BRICK WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE

Harvey Desgrosseilliers
(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu) June 28, 2007

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Brick Makers Oral History Project. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and today, I'm interviewing Harvey Desgrosseilliers, at Museum L-A, in Lewiston, Maine. The date is June 28, 2007. And Harvey, could you just start by telling me where and when you were born?

Harvey Desgrosseilliers: I was born in Rumford, out of Newry, in1935.

AL: And is Rumford the area you grew up in?

HD: No, my father was a wood chopper and we used to travel around from camp to camp. My grandfather was a jobber for the Brown Company, so we went to big camps. I was exposed to Slavics and Italians and Russians and all kinds of people at that time. We lived in the woods, with no running water and, you know, things like that, outhouses and chinking in between the logs, you know, and stuff like that, to keep the cold out in the wintertime. I remember all of that.

AL: Wow. And so, this is an oral history of brick makers, and so I'm wondering how you came to work in a brickyard and at what age?

HD: And, of course, when you were a teenager in my time, any job was a great job to have, you know, we collected paper and bottles, we collected things for the war, milk pods for, for life vests and things like that, that most people never heard of. We

collected rags, newspapers and things, and, and I was a customer working, and I did a lot of work with kindlings. Kindlings is the scrap wood that they used to use when they, they used to come up with that when they make the boards, you know, take the outside and cut it into little pieces. They'd pay us kids a nickel a bundle. We used to have a small container, we'd sit down on the floor, and they'd come in with a dump truck and dump a load of these things on the floor and we'd stick them in there, and then we'd have rubber bands that they'd cut from inner tubes and put them around there and we'd pull them out of that bucket, and they'd have them rubber bands and they'd stack them up there, and we'd get paid three to five cents a bundle. Because at that time everybody burned, most everybody burned wood, you know, and they used to use that to start the fire and stuff. I had a lot of interesting jobs, a lot of them as a kid, you know, a lot of real nice jobs, I really liked them. I liked to work because work gave me respect, you know, I was bilingual and when I came to the city they'd say, what are you, a frog? I didn't know what they were talking about, you know, so I learned how to speak English as quick as I could, and I learned how to drop my accent. After a while they'd say, you don't sound French, you don't look French. But anyway, that's part of my life, you know. My folks never had a car, so hitchhiked everywhere we went at that time.

AL: Oh, you hitchhiked with your family?

HD: No, alone.

AL: Alone.

HD: Yeah, alone. We just, that's they way we got around, you know, and it was a, it was a real interesting life, I mean I could talk to you for an hour about that, or maybe more, but let's, we'll get down to the brick business. When I was about fifteen or so, I went down, I hitchhiked down to Mar-, down to Dennis Brickyard, which was a, a brickyard, not too far from here.

AL: Was it in Danville Junction?

HD: No, this was in, in Auburn.

AL: Auburn, okay.

HD: On Washington Street, right where Crystal Springs is located, they sell bev-, they sell bottled water there. Anyway, I got down there with a, my neighbor, Wayne Smith, we hitchhiked down there, and they hired us and put us to work. He ended, he got done right away, because it was more than he wanted to get involved in. And I liked it and stuck with it, and they liked me and they taught me how to do different things, how to, how to stack the bricks and how to what they call hick them, and I stacked the slabs for burning, and I learned how to burn them and pole them, and it, it was really interesting how they made, I, I loved it, you know, and I loved it because, again as I said before, I, I gained respect from other men because I could do work like they did, and the more I did, the, the better I felt because the nicer they were to me, you know, I, I carried my load. And then I wanted to make bricks, because that's where the big money was, making bricks, that was the big money, I mean we were getting sixty five cents an hour, we went to, I think, a dollar before I got done, I think, I'm pretty sure. But making bricks was, striking, they called it striking, it's a three man crew, was unbelievable. You'd start in the morning at dark, and you had a bathing suit on, you working in water and mud, clay and sand, it was just, it was just, it was just a lot of fun, it was, to me it was fun, because I could, I could, I could go home and sleep later, because I needed my sleep, and all we did was run. I was working on an open yard, you've had interviews with the other guys, they worked on what they call a big machine, they get the mold on the front, they turn around and pump, and turn around like a circle. With us, we had a three man crew, and we had an antiquated machine, the machine that we were working on was run by a mule at one time, and the machine came into the automotive age, or whatever

you call it, they hooked a motor on it to turn the thing, and, but that, everything we did was primitive, very primitive, the molds that made the bricks, everything. And what we would do, we had a cart, we'd bring, as I recall this was, well over fifty years ago, sixty years ago when I was doing this, and as I recall, it was -.

