

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
CHARLES WALTHER
Electrician's Mate, Coast Guard, World War II

2002

OH

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Charles Walther, (1924-2005). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User: 1 audio cassette (ca. 60 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master: 1 videorecording (ca. 60 min.); ½ inch, color.

Abstract:

Charles Walther, a Mineral Point, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as an electrician in the United States Coast Guard. He reminisces about basic training, earning leave, and practical jokes. He explains traveling to Manila and training people from the Philippines and Australia to use unspecified equipment. He relates an electrician's duties, as well as the perils of being aboard ship, the food, and a friendly rivalry with the Navy. The discharge process in 1946 is remembered in detail. After the service, Walther recalls stories about his family and meeting Bo Ryan.

Biographical Sketch:

Charles Walther (1924-2005) served with the Coast Guard during World War II. He traveled to Manila to train people from the Philippines and Australia to use unspecified equipment. He was discharged in 1946 and became an active member in his community.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002

Transcribed by Daniel Ehn, 2012

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Interview Transcript:

McIntosh: Talking with Charles Walther. And the date is 11 July, 2002. Where were you born sir?

Walther: I was born in Mineral Point, Wisconsin. I only lived there about five months. Then my family moved to Platteville, and I consider that home. I lived there when I went away to go into service.

McIntosh: What year were you born, '24?

Walther: '24.

McIntosh: Ah, you're a year younger than I am, I was born in '23. So you were still in high school when Pearl Harbor arrived?

Walther: Yes.

McIntosh: And did you make plans to get into service or were you just going to wait to be drafted?

Walther: I was a senior in high school. We had a National Guard in our town, and some of the fellows went already. They were seventeen and eighteen.

McIntosh: Oh, while they were still in high school?

Walther: Still in high school; we had some. They had signed up. Some of them had lied I think, probably, about their age. So, I knew I had to do something. I wanted to do my part.

McIntosh: Of course. I understand that; that's a natural reaction.

Walther: I had some friends that went in the Coast Guard. They had liked it so I kinda thought maybe I'd give that a try. I didn't know anything about the Coast Guard at the time.

McIntosh: And where did you sign up in the Coast Guard?

Walther: I signed up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I thought if I signed up there, kinda west of the Mississippi I would go out to the West Coast, probably

for boot camp. [both laugh] Instead, we went a little bit west from Minneapolis and then we loaded more people on, and we ended up in Curtis Bay, Maryland.

McIntosh: Is that where your basic training was?

Walther: Yes.

McIntosh: I'm not familiar with the Coast Guard training school.

Walther: Yeah, they have one there and then they had a couple out in California. I can't think of their names off hand. I came back, I was at a receiving station there at one time. Alameda. They had training in Alameda.

McIntosh: How long was that boot training?

Walther: It seemed like it was six or eight weeks. The only way you could get a liberty there, when you were in training was to box or participate in a track meet. And I was a long jumper and I took first place.

McIntosh: Very good.

Walther: So I dressed up for my outing, and I had lied a little about my size. Because the blouse that I had, I had to double it under my armpits otherwise it would have hung down to my knees.

McIntosh: Why didn't you have one your size?

Walther: I don't know, the guy ahead of me said he was a forty-two, so I was a forty-two. And then I get in to Baltimore and I was told, you know, to salute all officers, and you could tell by their gold. And I could see these guys were the doormen, you know, at a hotel, and I thought, "Am I supposed to salute them? I don't want to get into trouble." So that was my experience and of course I got my picture taken to send home to momma. And she was proud of that. And later on, I felt pretty silly. [laughs]

McIntosh: [Laughs] Oh well, we all did silly things in those days! And did you need any special training at the next move?

Walther: Well, the next move they took me into New York City and we went to a receiving station. Now I had always been told never volunteer for anything. But we arrived there in New York on a Friday, May 2nd. Go downtown and come back Monday morning by 8:00 o'clock, which I did. Then they asked for people that could type or had office experience, and I had always wanted to do that sort of thing so I volunteered. And I got a

job with the purchasing department for the Coast Guard where I kept track of inventory control, and ordering uniforms, and all that sort of thing.

McIntosh: Where?

Walther: In New York City.

McIntosh: Oh in New York?

Walther: In New York. And I could get an apartment, and eat my meals out. That's subsistence.

McIntosh: Oh yeah, that's high living.

Walther: That sure was. For a small town boy that was. I went to stage plays, you know.

McIntosh: You hit the big time right off the bat!

Walther: You bet. And after almost a year at that I decided I'd enjoy to live there. How could I go back to my buddies, you know? How could I?

McIntosh: [Laughs] Right.

Walther: So I wanted to get a transfer, and the only way I could get a transfer was in electricians. So they sent me to electrician's mate school.

McIntosh: And where was that?

Walther: That was in Groton, Connecticut.

McIntosh: I've heard of that. Okay, I see that.

Walther: Then I went from there—

McIntosh: Then you got an electrician's rating?

