

Arthur Isles

Interviewed by Susan Amero, October 30, 2000



Q. O.K. What is your full name?

A. Robert Arthur Isles.

Q. And who were your parents?

A. My father is Arthur Max Isles. My mother was Myrtle Isles.

Q. And what was your mother's maiden name?

A. Claes.

Q. Could you spell that?

A. C-l-a-e-s.

Q. And who were your grandparents?

A. On my father's side? Robert John and Augustis Maude.

Q. And on your mom's side?

A. My mother's side? Ah.....Augusta Claes and a, oh gee.....I know it was Mary, was one of her names, any ways.

Q. O.K. And when were you born?

A. July 31, 1920.

Q. And where were you born?

A. Rate next door, in this big house here on the.....

Q. O.K. How large was your family?

A. I was the oldest of twelve.

Q. And what did your father do for a living?

A. Farm.

Q. And what do you remember about your mother's work day?

A. My mother was a nurse, in the V.G. (Victoria General) or the Camp Hill Hospital, when my father met her in 1918, after he came back from overseas. And they was married in 1919.

Q. O.K. What was a typical school day like?

A. Well, I tell you what. I was very fortunate up 'til a I was in, what grade seven, I think. I went to school right down the road here. And a, the old one room school. They was thirty-six or more of us in there, and a.....And when I first went to school, the teachers had to take and board with a separate family every month. She got a hundred dollars a year. And every month she had to change boarding house. And a.....it was typical one room school. The one.....the older ones helped the younger ones and so forth, etc. And a... I think, in some respects, we got darn good education that way.

Q. That's true.

A. So then a..... I think in 1933, I went to Oakdene School, in Bear River. In 1934, that Burnt down. Rebuilt, so we had classrooms down, in what is.....the classroom I was in Is what is now the Legion building.

Q. Oh ya.

A. And a.....one of the teachers I had then, just passed away, a short while ago, Grace Hubley.

Q. I know Grace.

A. Ya.

Q. I knew her very well. She was at the home where my mom is. Lovely woman.

A. Ya.

Q. O.K. So who was your best friend at school?

A. My best friend was a, Richard Ellis. He was a lot taller than me, but we was almost....He's just a few months older than me and a he joined the army, and was killed in Italy. Sicily or Italy way..... anyway, he lived next door down here. His mother had, altogether, five boys in the services. She got word that a, one was killed, two more wounded, missin', so forth, etc., all within a month. And a....I lost one of my brothers. He was a navigator in the airforce.....flying with the British.

Q. So what types of things would you do with your friends?

A. Well, I'll tell you what. We had to make all our own entertainment. Whatever we done we built hockey ponds, back here in the woods, where ever there was a place to get a pond. And a....we built our own jumpin' forms, so we could pole vault and jump....so forth, etc. And a....oh I don't know. Ah....ah.....we had one room, up here in the big house here. My father was a great one fer us to entertain ourselves. So he set aside fer a room to wrestle and box. We had wrestlin' matches, boxin' matches. (laughter)

Q. Well how nice was that.

A. Ya. And that was a gathering place for all the young people up there because we was One of the first ones to have a radio. About the first one to have a.... I think a scram-a-phone, even.

Q. And what is that.....a scram-a-phone?

A. A gram-a-phone?

Q. A gram-a-phone.

A. A record player.

Q. Oh ya.

A. Anyway, the first one we got, had great big round records, and they was about a Quarter of an inch or more, thick. And they was suppose to be unbreakable. And they Was one song on there, a woman sing, my father despised. So ahe says, one Night we had a bunch of us up there, he says, "Look" he says. "This record here" He says "is unbreakable." And he went and slapped it across the arm of a chair and By gosh it went to pieces. Come to find out it was one of his favorite records. (laughter) So a....no....but we had a lot of fun. My father and mother were look, the easiest goin' People, you ever wanted to know. I don't think my mother ever laid a hand on us. But God help ya, if father got ya. (laughter)

Q. So what is your best memory of school?

A. My best memory. I don't know just what my best memory is of school. I had a lot of Good ones. And I wouldn't say I had too many poor ones. I don't know whether to burn Down the Oakdene School or.....(laughter) But anyway a.....no, school days was school days, in those days. The only thing was, when I went to school, from the time I was nine years old, I had to start milkin' cows, 'cause we were on a farm and my father was crippled, in the one arm. He was wounded in the First World War, in Passendale and it was almost impossible for him to do the milkin'. So awhen I was nine years old I went up there and started pullin' tits. (laughter) And a....when I went to Bear River School, I was milkin' ten cows, night and morning. You know, I often stop and think, we never realized comin' out of a barn, goin' rate to school, what we smelt like.

Q. Ya.

A. But nobody seemed to mind. Nobody seemed to notice. And then a.....oh a little later On, I was about fifteen, when the neighbors over, had a dairy farm, and he was always, Milked at four o'clock in the afternoon.....way ahead of us. And he was always short of Help so some Saturdays, stop in there, and milk six or seven cows for.....before we come Home and milk ours, again.

Q. What subjects were you taught in school?

A. Readin' writin', 'rithmetic. (laughter) Mostly, but any way, no, we a...we a...we was taught a little French but a, the basics, those days, was the basics. Geometry and so forth, etc., algebra, and a.....I only finished grade ten. Got into the....well, I was one of these ones that had to be workin' all the time. I still can't stop. (laughter)

Q. What subject was your favorite?

A. My favorite? I don't know. I think mathematics was one of my favorites. It's a funny thing. The later Isles's generation, mathematics, they find hard.

Q. What was your least favorite subject?

A. I don't know. Maybe, geometry. (laughter)

Q. And why didn't you like that?

A. Well, I don't know. Just a, one of those things. No, I always enjoyed Geography and history and so forth, etc. And a....I still hope to thinkin' I'm still keepin' up with a little bit of it.

Q. What kinds of things did you have to memorize?

A. Ah.....I don't know. Those days you had to memorize, rememorize quite a lot, because when I first went to school, you only had slates to write on.

Q. Right.

A. And a....you couldn't.....retain them. Until after a while....I don't know what grade I was in when we started gettin' scribblers but it was up in....I think around, maybe, grade four or five. And a...that way you had to memorize everything. And I think it was a good thing, because that way a....Today, the children come out, they can't memorize any thing. They can't even write.