AL: Was this in the 1940s?

HD: Fifty one.

AL: Fifty one, okay, go ahead.

HD: Yeah, but anyway, we would bring this cart up there, a two wheeled cart, like a wheelbarrow, but it was a flat deal, and we had, and we had either six or seven molds that contain the bricks. We'd bring the molds up there, on this cart, we'd pull it in front of the machine, grab the molds on the lefthand side, run them through a water box, flip them, the water would go in the air like a spout and it would fall back into the mold, we'd drop it in the machine, and it would be one mo-, one motion like. After we dropped them in the machine, we'd grab a handle and lift the handle up, there'd be a pedal that would come up, jump on the pedals, that would push the clay, the clay into the mold, push it down there tight, and when we did that, after we did that, we'd pull a lever back and it would slide the mold out. And then we had a stick on top of the machine, a little board about four inches I think it was, by a foot and a half, we'd slide that across, it would take the excess, excess clay off and it would pick up the mold, turn around and drop it onto this cart we had and keep going in a circle again, and pick up another one, fill it up again, the same thing, keep going around. And when we had them all on there, I think it was six of them, we'd grab it and run down the end of the yard. We had a yard, a yard would be a flat area, was composed of clay and so forth, and we had a, we'd level it off, we'd put sand on it the day before, the morning before we started, so we'd take these wet molds down there, wheel them down there and straddle, we'd straddle,

well as wide as this table here, and grab them off and flip them down, put them on the ground, put them on the yard, and then take the top off and they'd be, all bricks would be formed right there, they'd be wet clay. We'd lift it up, threw it onto the cart, grab another one, go around again and dump it, and you just did that, you did that ten thousand times. That's how we got paid, because we did, we'd do ten thousand bricks a day, that was what they called a stint, we had to do that, and the more we did, the better it was for us. But ten thousand was usually our limit, sometimes we'd go to, we'd go to, was it, was it ten thousand? We'd go a little over ten thousand, maybe, but that was it. And it was, it was, it was a lot of fun, we'd run like hell all the way down and all the way back, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run. The faster we ran, the better they liked it. If we didn't run fast enough, they had someone else to take our place.

And I can remember my mother, after I'd been there a while, my mother saying to my father, look what, look at Herv. And my father's name was Herv, and she'd say, Hervie, look, look at Harvey's check, *(unintelligible word)* boy's check is bigger than yours and mine put together this week. And I was only sixteen years old, and I was making more than my father was making, who had been working in the woods all his life and knew how to, he was a cracker jack lumberjack, he was not an alcoholic or somebody who would ska-, run away from work, he loved his work. My mother was a baker in restaurants locally, she used to make doughnuts and pies and things, and I used to go with her, I used to go with her before I went into the brickyard, and I learned how to make honey dipped doughnuts and cruellers and all that stuff. I'd put them in the fat and fry them, oh, I had all, you wouldn't believe the jobs I had as a kid, you wouldn't believe it.

But anyway, making bricks was, was a, was a, was an interesting job, it was hard work, and it was work most anybody could not do, that's what made us so proud of being able to do that work. We were just so proud of it, and we'd get a hell of a big check every week. And if we didn't get a big check, we didn't stick around, because they'd get rid of us. We had to put those brick out. If we had a rainy day it made it a

little tough, because sometimes we'd get the bricks all laid out, and all of a sudden a storm would come in, whack, you know, you've seen hard rains come down and it hits like that. It would ruin our bricks, we had to shovel all off the yard. Nobody talks about that. We had to shovel them all off the yard and throw them back in the machine again, and run them back through the machine and make more bricks. And you'd think it was really heartbreaking, but we'd try to get by with, with a little bit of damage if we could, and they'd usually let us get by with, boy, we had to can a lot of bricks. I did that for five summers, I did it here in Auburn at Dennis Brickyard, and then I went to Morin Brickyard in Danville and I worked there for two summers making bricks, striking.