Walther: Rating, right. And soon after I got my, uh—

McIntosh: Third Class?

Walther: Third Class. And I was good on theory, but I wasn't worth a darn on—

McIntosh: [unintelligible]

Walther: On application, like soldering. We had one guy there, he could do all this stuff, but he couldn't do the theory. And he didn't get one right away, but I'm sure he must have, because he was really handy. Then they sent me down to New Orleans, and I got assigned there to I think it was an FS. Yeah.

McIntosh: In Alameda?

Walther: No, this was New Orleans.

McIntosh: New Orleans, right. The FS 399—

Walther: Yeah, okay. And—

McIntosh: What does FS stand for?

Walther: Freight and Supply.

McIntosh: Freight and Supply. That was a—

Walther: That was an Army—

McIntosh: A ship designation?

Walther: Yeah.

McIntosh: I'm not familiar with seeing a ship—

Walther: See, that was the Army.

McIntosh: Oh.

Walther: That was an Army ship really, but it was manned by Coast Guard. So it's a little confusing. So I got assigned to a ship that was being built in Decatur, Alabama. And they sent some of us down there about six weeks ahead of time to understand the workings of the ship. And then we took it up the Tennessee River, I guess it was, down the Ohio, down the Mississippi, to New Orleans. And in New Orleans, we went into dry dock because they had to make modifications.

McIntosh: How big was this craft?

Walther: It was about 185 feet, and it had a crew of about twenty-nine.

McIntosh: And it was really a supply ship for the Army?

Walther: Yeah, it was a supply ship. And so they decided that we're not gonna stay on that. So they put our whole crew out to Alameda where we got probably assigned to an LT. My understanding, that was "landing tug." It had a top speed of about five knots, took us about eighteen days to go from San Francisco to Honolulu. And sometimes our tow would be ahead of the ship. And you wake up in the morning, and you saw the island, and you looked at night, and when you saw it, it didn't look like it moved. [laughs] We had twenty-nine people, officers, it didn't matter what your rating was, right, for the most part we all got along. One guy got trained as a barber because he was with us a long time.

McIntosh: That would've been good.

Walther: Yeah, cut everybody's hair. One thing, going way back to when I joined in Minneapolis, and they sent us out West, as I had mentioned. We were told, "Don't tell your people where you are, no telephone calls." We went through all that. Some of us probably didn't obey. I obeyed. I mean, I was pretty scared. Because when I got to New Orleans they had their Navy, I forget what naval district that was. They would stand out there and this guy stole something from one guy, and he would get so many days of hard labor. It was pretty scary. I didn't want to screw up. [laughs] So now we went into Honolulu on our ship, and we took off from there. And the first island we hit was Ulithi. [Ulithi Atoll, Caroline Islands, Micronesia]

McIntosh: You were bringing supplies to Ulithi, was that the purpose?

Walther: We had a tow. Oh, see, now we are on a landing tug.

McIntosh: A landing tug?

Walther: It's an LT, that's an Army.

McIntosh: So, still with the Army?

Walther: Still. They called it the Army manning detail. We got assigned by the Coast Guard. And we were closed—

McIntosh: Not very glamorous duty.

Walther: No, no. But at least I thought I was doing something. And we had this tow and took it into Manila, finally ended up there. About that time the war was over. Then I spent time training Australians and Filipinos along with the rest of our crew. We turned ships over to them.

McIntosh: In the Philippines?

Walther: LT's and—

McIntosh: And this is at the end of the war?

Walther: At the end of the war. We stayed on and trained.

McIntosh: You never traveled in a convoy?

Walther: No, no. That would have been wasted.

McIntosh: I was gonna say, you weren't worth the torpedo, so they didn't—[both laugh]

Walther: But, at least I made a try. It kinda satisfied me.

McIntosh: Sure. Well, at least you got to see the ocean, and some islands and things.

Walther: Oh yeah.

McIntosh: Take your malaria pills?

Walther: No.

McIntosh: Never did?

Walther: No, not that I know of.

McIntosh: They didn't give you that one pill one day a week? Turn your skin yellow.

Walther: I don't remember.

McIntosh: You'd remember that.

Walther: Yeah. I remember going aboard a training ship at boot camp, and they asked me if I'd seen Charlie Noble. You know who Charlie Noble is?

McIntosh: No, I don't.

Walther: Well they had me going all over that ship.

McIntosh: Sounds like a gag—

Walther: Yeah. Charlie Noble was a smoke stack. I even knocked on the door of the skipper, "Sir, do you know where Charlie Noble is?" "Oh I just saw him go down in the engine room."

McIntosh: Everybody played the game!

Walther: Yep. I was probably about the youngest-looking kid in—

McIntosh: You were an easy target.

Walther: Yeah. I'm kinda jumping around here.

McIntosh: That's alright.

Walther: I like to tell my little stories.

McIntosh: Well sure, that's what I want. Tell me about life aboard this LT. Did you have enough room or was it crowded?

Walther: Oh, we really had enough room. It really was kind of a rough rider. Bounced.

