

Interview with Merv & Nina Troyer

Alan: We've been interviewing people for the last 20 years. I think we started with Ivan and Orpha Miller, and we had about 40, I don't know, between 40 and 50. I never thought I'd be interviewing my generation. But here we are. So, what's the first thing you remember? Your earliest memory.

Merv: I guess, my mother's death.

Nina: The train ride. The train ride to Cincinnati.

Merv: Yeah, the train ride to Cincinnati to see my mother. My mother died of cancer when she was 32 years old.

Alan: How old were you?

Merv: I was probably five at that time. Six. Well, when Mom died, I was six. My dad took us, she went to Cincinnati, Ohio, for treatment for cancer. She didn't really know she had cancer. First of all, she went to a chiropractor. She had breast cancer. And in today's society, she would have never died. So anyhow, that was really my first. And I don't really remember Mom at all.

Alan: Really?

Merv: No. I remember the funeral a little bit. I wondered why everybody was crying in the funeral. What was all the deal, you know? And we were in the Amish church. Not the real order Amish. We were the King, called the King church. And that's where I went to Sunday school and learned my "Ah, Bay, Tsay's", the ABCs, and things like that. The real German stuff.

Alan: Did you learn Pennsylvania Dutch first or English first?

Merv: Pennsylvania Dutch was the very first. That's all I ever knew. I went to school. They had a hard time with me the first year because they tried to teach me English. And it was all Pennsylvania Dutch. I went to a Christian day school for the first grade and the second grade. Then I failed the first grade because I couldn't speak English right. And then we bought a farm in a town called Middle Branch around Canton, Ohio. And that's when I transferred to public school. I went to public school the rest of my life.

Alan: The public schools there are partly controlled by the Amish, aren't they? Or aren't they on the school board?

Merv: They're much different than down here. They've got a good school system up there.

Nina: I don't think they're controlled by the Amish or even the Amish on the school board. But an interesting fact is that his nephew's wife teaches in Berlin, Ohio, in a public school that is almost entirely Amish children. And so when COVID happened, nobody had computers. She did lesson plans and the parents came and picked up the lesson plans and took them home a week at a time. But I want to insert here another very interesting fact, and you will like this.

And that is that Amanda Byler was a close friend of his mother. And they both had breast cancer at the same time. And it was considered not a good thing to do, to have your breasts removed. But Amanda had her breasts removed, and look how long she lived. Is that just amazing?

Alan: Is Amanda from that area?

Nina: She was.

Alan: She must have moved down here fairly young then because I've seen her in pictures when my mother was a teenager, and she's there with all the other young folks. A little older, but still in there. Yeah. It is interesting.

Merv: So anyhow, in my childhood, Dad always had a hard time financially.

Alan: Was he a farmer?

Merv: Yeah, we were on a farm. But he always wanted to work outside of the farm one day a week or so. He worked at this flea market for years and years. And he loved that job. I don't know. He didn't do it for money so much. He didn't know he got paid. He was a very good friend of his. Howard Miller is the guy he worked for. And there's a big shop in the Hartville area where we were.

Well, they stayed at the last in Hartville. But I was born in Hartville, Ohio. Then we moved to Miller Branch. And that's when I went to public school and did all that stuff.

Alan: Did your dad remarry?

Merv: Yeah. My dad found this Mennonite girl. It was a big change of our lives right there. He married Amy. Amy, she was working downtown cleaning houses, working for the rich people down there. And her daddy was a preacher in Indiana, Elkhart, Indiana. And she had some money, and she owned a couple of houses, and she gave everything to dad to start all over again in a farm in Miller Branch, Ohio. And that's how dad got another start.

Nina: Because the first farm burned down. The farm burned.

Merv: So we got going. And lo and behold, she slips and falls going down to the chicken house and breaks her hip and leg. I don't know, several different places. Knee something. I remember going to the hospital to see her. And she had this big pin and it would go

through her leg. She laid there for months and more. So she froze up. Her leg froze up. And so she was stiff from then on. And I remember my sister Esther, she took care of Amy. And by the way, Amy and dad had another son together, Donnie. And Donnie just passed away. So that's how that situation ended up. And her health was just not good at all. And dad just constantly had to take care of her and everything.

But she really brought a lot to us. But that's when we switched to Mennonites.

Alan: Okay, I didn't realize that you had.

Nina: He was nine. For three years the children, for several years the children lived with the relatives. And came home on the weekends. And then one day Esther, by then she was 13, she said enough. They all got together and said. She dropped out of school and took care of them for probably a year until dad married Amy. But Merv was nine when dad married Amy.

Alan: Okay. So then which Mennonite church did they go to then?

Merv: The Hartville Conservative Mennonite church.

Nina: We called it Frank Dutcher's church.

Merv: The Roman Miller church, the Frank Dutcher church. So many splits in those churches up there. Oh, they've got Mennonite churches all over the place. And so we always, dad always stayed with Frank Dutcher's church because his boss, Howard Miller, stayed in that church. Howard was the king of Hartville area. He still is. His family still is. So that's how we got to g

But then we got a car. That was a big thing for me and my brother. We decided...that car, man, carry on. We got to be high cotton. But all our relatives, dad's sister, Kate, and then they were Beachy Amish, but they had cars. And they all were fairly well-to-do compared to us. We were always on the bottom of the pole. Then Grandpa had a stroke. Mom's mom and dad had a stroke. He'd been paralyzed. Jonas?

Nina: Yeah, I don't know what all his... He required constant care. He was not bedridden, but up to a chair and back in the bed.

Merv: When I was a kid, all I remember is he was always in bed. Always in bed. We were never really that close to him. We were always close to dad's side a little bit more. Dad's dad was very rich. He was the king of... he had the best farm, the best everything. How many brothers and sisters did dad have?

