

Will Yetzer Oral History

World War II in Carver County Oral History Project

November 18, 1999

Interviewer: Stacy Helmbrecht-Wilson

Interview with Will Yetzer

Interviewed by Stacy Helmbrecht-Wilson

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Stacy Helmbrecht-Wilson SHW
Will Yetzer WY

SHW: This is the World War II Era in Carver County Oral History Project. The date is November 18, 1999. My name is Stacy Helmbrecht-Wilson. I am the interviewer. I am a staff member at the Carver County Historical Society, and today I am interviewing Will Yetzer. If you just want to say your full name and spell it, just in case we lose the tape case some day.

WY: It's Wilfred R. "Will" Yetzer. Is that sufficient?

SHW: That's fine. Why don't we start with when you were born and where you were born.

WY: I was born February 16, 1917, in Waconia, Minnesota. I was born in the only log cabin bedroom that still exists in Waconia.

SHW: You're kidding. Where is that?

WY: The XXX home. Do you know where that is?

SHW: Not exactly.

WY: It's right here on First Street.

SHW: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

WY: Yes, I come from a large family. I have seven brothers and sisters.

SHW: Oh, my goodness. That is big. Where do you fall in the order?

WY: I'm the third oldest.

SHW: Did you grow up in Waconia?

WY: Yes, I grew up in Waconia. I never left Waconia, in fact, except going into the service.

SHW: Did you go to Waconia High School?

WY: Yes. I graduated in 1946.

SHW: So did you drop out of school to go into the war?

WY: No.

SHW: You graduated in 1946?

WY: No, in 1936.

SHW: What did you do between '36 and '41? When did you go into the service?

WY: In '42. I worked at the funeral home and the furniture/home furnishings in town here. Then I went into the service.

SHW: During the late thirties and early forties, was there much of a sense of what was going on Europe or in Asia?

WY: No. Really and truthfully, there wasn't. In fact, we didn't have all this false news—nothing really came over. They didn't tell you that they were building in Iceland and all this and that. About the first you ever heard of the war was the African campaign. Then all of a sudden we had Pearl Harbor. That came in, and then the Italian campaign in Sicily.

SHW: So the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in '36 didn't really register that much?

WY: No, not at all. We were just at the end of the Depression, which you don't know anything about. There were a lot of kids that I knew that even lied about their ages and went into the service because that way they got a bed to sleep in and food to eat, which a lot of families didn't. There was no welfare or anything like that in those days. That was just like the CCC camps, which you have heard of, where a lot of people went in order to have something to do because there was no work.

SHW: But you got lucky and you got a job at the funeral home.

WY: Yes, and I went to night school at the university at times. That's the way life was in those days. When you went into Minneapolis, for instance, it was a complete day's job, you might say, to go to Minneapolis because the roads were poor, the weather maybe was such that you couldn't even travel, you might say. It was something you planned for a whole day. It wasn't a half an hour and you'd be in town, you know. It was a different world in those days.

SHW: That is wild to think about. So December 1941, what were you doing?

WY: Pearl Harbor, when that happened? I can remember that quite easily. I had a boss that . . . how should I term this . . . Anything that went on, he was a guy up and down, up and down. When Pearl Harbor happened—we never handled appliances, for instance, in the furniture store—and he found an opportunity. He remembered from World War I that at that time products could become very scarce. He put in Philco refrigerators. I remember him telling me, he said,

"We're going to make a cleaning on this because people are going to buy them now because they're hard to get." That really was the first thing that came in; like Social Security came in in those days. You didn't hear much about it, all you knew was that in a year you owed five dollars to the government for your social security. It was a far cry from what it is today.

SHW: It's frightening what it is today.

WY: Anyway, I can remember that day. But again, I don't think it hit the people that much. They talked about it, but we in the United States can't understand what war is all about because we've never had war in the states here except the Civil War and this and that, but where somebody was really bombing and shooting and all this and that to a big extent, where the whole United States was involved. So nobody really paid too much attention to it. These kids that went into the service that were sixteen years old and lied about their age, there was no way for them to check that because a lot of the birth certificates were nonexistent. The midwives or doctors would maybe mail in the certificates once a year of a child being born. So there wasn't anything at the courthouse, so the government couldn't check on these kids. So they went into the service, but they did it to have a life.

