

**JF:** Today is October 2, 1998. The following interview is with Charles H. Bell, former chairman and president of General Mills, Inc. The interview was recorded in the Governor's Room of the Minneapolis Club in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The principal interviewer is James P. Shannon, former head of the General Mills Foundation, the Minneapolis Foundation, and of the National Council on Foundations. Also present at the interview were Nina Archabal, director of the Minnesota Historical Society, David Hartwell, head of Bellcomb Technologies Incorporated and the Belwin Foundation (and grandson of Charles Bell), David S. Wiggins, program manager at the Society's St. Anthony Falls Historic Site, and James E. Fogerty, head of the Society's Acquisitions & Curatorial Department. Fogerty recorded the interview.

**JS:** I was wondering about the correlative advantages of the radio station. I'm thinking this is the time of Sam Gale as a sales representative for General Mills.

**CB:** Advertising.

**JS:** There had been no advertising on radio before that, and I can remember--I was actually singing a jingle to myself in the car coming down from home this morning. I think it was the first radio commercial that I can remember, though maybe not the first one I've heard. We had one of these Philco radio sets that was called the cathedral type, it looks like a stained-glass window or a gothic arch. The jingle was, "Won't you try Wheaties, the best breakfast food in the land. Won't you try Wheaties, Skippy never tires of them and neither will you, so just try Wheaties." That was new territory in sales, in advertising. I thought we'd use our breakfast time here to chat a little bit about some of these things that come to your mind.

**CB:** I don't recall the years when that jingle started. Wheaties went on the market in 1924, I believe. It was one of Washburn Crosby's first early attempts, and didn't get anyplace at all. If I remember correctly, at the first board meeting of General Mills, in August of '28, the directors voted to drop Wheaties.

**JS:** My goodness. That's a revelation.

**CB:** And Walter Barry, who was in charge of merchandising, and Sam Gale who was in charge of advertising, paid absolutely no attention to the board of directors. They planned a fall campaign and they broke it, I think, in October. Might have been November or somewhere in the fall. And it took off. The chances are probably the jingle you remember was the beginning of that marketing program.

**JS:** But in a sense, Charlie, they had to make a market for dry cereal, didn't they? They had to invent one or discover one.

**CB:** Oh, no, there was a market. Kellogg's had--

**JS:** Cornflakes.

**CB:** Yes, they had cornflakes and had it since about 1915. There was a big market for ready-to-eat cereals. I think it was one of their principal brands. They were in Europe.

**JS:** Yes, they got in early.

**CB:** Yes, they did.

**JS:** Was Wheaties the result of an R&D program, or was it an accident, or was it a happy discovery that you could do something with wheat besides mill it?

**CB:** That's way before my time, Jim. In 1924, you see, I was still in prep school.

**JS:** Yes. You weren't around then. Maybe it would be interesting to talk a little bit about the decision of James Ford Bell and the board to create the General Mills, out of all of the millers around the country who were beginning to compete with one another in a mature market.

**CB:** Jim, you're wonderful.

I can't tell you exactly when it started, what year, but Father [James Ford Bell] had been convinced back in the early and mid-twenties, that Washburn Crosby Company could not continue to exist as a local entity, drawing on just the wheat supply of the Dakotas and Nebraska and Wyoming and Montana. In case of a drought, they were left high and dry. His partners in Washburn Crosby were all old-timers--you know, the Bovey family, the Atkinson family, the Crosby family, and a whole bunch of Boveys--the Will Boveys, the Charlie Boveys, the McKnights, John Crosby, Franklin Crosby--and they had all risked a lot over the years. They'd mortgaged their insurance policies and their houses and so forth to keep the thing going in bad times and so forth. They just weren't willing to undertake a national company so that you could tap all the wheat entities of the Southeast and Texas and Oklahoma and all the way out on the West Coast and Northwest.

So Father said, "Well, the only answer to that is, we've got to sell the company," and they finally agreed. He made a sale sometime in the winter of early in 1928, might have been late '27. He sold the Washburn Crosby Company to Standard Milling, through a New York banker. I can't tell you exactly who the bank was.