Q. You're right, they can't. How were you disciplined in school?

A. With a great big birch stick. (laughter) Well, some of the teachers had straps. But I know one or two carried a good...sturdy....switch. And those old hands, if you got in trouble, you.....

Q. So what kind of things would you have to get in trouble for?

A. Well, bein' mischievous, most generally. Like puttin' a nail in the seat and pingin' it. (laughter) phone girls here and a.....oh just.....brawls out in the school yard and things. We, you know, we.....I don't care....I don't think kids are any different today, then they were then.

Q. No, I don't think so.

A. We all like to kick up a little stir, once in a while. (laughter)

Q. O.K. So what were your daily chores?

A. My daily chores? In school or.....

Q. At home.

A. At home? Well, as I said, from the....time.....we had ta....we had pigs, we had a ... chickens, we had horses, and we had cattle. Some where around forty-five, fifty head of cattle. And aalways a pair of horses and a.....I don't know just how many pigs. My father used to take and keep a few sows and araise young pigs. We'd put 'em in crates, in back of the old a '29 Chev, take 'em down here to the French Shore and peddle them. And all day, if you could....if you come back...if you made eighteen or twenty dollars, you had a big day.

Q. Isn't that amazing though!

A. Ya, I see my father sell his best cow he had in the barn, for nineteen dollars. We used ta a.... churn our own butter and had eggs. Take 'em up the village. Eight, nine, ten cents a pound or a dozen eggs. And a...a lot of times, a.....I know when I was a little older and we was cuttin' pulp wood and things, they used to take and haul it up here on the wharf in Bear River, to Tupper Warrens, and three dollars and seventy-five cents for a cord of peeled pulp wood. And you couldn't get any cash. You had to take it out in.... trade.

Q. So did you ever work at Tupper Warrens?

A. No.

Q. But....you remember what it looked like?

A. Oh yes. I remember Tupper Warrens down there. His old definance trucks and so forth, etc. 'cause one of my neighbors used to drive one of them. Great big rugged old things. They, they built them right there in Digby. They brought the engines in but the trucks were built there... assembled there. They wasn't.....

Q. Were they assembled right at the.....

A. Down in Digby, yup.

Q. Rate at the plant.....rate at the mill itself?

A. They had a special place there. I don't know which building it was, but they had it there because Morris Dunn, one of our neighbors here, he used to drive one, he used to tell me all about it, when I was a kid there. And a.....now it was quite a controversy 'bout Old Tupper but, you know, he kept a lot of people alive. He never paid no wages, you had to take practically everything out in trade, but, people lived, other wise they wouldn't have.

Q. And he had the "Company Store", also.

A. Ya. Well as I say, up here in Bear River, the old buildin' there, is made over into a Bed 'n' Breakfast, now. That building been many things over the years. After he left The Lincoln Pulp Company took it over. Any ways, we won't go on to that.

Q. O.K. What was your favorite holiday, when you were a child?

A. I think Halloween. (laughter)

Q. O.K. Tell me about it? Why was that?

A. Well a....We didn't do much Trick or Treatin' in those days but we always took and try to dress up, any way we could, sometimes only with chalk marks on our faces, and things, go around to the neighbors, because all the neighbors here had so many kids, that we just inter mix and.... You couldn't go to all the houses. (laughter) They just couldn't afford to give you treats.

Q. Right.

A. But if you got an apple, you was satisfied. Yup...

Q. O.K. What other holidays, or special events, do you remember from your childhood?

A. Oh, Christmas was one of the big ones, we remembered. Because when I was a....I don't know just how old I was.....See in those days, I'll get back to this basic, we never put the Christmas Tree up 'til Christmas Eve. That was my mother's duty, to put the Christmas Tree up. My father went shoppin'. My father done the shoppin' for Christmas. And, I'll never forget, I was about maybe ten or eleven years old, and he brought, I woke up in the morning and I had a big beautiful pairs of skis. And I still have 'em up in the attic. And a.....a storekeeper, up there, by the name of Harry Anthony he bought 'em and went skiing and darn near broke his neck. So he put 'em up for sale for three dollars. My father bought 'em. And a.....why, had more fun goin' down over these hills. I was the first one to have a good set of skis.

Q. Isn't that amazing though, haaaaaaa?

A. Ya. Ya.

Q. O.K. What was your favorite toy?

A. Oh, I don't know what my favorite toy was. I guess a hammer and a saw. (laughter)

Q. You're still using it today.

A. They say when I was about.....before I could walk, I went around and took the hammer and...and broke out all the basement windows out of the house up there. And then, I guess, shortly after that, the found me way down the field, I crawled way down the field, and here I was layin' with my head on a bull. And a....and my father says he couldn't trust that bull or anything but he said here I was.

Q. Isn't that something.

A. Oh I'm tellin' ya.

Q. What pets do you remember having?

A. Well I'll tell ya. Our favorites was always a dog. We had several collie dogs but a.... but one of our favorites was, I forget just what he called 'em now, but any way, we trained him to go a mile back See the cattle was runnin' in woods and they was fields, fields in the back end, years ago, and they always hung out back there. But I was always sure we despised havin' to walk back there every night to get the cattle. So, we got this collie dog trained. He was somethin'. All you'd have to say, "Go fetch the cattle." And he'd be gone, sometimes be gone, fifteen, twenty minutes, sometimes be gone maybe half an hour, sometimes maybe an hour. But he always brought the cattle back. And one time, they was goin' in the barn, I looked and here's a deer almost goin' in the door, before Spot decided to turn off. He had a deer rounded up with 'em. (laughter) (continued on next page)

And another thing he'd do, we trained him to catch hens. He'd go and he'd put his paws on each side of head, and bring his head down and hold 'em. And then we trained him to bring eggs. He'd go out, just gather up the eggs, bring 'em in the house, one at a time, in his mouth. never, I don't think he ever broke an egg.

