Mill Pond. The one on the North side. We had three parts of town; Northside, Bealtown, and Orchard Heights and you'd pick up teams. There was always a little bit of a squabble between Bealtown and Northside. They had a pond up there and it wasn't very deep. Our pond and play area at the time was south of Bealtown. The creek and Waterford Pond after that was built. There's a north side pond that we were swimming in was Amity Mill Pond where 7 Mile Road is. Nobody cared about safety. All the kids could go. Big kids, little kids, and in between, because all the big kids would take care of the little kids and do everything but let them drown. If you didn't know how to swim, you sure learned in a hurry, because they'd pitch you in and before you sunk for the third time, drag you out. So you all learned to swim. Then we started when we were a little older swimming in Curtis Lake which is now Highland Lakes. They were taking gravel out of there and that used to be a good hill over there for skiing. When they continued to take the gravel out, it filled up with water, and that was a swimming hole. We went over there swimming all the time plus the creek. We swam the creek. Where the race track is now was a hay field. I worked in a butcher shop two summers making hamburger and sausage. That was Lefevre's Produce Shop. Lefebvre's run a butcher shop and Hill and Butch Ball. The slaughterhouse that we used was down north of Seven Mile Road and east of Northville Road about where Sam Reese's building is now. Butch Lefevre, the son of the one that owned it, was the one that had to kill the cows and pigs. He had his pickup truck, and old Ford. When he was going down to slaughter something, why he'd come through Bealtown and pick all us kids up and we'd go with him to the slaughterhouse because he couldn't do it alone very well. The slaughterhouse had a big windless wheel up in the second deck with a rope on it and a concrete floor with a ring in it. If we had a steer that wasn't too wild, we'd put a rope through the ring, and of course it was on the windless up above, then put a loop over the steer's head and crank it down and that would pull him down to his knees. Then Butch would hit him in the head with a sledge hammer. Of course that would put him out. Then he'd take and cut the tendons and put a stick in there to haul the carcass out. That's why he couldn't do it alone and he couldn't pull it down to its knees and hit it in the head at the same time. That's what us kids did. After he got it held up, why he'd slit its throat and start to skin it. He had a lot of knives, and when his knives got dull, why then he'd let us use the dull knives and we'd play butcher. He saved the skin but the head and that, he didn't use that for anything so we would carve the head up. When he was doing pigs, of course we were young and we didn't have footballs, we had the pig's bladders and dry those and blow them up and use them for footballs. They made good footballs. I don't know whether that's the way they got "pigskin" or not, but we didn't cover outs with skin.

LW: Well the--, you played football.

FK: Play what we called varsity football for three years.

LW: What was your position?

FK: Halfback. Frank Hinchman was a big, big guy, a big boy. He was a friend of mine. I was the littlest one on the team and he was the biggest one. If somebody on the opposing team hit me too hard or hurt me, why he'd go tell him, "Don't you hit him."

LW: And what was your nickname?

FK: Zede. Got that from a lady who lived across the street.

LW: Were you ever mischievous?

FK: No. Never. Never.

LW: Didn't you paint somebody's fence?

FK: The people that lived across the street, there was a widow and there were three girls. They had chickens and one time the chickens didn't hatch so she gave us these eggs. So we went down to the alley and we come to a garage. All the garages opened on the alley down there and we busted the eggs and we didn't think anything of it. Next day Dad came home and wanted to know "had we done it?", and of course we hadn't done it. He said, that he knew and "get the scrub brushes and the water", and so we went down and washed the garage and the lady was happy after that, I guess. The alley was a good place. We'd hit golf balls. You could hit them down the alley if you hit them straight. You see, you go out there and hit one and then listen, and if you don't hear a crash, ok, you'd hit another one. If you hear a crash, run.

LW: Where was the alley?

FK: Between Plymouth Road and Yerkes Street. That was the only alley down there. It's still there.

LW: Plymouth Road isn't still there is it?

FK: It's South Main.