Nina: I want to say there were twelve of them, I think. About twelve. None of his brothers and sisters still living. One of your mother's... Your mother's youngest sister is still living. We have one aunt living. But a lot of the medical things that happened in his family would be curable today. It was just sad.

Alan: That was true. It strikes me in doing this research, how many people in our graveyard wouldn't have died if it had been today.

Merv: It was no such a thing as going to a doctor back in them days.

Alan: What kind of farm did your dad have?

Merv: We milked cows.

Alan: How many?

Merv: About twenty, twenty-five. Twenty-five cows.

Nina: By hand.

Merv: By hand. Dad never bought a milker. We were just...we were always behind the block. No modern equipment. Dad did everything the hard way. That's how he was brought up with. From his dad.

Alan: When you were a teenager, what would your typical day be like? You'd start out in the morning and then what?

Merv: We'd get up in the morning and go out and milk cows.

Alan: What time?

Merv: Five o'clock in the morning. We'd go out and milk cows. I had to milk about four cows. My brother milked about six and dad milked the rest.

Alan: Did you milk into a bucket and then pour it into a ten gallon can?

Merv: Then we had a milk cooler. The milk cooler was cold water. Then the milk man would come by and pick it up. Every day he'd come by.

Alan: Did you have a little crane to put it in there or you had to put them in there by hand?

Merv: Put them in there by hand. I remember I could pick up two of them and put them in there at one time.

Alan: Really?

Merv: Yeah.

Alan: How much did that milk can hold?

Merv: I got one up there.

Nina: That's a five gallon but you also used some ten gallon milk cans.

Merv: Most are five gallons.

Nina: Five gallons. Well that's a five gallon.

Merv: Five gallons. I would pick two of them up with both hands. Then I got a job being the milk man. Going around picking up milk for a while. I didn't do it very long but I did it for a while.

Alan: I did that when I was a kid and we used to ride along (with Daddy). Roll those cans from the back to the front. I was about six years old. Couldn't pick one up of course but we could roll it.

Merv: That was kind of my childhood. We lived on a farm. We always had plenty to eat. So on and so forth. We were always a little bit the poor people of the church, I would say. Because I know that the Compassion Fund helped Dad a lot. That's why I've always been going for our Compassion Fund a little bit. A lot of people helped Dad. But his dad, I remember when we needed a new cow. Dad would go in the barn of his dad's and there was a milk can he had hid back there full of money. And Dad would go in there and get money out of there and put a note in it. This is how much I took and away he went. And that's how Dad would buy another cow and on and on. And when inheritance came Dad didn't get none. Everybody else got everything.

But then living down there and I went to school and I was never a great student in school. But I made many friends in school and stuff like that. And then I got in high school and then I became quite a star. Football playing. I was an old farm boy just a lot tougher than all those other people were.

Alan: What position did you play?

Merv: Running back. Running back. Always running back and then on defense I played defensive back. But I got a lot of trophies and a lot of headlines in the paper for me for winning the scoring crown and things like that. Nina researched and all that stuff for me.

Nina: A few years ago, well let me back up and say that I made scrapbooks for all of my grandchildren. Went to their ancestry, did a family tree and from the time of their parents' marriage and so on all the way until they graduated from high school. Merv said, I sure wish somebody had done that for me. I said to myself, okay. And I did it. He didn't know it. I surprised him. And I did it in the attic and I did it at my office and where he couldn't see it, never saw it. But I wrote, thank goodness for the internet and I knew, I had a picture from his high school football team and I knew he was a star.

And so I went online and this had names and so I started looking for the names. And I contacted one and he contacted everybody else. They sent me newspaper clippings. They sent me his letter. You know, you get a letter like this (unintelligible) or something, you

know. Pictures, all kinds of stuff.

Alan: That's amazing.

Nina: Yeah, and at the same time I wrote to his... he then had five living aunts on his mother's side. And so I wrote to all of them and asked about his mother as a child growing up and so on. And they all wrote back to me. And I wrote to his cousins, his boy cousins when he was growing up and they all sent me stories. It was very fascinating.

But that's how we documented his... he ran one time, he ran a 101 yard touchdown.

Merv: 105 yards. That was big news.

Nina: Yeah, and then while I'm making this scrapbook, his brother Donnie sent, you know, because I asked each of his brothers and sisters for information and pictures as well. And Donnie sent me a clipping during that time that was currently in the Canton Repository. Fifty years ago today, you know, they always have, they do that, you know. Fifty years ago today, Mervin Troyer ran 105 yards for a touchdown. And so he sent me that clipping as well.

Merv: That was not long ago. That was a couple of years ago.

Nina: Probably ten now. I mean, COVID was five years ago. You think about that. You know, I base everything by before COVID. You think, well, if it was before COVID, it was at least five years ago, you know.

Alan: Did you play other sports, also?

Merv: Yeah, I played them all. But, you know, I played baseball and I ran track. Track was probably my second best. And the track coach said, I mean, the football coach said, cut all that stuff out, you need to pay attention to football. Because I was so fast. I could run so fast. And I held state records all over.

Alan: Really?

Merv: Yeah, the hundred yard dash and stuff like that. You know, and I did the hurdle jumpings and all those things. But, you know, I was very privileged to go to a really nice school. A high class school. They were one of the best schools in Canton. In fact, the Football Hall of Fame, that was our home field. Although they fixed it up really fast from where it was since I played on it. But that football field, they still play the Hall of Fame game there now. You know, Canton High was really known for football. You know, Canton and this little town called Massilon was really known for that. So, you know, that was basically, you know, once I got to school, I was pretty good. And Dad was always a little bit against me playing any sports.

Alan: How come?