Q. How amazing, really.

A. No, but you know, a dog is a man's best friend, I don't care.....

Q. And that's true.

A. And it's only how you treat 'em.

Q. Umhmm.

A. Yup.

Q. What was it like, at your house, when the catalogue arrived?

A. When the what?

Q. When the catalogue.....the Sears or Eaton's catalogue?

A. Oh my good God. That was our.....that was our favorite.... Bible. Because we took it out to the outhouse. (laughter) Read it and wipe! (laughter) Yup. Oh no, but a.....

Q. Where else did you get the things that you needed?

A. Well a.....as I was gonna say, my mother ordered from catalogues. And a....most generally, up here. We had eighteen stores in Bear River, when I was a young fella. They was mostly all a well.....every item out of it.....they was General Stores. They sold everything from a feed flour, vegetables, everything goin'.

Q. Ya.

A. And another thing my father used to do, we used to trade vegetables every fall, with the fishermen. They'd come in to Bear River and we'd get our salt fish and dry fish and things. Trade for vegetables.

Q. Oh, that was good.

A. Well, barter was a big thing in those days. And say, we had, on a farm here, we had, I think, close to a hundred apple trees, at one time. And we grew, forty, fifty, maybe a hundred bushels of potatoes, a thousand bushels of turnips and mangoes. And a..... I don't just know how many acres, time it was all buried, of grains and things. So a.....for years there, my father always took and grew his buckwheat, barley, oats and took 'em to a mill and had 'em ground, so we had all our own.....cereals.

Q. Well that was great.

A. Ya.

Q. How much spending money did you have as a child?

A. Oh boy, when I seen a quarter, I thought I was a millionaire. (laughter) My grand-father, on my mother's side, he was a, very well to-do there, when I was.....before The Depression, because he lost everything to the Depression. But, he used to come down, and boy when he'd give us fifty cents, and he...he owned a General Store, so he used to ship us down.....big a ...thirty gallon barrels of... candies and cookies and gosh know what, broken pieces and things. So we had a good supply of eats for a long while.

Q. That was good.

A. Ya.

Q. O.K. What was your religion?

A. Well, I was born and brought up a Baptist. Baptized a Baptist.

Q. So what were Sundays like, in your household, when you were growing up?

A. Well a, my father and mother.....You see, my mother was a Catholic. And my father and mother. So we didn't have too much on a religious side at home, but, down here in the school house, they was somewhere around maybe forty or fifty people down there on a Sunday, adults and children..... Sunday School. How they got....I often wonder how we often done it. They was two cloak rooms and then the rest they would all get in corners.

Q. Hmmmmm.

A. They was a McDormand family, up here in Bear River, that a....well one of them went on to be a doctor, very high, Tom McDormand. And then his sister, and one of his younger brothers, they started up a Sunday School down here. And a ...surprising how many classes we....they could hold, to get the attention.

Q. And what was your favorite hymn?

A. Oh, I don't know, I've got a lot of hymns. But..I think one of the old ones, way back, was 'Rock of Ages.'

Q. O.K. Can you sing me a verse?

A. Oh gosh, I don't know. I can't sing. I don't sing.

Q. O.K. What influence did your religion have throughout your life?

A. Well, I think it had a big thing to do with my life. As I say...a....I was brought up a baptise, which is under brimstone and fire in those days. And a....I was baptized at a sixteen. Any way a....

Q. Do you remember when you got baptized?

A. Oh, ya.

Q. What did they do?

A. Well, they put us in a tank, here in the Baptist Church, in Bear River. And a ...said a few prayers, and so forth, etc. And the next thing you rolled your...your back and put your head under water, and brought ya up and.....

Q. It was in a tank, you say?

A. Ya.....they still have a tank in that church.

Q. And they still practice that, today?

A. I think so. See, I don't belong to the Baptist Church any more.

Q. Right.

A. Ah...when we got married, my wife was a Methodist. And we was married in the Anglican Church, in Swancy, Whales. So, we come over here and we tried to get, the children's up, we'd alternate between one church and the other. And then it come to the decision we had to make. Either one or the other. So...we went to United.

Q. That's what I am.

A. And a...I think I've been an elder there now.....oh gosh, gosh.....four...over forty years, forty-five years. I wasn't long bein' maden, I'll tell ya. (laughter)

Q. So how did you keep up, with what was going on in the outside world?

A. Well, up home there, at that time, was...we always took a newspaper. And a...even way back, when we couldn't hardly afford it, we had a newspaper. Radio was a big thing. My father's first radio was a Marconi. It must of weighed hundreds of pounds, 'cause it took two people, at least, to carry it. And it had a, a big speaker, with about a twenty or twenty-five foot extension cord on it. And we used to take and put that speaker under the window, outside, so when we was out around the farm working, put in on full blast, so we could hear it. The neighbor, across the river, said "Max", that's my father's name, he said "What da ya do, play that music specially for me." I says, "I hear that radio, all the time." (laughter)

Q. So the newspaper, what...do you remember the name of the newspaper, back then?

A. Ah, well....the one of the big papers was The Family Herald. That was a weekly. And a... that was one of the papers we took particularly, not so much the local. And The Digby Courier. And sometimes we'd pick up the Halifax paper. But a...the big paper was The Halifax Herald. And we always had to have The Farmers Almanac.

Q. Oh ya. Did anybody else live in the house, with your family, when you were a child?

A. No other people, no.

Q. So what did you grow and raise yourselves?

A. Up there or here?

Q. Here.

A. Well....

Q. At your family home.

A. Before I moved this place.....see I only have two acres here, two and a half acres I guess 'tis. Anyway, this is part of the old home property. My father give this to us as a weddin' present, when we come back after the war in 1945. In fact, I'm gonna get away From the raisin' of things for a minute. We landed, back in Halifax, Valentine's Day, 1945, and a...on The Aquitania. And athey sent my wife down here. They sent me out to Montreal.

Q. Noooo.

A. Ya. So, any way, so she met my family all by herself.

Q. So why did they send you to Montreal?

A. I had to go there for debarkation.

Q. Which is what?

A. Well.....to a.....get my dis...outfit of clothes. See I was the Airforce. See, there's a debarkation.... or embarkation, places over in the Shea, in Montreal. So a.....but I 'm getting' away from the growin' the vegetables.