LW: When did you notice that Northville was starting to grow?

FK: I don't think it's ever grown because there isn't any more buildings downtown than there was then. Across the street from the drug store, right on the corner of Hutton, there was a blacksmith shop which was run by Litsenberger. A good friend of mine was Bob Litsenberger. We had a bobsled which we used on Center Street going just south of where Seven Mile comes in now and we used to use it on Buch's Hill. Come right down Buch's Hill and down High Street and if you had good ice, good conditions, you could go from Buch's Hill down to the Fairgrounds. That was used until one winter there was a kid got killed. The kids used bobsleds and sleds and one day there was a little kid that was going down the little hill before you come up to Randolph. A bobsled was coming down and hit him and killed him. After that there was no more using Buch's Hill for sledding. Then we went to skis. We used to ski over in the gravel pit. There were good hills over there where Highland Lakes is and Swan Harbor. Then down here in back of the Fairgrounds, which is a park now with no roads through there, the Hall brothers built a ski scaffold up there on the hill and used that for ski-jumping. The object was to get somebody with a car and ski behind the car out Eight Mile Road. You'd ski all over town. Nobody bothered you except once in a while, out in the country, why some woman would be coming to town and she'd be apprehensive seeing somebody on both sides of the road coming at her. She'd get into town and tell the cop and he'd come out.

LW: Who was the police at that time?

FK: Cracky White. He'd come and tell you and "OK, we won't do it" and so we'd go to another road. Nobody seemed to mind.

LW: Your mother could shop in town. Did she shop every day, because you really didn't have any storage?

FK: No, we didn't have any storage, but we always had a garden and we raised mostly vegetables. And the lot across the street, Dad got permission to plant potatoes in it. Of course, we had to spade it by

hand most of the time, but he had a plow originally. A colored man would come from Salem with a horse and a plow just to plow one lot then we'd have to cultivate it. Dad was cultivating it by hand. Dad would ride it and we had to pull him and he always would ride in the cultivator. He did walk all the time but we accused him of riding the cultivator. We had bees in the back yard. We had chickens in the back yard.

LW: Was your mother a good cook?

FK: Oh, yeah, a good cook all the time. You had to take the street car to go out to Meadowbrook and that was 5 cents. That was too much so most of the time you'd walk or thumb a ride. From Meadowbrook you'd come cross lots back through Power's apple orchard and cherry orchard. Of course you'd eat as much fruit as you wanted if they didn't see you and then down around Curtis Lake you could get frogs and wild strawberries and mushrooms, so on the way home, you could have your dinner if you would eat frog legs.

LW: Were you and your brothers quite friendly and companionable? Did you do things together?

FK: We always went together. You didn't have to go, but they just went.

LW: What was Christmas like?

FK: They had all the family around. Most of the family, aunts and uncles, we met with in Detroit. The Detroit city slickers didn't know much. They would come out in the wintertime and in the summertime practically every weekend on Sunday to go skiing or skating then in the summertime to go swimming.

LW: Did you have a Christmas tree?

FK: We had a Christmas tree most of the time. Of course you went out in the woods and chopped one down which nobody said anything about. Any place you want. All the farmland around town was just like a great big playground. Nobody bothered you. You didn't destruct anything. The farmers didn't care. They used to run cattle there and back to the Fairgrounds. The only thing is, say we'd hunt down there, we'd use BB guns or 22's, "don't shoot the cattle". They didn't care what else you did as long as you didn't (----) the joint up.

Swimming in the gravel pits. That was good. We didn't have to use swimming suits. The usually said nobody could swim there but the local kids they didn't bother. The city people started coming out. They'd come out and be there for a picnic or something and leave there garbage all around. It was too dirty so they put a fence around it and stopped 'em from that. The people would come out from the city and they didn't have garbage pails but they'd crawl over the fence and go and have a picnic and leave their garbage, all their paper sacks and everything there. We would be doing the same thing as they were doing but we'd go home to eat. We didn't have any garbage to leave in the first place. We probably would have gone someplace else and left garbage and been the same as they were.