Merv: He says, you need to stay home and work on the farm boy. You know, if we can't make no money, you play football. And so on and so forth. As far as having some scholarships or something like that. Yeah, I had some small schools look at me a little bit, you know. But it was nowhere to go because Dad would put a foot to that. You know, he was, he still, Dad always still, you know, he was the Amish guy, you know. He felt like his dad, you know. So when I got to the 11th grade, senior year, Dad made me quit school. And I never did graduate, I never did graduate. And once I got through football, the coaches came out and talked to Dad. He says, come on, we need him to play this final year. And so he finally let me do it.

I know he used to brag about me behind my back, but never to me, no, never to me. He never came to see me play.

Alan: Really?

Merv: No, never. Anybody ever played, seen me with my brother, Clarence. Clarence supported me a lot, you know. He was always there for me, Clarence.

Alan: Well, did you stay on the farm until you were 21?

Merv: Uh huh, I stayed on the farm until I was 21. But Dad used to ship me out to work for other people and stuff like that. You know, for a week or two here and a month here and a month there. But we still took care of the farm, you know. And then about 21 and a half, 22, is when I had to go to 1W service. And that was a total change of life there, huge. So I go from the farm to Cleveland, Ohio.

Alan: How come you chose Cleveland?

Merv: Close to home. Close to home, and I knew a bunch of my buddies from the church that went there. Paul Miller and little John Yoder. In fact, John became my best in my wedding. And when I went to 1W, me and Phillip met up right away. Like, Phillip's got the same idea as I got, you know. So we played ball up there and we did a lot of things up there.

Alan: Were you already there when Phillip (Miller) and Ed (Yoder) came up?

Merv: I went to 1W with Olin (Slabaugh), Phillip, and Ed.

Nina: You all came about the same time? They all lived in a big house together. Merv rented a big house. And they all lived in this house. And they only had, I don't know how many bedrooms, but somebody was always in the bed. You know. Some worked nights, some worked days.

Merv: We lived in a one room apartment in 117th Street in Cleveland.

Nina: That was the apartment.

Merv: There was five of us. It was one bed. And we all worked different shifts. There was somebody in bed the whole time. All the time. Occasionally somebody would sleep on the couch, you know. And what a mess that was, you know. So that was kind of my first business venture. I went out and found a house. And I said, alright, and I got these guys all to pay me so much. And everybody moved in my house. And that's where I started my little business thing. And I said, everybody go over there and I don't have to pay no rent. And it went that way. That was a nice home too. Beautiful home. Can't believe that guy would let me have it. But we had a good time there. I mean my folks even came up there. We made dinner for them up there. Stuff like that. Dad came up. Dad and mom, Amy, only came here what, twice? I think twice.

Nina: Twice, something like that.

Alan: So when was the first time you came to Virginia?

Merv: At Phillip's wedding. I came there once before for something.

Nina: He just came down with Phillip and Wayne the summer before Phillip's wedding. Sixty-one years ago. And because we went out on a double date. He was with Donna and I was with Eddie (Yoder).

Alan: Donna Miller?

Nina: Donna Miller, yeah.

Alan: She gave him my first kiss.

Merv: Say what?

Alan: That's how I got my first kiss from Donna.

Merv: Really? I didn't get a kiss from her.

Nina: Then he came back for Phillip's wedding.

Merv: Yeah and I told Wayne, I says, hey that Miller girl...is a pretty sharp girl. I'll check her out. So fix me up with a date with her if I come down there. And that's when she just broke up with Eddie. She dated Eddie Yoder. And she just broke up and I caught her on the rebound. And that was it. We didn't date. Three or four times maybe.

Nina: Wayne wrote to me. I was in Colorado in VS. Wayne wrote to me and said, I know you're coming home for Philip's wedding. And would you go out with this guy? And of course I knew him but I knew who he was because...anyway, I said sure. So we went to the rehearsal dinner together. And then I went to the wedding with my parents. And after I went to the reception with him. After the reception I went home and packed my suitcase. And a carload of us went to Ohio. And so I changed my airline ticket from flying from

Norfolk to flying from Cleveland I guess. And I went up there. Susan (Miller) was with Owen Yoder. And Wayne had Jeanette Matthews. And me and Merv. The six of us in the car. And the guys. I don't know where the guys stayed. The girls stayed at their apartment. We stayed in an apartment that they vacated for us. And then he took me down to visit his folks. And I went back to Colorado. And this ring came in the mail.

Alan: That's how he proposed?

Nina: Yeah. I went back to Colorado to VS. and I said, I'm engaged. And they were like, ha, ha, ha! And then this ring came in the mail. And that was in July. He moved down here about September maybe. And he lived with Philip and Martha. And I came home in November. We got married in December.

Alan: What kind of work did you do when you first came down?

Merv: I first came down, I was a warehouse man for Virginia Door Company. Virginia Door was owned by Wayne Door Company in Mount Hope, Ohio. So I went to Mount Hope, Ohio. I says, "Look, I'm looking for a job in Virginia. I know you have a branch in Virginia. An overhead door company." And this guy, Willis Mullett, he just took over the company. Huge company. Anyhow, so he hired me to go down there and work down there. So that would be a warehouse man.

Alan: That was over in Western Branch area?

Merv: That was over in Portsmouth.

Alan: What road was it on?

Merv: What road was the warehouse on?

Nina: Glasgow Street.

Alan: So it was actually in Portsmouth.

Merv: Right downtown in Portsmouth. The bad part I had, I didn't know the roads. I didn't know how to get to work. Nina had to help me finding how to get around. We didn't GPS and all that stuff. It was tough. But anyhow, it didn't last long that I was a warehouse guy that I moved into installin' doors. Those guys were making all kinds of money installin' doors. I said, I would like to install doors. And so they moved me in there and I became a door installer for a couple of years, I think. And then all of a sudden the company was having financial problems. Wayne Door. And so Willis Mullett, the new guy that took over, he was the son. He took over Wayne Door. And he came down here and somehow he just liked me for some reason. I don't know. Me and Ken Miller.

Alan: Was Ken Miller working there then too?

Merv: Yeah.