SHW: Did you enlist in '42 or were you drafted?

WY: I was drafted. I had three brothers in the service at that time. There were five of us altogether, and all five of us were in the service.

SHW: Your poor mother!

WY: Yes, I know. Actually, in 1941, I left my boss in January of '41 after Pearl Harbor, and I was going to take a job, thinking that my four brothers in service, we always felt they wouldn't take all of us, but they did regardless.

SHW: So your four brothers were already in service by January of '42?

WY: Yes.

SHW: Were they drafted before Pearl Harbor, or did they enlist?

WY: If I remember this correctly, I think three of them were enlisted and the fourth one was drafted. The oldest one was drafted. I had left this place of employment—like I said, the guy was high and low usually, and so I was going to take a job in Minneapolis. I was maybe the first person who ever went to a floor covering school, installing linoleum and carpeting and things like that, out in Carnegie, New Jersey. For some reason I decided to go because in those days people bought a piece of linoleum and put it on the floor. It was not installed like you see installation of carpets today, you know. So I thought I'd take a job in one of the carpet wholesale places in Minneapolis. Yet I never got there because people called me and said, "You know, you sold me this job. We're building a house and want you to do this and that." I never got out of town. Where the VFW building is, which was the old high school that had been moved over across the road from there before the high school was built over here, I rented that place. It was a

butcher shop or meat market in those days. The guy that owned it wanted me to occupy it. So I started there, and that's where I was. Where our present home furnishings are, the proprietor of that, who was a competitor to the other store that I had worked on, he passed on, and his wife called me to take care of him. So consequently after he passed on, I took care of services for her. Then I finally moved up there in July of '42. Then I went into the service in October of '42. Then I was drafted.

SHW: Where did you do your basic training?

WY: Camp Carson, Colorado.

SHW: That's pretty far away.

WY: Well, it was a train ride.

SHW: Did they tell you where you were going to be doing basic or did they just stuff you on a train?

WY: Well, you went to Chaska, and then they took you down to Snelling. They told you where you were going. They put all the funeral directors and medics together, or they tried to do it. Camp Carson, that's where the 109th EVAC was started and shipped down there. That's where we had our training. Finally I ended up in the surgery unit at the hospital. We had forty nurses, thirty-nine doctors and officers, and then there were two hundred enlisted men. It was a mobile-type of a hospital. They gave us our basic there, and from the basic we had our winter maneuvers down in Tennessee, and then from Tennessee we went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Then we took off from there with the doctors and nurses and we went over to England to Southampton. That's where we stayed. We were billeted in people's homes there, and they were very happy to take us because they got subsidized from the government, you know. Then we set up the hospital in the botanic gardens there. Then we moved down to the coast for the invasion. I'll always remember the invasion because the planes started coming over our hospital around twelve at night. It was just one continuous stream of planes and bombers going over the channel. We received some of the first casualties of the war. Then we went over to Cherbourg on the coast of France, one of the landing and staging areas. From there we went completely to the whole war. Our unit went into the . . . with Patton, but then we were called up to Bastogne for the Battle of the Bulge because they needed another hospital up there. We were the first hospital to cross the Rhine. When the war ended up, we were six miles from the Russians in Plzeň, Czechoslovakia.

SHW: How close to the front were you if you were that far forward?

WY: Sometimes we were ahead of the artillery and sometimes behind them. I forget the number of casualties that we took care of. We had eight operating tables going at all times. We worked twelve-hour shifts. The hospital was set up like a cross, big ward tents. I don't know if you know what a ward tent is. There was one circulating nurse and one technician to a doctor. We had eight tables going at all times. Technicians like myself and that, we worked with a doctor the same as an assistant doctor today as they do in an operating room. An interesting thing about the whole operation is the fact that the doctors . . . I worked with a doctor from New Jersey, and he was

quite a guy. He'd say, "You know, Will, that's the first time I ever did that." But we had all these youngsters coming through, and they were in the prime of health really. But we lost very few people. This Dr. Dowdy and myself, we had amputations of the femur down to eighteen minutes. Then we cleaned up the table and they'd bring in another one.

