

ROSE TREE MEDIA SCHOOL DISTRICT
Springton Lake Middle School

Name _____ Date _____

OLDEST PERSON IN FAMILY INTERVIEW - Name Bernard F. Wroath

1. How old are you? 73 When and where were you born?

Born 7/25/17 in East Orange, NJ. USA

2. Describe your family.

Only child. Brought up by mother, a teacher. 2 aunts and uncles nearby.
Four cousins younger than I. Grandfather lived with us for few
years before his death. Close-knit family on mother's side.
Very little contact with father's side of family, but friendly.

3. Describe your childhood.

(Separate sheet.)

4. When and how long did you attend school?

1922-23: Elmwood School, Syracuse, NY K and 1st
24-26: Williamstown Union School, Williamstown, NY 2 thru 5
27: Elmwood School, Syracuse, NY 6
28-30: Theo Roosevelt Jr HS " " 7-9
31-34: Central HS " " 10-12 35-39: Syr University - Grad BEA

5. When and from where did your family or ancestors come to America?

Mother's side (FELL): from England early 18th century (or before?)

Father's side: Don't know when but believe they also came from England.

6. Did you work? What was your first job? Did you have an occupation?

First real pay-job with dance band at Monticello hotel, Thousand Islands summer 1933.

Worked summers during college at Adirondack resort hotel... played in band AND ran a
'store boat' around Big Moose Lake to cottages that were accessible only by
water. First job in 'chosen profession' was with Loc Advertising Agency in
Syracuse as a commercial artist.* Continued in field of advertising with time
out from 1943-46 for army service until retiring in 1996 as owner/pres
of small full service ad agency.

*\$15. a 40 hour week. Social Security started

OLDEST PERSON IN FAMILY INTERVIEW (continued)

7. Do you have any famous relatives or ancestors?

None That I know of -

8. Are you a veteran?

Yes- WWII '43-'46

9. What was a day like for you as a teenager? What did you do for fun?

(Separate sheet)

10. What was life like during:

A. World War I?

Too young to remember - Have recollection of my mother being sick and losing her hair during flu epidemic.

B. The Depression?

(Separate sheet)

C. World War II?

(Separate sheet)

11. What changes have you seen over your lifetime?

(Separate sheet)

Matthew B. Osgood questionnaire

3. As an only child of a working mother it was necessary for me to assume more responsibility than most other children of same age. In 1923 my mother and I lived in a very small town in north central New York in a snow belt. Cars were replaced (what few cars there were) by sleighs and cutters during the winter. There were no plows to clear the roads that far out in the boondocks. We rented one side of a tiny duplex on the only street of the village next door to a meat market which is important only because this market butchered cattle and pigs in a slaughterhouse in the field back of the market. Being right next door I knew in advance when they were going to replenish their meat supply and could run over to my friend's house and let him know so we could watch - horrified, but fascinated - while they killed, bled, skinned and cut up the carcass. While we were living there my mother was sick for a number of days and I was forced into service as cook and housekeeper. As I think back, I'm sure I must have fixed nourishing meals of things like cereal (Puffed Wheat was popular then) and eggs, toast and, of course, that old standby, fried Shredded Wheat. The one meal I have never forgotten was one that never was. As young as I was I fished often and knew how to clean and cook fish so when a fish monger came through town peddling his wares I bought a huge smooth-skinned something or other to fix a special feast for my mom. The only trouble was I couldn't cut the foolish head off. I was too dumb to realize that I'd have to puncture the smooth tough skin back of the gills with the point of the knife before I cut through it. I sawed and sawed and became thoroughly frustrated and broke into tears. All my plans for a great feast were dashed. I finally had to swallow my pride and go next door and ask the landlady, Mrs. Billhardt, for help. The meal thanks to her was super, but I never forgot the utter feeling of helpless frustration that I felt on that day.

Before Williamstown I lived with an aunt and uncle in Syracuse while my mother travelled to schools throughout New York State selling text books. That was in 1922-23 and I was in Kindergarden and first grade. That's when I was first introduced to fried Shredded Wheat.