McIntosh: Because it had a pretty flat bottom—

Walther: Bottom, yeah.

McIntosh: Well, 180 feet long wasn't—

Walther: Well, now the tug boat is 125 feet.

McIntosh: Oh, that's even less.

Walther: Yeah. We had the same sized crew. We had a skipper and an ensign for executive officer. Then they had a warrant officer, for the engine forces. The chief petty officer for—

McIntosh: On deck?

Walther: Well, yeah, they had a bosun's mate.

McIntosh: And you served as an electrician—

Walther: And I stood watch down in the engine room with the chief.

McIntosh: What was your main duties, Charles?

Walther: Main duties was taking down readings, pressure readings and stuff. And switching generators. One of the ships was a diesel, and the other one was a—

McIntosh: Steam?

Walther: Steam. And that was hot. About 160 degrees, we stood in—

McIntosh: Had to do any repair work on any of—?

Walther: Well, yeah. It's amazing I was able to keep us going. We had some power off. There was a typhoon in September, I think, of '95. [probably means 1945] And that knocked us out. We were offshore.

McIntosh: That toss you around?

Walther: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you think you were going to sink?

Walther: No, no I didn't. I was more scared on the way back. Our skipper, he was about the third skipper we had had. And he told us to abandon ship. It was rougher than heck out there when we abandoned ship.

McIntosh: He told you to abandon ship?

Walther: To abandon ship. Just as a test, as a trial. Believe it or not, we did. We probably should have complained or something.

McIntosh: You jumped overboard? Jesus Christ!

Walther: I didn't go over, but they had one boatload went, I think—

McIntosh: You're lucky you got them back!

Walther: Yeah, I'm pretty sure.

McIntosh: Wow!

Walther: He was very strange. Almost everyday he would do semaphore, and run us to tell him what the message was. Soon as you told him the message you got to go off duty. So he did a lot of strange things.

McIntosh: Boy, he was really bored.

Walther: Yep.

McIntosh: Oh my. Did you get off at any islands?

Walther: I got off on Guam. I think the whole ship did. And we picked up an ice cream mixer, and boy was that a treat. One of the fellows got off to get mail at Ulithi; I forget where Ulithi was. Which may—

McIntosh: Well, it's in the [unintelligible]—but I'm not really sure.

Walther: We had been in Hawaii, and originally it mentioned Ulithi, "The Isle of the Pacific." We thought we were going to see some dancing girls! No such luck. [both laugh]

McIntosh: Another story.

Walther: Yeah, that's another story. We got off at Corregidor and looked at some of the caves there.

McIntosh: Tunnels?

Walther: Pardon?

McIntosh: And the tunnels?

Walther: Tunnels, yeah. Saw some heads there with the gold teeth removed, you know, somebody's been through there and done that. I consider it a very worthwhile experience.

McIntosh: How long did you stay in the Philippines before you started back?

Walther: I think, we probably left the Philippines, in September of '95 [probably means 1945].

McIntosh: In '45?

Walther: '45. And we got home in June of '46. We did make some stops along the way. It wasn't so fast going. We ran into a tidal wave on April Fools' Day, 1946. The radiomen came down, and being April Fools' Day we thought he said, "There's gonna be a tidal wave as predicted." And we bounced around in that. And then we got into Honolulu, and they wanted us to take some supplies up to some island where a couple guys, they were Coast Guardsmen, that were on a Lorraine, it was some kind of installation, I'm not sure what it was. But they had like two or three guys on one of these islands, and to save them from going crazy they raced wagons and stuff. And they fly them back to Hawaii, I think, every six months.

McIntosh: Sure.

Walther: Something like that. And that was our last bit of duty. By that time the SPs [Shore Patrol] had picked our skipper up. He had been so crazy.

McIntosh: Yeah he should have been in the loony bin.

Walther: Yeah. Well, yeah. Apparently he had an uncontrollable disease, too. Or a—

McIntosh: Had a brain tumor or—

Walther: Caught when he was up for rating, and they found that he had a venereal disease.

McIntosh: Oh!

Walther: And he was supposed to turn himself in. Now, this is hearsay. There was a story that went and they didn't catch him until he landed.

McIntosh: So tell me, where did you find this dog?

Walther: One of the fellas picked it up. I don't know if he won it in a card game, or what.

McIntosh: Where?

Walther: In the Philippines. They claimed it was an Australian dog. And we brought it back to the States. And when I say, "we," one of the crew members did. And he had it hidden kind of in a peacoat. Now whether he ever got it into the States, I don't know.

McIntosh: Was it a nice dog?

Walther: Oh yeah.

McIntosh: Friendly?

Walther: I mean, it would just bark at Filipinos as they went by in boats. I don't know if it was a boat, you know, canoes, or something. He'd go crazy, or she would. We had a monkey too.

McIntosh: A monkey?

Walther: A monkey.

McIntosh: How'd you get that?