Alan: Were there any other Mennonites working there?

Merv: Oh yeah. Solly Byler was working there. Cletus Hobbs was working there. Vernon Miller was working there.

Alan: Oh really?

Merv: Yeah. It was almost all Mennonites. Cletus taught me how to hang doors. Cletus Hobbs did that. Oh what a mess he was. And him and Vernon (Miller) taught me how to hang doors. And I just grew in the company really quick. And Willis came from Ohio. Came down here and says, "Look I'd like for you to take over the company. And if you'd be interested take over the company on an consignment basis. I'll send you the doors and you send me a check. When you sell one you send me a check. And whatever profit you make is yours." So I had everything from the peninsula, this side all the way down to North Carolina. And Ken had everything from Newport News on, Ken Miller.

And that lasted for about three years maybe. Something happened with Ken. He didn't pay his bills fast enough or something. And they took that franchise away and gave me that franchise too. So now me and Phillip's father, Vernon, we had a whole division.

Alan: You all were partners in it?

Merv: Yeah, me and Phillip's father. So then I said to Phillip, my best buddy, I said, Phillip, you need to quit the telephone company. You need to come to work for us. We can make a whole lot more money than you can make with what you're doing. So Phillip joined me in the door business. And that just grew and grew and grew. We did almost 80% of all the doors in the area almost.

Alan: Did you all build a warehouse on Portsmouth Boulevard?

Merv: We left there then and moved to the chicken houses. I said, I ain't going to pay that rent over there.

Nina: Glasgow Street to Portsmouth Boulevard.

Alan: And then to the chicken houses.

Nina: We never owned Portsmouth Boulevard. We didn't own the company. Once they got the doors on consignment, he and Vernon, they went to the chicken houses. Why would you pay rent to them when you could have an empty chicken house that you could make into a warehouse?

Merv: Yeah, I remember cleaning them chicken houses up and getting it all ready for when we were there. Martha would complain about all the dust and dirt we made. I said, Martha,

we're making money at chicken houses. But yeah, that's how I started in business. And then one day I saw this ad about a golf course. Stumpy Lake Golf Course.

Nina: By then they had bought Vernon out. Phillip came and worked as an installer for a little while. And then Merv and Phillip bought Vernon out. They paid him whatever his share was worth. And he continued to work for them. But then Merv and Phillip owned the business.

Alan: Back up on the golf. When did you start playing golf?

Merv: When I was about 22, 23 years old.

Alan: Was that in Ohio? Was that from Olin (Slabaugh)? Was Olin the first of you to play golf?

Merv: The first person that we had was Olin, Morris, Phillip and me.

Nina: Morris was never in Ohio.

Merv: No. I played some in Ohio. They came out and told the guys, let's start playing golf a little bit. So we got into golf a little bit.

Alan: I interviewed Olin about two or three months before he died. And he said that he was the first one to play golf. Somebody invited him out and he liked it so much he came back and told the rest of you. We've got to try golf. Is that how you remember?

Merv: It is a little bit that way, yeah.

Nina: That was in Ohio?

Merv: It was in Ohio. We didn't play much in Ohio. In Ohio it was basketball and softball. That's what we did. Olin didn't play much softball with us. Olin was a decent golfer. So when we came down here then it was Olin and Philip and me. And we'd go out there and play and play and play. It was me and Phillip against Olin and Morris. And Olin's started being being short, Morris got too good for us. He kicked all of us in the butt, man. He didn't take long. He was shooting even par. He was good, Morris. But anyhow, then we went and played most softball. You should probably remember our softball teams. We continued to play softball teams. So anyhow, then we grew in the business.

Then after a while, I just felt like, Phillip, man, all he wanted to do was go fishing. And I started having a fallout with Phillip a little bit. I wanted to keep growing in the business. He didn't want to grow in the business. So we split up.

Alan: How many years ago did you split up?

Nina: Well, let's go back and say, 1968 is when he first became an owner of Virginia Door. 1968. In 1977, they got their first lease at Stumpy Lake. And Phillip and Merv were still

in it together. So I can't tell you for sure. I think it was about 1979 when Merv took the, well, don't put that in the book, but you're aware there were some drug problems in between there. And Merv ended up with the golf, and Phil ended up with the door company. But there were some unpleasanties in between. We won't even go there.

Alan: No need to.

Nina: Because before he died, Phillip came up to him one after, when Phillip and Martha started coming back to our church, it was so heartwarming. He came up to Merv and clapped him on the back. I don't know what he said, something about, I want the past forgotten. I want us to be friends. It was wonderful.

Merv: Phillip and me patched up really good with everything. Phillip was just a little bit more laid back than I was. I was the aggressor of everything.

Alan: He worked for my dad as a helper when he was in high school. Daddy used to say "Philip was the best helper I ever had, until he heard a gun go off."

Merv: I'll tell you what, Phillip talked me into buyin' a boat. We bought a boat, and I'd see that boat pull up to the gas pumps, and he'd show, you know, that thing took hundreds of gallons of gas. And then he'd take a couple of my installers, and I'd say, man, this ain't right, Philip. Man, we got all this work, and you're out there fishing. But anyhow, that's how it all started. Then I just became very aggressive in the golf business.

How did the story go? When I sold Virginia Door back to Phillip and I built that big warehouse out in Greenbrier. That was a big move. That was back in the Carter days. We built that building. In fact, I forget who the builder was anymore. Anyhow, I know I ended up finishing the building myself.

Alan: Oh, really?

Nina: Wasn't it A.C. Miles?

Merv: I think it was A.C.

Alan: He built those kind of buildings.

Merv: Yeah. It was a big metal building. And finally, then when I sold the door company to Philip, I said, you've got to keep renting my building. So that was in Greenbrier, right there by Cavalier Ford, not far from it. And that was, you know, \$700,000, \$800,000 building, something like that. And so I got a start there, and then I kept going into golf.

