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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: 11/13/0

Interviewer: Kate Meehling

K. When were you born?

W. I was born on April 30, 1923, in Marshall, IL and given the name, William Francis Meehling. My parents were Frank Nicholas Meehling and Lorene Rose Waller Meehling.

In my family there were 2 other children. I had a year younger sister, Virginia Rose Meehling, now Virginia Rose Shawler. And I had a brother, Donald Jerome Meehling, who is a Catholic priest and has served at several churches in Illinois. Currently he is at a church in Springfield, Illinois.

I was born in a one-story home west of the South Side School...It still stands there. George Mitchell's family home was, I believe, one house north on Rt. 1. I don't remember George, because when I was about 1 year of age, my folks moved to a home at 406 Ash St. There have been changes over the years. Jot and Virginia Malloy lived there, and most recently Fores and Connie Richardson have lived there.

K. What about your parents?

W. My father was a grocer...he never went beyond the 8th grade in formal training, but he ran a business and meat market and was successful at it. His grocery was north of the courthouse on Archer Ave, in the building now owned by Fred and Charlotte Morecraft, which is occupied by Curves. I worked in that grocery as a very young boy, installing goods on the shelves, sweeping the floors, counting eggs, and candling them. Those had been brought in by farmer's wives, and they used the proceeds to purchase groceries for their families.

K. Did your sibling work there too?

W. My sister didn't spend much time working in the grocery. She helped around the home.

K. What are some of your memories?

W. One Christmas we got a nice bicycle...my Dad had obtained it from Hulman & Co. of Terre Haute. It was a boy's bicycle, but we were to share it. That day Virginia rode it and went between a fence post and the garage, and smashed the head light on that new bicycle. It took me a long time to forgive her for that that, but I've done it!

K. Where did you go to school?

W. I went to the North Side School on N. 7th St. for 8 years, and then to Marshall High School for 4 years and graduated there in 1941.

K. Did you play the piano for the kids to march into school?

W. Yes I did. When it came time to go into the school house, either afternoon period or first thing in the morning or after play, we would line up and march into the school in cadence with a pianist who played the piano on the second floor until the children all reached their rooms. For at least 2 of those years I played the piano.

K. Who was your piano teacher?

W. My teacher was Nina Hogue. She lived on N. 5th Street. My Mother had me take piano lessons from her for 2 or 3 years. I still play 2 or 3 tunes that I learned to play when I was one of her students.

K. Who was the principle?

W. Mrs. Washburn. We had 8 grades at that time...No Jr. High

K. What do you remember about high school?

W. I enjoyed high school, but I didn't participate in intramural sports, but did in intramural sports. Rather than practice with the teams, I was required to go to work at my parents' grocery each evening after school and on Saturdays from early in the morning until quite late in the evening, although sometimes on Sat. Eve. I was allowed to go to the movie at the Pythian theater at the southwest corner of the square. That theater burned several years later after I had returned home following my time in the service and completion of my formal education

On Saturday night, many farmers would bring in their cream & eggs to the grocery, and order, then go to the movie, and come back afterward to pick up their cream cans, egg crates and groceries that we had assembled for them. The store didn't close until sometime between 10:00 and midnight. And we had started to work about 6:00 a.m.

K. Who did you take to the prom?

W. To the Jr. Prom? Well I can remember going to the prom as a sophomore, as I was invited to wait tables for the Junior and Senior banquet held at the school. My date that evening was Betty Simpson. My Dad had a new 1936 Studebaker they let me drive. I drove out to the northwest edge of town and turned into the driveway of the home of Ernie Martin. There was another couple with us; one was George Leggett, I don't recall who his date was. Just as we entered the driveway, Ernie fired a shotgun into a tree above us. When I heard that shot landing on the car, I was afraid that it had ruined my Dad's car. But it was just leaves & limbs falling from the tree. Ernie talked to me about that years later, and laughed about it. My dad didn't care if I stayed out late for prom nights, but he expected me to get up at 6:00 in the morning to go to work, so I didn't stay out quite as late as I might have otherwise. However, I did get home just in time to go to work after my Sr. prom.