SHW: How could you do that for twelve hours?

WY: Twelve hours, yes. And that kept on going and going. One week we would be on twelve hours at night, the next week all of a sudden we'd be on eighteen, then we'd switch over to days, and that would be eighteen hours.

SHW: Eighteen hours actually in surgery?

WY: In surgery. Then the ambulances came in. Interesting, I ran into one kid from Waconia here that I knew. He was on the ambulance, and I was sitting outside smoking a pipe I guess on a break, and he came up with the ambulance, and it was a kid I knew from home. I had really a deal going. I had good friends in the motor pool, and once in a while you'd get a day off, and they'd be making a liquor run or a food run or ration run, and they'd say, "Do you want to go along?" So I got around here pretty well, you know. I ran into my older brother in Paris, and also in Belgium. So it was rather interesting.

SHW: Was he infantry?

WY: He was in the infantry. One night in the operating room, the sergeant brought in a fellow, helmet in his hand, and he says, "Will, do you know this guy?" I looked at him, and I said, "Shorty!" Here's a kid from town. He was shot in the buttocks. The doctor and I cleaned him up, and then I took him to the mess hall and got him a sandwich. I got him a bed to sleep in and the next morning he had to . . . but he wasn't hurt seriously. One thing I'll always remember about the service, I had a young fellow—just a kid, eighteen years old—and I looked at his chart and it said, "Shakespeare." The kid was shot right through the elbow. I knew he was going to lose his arm. We were in gown and mask, and they didn't know whether you were a doctor or what you were. He said, "Doc, you're not going to take off my arm." I said, "No, we're not going to take off your arm," because we didn't do that immediately unless it was very severe. The anesthesiologist put him under and we cleaned his wound up. Of course we knew we were going to take it off, but we always had a good deal going because you knew that when he came back in the operating room to have his arm amputated that it certainly would be on somebody else's shift. By God, two days later they bring him in and he's on my table again. He says, "Doc, you told me you weren't going to take off my arm." And they had told him that it had to come off. But I was kidding and I said, "Now you tell me you're Shakespeare . . . I suppose you're going to tell me you are a relative of William Shakespeare." He said, "You're kidding me, but I tell you, I am. I'm a descendant of Shakespeare." And of course I kidded him. That's one thing. And another deal, I almost got court-martialed. Our old man, he took them regardless of what nationality they were. And you had people in the service . . . Doctors thought they had pull, and a lot of them tried to get out of going along overseas. They wanted to get into one of the big hospitals in the states and stay over and save their hide, you know. Anyway, we had some of the first casualties out of the concentration camps, and they were nothing but skin and bones. But towards the end the

Germans drafted all the kids, and here this twelve-year-old kid came in, and he was shot right through the palm of his hand—I can still see it—right through here, and this Jewish doctor took care of him, and I was on the next table. Anyway, his technician that was with him wasn't there for a moment or so and he said, "Will, give me a hemostat." I said I was busy. But it had gotten me so mad that he had severed this young German's hand and cut the rest of his tendons, that this kid . . . naturally the Jews hated the Germans, but for him to do that to a young kid.

SHW: And he did it on purpose.

WY: I almost got court-martialed.

SHW: What did you do? Did you say something?