Walther: Well, one of the guys picked it up in the Philippines. And they sit on your shoulder, and—

McIntosh: A spider monkey, or one of those—

Walther: Yeah, and then they poop, you know, all over your—

McIntosh: Oh, wonderful.

Walther: Yeah. But that was limited to one guy handling that one.

McIntosh: The dog had the run of the place?

Walther: Yep. The dog did. So that's kinda the main—

McIntosh: So you had two animals?

Walther: Two animals.

McIntosh: Did they get along?

Walther: I don't—well, one of the guys tried to mate them. [laughs]

McIntosh: That's not gonna work.

Walther: No, no. I think they had the wrong idea there.

McIntosh: I don't think that would work.

Walther: No. It didn't, I know that. [both laugh]

McIntosh: Would they just set them your own food?

Walther: I don't recall.

McIntosh: How was the food aboard ship?

Walther: Pretty good. We had two good cooks, they were both from Texas. And the only thing bad was the eggs. We had eggs and you could have them sunny side up or anyway, but half of them that they opened up were rotten already.

McIntosh: Oh my!

Walther: Well they had been frozen, and then sat on the dock in Manila. So that was kinda bad, but no, I would say—

McIntosh: How about getting mail?

Walther: Oh, I don't recall how long it took. But I know my folks had sent me a package of cheese. And I caught up with that in Hawaii, and the paper was all oiled. It had melted.

McIntosh: That didn't work.

Walther: No, no.

McIntosh: The cookies that guys got ended up just being crumbles.

Walther: Crumbles, yeah. As I recall, the officers ate with enlisted men.

McIntosh: You all ate together?

Walther: Yep.

McIntosh: Sounds like you had a happy ship, then.

Walther: Yeah, it was pretty happy. The captain was—

McIntosh: The only problem—

Walther: Well, we had a good one. He was an old timer, he was in pre-war.

McIntosh: I see.

Walther: I guess there was one warrant officer who was an old timer, but most of the fellas were new.

McIntosh: Good.

Walther: Kids. We were lucky we got to these places. It was supposed to--

McIntosh: I suppose the only thing that was frustrating was the fact that the ship didn't move very fast. Must have pretty boring most of the time. Must have been a real problem for you.

Walther: Yeah, it was sixty days, as I recall, from the time we left San Francisco till we got into the Philippines.

McIntosh: And there was a stopover at Hawaii and a stopover at Guam.

Walther: No, actually Guam we got on the way back. On the way home. And that's where we got our ice cream and the skipper got a hold of a Jeep too. Which he loaded onboard.

McIntosh: Jesus, sounds like you didn't have much room up there. Did you strap it to the front deck?

Walther: Front deck, yeah.

McIntosh: You have a gun on that craft?

Walther: I know we did. I can't tell you what caliber.

McIntosh: Probably a three inch.

Walther: Because I remember down in Louisiana there were Army, and Navy, and Marines that took training. Anti-aircraft. I shot a gun a couple times, but I've never been much for guns.

McIntosh: So your duty as an electrician wasn't very complicated.

Walther: No.

McIntosh: Just monitoring all of the electrical equipment.

Walther: But if something went wrong, I would have to try to fix it.

McIntosh: I was gonna say, did you ever have to do that?

Walther: Well, we had a, he was a first class motor machinist mate who was very good. Our chief petty officer, he was no good for anything. First class took his job over, really. The chief, he had been in the fire department band in Boston, or something, and he came in with a high rating. He was older, 45, 50.

McIntosh: So you didn't have any beer? You couldn't get any beer at these places that you stopped?

Walther: We got some at Ulithi, apparently. Now, I'm not a beer drinker.

McIntosh: Oh, okay. Did you get a USO show? Ever see one of those?

Walther: Well, I saw them in New York City—

McIntosh: But not in the Philippines?

Walther: I don't recall any in the Philippines.

McIntosh: Or maybe in Guam?

Walther: No, we didn't. There wasn't anything. We were there just one afternoon.

McIntosh: Oh, I see. Didn't have much to do with the Navy—

Walther: No, we were called hooligans to Navy.

McIntosh: Oh really, by who?

Walther: Oh, by Navy. I had forgotten all about that. I was talking to a Navy guy, he says, "What outfit were you in?" and I said, "Coast Guard." "Oh, the hooligans?" [laughs]

McIntosh: I'd never heard that, I don't know where that came from.

Walther: Yeah, we took a lot of kidding from Navy boys.

McIntosh: Sure, well—

Walther: We were all able to take it, I think. And dish a little out once in awhile.

McIntosh: Yeah I don't think its very serious kidding; everybody's doing what they had to do, and wanted to go home. All right, that's done. Did the training that you got as an electrician serve you well when you got home?

Walther: No.

McIntosh: Never did anything with it—

Walther: No, I hire all of my electrical work. [both laugh] My son is very handy, though; I can replace light bulbs. And I can do some simple, very basic things. I had to switch generators, that was one of my jobs too.

McIntosh: Aboard ship?

Walther: Aboard ship.

McIntosh: What did that involve?