At Dennis, they wouldn't let me strike because I was too young, so they let me work on the wire cutting machine. That was a machine that, that extruded the clay like cheese, it would slide like a, like a piece of cheese. It had a big screw thing on back and it would be pushing the clay out like cheese, and it would slide out there, and then we'd get on the end of the machine, it had a big handle, we'd pull on it, so many wires would come down and slice it, just like a cheese slicer. It would slide onto another plank and the guy would pick it up and he'd put his, put seven of those in his wheelbarrow and take off, and there's another guy behind him. So I did that, there at Dennis, because they wouldn't let me make bricks, they wouldn't let me be a striker because I was too young, they didn't think I was mature enough. So I went down to Morin's, they put me to work in the yard, wheeling and handling slabs and things. I knew that if I had, had an opportunity there, they had three or four machines there, so there was a better opportunity. There was always somebody falling by the wayside that couldn't make it, they just couldn't make it, they, their health couldn't take it or their muscles weren't in condition to do it, their back couldn't do it, their legs couldn't do it. There was always something, so lo and behold, a guy came to me, he said, Harvey, why don't you do it tomorrow morning, we're going to, we're going to try you. From that day on, I became a striker. I worked there two summers, and then when I, let's see, when I got out of the Marine Corps, I went into the Marine Corps, and when I got out of the Marine Corps, I worked in, I went to prep school at MCI in Pittsfield, and I came

back down in the summer, and I worked in the brickyard in Gray for Joe Blair, I worked there for two summers, and I liked to work in there too. I used to find a lot of shells, fossils in the clay. It got me thinking about how in the hell did that get here, and I got pretty interested, I find big shells in there and so forth. At one time I guess, this part of the country was covered by water, and, and it had been laying in there for eons, I don't know how long it was. But it was amazing, I'd dig in the clay and find these shells in there. And I don't know, it's just one of things about bricks.

But, but anyway, for the brick making, we used clay and sand, and sometimes loam. Now, most people didn't pay any attention to that, and I'm not trying to be a smarty pants, but I remember that. The sand was put in there so that they would, would allow the clay to come out of the mold a little bit better. A lot of the mo-, the mold would come off the clay a little bit better. And also, we would have sand spread on top, on top of the yard, and we'd dump, dump wet clay on there, then we had a young kid sanding it. He would sand the top of them, so that they wouldn't crack, because the sun coming down, they're drying too fast, they'd crack. So we'd let them set there for a day, and we edged them. We had another machine, an old fashioned thing made by hand, we'd get over it with two handles, we'd pull it and the bricks would, they were hard enough so they could tip up. So we had to tip up like ten thousand bricks, we didn't just slap them on the ground, we had to tip them up and dry them. And after they were dried, we had to get together, three man crew, and hick them. We had to pick them all up by hand and put them in these piles so that the wheelers could come by and pick them up and wheel them into the kiln area and stack them in there, so they could burn them into brick.

I'm sure that you must have talked to somebody else about the bricks, but the bricks, they were different grades of bricks. There was a real hard one, medium, not so good, soft, and if you got away, the further you got away from the fire, the less demand there was for those bricks. Because that we see here, that these mills were made of, they're made of real hard bricks, they're right near the fire, and that was once just mud and sand, but the tremendous amount of heat in there caused that to turn into what we