Philip left as soon as his five years was up. He left, and he went and built that one out there now on Mt Pleasant Rd, that big building. And that's identical to the building I had. Yeah, almost identical. And this electric company rented it from me. They rented it for, I don't know how many years. Then all of a sudden, one day, we get a check for the

whole thing. The guy paid it off. And then I was trying to avoid taxes, you know. And we ended up getting the whole check at one time.

Nina: I think it was a rent to own or something.

Alan: So how many golf courses did you eventually start running?

Merv: Seven, yeah. It was,

Alan: I know Stumpy Lake was the first one, and you still got that one?

Merv: I'm still there with a five-year lease. And then we got one 20-year lease with the City of Virginia Beach. But we started off with Stumpy Lake, and then I became very good friends with Dr. Montero over here. And me and Montero, he got me into the banking business. And I would always say to the bank, I said, "Look, I don't want to keep renting golf courses." I want to buy golf courses." And they said, whenever you have one, let me know. And Bob asked him, he was the big guy with TowneBank. He said, "I'll make sure you get one." And sure enough, about a year later or more, Cypress Point Country Club came along. That was a big, big deal. Well, I think we paid about four and a half million for that, something like that.

Alan: This little Amish farm boy buying it.

Merv: This little Amish boy. That was a big deal. And we had enough money at that time, Nina and me, we could have retired at that time. And we discussed it a little bit. And Olin came to me and says, Olin says, "Merv, no, you can't retire. You're too good at making money, man. Don't do this." He said, "you need to keep on going." And a little bit of encouragement there, a little bit of encouragement here. It kept me going. And then we bought that and then I'm in debt up the yin-yang. And it took us, what, 25 years to pay for that golf course.

And then, another thing happened. City of Norfolk came to me. "Mr. Troyer, we need you to help us run some of our golf courses." And so that's when I got into Lake Wright Golf Course. Lake Wright Golf Course. Then they said, we're going to build a golf course. We need you to help us build this golf course. And then we built Lamberts Point by Old Dominion.

Alan: Oh yeah, I played that one.

Merv: And that was a brand new golf course. Yeah, that was, that was the start I got into construction of the golf courses and stuff like that. And I had this wonderful guy with me called Mark Fentress working for me. He was my manager. He was, what, 18 years? Something like that. And he helped me put all the stuff together and we had some good contracts with Norfolk. There were management contracts. I got to figure out whether we made money or not. And in fact, we didn't make no money for Lamperts Point. But Lake Wright, we made a lot of money for the city of Norfolk. And that's, that's how I got into

that. And then all of a sudden, now I'm on the board with TowneBank and I'm meeting all kinds of big guys, you know.

And this guy Tom Bralls, he's one of the big guys at the City of Virginia Beach and he helped us with money. And he talked me into buying Honey Bee golf course and Chesapeake Golf Course at one time. In fact, I did that without talking to Nina.

Nina: I was out of the country when he bought those golf courses. Yeah. But anyhow, it all worked out.

Merv: There was seven and a half million dollars. I was like, where in the world am I? But Tom became such a pain in the neck, I couldn't stand working with him. Finally, I bought him out and then I just stayed with Bob. Just Nina and me. And it's been that way ever since. So that's my business venture.

Nina: We had Owl's Creek too, somewhere in there.

Merv: And we bought this course called Owl's Creek.

Nina: When we were with Tom Royce. 2001. Stumpy Lake, 1977. Cypress Point, 1992. Lake Wright, 1996. Chesapeake and Honeybee, 2001. Owl's Creek, 2002. And Lamberts Point, 2004. In that order. Then God gradually took them away from us. Thankfully. Lake Wright closed because they made the golf club a shopping center there. Lamberts Point closed. Owl's Creek closed.

Merv: I sold Owl's Creek.

Nina: And then we sold Cypress Point and sold Chesapeake and HoneyBee just two years ago.

Merv: That's what really helped us was the virus came in and people didn't have nothing to do but play golf. You could sit in your house all day and the (unintelligible) would just come out there and grow. It grows. And we made a fortune in about three years.

You know. So our numbers just got way up. And then the guys from Ohio came out there and said, "we'd like to buy your golf club. We'll make all kinds of money."

Alan: That's time to sell.

Merv: That's when we sold. We sold.

Nina: They're not doing very well.

Merv: They're not doing so good.

Nina: But that's their problem.

Merv: It just goes to show you without good management what happens. This guy's got lots of money but they don't know how to run a golf course. In the meantime, we basically still own Chesapeake because I ain't been paid for that yet. They owe us for that one yet. But they're making monthly payments so I don't know how long it's going to last. I might get it back. And I hope I get it back before I die so I can what do with it what I have to do with to get it back in shape so Nina won't have to do it.

Alan: You had mentioned earlier that there were a lot of Mennonite churches in Ohio because they kept splitting off from one another. And every church does that. Because I've read any book I can lay my hands on about other Mennonite churches who have a history or the conference histories and so forth. And they all go through splits. And I've talked to Dale a lot about this about this because it was intriguing, the whys and the wherefores because they all seem to couch at first in a difference in theological belief but in reality it's a difference in personalities or somebody made somebody mad or you've got two different people who want power and so they can't share it so they split.

And one of the things like there was a split here in 19... at the Mount Pleasant Church in 1910 almost immediately after the church was built. But nobody knows about it and I didn't know about it either and only knew about it because I kept reading about, I started adding up the people who left and then started seeing in letters comments that were not specific to it but like it was a letter that Clarence Miller wrote to Dwight. Clarence was 13 at the time. He said something about A.A. Landis and where his farms are for sale you ought to come home and buy them because he was in Goshen at the time. And he said "I guess the whole tribe will leave and that means there's something different than the in people.