Q. Oh, that's O.K.

A. We'll go on to that later on.

Q. We can go back.

A. Now as I said, up here on the farm, a...we grew barley, oats, buckwheat and a potatoes, turnips, carrots, beets, all that....general products. And most of it was grown in quantities that we could sell. Now turnips, a....we used to ship them babies in.....after Christmas, sometimes, down the States. They went to the States. We'd make 'em up and ship 'em to the States. But we always had a order, well from the time I was, I don't know, goin' on for quite a few years, they was a dairy farmer , up here, Cunningham's. My father used to sell them a thousand bushel of turnips and mangoes, mixed, five hundred of each. And a... used to haul those up with a horse to the dump quarry. So it took quite a few trips.

Q. Ummmmm.

A. And a.....strawberries. We used to grow strawberries for.....sale.

Q. O.K. So did you barter for anything, did your family barter for anything?

A. Barter?

Q. Ya.

A. Well as I say, we... she traded our vegetables for fish and things like that. And as I ay a..... with Tupper Warrens, when you took wood and things in there, they was all barter, there was no cash passed hands.

Q. So how did electricity change things for you?

A. Well, electricity changed a big thing for us. I think it was 1927, we got....electricity up here. And a....the house up there. And the first electrical storm, we went in darkness awful fast. And it seemed every time there was an electrical storm that was up the end of the line. At that house, paddles used to get hit. Used to come in to a dead end. So my father had to put lightning rods on the house. But after they extended it, late years, they was no problems. But that was the end of the line, up there, and a.... oh no we was....as I say, got the radio in, that changed our lives altogether.

Q. So when did you get running water?

A. Ah....geee....running water, back in the late.....Well we always had running water in the house, in a way, 'cause we had a pump, to pump it in. But....rate up here behind my house, I think it's a....around 1930, my father had a well dug there, and he....he had a pump in the house to pump it over there, he.....rotary pump. In those days, the old churn pump they called it. And then we got the rotary. And a ...So I still have the wells. When ahe give me this land I asked him if he a....'cause he had so many cattle heads About seventy-five or eighty head of cattle, and that was handlin' that and the two houses. But there was sometimes, we thought we was getting' a little short, so I got him another one dug. And he got triple the water we had here.

Q. So what was bath night like when you were a child?

A. Bath night?

Q. Hmmmm.

A. I don't know. (laughter) You know one of those old copper tubs?

Q. Ya.

A. Ya, well....or one of those big old galvanized washtubs.....

Q. Ya.

A. You had a room off the a.....the kitchen there and a used to have to go in there one at a time andsomebody pour water over ya (laughter) so forth, etc.

Q. So was it one night a week?

A. Oh good gosh. We was lucky we hadddd, washed, if we got one, once a month.

Q. Oh I see.

A. So many of us.

Q. Ya.

A. Ya.

Q. So how did you take care of your teeth?

A. The what?

Q. Your teeth. How did you take care of your teeth?

A. Well a.....I know when.....very young....bakin' soda was one of the main things... and a piece of cloth. And you rub them with your fingers, 'cause we couldn't afford toothbrushes. But you know, it's a funny thing after all though years, they started puttin' baking soda back in the toothpaste.

Q. Ya.

A. Ya. One of the best cleaners there ever was.

Q. How true. How often would you see a dentist?

A. Oh my gosh. I didn't see a dentist 'til I broke a tooth....at about fifteen.

Q. Who delivered the babies in your community?

A. A.....well they was mid-wives in those days, up until, I don't know, a....most of all I think it was only my youngest sister that was born in the hospital. All the rest was born at home. And they was most generally a mid-wife. Dr. Campbell delivered quite a few, I know. But a.... the mid-wife did so.

Q. How....how far away was the doctor?

A. Two miles.

Q. And when would you call the doctor?

A. When ever it was necessary to call 'im. Now I don't know just how so. But a....no, doctor....a, when I...I, there was Dr. Campbell and Doctor Lovette, which had offices in Bear River, rate along all... one across the street from the other. There was one time they was three doctors up there.

Q. O.K. When some one died, how was the funeral handled?

A. Well I lost a....a sister, when she was five weeks old. And, at that time, she was raised in the house and the burial was in the house. But, when I was about fourteen, one of the neighbors down here died, and I was asked to be a pall bearer, at that age. Three weeks later..... the wife died..... and I was pall bearer again.

Q. So....at the church or at the house?

A. Most of them...was to....way back then, used to be at the house. And then later on, it went to the church.

Q. O.K.

A. Around here any way.

Q. So how long would the wake last....if it was in their house?

A. Pardon?

Q. How long would the wake last?

A. Well, it wouldn't last very long. Because, you see.....it...the bodies wasn't.....prepared.....fer.....keeping it any length of time.

Q. Right.

A. Funerals was quite often. And a... a lot of people was buried on their own properties at that time. I don't know just what year now, made it mandatory, you had to be buried in a....recognized cemetery.

Q. So what would happen in the winter time, if the ground was frozen, how would they get the body there?

A. Now look...I never dug graves, and I couldn't tell ya. But I know up here they used picks and shovels, crow bars and everything, to break the frost. And I've heard a grave digger, up here, say, he's gone down through three feet of frost to dig a grave, by hand.

Q. Wow.

A. Ya.

Q. What were some home remedies, that would have been common, when you were growing up?

A. (laughter) Well a....Sloan's Liniment, Minard's Liniment, a....Burdock Bitter. Yuck.

Q. Burdock?

A. They made a....an ointment, or a....a drink out of burdocks. You know the weed, burdocks?

Q. Yup.

A. Ouuuuuu, it was some awful tastin'.

Q. And what was that for? Why would you take it?

A. Fer colds and things. Any ways, and then a....mustard, a, a....poultices and.....on your chest and so forth.....

Q. O.K. What was the first one that you mentioned? The first remedy you just mentioned to me?

A. Minard's Liniment?

Q. No, the one before that.

A. Sloan's. That was a very ...watery...reddish...hot, hot.....a, medicine. My....it ...you. I give it to my wife here, one time, as internally. She...when we come over here, she was bothered with a laryngitis. And nothin' seemed, but I tried Minard's Liniment and sugar, so I put a few drops of this a Sloan's Liniment, I don't know if it was molasses or sugar. Well she hacked, she coughed, she pertin' near went crazy. But you know what, she never had laryngitis since. (laughter)

Q. O.K. Now how do you spell that word, that you.....Sloan's?

A. What?

Q. The name of this.....?

A. (laughter) Sloans. S-l-o-a-n-s.

Q. O.K.

A. Yup. The same as Sloans is spelt today.

Q. Oh, I never heard tell of it.

A. Ya. But...but you've heard tell of Minard's Liniment?

Q. Ya.

A. Ya. 'Cause that was Yarmouth, and a.....

Q. Oh ya.

A. And....the buildin', I think it's Minard's Bakery, down here, is the buildin' they first made Minard's Liniment in. That was all over the place...Minard's Liniment.