see, brick, brick red, and you bring them together like that and slap them together and then they ring, they go ring, they ring. They're solid, they're like steel, but then the further away you get from that fire, the softer they get. So when they build with bricks, they take that, that number one grade, they don't do that but that's what I call it, they put that on the outside, because that'll take the sun, take the wind and the hard rain and stuff, nothing will ever happen to it. So they take that second grade of bricks and put them on the inside wall, or maybe a third strip, because these bricks in these mills sometimes are six feet thick, all the bricks lined up, so you see they were, I think at one time I heard that there were thirty five brickyards here years ago, thirty five, and we only have one today. They needed bricks for foundations, they needed them for sidewalks, they used them to make cesspools, they used them to make pipes underground, they, of course they built buildings out of them as we know, as you look around and you see them, and the chimneys and all that. So they needed a lot of bricks, so there were bricks everywhere, brickyards. And people started brickyards, a lot of, a lot of small brickyards. You drive through the country now, and I've always noticed it because I was interested in bricks, what the hell is, is a brick building doing way out in the country sometimes. I've been driving on these roads, and I'd say, my god, what's that brick building doing out here? There aren't any stores around, no sidewalks or anything, just, boom. Well, these people came from Europe with that knowledge of making bricks, and they selected a piece of land, and there was material on the land, and there were trees and so forth, so they cut the trees down and used them for lumber or used them for fuel, and they, they made their own bricks right there, and they made enough bricks to build a house. They actually did that. There's quite a history with bricks, it goes way back to ancient times, and we've gotten away from that material because we have better materials they claim now. But these bricks have been around for thousands of years, and some of these better materials we have today I don't believe will be around thousands and thousands of years from now. I can talk to you all day about bricks, maybe I better stop.

AL: No, I, this is really good information, and I -?

HD: I'm the last of the Mohicans, there aren't any more people that make bricks in that method. We have other people you've talked to, that made bricks on what they call the big machine on the cables and so forth, not the same, not the same. The product is almost the same, and I think they can make them faster. I'm not sure because I never did that kind of work.

AL: Well, there must have been some chilly mornings, getting in your bathing suit, when you were working, because this is Maine.

HD: Yeah, yeah, in the fall, in the fall and in the spring, it was real cold, but we were anxious to get in there. See, once you get moving, you warm up. And in the fall, we, we'd, we'd, I told you we had that water box, see. After a while, they invented a different method of doing it. They had a pipe across, in front of the machine, it had a ho-, holes in it, like a water sprinkler for the lawn, and when you put the form in there, you'd have that water sprinkler sprinkling on the, on the inside of the form so that the clay wouldn't stick in, in the mold. But when I first started, and when we first started, we had a water box, they didn't have a piece, and we'd flip the mold in the water box. It was, all the mold, it was a, there was a movement, it was like a, it was like a dancer or something, and you'd flip it in there and the water would go up in the air, and as you move the mold, this was way, the water would come down, *(unintelligible word)*, into the mold, and splash in there, and then you'd drop it in the machine and you, you know. I don't know if I'm explaining it to you right. That's what we had to do. So, what else can I tell you?

AL: Well, can you talk about some of the people that you've worked with at the time, maybe some that have passed, that I can't interview, and who they were, and?

HD: Some of them, some of them were real nice, they were very hard workers and so

forth. But there were a lot of questionable people in there. There were people that, as a kid I was exposed to, that didn't have anything good to say about anybody or anything. They would drink up all their money, they couldn't wait to get paid so they could get drunk. And some of them were forced to it, they mentally thought they were forced to it, because they had to work so hard, quote. They didn't work any harder than anybody else, it's just that they just had something in them that made them do that, I guess, I don't know what it was. But we used to work with a lot of rough people, a lot of rough people, particularly the ones that did the wheeling and the working in the yard and so forth. Some of the strikers were pretty rough too, but it was an interesting group of people. See, they, they, most of them were working, as you know, seasonal, so they, they worked their season, and then they would have another, what we call dub around job the rest of the season, they just do anything. Some of them would let wives work and they wouldn't work. Or some of them would, at that time, I used to hear talk about it, I don't know how true it is, but I believe it, they'd go to jail in the wintertime because it was warm and they'd get fed. It's true, that I know they did that, some of them did that. And some of them were just not good people, but they might have been good workers for that short period, which is what the employer wanted. The rest they wouldn't give a damn about it, just as long as they were there to do their work and get going. There, I guess you would say they were pretty rough people, some of them. Some of them were nice people, but a lot of them were pretty rough people, very rough. But I liked it.