And so there were they all seemed to be from Juniata County originally and were here and several months after the church was finished and they started doing it they started meeting in Landis' home which was where Carson Hostetler's was the Deal Store place and then all left. But nobody ever really exactly what it was about I think it was probably to dress the fact that A.D. Wenger had just moved in here and T.J. Wenger who was a deacon and you had Brunk over on the other side who was bishop after Wert was kicked out and he was married to a Wenger sister. So you had this Wenger triumvirate and they were all very conservative.

I mean the Virginia Conference was at that time really pushing on dress. In fact I found a letter that Brunk had written to A.D. Wenger about 1913 or so it said "Grace Eby. is over here and she was wearing the most heathen Babylonish collar. You should address that. We have our own Eby problems we're handling them."

So I suspect that's what it was and one of the things I want to cover in this history, at least in some depth, is the situation with Sam. What is your perspective on that? What happened?

Merv: I thought Sam became dishonest especially with Nina, and he I knows that I spoke up, I don't speak up much, but this couple that worked for me what was her name? They

came to our church and that's how we got the blue book that blue hymnal, she wanted that blue hymnal...

Nina: Yeah it was Jill, Jill Fries's sister Cheryl.

Merv: Sam treated them so bad and she got so upset with Sam.

Alan: How so? I mean what how do you mean he treated them badly?

Merv: By lying to them, and this and than, and she just got... and I stuck up for her and I said how can a preacher do this to her we're losing people then and everything was starting to fall apart. But the big thing is I was upset the way he treated Nina. Sam didn't treat Nana right

Nina: Sam I don't know... Sam... people started coming to me...I forget what the... I don't even know what it was that he didn't treat me right I have no idea I couldn't tell you. I have no idea. Actually Sam was here yesterday soliciting money for Lezhë school and we had a good even after this all blew over he and I met for breakfast one morning and said "I'm sorry let's go on we don't have to agree but let's go on" so he and I have made our amends a long time ago. Anyway, people started... I don't know what happened with me and Sam, I can't tell you... but I can say that people started coming to me and telling me their stories. Marilyn Beiler whatever her name, was KD's wife, Hicks came and said that Sam threw a chair at her. And, Regina Miller came to me with a story I said I would never tell so something that someone had done some sexual advances someone had made to her and she went to Sam about it and he took the person's side against her. He didn't believe her and I don't know if the word got out but people started coming and talking to me. I'm talking a dozen or more people came.

And so I put out a request, that if you... we're gonna investigate him and if you have...I don't know how I did that...

Alan: Who was the request to?

Nina: To anybody and I don't know how I said to anybody if you have anything... I know I wanted to write to the conference about him and so I wanted anybody that has anything to contribute to this. And so I wrote to the conference. People came and talked to me and I wrote to the conference. I was really instrumental in getting Sam kicked out. Then from the conference point of view, then we had a church meeting which I also somehow called I don't remember, but, we met...

Alan: Well this was this was after they had the vote on whether to renew his contract, correct? And the vote was 50/50.

Nina: I don't know we had a meeting where everybody could come and speak, and he was there and people let him have it with both barrels I'm talking maybe as many as twenty people aired their grievances.

Merv: I even spoke that time.

Alan: Was there another meeting later then? Because I was at one meeting but Sam wasn't there.

Merv: I didn't think Sam was there.

Nina: You don't think Sam was there?

Merv: Not when I spoke.

Nina: Ok, well, then maybe Sam wasn't there I could be wrong. Anyway...

Alan: He was invited.

Nina: But chose not to attend?

Alan: I've interviewed Sam on this whole subject too so it's interesting getting the different perspectives and sides of the thing.

Nina: Sam was dishonest. He was selling... he was involved in a pyramid scheme.

Merv: This has been going on not long ago. I find out a lot because Eddie (Yoder) comes to me "that damn Sam, he just sold me this pyramid scheme."

Alan: You're talking about the buffalo thing.

Merv: I don't know what it is.

Alan: Shortly after Eric died, Sharon was working as secretary (at the church) and she came to me and she did and does for financial advice and so forth and said "Sam had this thing that guaranteed 10% per month and thought it was a great idea to take Eric's insurance and put into it." And so I spent three days just investigating it and found out that, yes, was there's no way that foreign exchange does that there's no way they can get paid that, this is a scam. Found out the guy was being investigated by Montana and the state of Virginia.

I took Sam to lunch one day pretending I was interested in investing in it to get more on that side of it and then Montana called Virginia, Virginia called me and said we need to talk to Sam because he's selling unregistered securities in Virginia. At that point I called Sam and said Sam here's what's going on I've done this, this and this... you might want to get ahead of this. That's the last I ever heard of anything from Sam on it. I told Sharon don't do it and Ed told me later that he and somebody from Amelia had to go to Oregon or Montana or wherever to testify when they charged the guy with fraud and essentially everybody lost their money. Except Sam. But that was the way they worked... do it with a preacher make sure he got paid back and then he would bring in the rest of them.

Merv: You never did get to talk to Philip?

Alan: I called to talk to Phillip and Martha answered it and I just told her what I found out and left it there. I said, " This is a scam if you have any more questions I'll be glad to show you anything I've got I just wanted to warn you." I never anything from them.

Nina: And he lost his money.

Merv: Philip lost a ton.

Alan: Ed lost his. Everybody lost money. Except Sam.

Nina: But Phillip didn't hold it against Sam. He continued to support Sam. I mean he left our church to go with Sam.

Philip: That's why Phillip left. I couldn't believe he left but it was his love for Sam

Alan: I didn't perceive this but when I interviewed Kenny Kurtz he told me, I hadn't even thought about it, he said more people left while Sam was here than left after he left.