WY: I told him I was busy. It was quite something at times. Those were just little things that happened. But the First Sergeant got me off. [shows pictures] Here's part of the crew. That's myself there. This guy, we always called him Slim Summerville; this guy is the one that narrated that film if you are interested in it. We've had reunions for many, many years. Here I am again out in the field. We'd set up in any field. We were a specialized group really. With the forty nurses, like I said, there was a nurse in every ward as far as that was concerned. And of course they were staffed twenty-four hours a day. We were kind of a privileged group because when we got done with a patient, they were sent to the ward. So we were done with them, you know, where the wards had them twenty-four hours a day until they were in a position to be transported back to a field hospital or something like that, that they could either do more surgery to them or send them back to the states. There were so few of us. The operating room was sixteen. With x-ray and lab, I think we had maybe about thirty or thirty-five or thirty-six people of enlisted men in those areas.

SHW: Did the Germans respect the Red Cross markings, or did you ever get shelled?

WY: In those days they did. You see, there were Red Cross emblems on the tents, you know. They respected that. But you know, to this day you take the average enlisted man that thinks nothing of the Red Cross. The Red Cross would come into our hospital and they'd give doughnuts, for instance, to the wounded people. As far as we were concerned, we had to pay either a nickel or a dime for a doughnut from the Red Cross. And these gals would come with the Red Cross, and they'd sooner be partying with the officers and so forth instead of . . . So you know, the enlisted men really didn't have much time for the Red Cross, which was unfortunate. Today the Red Cross is doing disaster work and this and that, and they're certainly a different breed than what they were in the service. Even when we were in Plzen, Czechoslovakia, like I said, we were just a few miles from the Russians. The Russians never were paid through the whole service because they taken care of with food and clothing and this and that. But then when they were once paid, it was always with our invasion money. It was not with their money. They were paid with our money. And interesting about this, this one that I called Slim Summerville I laugh about to this day.

SHW: Was he just a real thin guy?

WY: He played the black market, and really the black market. He would buy cigarettes from the rest of them, see. You got a carton of cigarettes a week from I presume the Red Cross. He would buy them up, and in those days they were \$6 a carton. Anyway, he came to me one time. My folks when I graduated . . . not my folks, but my family—my dad left our family many years before . . . for \$3.29 they had bought me a wristwatch when I graduated out of high school. And how they ever scraped the money together I don't know. But anyway, he said, "Will, I'll give you a thousand dollars for that watch."

SHW: A thousand?

WY: A thousand dollars. I said, "You're nuts!" "No, no," he said. I said, "How did you come . . ." He said, "I'm making a hundred off of them. Don't worry about me." Of course I knew I didn't have to worry about him. Anyway, so I said, "Well, what the heck." It was our invasion money that they were paying. About an hour later he came back from where the Russian guards were and he gave me a thousand dollars. We had a PX in the place, and I went and bought one for twenty dollars. It was a good investment I thought.

SHW: Not a bad stake for when you get out.

WY: Being in the operating room, we'd have to get supplies like bandages and things like that out of the stock tent and this and that. Then we'd steal the old man's champagne, for instance. You know the officers always had the best. When the old man couldn't figure it out, and of course Bert Woods—he was a Mormon from out in Utah . . . nice fellow . . . We had these pup tents that were . . . you've seen these half shelters, you've heard of them . . . He and I were billeted together. We worked at night, so when we woke up later in the afternoon or so, we had our bed rolls that we made—we didn't get regular sleeping bags like they have today; we made our own bed rolls, and then we had the champagne hidden in the bottom of the bed roll. So we'd pop a bottle, and sometimes I think we went kind of to work a little XXX.

SHW: I see; so you knew he was a lapsed Mormon.

WY: We had a fellow that was a bone cracker—a chiropractor, but we called him a bone cracker. He would go there and he'd help himself. Of course, we shared everything in his place. He put on all the plaster Paris bandages and things like that. There were a lot of things going on. But those were privileges we had. People in the wards never had that.

SHW: You came from a small town, Waconia. Even if you'd done a little mortuary work, was it hard to go into one of those field hospitals where there are just hundred and hundreds of young kids blown apart coming through? That must have been really tough.