Back in Syracuse in 1927 I took piano lessons for two years, then changed to the trumpet. I participated in sports of all kinds, but was only good enough to earn a letter in high school baseball. Started playing the horn in dance bands and played my first pay job when I was twelve. I was scared to death working with all the other old guys who were 18 or so. I was paid three dollars. Graduated from high school at 16. At that time you were allowed to skip grades and I had skipped fourth grade and the first half of the sixth grade. Lots of friends - some for sports - some for social activities - some in the bands - some just plain good buddies. Enjoyed all manner of outdoor activities. School was too easy and I got lazy and over confident, flunking Geometry in my sophomore year...and my mom was a math teacher. /Woke up and posted a 97 on the Regents the following semester.

Since I was so young when I graduated I stayed on a year for post graduate work. That was a fun year with no pressure and I could take any course I wanted to, which was fortunate because it was then that I discovered what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. If I had to earn a living I might as well work at something I could at least tolerate most of the time and perhaps even enjoy some of the time. I doubled up (took a year's worth of credit in one semester) on Physical Geography (and discovered an interest in our environment) on Music Theory and Harmony (and discovered an interest in arranging) on Representation and on Perspective (and discovered not only an interest but a talent for art) and on Creative Writing.

MBO questionnaire (cont)

9. There was no such thing as a typical day as a teenager. Just as the subjects differed each day at school, activities in and out of school differed as well. However, this schedule of events might give a picture of a certain type of day. Up about 6:30 or 7. Put on slippers, go downstairs and let dog out, go down to the basement, shake furnace, remove ashes, stoke up fire, shovel on coal, go upstairs, dress, eat breakfast, let dog in, grab books and lunch, meet a couple buddies outside and walk to school, remembering only then that you forgot to wash your dishes. (Mom left for her school before me) After classes take a bus to baseball practice, practice, shower, bus back to school, walk home, let dog out, change clothes, fix furnace, remember that homework was left in gym locker, raid icebox (we didn't have an electric refrigerator yet) whistle for the dog, walk up to friend's house, hang out or play catch or something else, back home to supper, do dishes or wipe, explain to mom why no homework (hard time), practice the trumpet or if it's Wednesday have mom drive me to band practice, rehearse until about 10, get a ride home with one of the older guys in the band, let dog out, undress, whistle dog in, bank the fire and go to bed.

No TV - no automatic heat - no dishwasher - no thermostat or oil or gas heat - no school bus. Yes, radio - yes, cars and cheap gas - yes, telephone - yes, good times with good friends.

On vacation things were a little different. Up about 6 or 6:30. No fire to fix. Let dog out, eat breakfast, clean room and do any other chores Mom had lined up like weed the small garden or clean cellar or ??? I am practically positive that I did not do these things without grumbling, but I did have to do them regardless. It was part of my responsibility as a member of the family, small as it was. After chores I'd whistle for the dog, hop on the bike (\$7.50 at a police auction) and peddle up to friend's house, decide whether we go swimming, play baseball or whatever, do it, eat lunch, mow lawn or give the dog a bath, call friend about going to a movie that night or call a girl friend about a date on Friday or Saturday if the band didn't have a job, eat supper, do dishes or wipe then do whatever was planned (if it's a movie it might be a 'dish night' when they're giving away soup bowls or some other item from a full set of china).

On real lucky vacation days I'd be at my uncle's camp on Skaneteles Lake where there were several other girls and boys in their teens in neighboring camps who liked to swim, fish, hike, sit in the sun, etc. It was a great adventure to swim across the lake - accompanied by a boat, of course - but one had to work up to it since it was a mile or more across. It gave one a real feeling of accomplishment when the crossing was done. That evening after one of us had swum across we'd celebrate by walking up to the village for an ice cream cone.