Walther: It's been so long I can't really—cutting down one and getting another one to take over. And I forget how—

McIntosh: Switching, that sort of thing?

Walther: And you had to be careful in switching that you didn't touch a hot line with something.

McIntosh: Or we wouldn't be talking?

Walther: No. We had that one chief I mentioned. He screwed up and did something one time.

McIntosh: Didn't kill him?

Walther: No, didn't kill him, darn it. [laughs]

McIntosh: Didn't care for him?

Walther: No, he was a B Ser. And the first class guy really made him tow his line. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** Because he—

McIntosh: He knew what he was doing.

Walther: He knew what he was doing. And the chief knew that—

McIntosh: That he knew that.

Walther: That he knew that.

McIntosh: So, what did you do with this dog when you came home? Somebody take it back to base?

Walther: He tried to, I don't know if he did or not. We came back on a troop ship, and they marched all of the women off first. We didn't know there were any women on this. But they let them get off before we got off.

McIntosh: Safer, right.

Walther: Right. And he disappeared, and I never saw him again.

McIntosh: Oh, the guy with the dog? They put him in his jacket—

Walther: He was going to become a Lutheran minister, I don't know—

McIntosh: And you never followed up—

Walther: Never followed up, no. He was from Iowa.

McIntosh: Have you kept track of any of the other guys?

Walther: Well, just this one fellow that's hit me for money a couple times.

McIntosh: That big tall, good-looking guy?

Walther: No, not him. This was a fellow, I think he was our radioman. He's the one that took the pictures, took orders for them, and I gave him maybe twenty-five bucks for the pictures, and never got them. And then he called me up about five years later, and wondered if he could borrow some money from me. He had been in business, I don't know what—

McIntosh: And you told him that, "When I see the pictures we can discuss it."

Walther: Well, no I didn't. I should have thought of that.

McIntosh: Sure. Right. [both laugh] Who else? Anybody you keep contact with?

Walther: No, not really. All my—

McIntosh: None of them are around Wisconsin?

Walther: I don't know of any.

McIntosh: Any reunions for your ship?

Walther: No. They were too small to.

McIntosh: Too small. Any Coast Guard reunions?

Walther: I haven't heard of any.

McIntosh: I'm sure there are.

Walther: Yeah. A lot of the guys were from Texas and California. There was one kid from New York State, and there was a kid from Ohio, and one from Iowa.

McIntosh: And you were the only one from Wisconsin?

Walther: On board that ship, yeah. I ran into some Wisconsin guys while I was in. One was at Curtis Bay, and he was a master-at-arms, I think, at the training center there.

McIntosh: So how did you get out of the Coast Guard? How'd you go about that? You went back to where?

Walther: I went back to St. Louis—

McIntosh: From San Francisco?

Walther: From San Francisco. That was the time the railroads were on strike. We were wanting to get home and the trains aren't running. Finally we got on, and they even hired some of the servicemen to wait on tables, and they paid them. Oh, I remember landing in San Francisco, it was on a Friday, and they came and told us, "Keep it full dress. Leggings, and all that." "Leggings, what are those?" "You gotta have that, the skippers have them, you know, at the training session."—

McIntosh: Training session?

Walther: Well on Saturday, he was going—

McIntosh: On the day you were supposed to get out of the Navy [Coast Guard]?

Walther: Near there. We told him to blow it out his—

McIntosh: I was gonna say, pass on that.

Walther: Yeah, we passed on that. So he said just get out of the camp, then. They didn't even want us in there because they were training new recruits, and we weren't dressed.

McIntosh: Thought you'd contaminate the new guys.

Walther: And so we got off at Salt Lake City, and we all went in there. And we T-shirts on, and blue jeans, and there were about two SPs [Shore Patrol] and they were—

McIntosh: You didn't have your blouse on?

Walther: No, I didn't have my blouse on. And the SPs tried to stop us; with a couple hundred sailors, two SPs aren't gonna control it. So we got what we wanted, coffee and—

McIntosh: And they didn't bother you then?

Walther: Nope.

McIntosh: That was good. So you got to St. Louis and then what?

Walther: They gave me a check. Twenty-seven dollars to get from St. Louis on the train to, I think it was East Dubuque, Illinois. My son copied something else, and maybe my daughter may have that. About my discharge.

McIntosh: That's alright. So you got to East St. Louis [Dubuque, Illinois] and then what? You got off?

Walther: I guess I had mom and pop pick me—

McIntosh: Mom and pop met you there?

Walther: Met me there, and gave me a hug and there I was.

McIntosh: Yeah. The hero has returned.

Walther: Yeah. Went down on Main Street that night, you know.

McIntosh: In Dubuque? Or St. Louis?

Walther: No, in Platteville. Now I'm home, see.

McIntosh: Oh, I see. They drove you up to Platteville.

Walther: Yes. So, went down and stood in front of the theater, it was about ready to get out. Looked for single girls, you know.

McIntosh: Right. Now that you've returned where are they?