K. I think the war started about that time.

W. It started in 1941 with the attack on Pearl Harbor, and I was a freshman at the University of Illinois in the college of commerce. I enlisted but was permitted to stay at university as a reserve ROTC officer-training student until about June of 1943, when I went on active duty. I went to infantry training school, OCS (officer candidate school) in Fort Benning, GA, graduated as a 2nd Lieutenant, and was with the 174th infantry until I went overseas. I went to the Philippine Islands and later to Japan. After about 3 1/3 years of military service I was released from active duty and returned to law school at Uof I. [University of Illinois] I was in General Headquarters of the armed forces of the Pacific and I had occasion several times to see General McArthur who was the commanding officer.

After I completed my law school, in 2 years instead of the usual 3, I returned to Marshall and assumed the general practice of law and have continued that practice since Jan. 1949.

K. When did you marry?

W. In 1951 I married Anna Katherine Scholfield and we always have lived within a few blocks of where we lived as children. She lived only 2 blocks from our present home and I spent most of my youth 6 or 7 blocks from this home. Initially we lived at 210 N. 4th St., a little home. Charlie Gamm and wife live there now. When we first started housekeeping we paid \$50 a month rent and had a hand-fired furnace and it cost about \$50 a year for coal.

K. What are probably the most outstanding events of your life?

W. Well of course the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 was something that I'll always remember. The surrender of the German army was also a great event in my memory and the surrender of the Japanese followed. Those times are very important in my memory. Of course my marriage and birth of children are outstanding too. We have 3 children, Melinda Anne Meehling and twins, Thomas Warren Meehling and William Donald Meehling, who live at various places now and occasionally visit us in Marshall.

K. How has the town of Marshall changed in your lifetime?

W. The town has changed significantly. When I was a child and worked in my Father's grocery, there were several small groceries in the city. We had a delivery service so when I was old enough to drive, I delivered by model A Ford delivery truck. But on earlier occasions I would deliver by bicycle. Most people had no refrigeration, maybe an icebox, so they would frequently order just enough for one meal at a time. So we had refrigeration in the store and could store meats and other products.

K. Didn't your folks move from the house at 406 Ash Street?

W. Yes, they did. They moved to the northeast corner of 6th and Ash St. and later demolished that home and built a new one. It is standing there now. A very respected carpenter, Tom Findley, was the principal contractor on the construction of that home. At the death of my parents, the house was sold to Virginia Doll. It was later occupied by Mr. & Mrs. Don Stanfield, and now by Daniel and Molly (Morecraft) Reed and family.

K. Do you think the weather has changed over the years?

W. Well it seems to me that the winters were more severe when I was a youth. I feel certainly that they are warmer now. I now, within the last 4 or 5 years, have played golf in this area at least each month of the year, that being on the occasion when the temperature would get to 50 degrees or higher and I don't think that would have been possible when I was younger.

K. In your work have you had any outstanding cases?

W. Well, I have had cases that to me were outstanding. I feel I've had quite a broad experience. Many of my trial practice years were defending in lawsuits, many of which were negligence cases or personal injury or property damage cases that arose from automobile accidents and when I was successful in those I felt especially good. And when I lost one, with a substantial verdict against my client, I didn't feel nearly as well.

K. How do you feel about the advent of television?

W. Well I don't feel that television in itself is good or bad.... much good can be said about it. However, I think children spend too much time watching television and they should be limited more. More time reading, exercising and doing other things. Much television may not be appropriate for young people.