Q. So any other home remedies?

A. Oh, I don't know, they was different ones, they coctioned {concocted} up out of...a various trees and things.

Q. O.K. So how often did you get to leave town? Get to leave your area here?

A. Well, 'bout once and year a..... My mother used to take us, when we was kids, and...and take the train and go to Halifax, to visit her parents and things...in...in... Woodside.

Q. Oh, ya.

A. Outside Dartmouth....on the edge of Dartmouth there. And I.....that's where I got to see.....my first movie. (laughter)

Q. O.K.....O.K.....so....how was the movie? What was it called?

A. Oh...I can't tell ya just what it was called, but I know it.....they was a...no voices. It was all just actin' and ...and the.....I remember the piano goin'. Some of these things I...I got a mind.. block.....when it comes to certain things.

Q. O.K. What were the roads like?

A. (laughter) They was beautiful. They wasn't a pave....bit of pavement between here and Halifax. But a....as I say.....those days we traveled by train. But even a...in the... late thirties, they was very, very little pavement. It was all pretty well dirt roads.

Arthur Isles's wife, Meagan, just entered the room to ask me if I'd like a cup of tea? To which I politely answered, no thank you.

Q. O.K. So who would look after the roads?

A. Well the.....this part of the road here, I don't know what it's all like, as far as snow removal things. They pick somebody on the road, like my father was called a...road foreman in the winter time. He was...he was responsible to have the snow removed and things. And most generally it was with shovels and things. And I'll never forget, rate out here in front of the house one day, they was twenty feet....of snow. And this one old fellow, he said "Max," he says "how old ya got to be, before ya don't have to shovel snow?" "Sixty-five." "I'm sixty-five" Took his shovel and went. (laughter) Weather he was sixty-five or not my father never questioned. (laughter)

Q. O.K. What do you remember about your teenage years?

A. Oh well, as they say, they was their own....makings. We had a theatre in Digby, we used to go to there, I know. I got my driver's license when I was sixteen years old. Because I done so much work on the farm, my father let me have the car. So I had a dollar I....take a girl and go to the movie, come out, and have a little treat and come home. Oh yes, buy a little gas, and I still had a few change in my pocket. (laughter)

Q. O.K. Mr. Isles. When you were back in school, I forgot this question. You said that you only stayed 'til grade ten?

A. Ya.

Q. So, do you know how old you were, when you left school?

A. Ya, 'bout fif...just over fifteen.

Q. O.K. Sorry about that.

A. On account, on account of....a farm work and so forth etc.

Q. Right. O.K.

A. But I furthered my education afterwards.

Q. So as a teen, what kinds of things did you do for fun?

A. Well a....as I say, one of our big things in the winter time was, we built our own ponds. And a...we cut our own limbs, spruce limbs, for hockey sticks, take a piece of spruce limb, cut it round for a puck. And that's what we had. And a....I know... I couldn't afford a pair of....of men's hockey
(Continued on next page)

..... skates, so I borrowed one of my uncles'a.....figure skating skates. I don't know how.....he purchased those some way or another. And that's what I learnt to play.....hockey (laughter) on those skates, 'til I was.....I don't know just how old I was before I...I got my own pair of skates. But I bet ya I was about seventeen.

Q. Pretty awesome. What kind of music did you like?

A. Well, I wasn't very musical. But seems to me all my brothers and sisters and every body here played guitars. (laughter) And I can appreciate music but I can never play it.

Q. Right.

A. The only thing I got out here, that I, I could make a tune out of is a Jews' Harp. (laughter)

Q. I remember those.

A. Ya. But that's not very good. No I a....funny thing though, that's one thing I couldn't get was music.

Q. O.K. What do you remember about dating?

A. Dating? Well as long I had the car, I was doin' pretty good. (laughter) Oh, I'll never forget, there was a girl from up a....Bridgetown way, used to come down to her relatives there, had the dairy farm. So...so I tried to strike up a date with her, everybody was tryin'. So I went to pick her up.....so she got in the car. Three other fellows jumped in the back seat and they wouldn't get out. (laughter) Friends of mine. So I...I never had her out alone. (laughter)

Q. So what did you expect to do, when you grew up?

A. Me?

Q. What did you expect to do?

A. Well I didn't know at one time I...just what I'd take up but a.....I thought it was likely goin' to be farming, because I was born and brought up on a farm. And a....and a....but....by then at nineteen I joined the Airforce. And that changed the whole aspect.

Q. Did you like airplanes?

A. Oh ya.

Q. Ya.

A. I was a mechanic. And a.....I a.....was at Dartmouth there, takin' my training there, and a....number one fighter squadron, from Winnipeg, come there to regroup, get ready to go overseas, and they showed us some personnels, so, had the medical. "You're too short, you're too fat, where're your front teeth?" And he looked at me and looked at the records, "you look O.K." he says, "You're it." (laughter) So a...on the eleventh of June, 1940, we set sail on The Dutchess of Bedford.... for overseas. And the Dutchess of Athol, went the same time, but we didn't see her from the trips, we separated, you see. We went alone. And, takin' number twelve army co-op squadron, with Lysanders, we had hurricanes. (Continued on next page)

We had six hurricanes, she had no guns, no....no nothin' on 'em. And a...any way...a...when we got to England there.....Do you wanna hear the story on This?