WY: A field hospital was a different type of a hospital than what we had. We were on the front lines. The field hospital was back. All the other hospitals really were back, except they had first aid stations and first aid people that were right in the infantry and so forth. But you know, to this day, I think it was thirty years before I took a gun and went hunting with my dog, because after you've seen what a gun did, I couldn't go hunting. In fact, this movie that they've got, "[Saving] Private Ryan," I won't go see it. I can't, even sixty years later. When you see these kids in the

prime of their life, you might say—eighteen, twenty years old—shot all to hell. It wasn't for me. But being in mortuary work, at that time there were only so many mortuaries on the European Theater. Of course, you can imagine the amount of funeral directors that you get. If you're lucky—I wouldn't even say lucky—I think I was more lucky to go into somewhere where I could do something constructive instead of something that couldn't be helped, and ship somebody home to somebody. So that was the biggest thing. Our 109th was scheduled when the bomb was dropped in Japan, and being that our work was practically finished up because the European Theater was over before the Japanese Theater. So consequently, we were scheduled to go over there. Of course, when they dropped the bomb that did away with that. Otherwise I guess we would have gone over to Japan, as I understand it.

SHW: Did you know where your brothers were? Were you able to keep in touch with them?

WY: I knew that Joe, my oldest brother, was in the African campaign and then into Italy. John, my second oldest one, I ran into him at Bastogne and also in Paris, so I knew where he was. Then as far as Leon was concerned, that was the next one after me, he was in the navy, so you don't know where in the heck they were. Stan, the youngest one, was in the Coast Guard, and he made trips back and forth in convoys. So that's the extent of it.

SHW: How did censorship affect you being able to write to your mom and tell her what was going on?

WY: You couldn't tell her. It was all censored. They didn't have copying machines or anything. Just think of her once a week writing five letters.

SHW: That's a lot.

WY: She took over the store. I hired a guy I think the night before I went down to Chaska to leave for Fort Snelling. My mother had a fourth grade education. She was a shrewd woman—it wasn't always book knowledge with people in those days, and she came from a farm. When there was work to do, they didn't go to school. With this guy, she ran the funeral home and also the store. We had kids that came in from high school that would help out, but then in 1945, this guy was called into the service, so that left very few funeral directors around, you know. Anyway, two of my friends—one from Chaska and one from Jordan—took over and did the business for us. If one was busy then the other one would take over, besides running their own business. They were too old for the service, which was also quite a hardship, you might say, for them. We got enough gas. Farmers, in those days, if there was a death and the farmers always had a little extra gas for the tractors, so they'd give us extra gas. My mother would give any guy that came home on leave or this or that, she would give them a car and plenty of gas, so if they had places to go.

SHW: Was getting news from home, and getting mail from home a huge deal?

WY: Everybody waited for that. Then they would send packages, and you'd share your package. In England, when you saw these robots coming over, you never knew where they were going to land. That England took an awful kicking when we were there. They had foxholes right there that

you dug in yourself, and they were about this deep, and you slept in them some nights, you know. It was one of those things, you know.

SHW: That must have been terrifying. Did it seem real that you could die?