Nina Right! There were people... and that was the thing, that's when I got involved and people were just, just quietly leaving and I started asking, calling those people...then I got on the ball and got a campaign going really when I think back on it it was mean, but maybe it was necessary that I had a campaign going where I called people and said why did you leave? Will you tell me why you left and that's what then I wrote to the conference and said they left because of this they left because of that they left because of that. All of them left because of Sam and we need to do something. I don't know... I try not to think about it

Alan: I'm good friends with Sam, I think he's got a gift.

Nina: I am too, but I don't trust him as far as I out of my sight. So he's soliciting. Yesterday he comes here and he's soliciting money for Lezhë Academy and we had already.. I guess he was a little embarrassed... we had already made a pledge but he didn't know about it. Anyhow, so I said that. So he, "Oh ok well alright, well then just pay your pledge" or whatever. And I said we contacted them recently and asked them when are we supposed to pay this and they said when we get enough pledges for two million dollars then we're going to go forward with it, but just hold off. And then I talked to Klementina when she was here and I asked, "Do you have your two million pledges?" and she said "We're contacting our big donors now." So then Sam sits here and says "The big donors each pledged half a million, so we have it", he said "We have the two million."

So I wrote to Klementina this morning and I said Sam said that you have it and that's wonderful, that's awesome just let me know when we should pay our pledge. I'm waiting to hear whether she says they have it I bet they don't I'm betting it was a lie.

Merv: This is a five million dollar project

Nina: I don't trust him I don't hate him but I don't trust him

Merv: I never got involved with his finances he tried to get me many many times and I always backed away from him. I always had a theory if it's too good to be true it's not true that's always the way I felt. I have a first cousin up in Ohio that lost everything in one of them things. Kurt Coblentz and my sister's son and he took everybody down with him... his brothers.. everybody in the area. And his home was paid for, they lost his home he lost everything he's a big plumbing contractor and he's making a comeback now but Kurt tried to get me in more than one time I just thought it's too good to be true Kurt. Come on it don't make sense. Find real estate in Florida those people all went to jail.

Alan I was really surprised that Ed got involved because as tight as he is...

Nina: I know Sam is smooth.

Merv: He's talked to me, Ed has talked to me several times.

Nina: You have to be to do a pyramid scheme you have to be smooth

Alan: Ed tickles me... "this isn't everybody's business and I know you won't tell anybody." I say come on Ed.

Merv: They had a terrible time with the inheritance thing and Ed is telling me he wants to settle right away right away, it's going to take a while to get this thing. Sam wanted his money right now good old Sam, but then he says good things about Sam.

Alan: Well I think Sam has got some good qualities. I think one of the biggest problems was he has almost no empathy with people, he seems to have a tin ear that things don't make an impression on him that he can perceive how somebody else is reacting to or feeling about something he's saying or doing. It just seems to roll off of him.

Nina: Yeah, yeah, he preaches like everything.

Merv: Great preacher, man, I miss his preaching.

Nina: He wasn't a good pastor

Alan: Well he came from that fit in Harrisonburg whose... I forget their name now.
(Cornerstone)

Merv: I remember he was in a church in Harrisonburg .

Alan: Yeah and they kind of left the Mennonites. They're still nominally Mennonite but they've got their own conference. The guy that ran that was something of a control freak and

would bring on young pastors like Sam and as soon as they got to a position where they might be confronting him or in competition he'd fire them. There was even a group of them that would get together they called themselves I forget what it was the resigned or the pre-resigned preachers of whatever this outfit was. And so when you have that kind of training where what the minister says, goes, and get to a congregation like Mount Pleasant where the congregation is used to making decisions having somebody up above try to make decisions for you it doesn't work so well. And the same thing at Lansdowne when I was over there I interviewed Dave Zook to get his perspective on...

Merv: Oh yeah, I like Dave... you know back to my family all four of us my brother other than my half brother Donnie we all became millionaires all four of us without any education anything my sister Ruth is married to a preacher up here in New York in fact he's in our conference, him and Dale are good buddies. So my brother he always was a construction guy but my brother Donnie now he's the highest educated of all of us he went through high school through everything he was a good student but he was a pot smoker.

Nina: He could never get beyond the warehouse. He worked for Hoover all his life. He worked for Hoover Sweeper and he drove a forklift but he could never get up because he couldn't pass the drug test. He never married because pot was more important to him than a woman.

Merv: (Quoting Donnie) "They moved me out to the loading dock where I could smoke, all I wanted was to smoke."

Nina: But he was happy he was content he was like my sister Velma you know. She's so pitiful but she's so content

Merv: Hhe was smarter than her.

Nina: How can you say that? Sometimes you say to me that Velma's smarter than me.

Merv: Yeah she's pretty slick too.

Nina: today is Rodney's (Morgan) birthday he's 32.

Alan: Hheaven sakes, it doesn't seem possible. So where do you think the church is now and what the future...is it in a good place, bad place?

Merv: Good place. I think the church is really good. That school really makes us take financially... the church is in great shape. I just last Sunday was amazing how many people was there it was really amazing and I see a lot of young kids you know especially with all the Keffer's running around there. I just I think good things for our church .I really like Nevin and I like Keith too, both. We were kind of lucky to get Keith back in the church again. It was a big one there I thought.

Alan: Yeah I thought so too. I was surprised ...well I wasn't surprised either because in fact I

had interviewed him and gotten his... I think you're the last people that I have to talk to me at least on the the Sam thing.

Merv: You've been all the way through ,you've talked to a lot of people.

Alan: Aabout 50 all together.

Merv: Wow, wow, I'm going to read it all in this book.

Alan: Well none of that's in the book. That's just my stuff. You're in there though. So's Nina.

Nina: this is your family story?

Alan: Yeah.

Merv: We really had a good time with your brother in the last cruise that we ate dinner together every night, you know stuff like that, especially Nina and Dale, they know everything.

Alan: What would you improve about the church if you could anything?

Merv: What would I improve? I wish they would remodel the church. I give 'em a lot of money for the building expansion, a big big chunk of money I give and then they put it in the bank.