AL: Were there any, at the time you that you were there, that had been there for a long, long time?

HD: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

AL: Do you remember who they were and their names?

HD: I can't remember that.

AL: It's hard to recall that far back.

HD: No, I can't remember their names. Well, let's see, Godins were there, they were there quite a while, Bernard Godin, I remember those people, and they were, they were kind of a rustic bunch. They would, some of the Godins were involved with Salvation Army, you see, when they would get done with their work they'd go, they'd go to the Salvation Army and work there in the winter, or whenever they'd do it, I don't know how that works. But I know I used to see them with the uniform on sometimes, they'd do that every year. But it was really, it was really interesting. It was some awful rough people, awful rough people, and some of them were so strong, they'd, they'd, during when they had lunch hour they'd go out and lift up the front end of a car. They'd have contests like, it's true, they'd get, they could, oh, it was really something. They'd lift some tremendous loads with their back and with their arms and we just, it was another time.

AL: And you were quite young at that time?

HD: Yeah, very young. I learned a lot from the older people. I used to go buy their beer for them, I remember they let me drive their car. One of them had an Oldsmobile eighty eight, at the time, and I must have been, I was fifteen, I guess, fourteen or fifteen. I did so much as a kid because I was, I'd always get in the way and be there, but anyway, they did, they'd have me go down and get the beer. I used to go down to Mooney's, down on Washington Street, and I had the big old Oldsmobile, and I looked through the steering wheel, that's how I got down there, I swear. I'd look through the steering wheel, I'd go down to Mooney's, and they'd put the beer in the car, and I bring it back to the brickyard. When I worked at Dennis' Brickyard, I just loved doing that. Because we never owned a car. They used to let me drive a car, an automatic, I'd hydr-, hydro drive, hydroplane, it was called at that time, I can still feel it going *rumm*, down the road, that Oldsmobile.

I had fun, I had a lot of fun, and it was wonderful, wonderful. They treated me wonderfully. Yeah, the people, that I worked for were awfully nice to me, and the people that I worked with were, oh, they were nice, they taught me all kinds of shortcuts, they'd say, don't do it this way, do it this way, it's going to be easier on your back if you do it like this or like that. And I learned that at an early age, so I was able to do things that I would normally not be able to do, because they showed me how to do things differently, instead of just, instead of just bulling in the stuff, it was, it was a good learning experience. I remember one time I had a shovel, I was shoveling up there, doing the pit, and I got a splinter in, in, in the shovel, wooden shovel, the shovel's got a wooden handle on it, on the steel's, steel end there, and I was shoveling, and pretty soon I got a splinter in my hand, and I, it happened twice, and I said to the owner of the brickyard, Mr. Dennis, I said, Mr. Dennis, I think I need, I need another shovel, this shovel is getting pretty hard on my hand. He looked at the shovel, and he said, no, no, he said, that shovel is still pretty good, you can handle it pretty good. So I told one of the fellows one night that, one of the brick guys, he said, boy, I wouldn't take that, Harvey. I said, what do you mean? He said, I wouldn't take that from them people, he said, they need you to work here, he said, they'd get you another shovel. He told me, he said, I'd do something about that. I said, yeah, he said, well, oh, yeah. And the next day, he came up again, I said, I need another shovel. He said no, I told you, you don't need, that shovel is still good for a while. I said, it is, huh, and I took the shovel like that, I went over my head and I dropped it down, and it went bam and it broke in half, and I said, I don't think I can use that shovel anymore. Anyway, I got another shovel.

AL: Yeah, that's one way to get another shovel.

HD: Another thing I remember about being a fellow down there was an Indian, and he smoked a pipe, wore a hat, wore a felt hat, when he was working in the brickyard. He was a striker, he, he was a pretty good worker, but he'd go fishing over at Worthley Pond, which is not very far from, from Poland Springs. There was a girls' camp there,

and I used to go up there a lot. And anyway, he'd go up there fishing and he'd get these pickerel, about that long, I guess about that long, and he'd bring them, and the next morning he'd come in, the next morning, he'd come in with a lunch pail, and he'd open it up and there'd be this pickerel all the way around in the lunch pail. I had never seen that before. And he's, he'd take them out there, and of course he had, I guess he had the heads off of them, he'd chew them, he just kind of eat them right up, just like that, right out of, right out of, right out of his lunch pail. He had one of them round lunch pails, black, and he had them laid in there like pieces of wood, that was his lunch.