Q. Sure.

A. O.K. then. We landed a....at Liverpool and they took us on these double-deck buses, old, windin' country road, down to aa little airport. And seems every time you went you was gonna hit the ground, as you went around the corner. Any way, first night we was there, if they didn't try to bomb the air...aerodrome.....Germans. So the next day they shipped us off down to a....Southern England, just outside a place called Middle Wallop, outside of Salisbury Plains. And we....we got another dose of bombing. Any way a.....so any way a....we planned on getting' organized and things and went to...Well I....altogether I spent.....time on twenty-five aerodromes, in England, Scotland and Wales, in four years. And a...seemed every time we went to one, we get either strided with.... German.....guns....a planes or bombed. But....now here.....Canadians got....Cor....was one of the biggest ones....we had cordoned the Airport. I got permission to go to town, another fellow and I, and just got off the bus at the Y.M.C.A. and the sirens went. So a....this fellow and I rushed up, up the stairs we could see the....German planes go in and bomb the airport. Was only....I guess about two miles back to the aerodrome so...we ran back. My God.....they was factories along side there, just changin' shifts. And they....these a....steel picket fence....they was bodies comin' through those fences. They was arms, legs, heads, everything, all over the place. So we got back inside. They was a few of the British airforce fellows killed. But a....they was none of our personnel. We was some lucky.

Q. Were you scared?

A. Ya.

Q. Were you scared?

A. Well I don't know....excitement and things, there wasn't time to be scared. No, II.....I don't know. I think maybe sometimes might have had a little fear of things, but...I don't think a.....So any way a....Another place we was at was Weymouth, England, early morning. All of a sudden, my gosh, of all the rippin' and tearin' and explosions and things. I know I rolled under my bed. And when I come out there, there wasn't anything wrong with our buildin'. And a....we looked just on the other side of us, were the british was, why the buildins' was all riddled. The mess hall, which we should have been, we was, Canadians always late goin' to mess hall, it was all riddled with bullets. We never got a mark on us, again. We...I don't think we....I think we lived a.....(laughter)

Q. That was a part of your....a mischievousness, or something.

A. Ya. Ya. But turn around a.....London area, those airports there, one of the worse things was, is flack. Shrapnel comin' down from anti-aircraft guns and things. I know we was walkin' out a...we was buildin' houses there, fer Kinley. And all of a sudden ping, rate at my feet. And a....any way next morning I went back and I found a piece about maybe, four inches long, like a big pencil, a sliver out of an anti-aircraft gun....shell. (laughter) Now you can imagine, that would of hit your old steel hat.

Q. Ya, I'd say. O.K. What year did you start your first job?

A. My first job? I started nine years old. (laughter) No, I....I never worked out....well what I done. My father....we had to take and a, do his work first. And then I'd take the horses and I'd go around, and in the spring, do plowin' and plantin' and so forth etc. And come hayin' time, I hayed practically all the hay on the roads here. I used to charge a dollar a ton. That's cuttin' it, rakin' it and puttin' it in.

So the old Scotsman over here, run the dairy farm, I charged 'im fifty dollars. He said "Oh," he says " I think I had more that fifty tons of hay." He says " I think I had fifty five." So he give me an extra five dollars. That's a big reward, (laughter) in those days. But a...no, my first job was in the airforce, really and truly outside the farm work.

Q. O.K. So how did you meet your wife?

A. Well a...I'd get her to tell that, but I won't. (laughter) No, I met her in Swansea, Wales. She was workin' in a hotel, and a bunch of us hoodlums got in there. We's had a couple of drinks. I didn't....I never touched a drop of liquor 'til I was twenty years old. Beer or anything... wine. And a...no we had a few drinks....feelin' good. So we in to this big ritzy hotel. They had a bulletin board there. And we was changin' all the.... times, and things for these people on it. Her and her girlfriend come along and started givin' us the devil. (laughter) So any way, he made a date with, Mary, her girlfriend. I didn't bother. So...I don't know. It was a couple of nights later or so, or a few days later, he says "Look" he says "I can't get away" he says "you go down and tell that girl, MaryTobert goin' to meet her, you see. She says I can't meet her." he says. I went down. Who was there, but my wife. The girl.... her girlfriend couldn't come, so her and I, that's how we started out. (laughter)

Q. That's amazing.

A. Well thank you.

Q. So once you were married, where did you live?

A. Where did we live?

Q. Ya.

A. Rate here.

Q. O.K.

A. Oh no, but when we came back from overseas, I was still in the airforce, so we lived in a...Glance Bay, for... 'til I got discharged, in August of '45. And then we come here, and started to build a house, I was.....we lived with my parents fer a year.

Q. O.K. And what year were you married?

A. I was married in 1944.

Q. So how much did it cost for your first home?

A. This house here....about five and a half thousand.

Q. O.K.

A. Because a...we...Ieven Meagan went back and helped me cut the wood on my father's property. We cut all the logs, took and saw....hailed it in to mills, in Joggin Bridge and then had to take it nearer to Digby, and have it planned and brought it home. And we a..couldn't even get a cement mixer or a bulldozer. So we dug this basement, by hand, down through solid slate. Took and used my father's horse and scoop....scoop it Out. And then I had to bring in some of the neighbors and we mixed over two hundred Bags of cement by hand. (laughter)

Q. Amazing. Oh....

A. (laughter)

Q. O.K. What can you tell me about your first job?

A. Well...I say....when I was working on the farm and things, I did a couple...a few winters, go in the woods with the horses, haulin' wood and things. And I did...when I was..... sixteen, go down here, in one of the old places and ...and cut pulpwood for..a...few...months.

Q. So what was your salary, when you started that job?

A. Well we got a dollar a fifteen a cord, fer....most of the wood, pulpwood cord wood and so forth, etc. We got a dollar a cord for smoked wood, which was wood that wasn't fit to go fer pulpwood or cord wood. It went to the smokehouse, down here in Digby. And a....so we all decided to a... stop, so they give us ten cents more an hour, so we went back to work. A dollar quarter a cord.

Q. So did ya have to pay any tax out of that?

A. Nope.

Q. No tax.

A. Any way a....I first went, I'm gonna tell you this, I had one of these old buck saws...and I cut a cord of wood. I never cut that much wood before, just around fire wood and things. So any way, fer two days I couldn't get out of bed, I was so lamed up. (laughter) So any way....I.....when I first paid... .I went up to Bear River and I bought a bow saw...they call 'em, a Swede Saw, I think. Boy, wasn't I able to make the chips fly...(laughter) And I still got that saw....a...frame down in my basement.