WY: Yes. If you were at the right place at the right time, it's like having an accident, hey . . . Fortunately; we had one guy that was in the motor pool that committed suicide. Otherwise, our group, and we had really a bunch of hillbillies in many ways. They didn't work in the war or didn't work in surgery or anything. They were the guys that would set up the tents and do the manual labor around and work in the kitchen and this and that. I always laughed at one of them. There are certain things that you . . . you laughed and you had fun. Tommy was one of them. He said to his buddy—I forget what his name was, "When I get home, I'm going to buy me a car." You know how they talk. The other one said, "Well, you know, Tommy, you don't even have a road to your house!" Tommy said, "I know, but when the crick bed dries up, I can drive it up the crick bed." The education in many ways was the Sears Roebuck catalog. That's true, you know. Talk about sex education—that's where they got fit, you might say. It was really something. There were just a lot of little laughs, you know. But that was the service. It's interesting . . . Comparing that with the Vietnam war, we actually thought—and I mean we talked about it in our own little circle—that we were fighting a war that was going to end all wars. I think we really thought that, because you know, our little world before was the United States and our little communities. How many people fifty or sixty years ago did the traveling to Europe. Euna and I have been over to Europe five or six times with her. Of course the one time I was forced to go. It was such a little world that we were in. I mean, we went to Washington, D.C., or went out to one of the parks. It was only the elite type of people that had . . . For people like us you had geography in grade school, and here's the park and here's Yellowstone; you read about it, but you never dreamed that some day I would go there. I think the biggest thing, when I think about it, when I got out of high school, was to think that, Am I going to have a job? What am I going to do? We didn't have the counselors in the schools like they've got today, which is bad or worse or no good at all, to be very frank with you. You see, we lived in a little world. It wasn't a big world, and all of a sudden all of these people were brought out somewhere. Some of those guys to this day . . . like Vietnam, that was a waste of time. At that time, some of them that were in Vietnam, their fathers were in World War II. We had some people that were in World War I, but we didn't talk to them about the war. They didn't say a heck of a lot. All I ever heard at the mortuary was, "He was gassed," and this and that. I belong to the Legion. I'm in my 50th year with the Legion. These are all the trophies and things. Anyway, it was a different world then.

SHW: It sounds very, very different. What was the hardest part about being in, and what was the best part?

WY: My hardest part was the fact that when you owned a business, you didn't really know if you'd have anything when you came back. There are a lot of people, like I mentioned before, that went into the service that didn't have a job, didn't have anything to look forward to. They went into the service for survival, you might say. Of course, they came in with the GI Bill, and you could go to school and this and that, but a lot of them didn't even have a high school education, you know. It's just like going to the university in the 1930s and '40s. What did you really have? You have General College, Engineering—there were about three or four things you could take.

Think of what is available now, even in Engineering. In those days there was the law school in St. Paul. There was none at the university.

SHW: William Mitchell was the only one?

WY: That's right. That was the only law school that I ever remember. People I know had to go there. But this has all branched out. It was so limited. You didn't have choices. And then to get into school . . . Today they beg you to go into college. Then, anybody who didn't have any money, there was no way of getting a nickel from anybody. There were no scholarships except if you had a lot of pull. You could go into medicine if you had a dad that was a doctor. Even in medicine there weren't all these anesthesiology departments or surgery. You were a plain old doctor who went into the community and worked your rump off all day and all night.

SHW: My husband's grandfather did that in Oklahoma. He did surgery, but he also did everything else.

WY: Just think about going to bed at night, and here's a midwife and a birth is coming, and he'd have to hitch up a team of horses. I knew doctors like that. I dealt with doctors like that. I dealt with doctors all my life. Some people bitched about them making money. The old-timers earned every nickel that they got.

SHW: My husband's grandfather used to say you can't really get rich practicing medicine in a small town.

WY: But you had prestige. Think of this years ago, who were the four most prominent and respected people in the community?

SHW: Doctor, lawyer, minister, I don't know who the fourth would be.

WY: First of all, your parents. They were the first. Then the doctor was there, the lawyer was there, the banker was there, and the minister was there. Now when you really think about it, do you respect them as much as you used to?

SHW: I think things have changed so much.

WY: Yes, they have changed. This is, again, coming right around what I was saying about everything when you say what was the worst or what was the best. Things have changed so much. In this world today . . . Am I taking too much of your time?

SHW: Oh, no, definitely not.

WY: In this day, look at the children. Some of the kids have four sets of grandparents. They don't know who their father is. Some of them don't know who their mother is. What is going to happen to these kids? Are they going to follow in the same footsteps because they've been brought up this way? There's no life for the kids. They're hyper, they're doing this and that, and the parents don't do that, and some of them don't have any discipline. It's a complete change.

SHW: Is there any way to try to explain what it was like so that a high school kid today could even come close to understanding it?

WY: If they don't come from a home, I don't know how they can. I wouldn't be a teacher today if I had to be a teacher.

SHW: But you feel like you're doing so much.