AL: They, they weren't cooked?

HD: Oh, they were cooked.

AL: Oh, they were cooked.

HD: Oh, they were cooked but they, I'd never seen that before, they were cooked and they were laid in there like that. And he had, what the hell was it, not Balantine, Ox Head Ale, he used to like Ox Head Ale, he'd drink that by the quart, swill all over the place. But anyway, that was a, I don't want to mention his name because his kids is still living, and I don't know if they'd like it. I used to have fun with him, he was an Indian. That's another thing, we had, we had a lot of, a lot of French people, because there's a lot of French people around here, and French people were known for their work, they were, they were really producers. Of course they thought they were, we thought we were the only producers, but there were other people producing too. But it was, it was, it was just a hell of an interesting time, it really was, it really was. It was just, it was just a wonderful time, *(unintelligible phrase)*.

AL: And you've gone on to do a lot of other things since then?

HD: Well, I think the best thing I ever did was join the Marine Corps, and then I didn't know the Marine Corps from Salvation Army, I said to my buddy Teddy Emery, I said, Ted, what do you think we get out of here, I said. My girlfriend at the time, her father decided to send her to prep school, because I guess maybe he thought we were getting too serious. So I said, I'm getting, I want to get out of here. He says, yeah, I'll go with you, Harvey. I said, well let's go, we'll go down to the military, and so we go down. We went down, and all, we went to all the branches, it was during the Korean War, can't remember the Korean War, so we went to all the branches. I went to the Army first, and I said, aw, they said, no, no, we're full up. We went, but they said, well if you want to put your name down, we'll take it. So then we went to the Air Force, absolutely not, they just had all kinds of people in there. And then I went to the Navy, and I was at the Navy, and the Navy guy says, well he says, right now, he says, our quota is full, but if you want to sign up we'll, we'll put your name down, and in three or four months, maybe you could go. So it just so happens that we were standing in the doorway of this recruiter's office, and behind us there was another door open, we didn't notice it. We come out and the door's open, there was a guy sitting behind a desk there, was, looked like a military man, he said, boys, come in here. We went in, he said, how would you like to leave tomorrow morning? We says, what? He says, yeah, all you have to do is sign here, and we'll just, we'll put you on a train and send you right to Parris Island. Well, you sure? He says, yeah, so we signed up.

The next morning we went down there, I think it was the next morning, two days later, we went down, our train date, look, that started the train in Aroostook County, a whole train come down through and stopped at every train station, all the way down to Portland. So when they got to Portland, the train was full, I mean full, so they put us in a hotel down there, and it was all teenagers, all kids, all teenagers, a whole hotel full. We started throwing mattresses out the window and pillows out the window, we just didn't care what the heck we were doing. We had a hell of a good time. And the next morning, they swore us in on the steps down there at city hall or something, loaded us on and we went down to Parris Island. All of a sudden, we got down there and they

said, hey, they started screaming at us and hollering at us. And I had leather jacket on and I had what they called a duck's ass at the time, it was a long hair, and I was a cool cat. They opened the door, they opened the door of that bus, grabbed all of us and pulled us out, and said, line up, line up. And there were three or four of them guys running around with sticks, banging like this here. Line up, get them boxes off and put them on your shoulder. We all had a little box with our *(unintelligible word)*, put them on our shoulder, load us into another bus, and says, now you are our boys and you're going to do whatever we tell you to do. We go into this place, and we had two guards in there, and we went onto an island, they call it Parris Island. I thought I'd died and went to hell, it was unbelievable, it was unbelievable.