**JS:** Where was Standard headquartered, Charlie?

**CB:** I don't know, but they were represented in New York by a New York bank. The sale was for forty-four million bucks, which was a hell of a lot of money in those days, and everybody was excited as hell and thought everything was just wonderful. All the

families were delighted; it was more money than they ever conceived they'd get. Father was sitting in his room at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York on 46th and Madison, had been talking with the lawyers, and the contract had been drawn and all the I's had been dotted and the T's crossed. They were to meet Friday at 11:30 at his suite at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Nobody showed up. So he finally, about twelve o'clock--he waited about half an hour--he finally called the bank. "Oh," they said, "Mr. Bell, the board of Standard Milling Company met at midnight last night, and withdrew the offer."

**JS:** Goodness. What an announcement. My heavens.

**CB:** So, of course, the first thing he had to do was to telegraph all of his partners back here and disenchant them. He sat there the whole weekend and started figuring out what he could do. He called the First National Bank of New York, asked for an appointment with Mr. George Baker, whom he'd never known, never met. He got an appointment, went down to see him on Monday, and told him what had happened and what he thought should be done. And Mr. Baker looked at him and he said, "Young man, how much money would it take to do this, to create a national company?" Father said, "Fifty million dollars, to be comfortable." He said, "That's what I can give you."

So anyway, fifty million dollars was the best figure that Father could come up with, and Mr. Baker looked at him and he said, "Young man, if you can come back to me in ninety days and prove to me that you can put a national company together, you've got your fifty million dollars."

**JS:** So he had a ninety-day window.

**CB:** Ninety-day window with no board of directors approval, no committee approvals, nothing.

**JS:** All he was doing was saving the company.

**CB:** And so that's what happened, and that's how General Mills got formed, on--I think it was the twenty-second of June, I believe.

**JS:** And this would be '28.

**CB:** 1928.

**JS:** So that they had the pieces in place before the stock market crash in '29.

**CB:** Oh, yes, indeed. Oh, yes, indeed. Because Father was smart enough to keep assets in cash. I was on the ocean with him, on the way to Europe, with both Mother and Father. I was getting married in January 1930, and they were taking me on a trip that I'd never

been on. The stock market crashed on October 24th, I think it was. And Father could have cared less. He had absolutely everything except General Mills stock in cash.

**JS:** My goodness.

**CB:** All through July and August of that summer, he tried to persuade all of his friends to do the same thing, and they paid no attention to him.

**JS:** That's fascinating.

**CB:** So that is the best recollection I have of the story of General Mills' formation.

**JS:** The thing that's coming up on my screen is a story about your father personally traveling around the country to the major millers. Maybe this is the ninety-day window in which he--I think of Sperry in California.

**CB:** Yes, Sperry.

**JS:** And similar entities, maybe, in Buffalo, New York.

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** In St. Louis. I don't know about St. Louis, but my memory of reading somewhere is clear that he put together that consortium that the banker wanted in ninety days by going to the millers who were in similar position to his position.

**CB:** Oh, I'm sure. Father was president of Washburn Crosby Company, and I'm sure nobody else did it except him.

**JS:** Well, that's a remarkable story of his prescience in thinking that something was going to happen with the stock market, and also in knowing that he had to put together this coalition of millers.

**CB:** Sperry, of course, was one of the big entities out of the whole West Coast.

**JS:** The milling for General Mills is still called the Sperry Division, I think.

**CB:** I don't know whether it is or not.

**JS:** In the parlance of the company. In the folklore, they talk about Sperry and that's a name that survives from that merger.

**CB:** Well, there were mills in Vallejo and there was a mill in Los Angeles and Tacoma, Spokane, and in Ogden, Utah. I think that's about it.

**JS:** I see. It's a new insight for me to listen to you now and talk about a motivating feature in your father's mind for creating the General Mills, was the fear that their source of supply of grain in a dry year would be threatened.

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** I had always thought from the opposite angle about the market, that the market was mature and that they had to get bigger or they would have to get smaller. Maybe it was a combination of those things.

**CB:** There may have been some combination, but it was pretty largely that he didn't think they could exist just relying on one wheat market.

**JS:** Somewhere in my reading in the last year I came across a statement that by the end of the decade by the 1850s, the largest volume of wheat being shipped by water from any port in this country was shipped from the port of Red Wing, Minnesota, which was an indication of the volume of wheat that was available here early on.