K. What is your opinion of the park systems nearby?

W. They are great. We have a nice park about 3 miles south of Marshall, Lincoln Trail State Park. I think our former Secretary of State, John Lewis, was in large measure responsible for establishing that park site. Bob Flowers was another person that worked on obtaining the real estate for that site. We have Mill Creek Park north west of Marshall, and it was formed by Clark Co. Park District. The process of acquiring the real estate for that site involved dealing with about 150 owners. We had to try only 1 condemnation case, and were able to settle all other cases and acquire the land for that property. I consider that as an event that was very good for the community. I know Lyman Shawler, who was president of the Park Board at the time, Robert Hollensbe of Casey, Illinois, who worked on acquiring the property, were people that deserved much thanks for what they did. Another major project - which was controversial in the county - on which I worked was the Clark Co. Housing Authority that built homes for persons who might not otherwise have been able to afford decent living quarters.

You asked me what our kitchen was like when I was a child. I can only tell you that we didn't have refrigeration. We did have at some time an ice box, and a local business would travel around with a wagon pulled by a team of horses and sell 25 lb. blocks of ice to occupants. We, as children, would follow the ice wagon, in hopes of getting a splinter of ice to suck on.

We had outhouses in our neighborhood, although we had an indoor bathroom. The cooking stove was a coal or wood stove. We also had a kerosene stove that was used for some occasions. I can remember we had Saturday night baths, whether or not we needed it! Often times we had a foot-tub in the kitchen and buckets of hot water that had been heated on the stove were poured into the tub. We had to scramble to see which kid would be first in the tub.

K. Did your Dad make wine?

W. Yes. My Father never used alcohol to excess, but he and his Mother, who provided the grapes, would make wine. And he also made home brew; and while that was working we kids couldn't run or jump in the house or we might disturb the process. I can remember after it was bottled and capped and stored in our basement there would be an occasion when a bottle would explode and throw glass around.

I haven't mentioned before, but as a part of my entire life, I have been active in our Catholic Church here in Marshall, and some of the persons that I remember most of all are the various priests who served our community. I had been an acolyte or altar boy over many of my younger years. I am still active in that church and a few nights ago I met with the finance committee. We just completed some renovation and building projects so finances have been a matter of concern.

K. Who were some of the priests?

W. I can remember some of the earliest priests. Father Wilson was there early on, and for many years Rev. Michael Donahue was our priest. My wife and some of the other girls here in town would play golf with him. In his older years he had trouble getting some of the men to play with him, so Kate and Virginia (Mathews Smitley) Bennett were among the women who golfed with him. Then there was Father Ryan, Fr. Lawrence Auda, Fr. Jeff Grant and now Fr. Chris Brey.

K. I guess that about covers everything.

W. You've asked me about things that are outstanding in my memory. We have just passed Veteran's day here, and of course not only that day but many other times through the years, I've looked back on the experiences I had in the military service, and I consider that as something very important in my life. An odd thing was that during my training in Georgia, another trainee, Howard McNair, and I were sleeping in a pup tent, with a mosquito liner in it and we were awakened by a skunk in with us. He sprayed us both so we were run off from the area by the other guys, and we couldn't get a bath for a week. That was over 50 years ago, but I was able to find McNair's phone number through the computer, recently, and when I called him, he had a very clear memory of the incident.

When I was in the service in Japan, driving down the street, I looked over in the next jeep and there was Bill O'Rourke from Marshall. In the Philippines, I was able to locate and spend some time with John Hoback, my long time friend from Marshall; also George Moye whose father had a grocery store here in Marshall. George now lives in Belleville, Illinois and John lives in Carlinville, Illinois.

K. Who were some friends of your parents?

W. My father, who was a founding member of the American Legion Post 90, Marshall, had many good friends in that organization. Some of those and their wives became good friends of my mother and father and spent many times exchanging meals in their homes. Some of those were Arthur and Felicia Lowry, Le Roy and Dora McNary, Van & Flossie Tarble, Grendel and Irene Bennett, Charles Curran & wife, Jack & Irene Cline.

K. I think that is enough. Thank you very much for the interview.

W. Thank you for helping me out a little.