Walther: Yeah, where are they! No girls. One was marching, carrying shoes, she was barefoot. I thought, "That's strange." Girls don't go barefoot on Main Street in Platteville.

McIntosh: What was that about?

Walther: Well, I guess it was hot and she was warming her feet up.

McIntosh: Oh. Well what about your high school girlfriend, you haven't mentioned her. Where is she?

Walther: I don't really have a high school.

McIntosh: You didn't?

Walther: I had a lot of friends, we—

McIntosh: Did any of those girls write to you?

Walther: Oh yeah. Couple of them wrote. They either got married or left the area by the time I got back. And I don't think there was any connection between their behavior and me.

McIntosh: So, you got out of the Coast Guard here and did you use your GI Bill?

Walther: Yeah, I used the GI Bill. I entered--well now it's called UW-Platteville. I had gone there for one semester before I went in service. And I got in back in June, so I listed in the fall of '45--no, not '45--

McIntosh: '46? Probably '46 then. It was after the war right?

Walther: Well, at any rate, I went one year there then. I didn't want to be a teacher, and that was the main thing there.

McIntosh: Yeah it was a teacher's college--

Walther: At that time. And so I went into Milwaukee and got into the business college there. That's what I always wanted; I was kinda sorry I didn't go to one of the state universities. And I got a bachelor's degree but it doesn't have the quality that--

McIntosh: Sure. What did your father do?

Walther: He was in the cheese business. He didn't own the buildings, but he had about five or six factories where they made cheese, and he furnished the cheese maker and the equipment. Farmers owned the building itself and they'd hire him to do that. And he did that until the war came, and since then it's all been--

McIntosh: So he had retired by the time you got home? He was no longer in the cheese business?

Walther: Right. He was in his forties when I was born, so he was quite a bit older--

McIntosh: Oh. So he was in retirement by the time you got old.

Walther: Yeah. He actually worked till he was eighty-three.

McIntosh: Oh my.

Walther: Yeah, he was a very active man. And he could chin himself; I can't do that now, I can't get my feet of the ground.

McIntosh: [Laughs] Son of a gun. Well, he was a laborer for a long time, so he had that upper body strength.

Walther: Oh yeah. [laughs]

McIntosh: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Walther: I'm an only child.

McIntosh: Like me. I am too.

Walther: Well, they figured they got the perfect one, and—

McIntosh: Why pursue it?

Walther: That's right. You never know what you might get! [both laugh]

McIntosh: So anyway, now you got a business degree.

Walther: Mm hmm. [affirmation]

McIntosh: And how'd you make that work?

Walther: Well I finally ended up going to a placement service. I had taken a test with the government. I had a good score and plus I got a government bonus for, uh, work with IRS. But I didn't know where I was going, I was afraid they'd send me up north and I'd be a bachelor all my life. You know, no girls up north.

McIntosh: They have girls up there though; they're pretty nice.

Walther: Oh yeah. [laughs] So I took a job with a glove company in Milwaukee, as inventory control. And I liked that, and when IBM came out with some of their computers I took a quick course with IBM on computers, and I got into programming.

McIntosh: Where was that school?

Walther: Right in Milwaukee.

McIntosh: Where in Milwaukee, on Wisconsin Avenue?

Walther: Yeah I think it was on Wisconsin Avenue.

McIntosh: That was an IBM-run school to learn their—

Walther: Systems, yeah.

McIntosh: Was that hard?

Walther: Wasn't for me. We had a fellow that had been in charge of the—

McIntosh: This was in 1946 or '47, or both?

Walther: Yes. '46 and '47. And he had been in charge of when they had the punch card system, and he was given first choice, but it just floored him. He couldn't handle it, he just couldn't get it, with the computer. Because he had done it this way so many years. So I stayed there until 1970.

McIntosh: At the glove company?

Walther: Mm hmm [affirmation]. The only reason I quit, we were going bankrupt. Ladies weren't wearing dress gloves, labor was too expensive. We did some sending out to the Philippines but the labor cost was so high we couldn't participate and I knew we were going under, and they said, "You better look for something else."

McIntosh: Right.

Walther: And I did. I went to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Wisconsin, and went into their systems department. Don't ask me about any claims that aren't paid. [laughs]

McIntosh: That was in Milwaukee too?

Walther: Yeah.

McIntosh: And how long did you work there?

Walther: I worked there until 1978.

McIntosh: It was a long time.

Walther: Yeah, I only worked nineteen years.

McIntosh: By this time you'd gotten married and started raising a family?

Walther: A family—

McIntosh: Marry a Milwaukee girl?

Walther: No, I married a girl who went to a girl's school at Milwaukee-Downer College. It's now a part of Lawrence University.

McIntosh: Yes, I know Downer. I married a girl who went to Downer College.

Walther: What year did she get out?

McIntosh: Well, she didn't finish there, she started there then she finished in Wisconsin.

Walther: Oh.

McIntosh: Well, she's our age.

Walther: But she might know of—my wife is dead, though.