**DW:** In the 1850s.

**CB:** In the decade of the 1850s, just before the Civil War, the largest volume of wheat shipped from any American port, and that means San Francisco or New York.

**CB:** In 1850?

**JS:** In late 1850s, just before the Civil War. See, the railroads were just beginning to appear and they eventually became the major carriers of grain on the ground, but at that time the farmers all wanted to be near the water because that was the mode of transportation.

**CB:** I don't know anything about it. I suppose, Jim, that the change in agricultural practices had something to do with Father's concern. Wheat was probably the only crop grown all through this whole Western region, and as corn and other things began to come up, the supply of wheat was beginning to shrink, out of this particular market.

**JS:** Sure. That would make sense.

**CB:** Probably one of his major concerns.

**JS:** That would be a factor, yes. By the time of the 1920s, Jim Hill's prediction had come true. He was warning the farmers early on, early in this century, that they were jeopardizing their economic future by only cropping one thing, wheat, and he used to

preach. He'd have a presentation at the State Fair to tell them that they should rotate their crops and have different kinds of crops.

**CB:** I'm sure that was a major consideration of the need to go nationally.

**DW:** Canadian wheat was becoming increasingly important at this time, too, I think, wasn't it, the Canadian wheat from Saskatchewan?

**CB:** Oh, yes.

**JS:** Yes, I'm sure of that.

**DW:** Those fields were a little fresher.

**JS:** I was going to ask you a question, too, about the invention of Betty Crocker. Was that Sam Gale's handiwork?

**CB:** No. Betty Crocker originated, if my memory serves me correctly, in I think about-- you can go back and check the records, but my guess is it was about 1919. They ran a two-inch column in *The Saturday Evening Post* offering a recipe to women. They got something like 10,000 responses.

**JS:** My goodness.

**CB:** They had no nobody to respond, and they got talking about, you know, maybe it ought to be a woman. God, there was no woman in the company. [Laughter] Where do we find a woman? And then they--I don't know how accurate this is, but my recollection is, in the grain or auditing department there was a fellow named Crocker.

**JS:** An employee?

**CB:** Yes. And they were kicking around all kinds of first names. Will Crocker. He wasn't a major executive, as far as I know. They were kicking on around, and somebody came up, "Let's use Crocker's name." Well, what goes with Crocker? They finally settled on Betty Crocker. They said, "Oh, no, that's no good," and threw it in the waste basket. And the story is, Father dug it out of the waste basket and said, "Jeez, you know, there's a pretty good alliteration to this thing. Betty Crocker. It flows, it sounds pretty good." So they didn't have a Betty Crocker; they just sent out the recipe and signed it "Betty Crocker." [Laughter] When they got a gal in to represent Betty Crocker, I don't know.

**JS:** That's fascinating.

**CB:** That's essentially the story.

**JS:** That's become part of the institution.

**CB:** Very haphazard.

**JS:** But very successful.

**CB:** Yes. Of course, they always had trouble--whoever was the director on the products thing always wanted to latch on and be Betty Crocker. Sam Gale was absolutely determined that no one person was ever going to become Betty Crocker. She could represent Betty Crocker, but she couldn't become Betty Crocker.

**JS:** There was no single person.

**CB:** There was no single person.

**JS:** But there was an image, a portrait of Betty Crocker that was repainted about every decade.

**CB:** Oh, yes.

**JS:** And they've just redone that a couple of years ago.

**CB:** Yes, I think a year and a half ago or something like that.

**JS:** Yes.

**CB:** We went through two or three of them back in the thirties.

**JS:** Mercedes Bates was Betty Crocker.

**CB:** She was as close. She wanted to be Betty Crocker, and was tough. She was hard to handle. She was a tough gal.

**JS:** Yes. Her successor is Marsha Copeland. Marsha Copeland isn't quite that aggressive in maintaining the personal identity with Betty Crocker. She is able to receive all mail addressed to Betty Crocker. It's been a great success.

Charlie, let's talk a little bit about your going to work for the company and your early years, your different positions and your recollections of that, about yourself and about the company at that time as it was growing. When did you start to work for the company?