They took us into a room and took all our clothes off us, put them in a pile and said, grab your clothes, there's skivvies and everything, and go mail them home right off, and get back over in that square. We had a square with a number on them, number thirteen or whatever it was. We stood in that square, and they'd come by and drop a pair of shoes, come by and drop a necktie, come by and drop a belt, come by and drop a shirt, come by, and I'm standing there bullocky bare assed like everybody else, so put a hat on, and oh, that's another thing, before that, before that they made us go in a shower, shower down clean and then they painted a number on our chest, a number, everybody had a number, a big number so you could read it, on your chest. And then, what the hell, they shaved, oh they shaved our heads. They took a razor and went, and went right over. And I had hair, I had a big head of hair at that time, I was really cool, they took, cut all my hair off, and then they gave me a hat, put on my head like that, and it was down here and my ears were folded over, oh. I went outside and I had to stand at another, I said, I said, a guy standing next to me, I said, I'm looking around for my buddy, because he was, he and I grew up together, and I, I felt pretty good, and he felt pretty good, and we knew each other, all these other guys, we didn't know who in the hell they were, we knew nothing, all we knew is that we were in big trouble. So I'm looking at him, and honest to god, I'm looking right at him, and I said, do you know where Ted is, my buddy? He looked at me, he says, I'm Ted. Honest to god, he said,

I'm Ted.

Well, anyway, I stayed in there, and I was a buck private, and I became a private first class. I went to Camp Lejeune, and I went down there, and I was big for my age, and I'd been working so hard, I was muscled up and everything, so the marines kind of liked that a little bit, see. So here we were down there and there was all these marines and there was all us kids, and it was about, I don't know, must have been a couple of hundred of us, and we're all buck privates, or, or, or buck privates or privates, I mean one stripe or nothing. So they needed corporals, they needed somebody in charge to do so, and I did my work and pretty soon, he said, Desgrosseilliers. They called me Alphabet. Alphabet, get over here. I'd get over there, and he said, I heard, we're going, we're going to recommend you for corporal. Wow, I mean we didn't get into that until later on. So anyway, you're recommending me for corporal. And there was this little Italian guy, who just come back from Korea, he was from New York and he was a real cool dude, and he didn't like me at all, because I was big and in pretty good shape, because I'd been working in a brickyard and the woods. This guy was just a big mouth from the city, but he was a bad ass, and he did not like anybody making, he was a buck sergeant and he'd come back from Korea, to think that anybody get another stripe, when you're supposed to wait two years to get one of them stripes, they were going to give me one right away. That, that would mean that I would get to be a, a staff or a tech sergeant pretty quick, which is almost unheard of. This guy, he, he was, no way, he went right to the old man and said, absolutely not, I been to Korea, I did this, this, and this kid going to do that, no way. So there they are again with no corporals. Again, they put me up again, this guy beats, beats me down twice, so I learned some hard lessons. So then I go to Puerto Rico, next thing you know, I go to California, and then I go to Japan, then I go to Korea, then I go to Japan. I stayed in Japan for a year and a half, and I become a colonel, a captain's, a base commander's driver, because I was pretty squared away and I looked, I looked the part pretty good. So I became the base commander's driver, and I went all over Japan. I saw Japan like nobody ever saw Japan, unbelievable. Here I was over there, a poor guy from Maine, pretty soon I've got

a corporal stripe, I got a sergeant stripe, I'm driving all over Japan, I go to Mount Fuji, I go to Kamakoto Beach, where that big *(unintelligible word)* is, big, big *(unintelligible word)*, and I go down the beach. I had such a wonderful time over there.

One day I'm driving this lieutenant around, he says, I, he gets talking to me, and I'm up front and he's just sitting in the back, he said, I don't know what I'm going to do with that car. Nobody over there has a car. I said, what do you mean, sir. He said, well, I'm leaving tomorrow to go home to the States, he said, I've got this Dodge convertible, and he says, it needs a lot of work, he says, it's in tough shape, he says, I've got to leave it here, I can't take it with me. And I said, you have the papers on that car? You had to have papers to prove it was yours. And he said yeah, I got it at the BOQ. I said, well I might be interested in a car. He said, well, go down this street, go this street, go this. We go down these narrow alleys, and we pull up, and there's a car jacked up with four tires gone off it, the top's all torn, the hood's lifted up. I looked inside, looked at the inside underneath the hood. All the pl-, spark plugs are busted off, the distributor's gone, I mean it's a wreck. He said, he said, I told you it's in rough shape. Well, I said, what do you, what do you want for it? He said, what will you give me? I said, I'll give twenty five bucks if you've got the papers. He said, good enough, he said, come down *(unintelligible word)*, I've got the papers. Give me a bill of sale, give me the papers, I give him twenty five dollars.