Q. Boy, that's neat.

A. I...I was tempted to take it up and put it in the museum in Bear River but I said "No." I gotta hang onto that.

Q. O.K. Let's see. Do you remember anything about the Depression?

A. Do I? I was only a kid, but I was nine years old, but I remember it. We...see...we on the farm, it didn't bother us too much.

Q. Ummm. That's what I've heard.

A. Ya. And a...our underwear was made out of flour bags. Red Rose flour bags.

Q. Your underwear?

A. Yup.

Q. No way. (laughter)

A. My mother made all our underwear. So when I was fourteen I decided to build a boat. So a....brother next to me, we got the lumber from my father. He had lots of lumber there. And we built this sixteen foot punt, we called it. And a...had one set of oars. We took it down there to the river and we went to the island and back. And boy that was hard work. So we put an extra set of oars, then we put an extra set. We had three sets of oars in it. And then I decided....boy the wind always right comin' home. Why not put a sail on it. So I asked my mother. I said "Mom, could you make me a sail?" She said "You wanna go for....without underwear?" I said "Gladly do it." So we made a sail twenty-five feet high, twelve feet....on the....boom and boy we had fun. Then we figured we had to have a jib, that's the front sail. They went back...she was usin' a bag of flour a week. And she made the jib. I got a picture of it here, somewheres.

Q. Isn't that amazing, though, ha!

A. And a....

Q. So would you go to Bear Island?

A. Ya, Bear Island. And what we'd do, we'd circle the island, at real low tides. We was fishin' fer different types of fish and bring them here ta Chisholm's....for his fox farm. We'd get two cents a pound fer...the fish. And a....if we got three or four hundred pounds of fish....flat fish....flounders, we was doin' well. What we done at real low water, we had spears rigged up and we.....so we only needed that much water, maybe two feet of water, we'd spear 'em. (laughter) Oh, we had a lot of fun with that.

Q. Did you remember the hotel on the island? On Bear Island?

A. No. Nope, there's...there's only the ruins of that.

Q. So how did you plan for hard times, or your retirement?

A. How did I plan for my retirement?

Q. Ya, when you were growing up?

A. Well, I don't know weather I done any plannin', really. But I always....I remember when I went overseas, I had eight hundred dollars saved up in a bank account. Now just a few dollars and things.....run...run my father's car and things, I was able to save money. I made sure I did. And a...we got thirty nine dollars a month....when we joined up. They took twenty dollars of that and put it in a save....saved it for us. When we went overseas we was getting' nineteen dollars a month, which was triple what the British.... Military...of our ranks....was getting'.

Q. Oh ya.....It's pretty darn amazing, really.

A. And a....no, but the British a....their salary is awful low, but, as I say, a pound at that time was four forty-seven (\$4.47). That was the rate we got during the war. Before that somebody said it was up as high as five dollars. Now look what 'tis.

Q. Ummmm.

A. Ya. 'Bout two twenty. (\$2.20) Any way a....so a....when we got overseas, they took another eight or nine dollars off us, and put it in an..... account.....in the....London. So a.....I like to play cards, so we....we play different cards and I always made money. But when I got those bones I always lost so I didn't play bones too many times. Any way a....get married, I very fortunately had quite a little bit of money in an account there, which I was able to collect, and I went around to all the people that owed me money, and I got every penny that was owing to me. Some of it was owed to me for a year or two. They all come through. (laughter)

Q. So what was this bones that you're talking about? That was a card game?

A. Crap.

Q. Oh ya. O.K.

A. The dice. (laughter)

Q. O.K.

A. I didn't pay too much to those 'cause I.....(laughter)

Q. So, do you remember anything about the Poor Farm?

A. The Poor Farm? Oh I certainly do. 'Cause a one of my uncles run that for years. And his father before him, Guy Thomas.

Q. O.K.

A. Ya, he married.....

Q. Did you ever go there as a child?

A. Pardon?

Q. Did you ever go.....go to the Poor Farm as a child?

A. Not really as a child, no. But a...after I come home from overseas we used to go down and visit 'im and things. A...see...he married my father's sister, which was the oldest one in that family. And a....and then he come down.....with an illness and who did they come after to run that place, Meagan and I.

Q. Did you really?

A. That was about 'round 1946, I think. So...so any way, no, we a...I said I don't want nothin' to do with that. I didn't figure I was the type to a.....No, when I come home....

Q. Was it a scary place to ya, though?

A. Pardon?

Q. Was it a scary place to you?

A. No it wasn't a scary place to go.

Q. No?

A. Because..... they all called him and her, mom and dad.

Q. Oh ya.

A. And wherever he went with the wagon he'd take all the men with him. He'd have maybe a dozen or so on, ten or twelve on the wagon. She's had 'em all trained to do somethin' in the home. But..like....she done the cookin', but, she had to prepare vegetables and lay tables and so forth, etc.

Q. Right.

A. And a...I wouldn't say they was a real crazy one there. They're just handicapped a certain ways and things.

Q. Right.

A. And Old Everette Lewis, he was the night watchman there. So we got to know Maud a little bit.

Q. So you met Maud, then?

A. Oh yes, I've been to her place several times. And I often wondered how she was ever takin' hold of those brushes with those crippled hands and things.

Q. She was very crippled.

A. Oh, really crippled, ya. And the way they lived in that little shack, was out of this world. But... I'm not pleased with what they done down there.

Q. Neither am I.

A. They should never, never taken that house out of there. The last time.....time I seen it was all in pieces up in....up in Sunnyside there, in Halifax.

Q. Ya, you're right. They should never have done that.

A. No, a..... Albert Guy there, he raised a lot of food and things. He raised cattle and things, so they had there own milk, they had their own beef, they had their own pork. Had all their own vegetables. And he was a terrific farmer. But I never forget when he a....retired and come up and live in the Joggin. They was aoh....I forget his name one of his neighbors there, thought it was a big joke. He went over and robbed his garden of a mangle and put in on the exhibition in Bear River. Got first prize, my uncle got second. (laughter) After the exhibition, we went and told my Uncle Guy.....what he done.