**CB:** I reported--I'm trying to think of that general manager's name.

**JS:** It wasn't Spike Kennedy. That was later.

**CB:** No. Actually, I started April 1, 1930, at the mill here. I was a sweeper. No, that's not right. I wish I could think of the guy's name. Anyway, he was the manager of the whole property and he said, "Well, just wander around, get yourself familiar." And Art Hyde had a small office over in the C Mill, about the third or fourth floor, and he took me under his wing and he laid out a program for me, very informal. We changed clothes up there and we chatted about this aspect of it, and I finally got a job after about three months, I think three months of just wandering around, doing nothing. The guy didn't want me. He wanted to get rid of me. He told everybody I was to learn nothing. Most of the head millers and so forth were pretty decent guys and they had a lot of respect for Art, so when Art said, "Take Charlie under your wing for a few days and teach him this and that," I got a pretty good indoctrination.

Then I was a sweeper and oiler. I can't tell you for how long. And took on various jobs in the F Mill, some of the minor milling jobs.

**JS:** Where was the F Mill, Charlie, relative to the A Mill?

**CB:** The F Mill was a small mill absolutely adjacent to the C Mill west. It probably wasn't any wider than this room, maybe three times the length. It was a relatively small, specialized mill.

**JS:** What does it mean to say "specialized"?

**CB:** I don't remember correctly, but it seemed to me there were baking companies that wanted a special kind of flour, Jim.

**JS:** Milled to their needs?

**CB:** It was pretty much used to do specialty orders, I think. Anyway, I was free enough most of the time that I could get pretty well acquainted with a painter, and the tin millers and all the various steam engine people. Henry Crosby was somehow or other in charge of the internal power. I met somebody in products control. But I was able to touch every aspect of that whole milling operation through the A mills, where we made durham, to the big C Mill and the F Mill, the utility building, and packaging.

**JS:** So this was the technical side of the company, how it got its work done, how to mill, how to package, all that sort of thing.

**CB:** Absolutely. And I worked under George Cormack, who was vice president in charge of manufacturing. Art Hyde was his special assistant. I traveled with him a great deal,

probably starting a little bit in the late twenties and all through '31. Occasionally I'd travel all over the United States with George Cormack.

**JS:** To other milling facilities?

**CB:** Other milling facilities.

**JS:** How long did that span last?

**CB:** I was associated with the mill and with George Cormack until December '32.

**JS:** So, maybe three years. '30, '31, '32.

**CB:** Two and a half years.

**CB:** I spent a few months somewhere in that two and a half years in the drawing room, in that little building that's just off of--it was only a two- or three-story building at the time. I think the offices were underneath it on the ground floor. The drafting floor was up on the second floor. I spent, oh, maybe three months learning the drafting of the flow of mills and so forth.

**JS:** Was William Hood Dunwoody on the scene?

**CB:** As a name.

**JS:** He was long before your time. He was in Washburn's time, wasn't he?

**CB:** Yes, back in Washburn Milling Company. Back in 1888.

**JS:** Starting in about 1860, I think.

**CB:** I had some wonderful times with Art and George Cormack. They had a small mill at Waco.

**JS:** Texas.

**CB:** Texas. And Art and I were in one room and George Cormack was in another, and the bathrooms had ventilation up in the ceiling between us, so you could hear what was going on in both rooms. Well, this babe came knocking on Art and my door one day, and she pushed herself in, and she was hell bent to have fun with us, and we finally picked her up, one on either side, and shoved her out the door, and we said, "Now, listen. If you really want some fun, Mr. Cormack is just looking for somebody." [Laughter]

**JS:** I can see how people had fun on the job. [Laughter]

**CB:** We jumped up and we stood up on the bathtub, on the sink, so we could get up and hear George Cormack fighting this woman off. He was a dour old Scotchman, dear person, you know, and he was in his sixties or so. Oh, dear.

**JS:** He learned the milling process in Scotland and then came here?

**CB:** Yes. He was a genius.

**JS:** But we imported millers.

**CB:** Well, I don't know when he came to Washburn Crosby Company. He'd been with them a long time. He was not an import for General Mills; he was a carryover from the Washburn Crosby days.