McIntosh: Yeah, so is mine.

Walther: Yeah. Because I knew a lot, I hung out at Downer.

McIntosh: Oh, you did?

Walther: Yeah, I had a new '50s Studebaker, and—

McIntosh: Amen!

Walther: I had wheels—

McIntosh: You were hot stuff.

Walther: And I got in with a dollar. I went to their dances and all that stuff. My wife had a Downer jacket. Hers was red, it happened to be. And that signified what year it was. So she got out probably in 1952. She worked in the Menomonee Falls school system for many, many years.

McIntosh: Menomonee?

Walther: In Menomonee Falls, yeah.

McIntosh: And how many children did you have?

Walther: I had three. A boy and two girls.

McIntosh: A boy and two girls. One of these girls here.

Walther: Here, yeah. The other girl is a granddaughter, she just graduated—

McIntosh: I know the other girl is a granddaughter, that's how I found you.

Walther: Yeah.

McIntosh: Is that her daughter?

Walther: Yes. That's—

McIntosh: That's mother-daughter.

Walther: That's mother-daughter, yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. I didn't want to be stupid about it.

Walther: They both have red hair.

McIntosh: I know, that granddaughter is absolutely charming.

Walther: Yeah, she's a smart little girl. [both laugh] She had 3.86—

McIntosh: That's scary.

Walther: She's good on the computer, anything. She's got a lot of confidence.

McIntosh: And she's got a lot of guts, and she's an athlete too.

Walther: Yeah. She plays soccer.

McIntosh: What's she gonna become?

Walther: She wants to teach history.

McIntosh: History? Yeah, I'd try to talk her out of that. [laughs] I'd say, "You're not gonna make any money teaching history."

Walther: No. She wants to go for her doctorate.

McIntosh: As a lot of history majors end up going.

Walther: Yeah, you know, that's—

McIntosh: Go to law school, then you can earn enough money to live like you want to live.

Walther: Yeah. That's, I think, pretty good advice.

McIntosh: Right. Going to law school is a lot like going to medical school. There's a lot of options once you get past the school part. There's a million things you can do, other than just the standard stuff.

Walther: Yeah, that's right. She told me she had met you, and you were going to talk to me. "Would you do it, Grandpa?" "Oh, sure." As a rule, I'm not much of a talker, but—

McIntosh: You did well today.

Walther: I get wound up. I don't often talk about World War Two.

McIntosh: Well, I know. I have methods to keep you going a bit. Practicing medicine for 35 years, I know how to get people talking.

Walther: Oh, right. [both laugh] Yeah, right now I've got balancing problems—

McIntosh: Yes, I noticed that when you came in. Most people our age do.

Walther: They gave me a cane. Now I try to use it, but it's more practical for me not to use it because I can walk, but I know what the doctor wants me to do.

McIntosh: Well, what he doesn't want you to do is to fall over, and then somebody will say, "Well why didn't you give him a cane?" And then he'll feel responsible.

Walther: Right.

McIntosh: Now it's the doctor's responsibility even though he doesn't know if it's gonna help or hurt.

Walther: Yeah. But I mean I can step out there and walk pretty good. But I should look down when there's a change in height on the floor.

McIntosh: You don't have any tremor in your hands?

Walther: Sometimes—

McIntosh: And that's not the name, but nothing like a tremor or a Parkinson's is it?

Walther: Oh, sometimes—

McIntosh: Can you hold your hand like this? No.

Walther: No.

McIntosh: No. You don't have the Parkinson's look about you.

Walther: I asked the doctor if I had Alzheimer's, and he said, "You wouldn't be asking me if you had it." [laughs] I get so frustrated though when I can't remember things.

McIntosh: Yeah, but all old timers are the same.

Walther: My glasses could be sitting here, and I'd come up and, "Where are my glasses? Have you seen my glasses?" "Grandpa, they are right over there." [laughs]

McIntosh: Yeah, that's always a problem. But that's natural. That's why when people ask me about Alzheimer's, I said, "Well, so what, leave me alone."

Walther: Yeah.

McIntosh: You got to pick something, you know. Did you join any veterans' organizations?

Walther: I joined all three of them. But I only lasted until 1945, probably.

McIntosh: I don't think they offer much.

Walther: No. And I belong to the Cudworth Post in Milwaukee.

McIntosh: What's that?

Walther: That was the legion post.

McIntosh: Oh, I see.

Walther: And that was a fine one. You could take your family out for dinner, and they had dancing on Saturdays and Fridays.

McIntosh: Hey!

Walther: But we couldn't afford a babysitter when we moved out here. When we moved out here, we were in Milwaukee, we had in the apartment we had people that would sit. Here we had these kids we had to drive in and just couldn't afford it, and so it got away. And the other AMVETs and VFW didn't—if you wanted beer—I'm not a beer drinker, so—

McIntosh: You never were.

Walther: Never was. No.

McIntosh: So when you retired from Milwaukee, is that right, you left the glove factory, you just left that and then went where?