Alan: What kind of remodel"

Merv They were talking about when we lost Kathy and...

Nina: Neil Townsend was turning the sanctuary around.

Merv: I'm so hard of hearing, of course, I should move up front probably to be able to hear better but they were talking about Neil said we can never get a good sound system in there because it's a tunnel, it's a tunnel like thing, so they go do the thing around I said we need X amount of dollars before we can do that so I gave them X amount of dollars the money's there.

Nina: \$50,000

Alan: Well you will be happy to know then; one, Neil is wrong about the sound system, that's not the reason to do it. But the admin committee has appointed a committee of all young folks and given them until August to come up with a plan to get it done to, get it done.

Nina: Get it done? Turning it around? good good.

Alan and I think Ronnie not Ronnie, what's Lynn's youngest boy's name?

Nina: Ricky

Alan: Ricky is in charge of it.

Merv: He'll get something done.

Alan: Aand they're all in that generation.

Nina: That's that's what's so... let me just start by saying Merlin (?) used to sit in church and complain," children are rattling the table" you know it's noise now we're just so happy to hear all the children in the church and the young people in the church, the church has life again really I thought we were going the way of Deep Creek you know. We never got that bad but you know we were dwindling. But we have life again in the church.

Alan: Not only life but there's there's a lot deeper spirituality there...

Merv: Yes, yes.

Alan: Than has been the case a lot of times in the past.

Nina: Right right. They may wear shorts they may wear clothes with holes in them and all of that stuff, but they're much more spiritual than we were when we were making sure that our sleeve was long enough and our dress was long enough.

Merv: Brother Phil always complained about that. Wasn't Phil one of the first ones that wore a sport coat.

Nina: He wore a tie.

Alan: He was much more evangelical than his predecessors were.

Nina: He and my dad really butted heads over things like that, music musical instruments in the church. The first time Brother Phil played the guitar in church my dead parents left.

Alan: Ddid they really?

Nina: They did. They walked right on out.

Alan: Have you ever walked out of church over something?

Nina: No. I walked out of church one time because I had two little girls and I don't know why, I think he was working nights or something. anyway he wasn't there, I guess it was a Good Friday service. It was in the evening and they were going to have... I went because it was going to be communion and my little girls were so fussy and I finally left and didn't take communion. It's one of those things that just sticks in your mind. That's the only time I know that I ever left.

Alan: Oh you had mentioned sitting through a lot and I think I figured that must have been when the lot was for Amos Wenger or Eli Kramer to be bishop because that was about 1955, '56 and I can't find any other lot drawn since then.

Nina: You sure there wasn't a lot when they chose someone for Deep Creek to be the pastor at Deep Creek? Because this lot, if I recall correctly, James Bergey was in the lot that I was talking about.

Alan: I'll have to look further because I have not seen anything for that yet but it could have been.

Nina: It seemed to me that it was. I know that James Bergey was in the lot because Mary was very hurt he wasn't chosen and later he was chosen so I think this might have been a lot for a deacon and not for a pastor.

Alan: Could be... because the pastors... let's see Levi Kramer wasn't by a lot Clayton Bergey wasn't by a lot, Phil Miller wasn't by a lot, Amos Wenger was by a lot but that was long time ago and none since then.

Nina: I don't know, I could be wrong. Anyway, I just remember sitting there you know and then one by one they got up and took their books

Alan: Dale was by a lot, that's the only one I've ever seen.

Merv: Does Willie know a lot about the history? He has read some history stuff too.

Alan: Yeah I haven't interviewed him yet but I've talked to him quite a bit.

Merv: He knows everybody. I mean he goes to Florida and they're all related to him and he knows everybody. We hang with Willie and Carolyn (Yoder) a lot.

Nina: He's more into family history than he is into church history, particularly he's into who's related to who.

Merv: Yeah he's really into that stuff .

Alan: Yeah I interviewed Clifford about five months ago, just a couple months before he died.

Merv: Just before he died?

Alan: Be careful, don't do anything rash here.

Merv: The one I miss is Olin, he could be going strong now yet you know.

Alan: Yeah that was that was sad, that was too bad and that was really a shock because when of course when I interviewed him it was just before his court appearance and so he was

upbeat and happy.

Merv: Yeah I went in there several times. I felt like I didn't go in there enough to see him you know uh but uh it was quite something.

Alan: Yeah well I will get out of your hair. I think you've told me everything you know Everything printable anyway.

Merv: It's nice what you're doing you know uh to get some history on this.

Alan: All of it's going on a website too. Even interviews will be transposed so that the written data is there for anybody whowants to read them or they'll be in there in in audio. I have to I go back through and edit them to take out the pauses and I'm like Olin was telling some stories we don't want in here... just cause it wasn't necessary it didn't add anything to it it didn't add anything. Interesting to hear but no need for.

Merv: This is a historic church you know.

Alan: Yeah it's been fascinating doing the research on because the way I'm writing it is that the first part is basically the stories of the individuals who came here up through about 1920 25 or so but it's more than why they came here who they were related to that came here what happened to them after they came and left like a lot of families. The Barber family was here for one year and gone, you know. Where did they come from, what happened? It turns out that he was the Valley folks were crossing to West Virginia to preach. It took days on horseback to get there. This wasn't like going to Norfolk and singing at the old folks home and in one particular valley one of them heard news there and this guy walked 14, 15 miles over to hear the preacher and said hey "could you come preach in our valley"? Well he did and he converted the Barbe family and another family who built A church. One of the Barbe boys went over to Harrisonburg in the summer to work when he met a girl there. They migrated to Montana then Kansas and then Newport News and then they were in Fentress for a year. It doesn't really add much to the history here but just telling that story is kind of an illustration of how people came and went and did and what happened to them afterwards. He went back to Harrisonburg and I guess took over his wife's father's farm and that's where they lived and died so hmm yeah.