**JS:** Tell us about the next stages in your career at General Mills. A lot of interesting technical stuff comes to the surface here as you talk about the company growing and your moving up the ladder.

**CB:** Well, I jumped from December of '32 till about April 1, 1933. There were four months, five months. Four months when I was in Europe. I never knew how it happened. I don't know how Mother inveigled Father into permitting it.

**JS:** "It" being what? A year in Europe?

**CB:** Mother took a chalet in Gstaad, Switzerland for the winter of 1933, and she took my older brother and his wife, my younger brother, who was still in Yale, at college, my sister, who was probably just finishing preparatory school, my wife and myself, our two-year-old child, a nurse, and Mother's housekeeper. We all sailed to Europe on *The Empress of Britain* on the second of December 1932. It was on a world cruise. We got off at Monaco. Had a wonderful time going across the ocean. It had a double tennis court on the top deck. There was the Webster family, a senator from Canada and his family, who were also tennis players, and my family were all tennis players. We played tennis across the Atlantic for eight or nine days, had a wonderful time. Ten days. I don't know, it was eleven days, maybe.

We went up to Paris for Christmas. No, we went up to Paris before Christmas, and then went over to St. Moritz for Christmas. Then to Gstaad for New Year's, and we stayed in Gstaad most of that winter. We went to Munich, and Lucy and I went to Berlin because we knew the naval attaché, who was headquartered in Berlin, and the rest of them went to Budapest. We got caught in Europe the first day of the banking holiday, with no funds to get any further than Paris, and no funds to get a trousseau off for my sister-in-law, whom

we'd ordered a trousseau for. We had quite an interesting time.

So then I came back here, and I think probably it came about, Jim, because--and I'm just guessing this--I'd been in the mill, so nobody knew me in General Mills except in the milling process. A few people in the sales offices knew me, but nobody knew me as the son of J.F. [Bell]. I was going to go up into promotion, in marketing. So there was a break from the milling process over here to coming up to the office and being visible to everybody.

**JS:** Where was the office then, Charlie? The main office.

**CB:** It was on Fourth Avenue and Fourth Street, in the Chamber of Commerce Building, on the second floor. The whole second floor. I think that Father thought he could get away with it without doing me any harm, because there was no connection between the two jobs.

**JS:** Sure. Sure. Fresh start.

**CB:** So I started under Ray Brang. Ray Brang and Cliff Lott were equal. Walter Barry was the head of marketing.

**JS:** That's the Walter Barry, father of the Walter Barry who's alive now.

**CB:** Yes, young Walter Barry's father. He was considered, even in the thirties, the greatest marketing genius in the United States.

**JS:** I've heard that.

**CB:** And Sam Gale was director of advertising. So I spent quite a bit of time under Ray Brang. I can't remember exactly how much, starting in '33. Probably about '36, '37, I was put in charge of promotion and Ray Brang was moved up into marketing from promotion. I was there all the time until the war started.

**JS:** Then you enlisted in the war.

**CB:** I went to the WPB [War Production Board] in Washington on the first of January 1942, and, typical of Washington, they put me in the Machine Tool Division.

**CB:** Another triumph for the administration.

**CB:** I didn't know whether a machine tool was the size of this fork or the size of this room. I hated every minute of it, and I finally asked for a commission in the Air Force and was promised a captaincy. I quit the WPB, waiting for the commission to come through, and it came through as a second lieutenant.

**JS:** Another slip, huh?

**CB:** And so I was assigned to Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio, which was responsible for all the manufacturing plants, all the shortages of materials, everything to do with construction of airplanes. The order for 150,000 airplanes a year was absolutely unheard of.

**JS:** Yes. Miracle of production.

**CB:** Yes. So the first thing the Air Force did with me, they put me in charge of critical shortages of machine tools. [Laughter]

**JS:** They had a file on you that said, "This guy's an expert on machine tools." They couldn't get rid of that. [Laughter]

**CB:** So I ended up downtown, in the Steele High (school) building, on the stage platform of the big auditorium, in charge of critical shortages of machine tools.