I go back to the barracks, I said, guys, I got a car. I mean here's a, here's a, here's a *(unintelligible word)*, I mean three or four barracks, and nobody's got a car, they got lucky if they got a bicycle. He says, come on, you're shitting me. No, I said, I got a car. Yeah, come on, Frenchie. I said, I got a car. So anyway, I tell them about the car, so this guy from Connecticut, *(name)*, he says, Harvey, I can, you know we used to work in junk, I can fix that up, he says, take, take me over and show it to me. I take him over, he says, listen, that's got the same engine as a weapons carrier, because Dodge made those weapons carriers, period. He said, I've got everything, I got plugs, points, everything's down to the, down to the motor transport. He said, we got all that stuff, we've got wheels, tires, everything, because we've got the staff cars,

it's the same, same wheel, same tire. So I get brand new tires, brand new wheels, they fix it up. He said, what am I going to do with the top? Go down to the parachute lofts, go down to the parachute lofts, he said, they have everything you need. You do? I'm getting married to one of these Japanese girls, and if I had a car for my honeymoon, for the week, I'd put a top on that, seat covers, floor mat, whatever you need. I said, you will? He said, yes.

So I got a brand new top, new seat covers, new floor mat, oh my god, my car was all running good, and of course, it was all patched up. At last we took some stovepipe and welded around there, soldered it in, we painted it, we fixed it all up, oh boy. So here I was over there, then I won a motorcycle in a card game, all in a basket, in a basket, with a basket, I mean a real basket case. They tried to fix it and they couldn't fix it. It was in a basket, and I won it. I took it outside the gate and had a Japanese guy put it back together and got it all running and everything. So I had a motorcycle and a car, I almost stayed in the Marine Corps. I go down to the Marine Corps sergeant downstairs, and he said, they wanted para marines, which are marines that jump out of airplanes and *(unintelligible word)* bodyguards, underwater demolitions crew, one of the three. The reason I wanted one of those is every one of them paid more money. If you were just a regular sergeant or whatever, you just got top, you got top paid, and you got overseas pay, then if you had one of these other things, you get some more money, see. It was the only way I could do it, because I had no education, didn't have any, any paperwork. So anyway, what the hell was I going to tell you about that?

AL: You almost stayed in the Marines.

HD: Oh yeah, I go down to see the first sergeant and I said, look, I'm interested in that, I saw it on a bulletin board out there, I said, maybe instead of shipping over. Oh good, he says, here's, here's, here's, it just so happens I've got the papers right here, and I'm standing over there. He says, I've got them right here, he said, all you've got to

do is you just sign right here, and he said, we'll get you taken care of, you'll get one of the ones you want. So I'm standing, well, I said, I know how them guys are. He said, well, look. I want to know which one I'm going to get. Don't worry about that, he said, don't worry about that. I said, I'm not worried about it, I just want to know which one I'm going to get. Finally, he says, look, you, he gets up and knocks his chair over, sticks his finger in my face, and he says, whatever Kennedy had said, don't ask what you can do for your country, whatever, I forgot what it was.

AL: Yeah, yeah.

HD: Do you remember what it was? Don't ask what you can -.

AL: Don't ask what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.

HD: That's right, he stuck his finger in my face. I said, yes, sir, and I left. That's how close I came to getting in. But anyway, I could talk to you until tomorrow morning. I just had a lovely life, oh, I had a wonderful life, wonderful, wonderful.

AL: I guess we better stop for today, and hopefully, I get to talk to you some more.

HD: Well, I don't know, I might bore you to death.

AL: Thank you.

End of Interview

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