WY: You don't know my brother Stan, but Stan ran the home [No sound on tape; the rest of side 1 is blank.]

WY: You know XXX? Her husband is a teacher in Watertown.

SHW: Is she the one who is home schooling her four girls?

WY: Yes, she's schooling her own children.

SHW: They're lovely girls. I've met them a couple times.

WY: But today, you can't touch a kid. You can't do anything. You can't discipline them. They're not being disciplined at home. They're little angels at times . . .

SHW: . . . and little demons the rest.

WY: It's so surprising now. Take children . . . you see them when they're two years old, and then they finally get up to being a teenager. You'd be surprised on parents where they hold reigns on them and they can only do this and that and that. They'll grow up if they have the discipline at home. But if they don't have it . . . Teenagers today, parents have to understand them, I guess.

SHW: Let's get back to the war. How long were you in Europe after V-E Day? How did you end up getting back stateside?

WY: V-E Day was June 5. I left out of Plzen in November.

SHW: Did you feel that you were fairly received when you got home?

WY: Yes.

SHW: Did you just go right back to work for your family?

WY: Oh, sure, immediately.

SHW: In about ten seconds? Did you get a little bit of a break?

WY: If I remember this correctly, and it seems to me it's correct, I think I had a funeral call that night, and I went right out.

SHW: The day you came home?

WY: Yes, the evening. And I came out of Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, where they discharged us. I remember we were on a train, we'd come out of a camp on the East Coast somewhere. They put us on a train and we had to stop at another camp in Philadelphia. There were three or four of us. We were going to Camp McCoy. I think that camp, and from there they branched them out, if I remember this correctly. Anyway, we went to a hotel. I don't know the name of the hotel, but they had a dining room in the hotel. All of a sudden the dining room all filled up. Here there is a round table in the middle. They set us down there. We had a meal that, after a couple years of army food, it was pretty good.

SHW: Was army food as bad as they say?

WY: It must have been pretty good, because as we came through the line with our mess kits, the German people were so hungry that the stuff that we scraped into the garbage cans they put their plates or whatever they could muster, to catch what we were throwing in the garbage can. So it must have been good. We didn't think it was good. Some people even bought us a couple bottles of wine.

SHW: I interrupted your story about the restaurant. Was there anything else to it?

WY: These people that were in the restaurant bought us some wine. Another interesting thing, in Camp McCoy it was really funny. There was a guy from St. Paul—he was an Irishman—and he said he had tough luck on the boat coming back and he had no money. He wanted to go buy himself something, and wanted me to give him five dollars. They had this mustering out pay at that time. You got a few dollars to go back. Just like they do with inmates at a prison. They give them a few bucks. They gave us a few bucks too. So I gave him the five dollars. He'd pay me immediately when he got mustering out pay. Needless to say, he didn't look me up and I didn't get it. Then we had the mayor of Waconia, Ray Erhart—you know Mary Erhart; it would be her dad. He was a different guy than Mary. Anyway, he went up north a few years later. Here he ran into this guy, and they got to talking like you do at cabins or a resort, and they got together, "Where are you from?" "I'm from St. Paul." "Well, I'm from Waconia," Ray told him. "Oh," he said. "I've got a good friend at Waconia." Ray came back and was telling me about this good friend of mine. Here it was this guy—small world!

SHW: I'm surprised he was willing to fess up that he knew you after that.

WY: There was nothing he was ever going to do about it. But he remembered me.

SHW: That's a plus. Do you have any other funny stories you'd like to share?

WY: There are so many of them. One thing that always intrigued me more than anything else, as a person was wounded in service, the first aid people would make a tag for them. The first thing

they would write was, "I'm from Minnesota," or whatever state they were from. Instead of looking when they came into our operating room at what was really wrong with them, we'd see where they were from. You'd be surprised how close that they really come, and people they knew that you'd know. Of course, being with the funeral home so many years, you knew families and relatives from quite around, so I always got a big kick out of that. When we were sent up to Plzen, by the way, we ended up just a few miles from the Russians, outside of Plzen. But then we set up in a park in Plzen, and we started taking care of the civilians. At night the doctors didn't care to get up for an OB case, for instance. I bet you, I don't know how many kids this other guy and I brought into this world. Or if there were even appendectomies and things like that, the doctors didn't give a darn at that time. But we still get together. The group is getting less and less with the hospital reunions because we're all getting older.