**JS:** This was in Dayton?

**CB:** This was in Dayton. There was a thing called the Aircraft Scheduling Unit, was also in Steele High building in downtown Dayton, and it had a fellow named Rawlings in charge, who was a colonel. I think he was only a lieutenant colonel, but I'm not sure. He had an assistant from the British Navy, an assistant from the U.S. Navy, and basically it was just the three of them and maybe a secretary or two, and they had the unique position of having complete authority--I mean complete authority--to allocate production of airplanes between the British Navy, the U.S. Navy, and the Army Air Force. Rawlings essentially had enough authority he could overrule General Arnold if he wanted to. He's a regular Army officer, but here he was having a completely separate entity, in addition to being responsible for all production things.

He got a guy from First Bank, either the First Bank or Harris, in Chicago to come down and help him organize this, because this thing was all new, all building up, you know, and expanding like crazy.

**JS:** This was before we were in the war?

**CB:** Oh, no, no. We were in the war. So Tom Beecham came down from Chicago, and his sister happened to be married to Carl Humphrey, who was the financial vice president of General Mills. He was looking through the list of officers that were available down there and so forth, and he runs into my name. "Oh," he says, "Charlie Bell. God, what's he doing in machine tools, for heaven's sakes? You'd better get this guy down here as one

of your assistants."

So I was called down. The net result was, I was transferred in as one of Ed Rawlings' assistants, and I worked for Ed Rawlings during the entire war in one capacity or another, in all kinds of requirements and shortages of materials and anything that had to be done.

**JS:** Had Rawlings already acquired his knowledge of computers by that time?

**CB:** Well, Ed Rawlings came out of Marshall, Minnesota, a little town--it wasn't Marshall. Just near Marshall, Minnesota.

**JS:** And also Hamline University.

**CB:** Went to Hamline University. Was a three-star athlete. He joined Dayton's (Department Store, Minneapolis) in one of the lower departments, signed up for an Air Force cadetship, I think in 1928, got his commission to go to Luke Field, and so he left Dayton's. He was in some funny little department that Dayton's had. In '32, the Air Force sent him to Harvard Business School for two years. He came out of Harvard Business School, and he set up the first budget office for the Army Air Force. I would think--'37, '38, '39, somewhere in that period, I doubt if he had computers, Jim. It might have been the early, early thing. I don't know for sure.

**JS:** The reason that pops into my mind, in my travels a few years ago I met a man in Dayton, Ohio, who was the CEO of the Husky Bicycle Company, and he had been on that staff. I don't know of that staff, but he had been an aide to Rawlings, and thought the sun rose and set in Rawlings as a commanding officer, as someone who had vision and energy and drive.

**CB:** He did.

**JS:** He spoke very, very highly of Rawlings. My memory of that conversation focuses on Rawlings' ability to get an accurate inventory of parts for all aircraft all over the world and say, "We've got 10,000 more of these than we need, so cut that," or, "We need more of these, so boost this up." And it was a function of a computerized inventory. So maybe it's a little later.

**CB:** I think it was a little later. Ed was probably the most brilliant executive I ever contacted.

**JS:** Really. That's a great tribute.

**CB:** Anyway, I worked for him all during the war. We finally moved out to Wright Field, and one morning I was called by some general, to come over and see him. So, being a

good Army Air Force officer, first lieutenant or something, I walked over. The guy said, "We want you to head up all the restaurant operations for Wright-Patterson Field."  
[Laughter] I said, "General, I don't know anything about restaurants. I was in the retail business. I don't know restaurant from a hole in the ground." "Oh," he says, "you worked for General Mills, didn't you? It's a food company. You'll do all right. We'll make you a lieutenant colonel."

**JS:** Goodness sakes.

**CB:** So I hedged as far as I could. I went back and told Ed Rawlings what had happened. Ed says, "Forget it." Picks up the phone, calls the general, says, "Shut your mouth. You can't have this guy." [Laughter]

**JS:** He really did have authority beyond his rank.

**CB:** Oh, yes. And he knew how to use it. Ed had a wife and three boys, and as a regular Army officer he did something very unusual. He took two of us, at least, and maybe three, Herbie Walker, from J.H. Walker and Company in New York, a brokerage business, and myself and another guy, and he would have us out to his house, my wife and myself, and we became socially very good friends, in spite of our difference in rank and so forth. And our wives became great friends. So when the war ended, I kept saying, "Ed, I want to keep in touch with you." As I flew back and forth to New York on a DC-3 we had to stop and refuel, and I'd stop in Dayton, Ohio, and spend the night with Ed and go on to New York. When I came back I'd bring Maine lobsters, and we'd have a nice big cookout on the way back home.