Caddying was always fun. We could play golf one day a week all we wanted. At night, after everybody was practically off the course you could play golf. They had a caddy team and that was fun playing on that.

LW: In high school you said you didn't belong to any clubs or anything. What about social activities?

FK: When you got old enough, the thing was to go to Walled Lake to the dance hall where they had big-named bands and that. Every Saturday night that's where everybody went to the Walled Lake Dance Hall.

LW: So there would be a bunch of you fellas that would go over?

FK: Fella's and girls both but they probably didn't go together. The girls went and the fella's went, they danced and then the fella's went home and the girls went home. At least we didn't take any girls with us 'cause there was always girls there. Of course the parents wouldn't let them all go to the dance hall.

During the summer every church and business in town had a softball team. They played down there in the center of the race track.

LW: Do you remember when the race track came?

FK: The race track was always there as far as I remember.

LW: Well then where was the fairgrounds?

FK: That was the fairgrounds. The race track was in the fairgrounds. Maybe about five or six softball games were going on this one night. Everybody in town was there because everybody was there to play softball to get enough teams. It was just competition and something to do.

LW: Everybody knew everybody.

FK: Everybody knew everybody. That's where they had the football field. They didn't have any bleachers and the people would walk up and down the sidelines following them. Of course most of the mothers were there and poor Johnny would get hurt and (they would) run out on the field.

LW: Was your mother there? Your dad?

FK: Mother was there sometimes but she never run out on the field. You weren't supposed to do that.

LW: Did you have uniforms?

FK: (Yes)

LW: How did you raise the money?

FK: Well, the school and they had Doc Snow and Doc Holcomb, Stuart, and somebody else. Money usually come from the business community. All you had was a pair of pants, a pair of shoulder pads, and a helmet, and a football jersey. You had to buy your own shoes. They didn't have enough for two teams so in practice it was the seniors or the first team would scrimmage against the second team or the scrub. Kick the hell out of you! Then they had a golf team. I played on that four years. Played basketball for three years and then the fourth year, I didn't play because I was too short.

LW: How tall are you?

FK: 5'6". They had enough taller ones. You skied all winter and swam all summer.

LW: Did you ever go on any trips when you were growing up?



FK: Sometimes we'd spend the summer with an old maid aunt over in Canada. That was fun. We didn't have to work. We didn't have to do anything.

LW: What about your uncle in Plymouth?

FK: We used to walk to Plymouth and he had a cow and he had bird dogs so he gave us a bird dog pup. We had to walk over and get it. It was early in the spring. We were walking back on Sheldon Road. On the way back, the little pup got tired and he couldn't do any more so I put it in the front of my shirt. We carried it. Then a man by the name of Marcum who lived in Bealtown had race horses. He used to exercise them out on Sheldon Road. He was out there in a big cart so he packs four of us kids in the cart and the dog. The dog got sea sick and threw up in my shirt. What a mess! We kept the dog for about thirteen years. It was a neighborhood dog. All the kids and everybody played with it. We'd take it up town with us and we'd go in the pool hall and make the dog sit out front on the sidewalk. It would sit there. We'd take it to Stuart's Drug Store. That was about the only one we could go in and take the dog in. Stuart would give it a piece of candy.

LW: Where was the pool hall?

FK: Right where the restaurant is now.

LW: Your mother let you go in the pool hall?

FK: Well, sure. Everybody went in the pool hall. You played pool. There wasn't any drinking or anything so that's where you learned to count and add. Of course the big boys would play 8-ball and gamble, but anybody could play pool. There wasn't anything else to do. Everybody would meet in the pool hall, in fact you'd have a shoeshine boy in the pool hall. Genitti was a shoeshine boy in the pool hall on Center Street, just south of Schraeder's. Walker run the pool hall down on Main Street. Then they had a bowling alley in town and that was on the second story of the north side of .....