SHW: A lot of the doctors must have quite a few years on you.

WY: They were pretty young. Our head surgeon, he was from down in Iowa, Captain Medford was his name, and he was a prince of a guy. He and Colonel Prazack, who was what we called the old man, they were buddies. So when Colonel Prazack got into the hospital, he got Medford in as chief surgeon. But he was maybe the oldest. Right now Medford doesn't come, or Prazack or any of the older doctors. This Hirschfield that I told you had taken care of this German, he comes to the meeting. I had my tonsils out in service. I tell you that was a deal, under those conditions, tonsils taken out. That doctor, about five years ago he didn't come. He had passed on. A lot of them, like you say, not only that they were old, but healthwise. Everybody isn't lucky enough to live into their eighties.

SHW: Minnesotans seem to live longer than everybody else.

WY: So there you go. That's about the extent of it. There will be some things I'll think about, but . . .

SHW: I just had one more question. What was the strangest part about coming back to civilian life? Was there anything that stood out as just really odd or difficult to get used to?

WY: You have heard, and I say this maybe off the record, you have heard of people coming out of service and they have nightmares and everything. That always kind of bothered me because there are certain incidences in the service, like in the operating room how close it was to lose a patient or this or that, and you kind of felt like, Hey, if I would have done this, we wouldn't have had to go through this or that. I always hoped that nothing like that would come back to haunt me later on. We never lost a patient on that table. But one time, after we got back, I think about three or four years back, I had a nightmare, and that was the only time I ever had anything come back, except when I'll turn on some TV and watch it in service—I'll actually turn it off. I don't want to see it. Or she'll turn it on, but I'll come in here into the other room. It's just things like that. But all in all, I felt that the best part that I felt when I came back was that we fought a war, and we were victorious. There was a time when things were pretty nip and tuck, that the United States and England were really going down. But we fought a war to end all wars, and it didn't turn out that way.

SHW: It would have been nice if it had.

WY: You never know. That's the way it goes.

SHW: Thank you very much for giving the interview. You mentioned some great stuff.

WY: Some of that I hope you'll read. I just want to show you this here. [shows picture] You can see here . . . Look at the mud in everything that we would be involved in.

SHW: How did you keep it clean?

WY: It was a matter of housekeeping, you know. Interesting about the 109th – Our 109th was closed, but being the record that we had, that there was another 109th established, and it just went of existence I think in '97, to carry over what we did. Once in a while during the winter months, we would be settling in to some school or something like that, like here [shows picture]. It was an academy, and we set up the hospital during the winter. Here's somebody that had salvaged a German uniform off of some German that we took care of. You can take this book along too if you want to. These were the officers here. Here was Dr. Felden. Here was Major Dowdy. He was a captain for a while. He was assistant chief of staff. This was Medford, and this was the old man.

SHW: He just doesn't look that old.

WY: At that time he might have been in his thirties. He's close to ninety now I'm sure. Some of these people were in the motor pool. And he were our nurses.

SHW: The nurses were all officers, right?

WY: Yes. They become second lieutenants immediately when they come into service. Miss Donovan—she's still living—she's ninety something. She was the chief of nurses. Here's the guy that saved my rump the time I was almost court-martialed. He was a First Sergeant. We were all young kids here.

SHW: Were you a private or a corporal?

WY: A technician. Here I am [shows picture].

SHW: You look young in that picture.

WY: Yes, that's the way she went. When I got out of the service I was twenty-eight. You can take this along too, if you want to.

SHW: I think we'd love to photocopy parts of it. Then I can bring it back to you.

WY: I'd appreciate that.

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SHW: All right, let me stop this then.

[end of interview]