10 B. Depression. I don't remember feeling 'poor' because nearly everyone was in the same position. No dough. Many, many people without jobs. There were bread lines in every city to feed the ones who had no food. My grandfather lost a great deal of money and property in 1929 crash but we were very lucky because my mother was a teacher and kept her job even though her salary was cut. Before the crash, in 1928, my mother had a house built and it was heavily mortgaged. During the depression it was refinanced and the mortgage move from one bank to another in an effort to keep ownership. There were no 'extras' and no treats during the depression. No candy bars, no movies for most people. What movie houses stayed open offered all kinds of incentives to get customers. The older kids had it tough because they didn't have money enough to go out on many dates. More time was spent at home playing games and reading since there was no money to spend on anything but housing and food. We were lucky to keep our old second hand car but it wasn't used for any trips.

10 C. WW11. Everything was rationed. One needed stamps issued by the government to buy gas, shoes, sugar, tires, meat, butter - nearly everything. In the cities you had to put up blackout curtains inside every window so no light would spill outside during dark hours. Air raid wardens, volunteers, patrolled the streets to make sure there were no violations. Travel was restricted. Even if you had ration stamps to buy certain things you might not be able to find the item you were looking for. Many common items were in short supply. Even choice of food was limited. War news came via radio and newspaper. and was often delayed by several days. Censorship was rather tight. ("Loose lips sink ships" was a common slogan) There were campaigns to sell war bonds to help finance the war. Parents who had sons in uniform displayed a small square banner in a front window with a star in the center indicating each boy in service. Some banners had three and sometimes four stars. More and more men were called into service - were drafted - and there were uniforms everywhere. By 1943 any healthy men 18-35 who had not volunteered or been drafted began to feel conspicuous in civilian clothes. If you were in service you were required to wear your uniform at all times and you were proud to do so.

11

11. Changes. Radio came of age and grew from large, clumsy battery-operated monstrosities to the small compact units of today. Telephone lines were extended into rural areas so people outside the cities could communicate with each other. About 1930 a national program of electrification made electricity available in farm areas. Most farming was done with horses. Very few tractors and they were inefficient monsters for the most part. Before a farm had electricity the work that couldn't be finished during the daylight hours was finished by the light of kerosene lanterns. When I lived in Williamstown we had no car, no electricity, no central heating, no telephone, and no indoor plumbing. No indoor plumbing? You don't know what cold is until you make that first cold winter morning trip to a smelly privy. City houses often had furnaces instead of stoves and they changed from wood and coal burning units to all coal - you had a choice of coal sizes - according to your preference of whatever burned best in your furnace. Then oil burners came along. At first the burners were inserted in the old gravity furnace system but soon there were specially designed oil furnaces which utilized blowers to introduce the forced air systems. After pipe lines were extended to the Northeast from Texas natural gas became popular as a fuel and furnaces became more efficient. Insulation was developed and incorporated in the building of homes to eliminate drafts and conserve fuel and money.

TV was invented about 1939 but wasn't available to the general public until after WW2. We didn't own a TV until after your Mom was born. Frozen foods came after the war, too. And sliced bread. Remember the phrase "the greatest thing since sliced bread"? Well, bread used to come in a solid loaf just as it was baked and you had to slice your own with a special bread knife. Copy machines weren't much in evidence until 1960 or so except for clunkers of mimeograph machines. Fax machines? Not even imagined. Other 'new' things I can remember...electric toasters, toaster ovens, microwaves of course; VCR's, compact discs...and for that matter, 33 and a third records and now ancient stereo systems; snowmobiles, ski areas, ski lifts, quick release binders; fast food restaurants like McDonald's and Burger King; motels...the best we could do when I was growing up was find a tourist home and when your Mom was growing up we could find some clean cabins once in awhile...cameras and films are so excellent today that almost anyone can achieve professional results, a far cry from the hand-held flash powder and wet plates of yesterdays that I remember.

MBO questionnaire (cont)

Advancements in the field of medicine are miraculous. The medicines available and the treatments performed today would have been considered laughingly impossible dreams as recently as the 1940's. I would not be answering your questions today if that illness three years ago had happened five years before that. So much progress - so many advancements - too many to remember - I've mentioned only a few.

Matty: As for "favorite things when I was 14" ...has been answered by question #9, I think. When I was 14 I concentrated on the 3 B's: Bands...Books...Baseball...but not necessarily in that order. It wasn't until I was 15 that I added another B...Breads.