Walther: I went to Blue Cross.

McIntosh: Blue Cross, right.

Walther: And I worked there until I retired.

McIntosh: Seventeen years, right.

Walther: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. Then when you retired from that, you went back home, to Platteville?

Walther: No, no. I'd spend a lot of time down there. They had a good basketball team. National Champions three years in the '90s.

McIntosh: Right, now you've got the coach up here.

Walther: Right. I followed with them down to San Diego, San Antonio, over on the East Coast.

McIntosh: What do you mean you followed them?

Walther: When the basketball team played.

McIntosh: Oh, you went with them?

Walther: Yeah.

McIntosh: You mean you traveled?

Walther: Traveled. I was—

McIntosh: What were you, a mascot?

Walther: No, a booster.

McIntosh: A booster. [laughs]

Walther: We had a lot of boosters. Down in Platteville that's about all there was to do. Go to basketball, all elderly people there. It was exciting for them.

McIntosh: Sure. A group of what, thirty?

Walther: Oh, there'd probably be seventy-five—

McIntosh: Really?

Walther: And we'd have them all at our game. We'd have more if they played Superior; at Superior they made it, you know. That was the big thing.

McIntosh: Well then you and Bo Ryan should be old friends.

Walther: Yeah, we have speaking acquaintance. He's a real nice fella.

McIntosh: He's charming. I met him once at a party, when he was coaching here with Yoder. And I spent an evening chatting with him. I thought he was awfully nice.

Walther: Yeah. Well, we'd go on these trips, and he'd spend a lot of time with the team, but he also gave time to the fans.

McIntosh: The bleachers, sure. Yeah, he's an awfully nice fellow.

Walther: My son never was interested in sports really. I took him to a game and he said, you know, "Dad, let's go again." He likes Bo too.

McIntosh: Where does he live?

Walther: He lives in the next suburb over from Madison—

McIntosh: Middleton?

Walther: Middleton.

McIntosh: What does he do?

Walther: He's a policeman in Middleton. Been a policeman twenty-six years. He was just picked by the--not Rotary--one of those organizations for policeman of the year.

McIntosh: That's not Katie's father though?

Walther: No.

McIntosh: Oh. Where do they live?

Walther: They live in Oshkosh.

McIntosh: Oshkosh. That's right, I knew that. I knew that. My memory fails too.

Walther: Yeah. No, my son in the last two years he's revived four people whose heart had stopped so they gave him that honor. He fluffs it off but dad is proud of him.

McIntosh: Sure. So one daughter lives in Oshkosh, and one—

Walther: And another daughter in San Francisco. And the daughter from Oshkosh and her husband have a wedding down in southern Missouri Saturday. Then they are taking off in the car for San Francisco to pick up two of my grandchildren there and bring them back. Their mother needs her rest. And so they are in for a long trip. We have some gifts that have never gone out to her because she didn't have room, or—

McIntosh: And Katie's gonna get married.

Walther: Yeah, in another two years though.

McIntosh: That's what she said. I laugh at her when she talks about it. Said, "My experience about long engagements always makes me laugh, because I've never seen one last."

Walther: She has a nice boyfriend.

McIntosh: That's what she says. She assured me that she's gonna be different than most.

Walther: Yeah, he's a very bright young man.

McIntosh: God, she's bright enough for both of them.

Walther: He's even brighter. He's—

McIntosh: Well he should be bright enough to take care of her and stay with her because she's dynamite.

Walther: He's, I forget, it's got to do with computers. He and his buddy won a prize, like \$7,500 dollars for an engineering show.

McIntosh: In Texas?

Walther: No, here. Two years ago, I think it was. He's a whiz, I guess, on computers.

McIntosh: Well, sounds like great kids.

Walther: Yeah. I'm still worrying about them.

McIntosh: Sure. I worry about my grandchildren. I got two great-grandchildren, and I worry about them. They're too far away.

Walther: These two in California really don't know their cousins that well. Of course Katie is a cousin to one is three years old and another seven, another eight.

McIntosh: Okay, I'm running out of things to ask you. You say you haven't gone to any reunions at all, of any kind.

Walther: No. No, I think we're—

McIntosh: Doesn't the Coast Guard send you things?

Walther: No, they don't.

McIntosh: I'm surprised they lost contact with you.

Walther: Yeah. My son copied something, I'm sure a lot of it is on the discharge. But I noticed I had an additional service medal or two, I don't know where he got that; I was surprised.

McIntosh: Well it's too bad you didn't keep contact with some of those guys you were enjoying so much aboard that ship. I have to have you sign this thing here.

Walther: Could we get a copy of that sometime?

McIntosh: This? Oh, I'll mail you one.

Walther: Oh. Good.

McIntosh: I take this home, and put on a regular VCR, then I make a copy for you.

Walther: Fine, thank you.

McIntosh: [Unintelligible] This gives us approval to use any material that you've just given us in the publication of whatever. Right in there, just write in that space right there, if you can sign that please.

[End of Interview]