Q. So what do you remember about elections?

A. Elections?

Q. Ya.

A. Well, I'll tell you one thing. I drove for the Liberals....when I was 1936 when I was sixteen years old and got the big sum of fifteen dollars fer the day's drivin'.

Q. But was that good money back then?

A. Oh, I guess it was.

Q. Ya.

A. Dr. Lovette, ya I didn't tell 'im, and II drove a couple of Conservatives as well. (laughter) Gotta give ya a list of people.....to go pick up and things. And a....ya my father...he wouldn't go drive, so he said you can have the car and go drive for 'em.

Q. That was good. What do you remember about the first time you voted?

A. Well I never voted 'til I come home from overseas. And a....I got a faint memory of that...I never thought about that. (laughter) I voted fer everyone goin' and I still curse 'em. (laughter)

Q. Do you remember any ghost stories from your younger years?

A. Ghost stories? Oh they was some ghost stories, but I don't know. I can't relate to 'em. I'm not a story teller.

Q. Do you have any superstitions?

A. No. No superstitions. I love my wife. I understand that. That.....I.....I married a w itch. (laughter)

Q. Aren't you awful. So how did people know when to plant and when to harvest their vegetables?

A. Well. I'll tell ya. Back in those days, they went by the moon. They always tried to plant things on the growth of the moon. And they claim they always done better. If it was on the clay of the moon they figured they wouldn't grow good. And a....lot to do with the weather, the frost and things in the ground and so forth, etc. But our big plantin' day home was the 24th of May. That's when all the potatoes and things went in.

Q. Everybody says the same thing.

A. Ya. Ya, that was....and I know, when we was a little older.....my father always took the 25th of May off and went out.....with Benson up here, Harry Benson, fishin', out in The Bay of Fundy.

Q. Well how nice for him though.

A. Ya.

Q. So a....after he had all his vegetables planted, he took a day off.

A. Ya. We didn't plant 'em by the bucketfuls and things, we had 'em by the barrels. (laughter) Roll out so many barrels. (laughter) They was all horses in those days. We...we a....my father never had oxen.

Q. Right.

A. And a.....well he....he...did have, but never fer work. He just grew 'em to sell and things. I bought my first pair of a....steers when I.....I was seventeen, I think. Paid forty-five dollars for a little pair of calves. And a....in 1938.....I sold 'em. Got a hundred dollars out of 'em. And they turned out to be the biggest pair of cattle in the up...just hand me that there a minute.

Q. O.K.

A. In this part of Nova Scotia.

Q. Well....that was...well that's pretty amazing. Is that a picture of you?

A. Yup. That's a real typical farmer. Seventeen year old farmer. (laughter)

Q. Hold this up in front of you so I can get in on camera.

A. Maybe now I can get some of this other stuff out of the way here.

Q. Yup. Up a little higher. Perfect! Pretty amazing.

A. Ya a....they were Grey Derms. I bought 'em from a Henshaw down in Deep Brook and sold 'em to a Ken Sanford in Bear River East when a.....But any way a.....this one back here, a....just a minute now.....come mere.....where the heck you do with it. I thought.....I won't bother getting' with it now. But....first photo taken of me, when I was three years old. Now where the heck did you go? Any way we'll dig it out later on.

Q. O.K.

A. We won't bother with it now.

Q. O.K. What is the worst weather that you can remember?

A. Oh.

Q. Or a bad storm or a.....any thing.

A. Well the worst one we had here was in 19, what was it....60. Groundhog Day they called it.

Q. 1976.

A. 76, that was it. 1976...ya. A....my wife....she was a nurse at that time. She happened to be home. And she says. She phoned me to the office and she says....I was at Cornwallis. She says the roof comin' off your brother's barn, Freddy's barn up there she says. Sheets blowin' everywhere. So Freddy was workin' down below, so I got him....and a.. when we come up this way, they was sheets of steel just a flyin' every which way.

Q. Excuse me (I burped)

A. So the first thing we noticed, was his a.... truck camper, that I had built 'im, comin' down the driveway. So we managed to git up the sheets and things, got a rope and tied that to it, and a ...he had thirty-two head of cattle in the barn, at the time. So he let the cattle out and a...I said " Better go down home and see what it's doin'." And a....there's a pot sittin' out there in in front of the house that never even moved. And just as they got here, we happened to turn around and look, and Freddy's workshop....It was wood....it went rate up in the air. I don't know just how far, fifteen or twenty feet, and all of a sudden it just went to pieces. And that's what the worst storm I think we had here. Oh, I know we had big snowstorms and things like that, but that was more or less like a little tornado come across here. As you know, down on Digby Neck and things, when you come up across here, but it's only a narrow path...that didn't....

Q. Right.

Q. Come into a large area.

Q. How was....how did your community police itself?

A. Well I guess we....there was no need for too many policemen there. We had a Justice Of the Peace.....in Bear River, Harv Kinney. Any way a....the only instance I know of was my father and one of the neighbors down here, used to go down on a horse and buggy and rate down, out in front of here, the other neighbor, well this neighbor here, he wasn't liked too well any way, he come down there and.....this other neighbor took and made a swat at 'im. And he took ta runnin' and by gosh time he got up to house.....Bear River, with the horse and buggy, he had the Justice of the Peace waitin' fer 'im. (laughter)

Q. No.

A. Ya. Ya a....so anyway, no, it was pretty peaceful around there those days a.....You never knew what a break-in was.

Q. Ya, that's true. What was the largest employer in your community?

A. The largest employer a.....well a, when I first growin' up, it was a....Clark Brothers. See, they had a lumber business. They had the....Lake Jollie clothes factory, the box factory, and the barrel factory and the lumber mill and things. Which burnt around 1928, I think it was. 'Cause I know I was back there, with my father, in 1929, after the fire. And then they employed a lot of people around the vil-lage, 'cause they had a.....vessels goin' out.....sail.....they had sail boats in those days. I remember the Ethel Clark...in my time. Just about the last one. I was very small. But the old Bear River Packette, that... sailed between here and a.....