It finally came, probably in about 1954 or '55. Ed kept talking about how he was going to have his thirty years of service done pretty soon, and he could retire with full benefits. He had three boys that he wanted to put through school. He was going to have to get a job. But he was determined that he was not going to take any job where his military experience could be used. Most of the big companies--General Electric, General Motors--all were after Ed to come with them, but he said he wouldn't take any job where his background and influence in the Air Force could be used.

**JS:** That's good to hear.

**CB:** So I kept saying to him, "When you get ready, let me know, Ed. Give me a chance." So it came down to going with either Herbie Walker's T.H. Walker and Company investment bankers or with General Mills. I persuaded Father and Mr. Bullis to let me hire Ed as financial vice president. By this time the Air Force had become an independent organization from the Army Air Force.

**JS:** Air Corps.

**CB:** Air Corps. He had set up the first comptroller's office for the new Air Force with all the modern computers and everything else, and then had gone back to Wright-Patterson Field as the commanding general, and was the youngest four-star general ever.

**JS:** Really. I didn't know that.

**CB:** And so it ended up, he finally came with General Mills, and I think in about eight years he became CEO, president, and chairman of the board.

**JS:** What year did he come, Charlie, to General Mills, approximately?

**CB:** Well, sometime in 1958. I think it was March '58.

**JS:** At this time you were the president of the company.

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** And your father was still--

**CB:** Father was chairman of the Finance Committee and the Research Committee.

**JS:** And was Harry Bullis still alive at this point?

**CB:** Oh, yes. Harry was chairman. Don Davis had been the chairman, and he left to go with WPB about '43, I think. He wanted to be a real big shot in the financial world, and he thought that was a stepping stone for him to New York. Then he didn't get that job and he wanted to come back, and they said, "Hell, no. You left General Mills high and dry during the war, and you didn't have to go down there." So Harry was chairman, Les Perrin was president in 1950.

Les Perrin called me in. I had a job--when I came back, they created a job called research production coordinator. They'd never had it before. They were having a hard time getting the marketing people to accept what research was doing, and getting research to try to work with marketing on what marketing needed. So I was the crosspiece in there. I had an office on the top floor of the--what was that building?

**JS:** Chamber of Commerce Building?

**CB:** No.

**JS:** Not the Grain Exchange?

**CB:** No. It was uptown. What was the old restaurant?

**JS:** Charlie's?

**CB:** No, not Charlie's.

**JS:** Harry's?

**CB:** We had the whole building on Second Avenue and about Fifth Street.

**JS:** So it was three blocks from where we are right now.

**CB:** Yes, approximately.

**JS:** I can't visualize that.

**CB:** It's across the street and down a block from the old parking ramp of the First Bank. Anyway, Les Perrin called me in one day, I think it was October of 1950, and said, "I want you to succeed me." Out of the blue. And I swallowed and I said, "Well, I've got to think about this. Give me a little time." And so I took a couple of weeks, thinking about it. I was in a pretty nice position. I was sitting up on the top floor with Walter Barry, Spike Kennedy, Cullen Thomas, Don Stevens, Harry Bullis, and Perrin. I had no P&L responsibility. I was involved in everything that was going on and had good relationships with everybody, and was involved in everything, but didn't have any responsibility. You know, that was a pretty nice position. [Laughter]

So I talked it over with my wife for a couple of weeks and I finally went back to him after two weeks and said, "Okay, I'll take it." He said, "Well, we'll make you president of the Food Division." I said, "No, you won't." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I'll take it on one condition: you want me to take over first of June 1952, a year and a half, I want to be free for a year and a half to travel this company from one end to the other, get to know the people. They've never had anybody at the top of this organization that they've ever known. I don't know what their problems are. I don't know how to deal with their problems unless I know. And unless you can give me *carte blanche* for a year and a half, I won't take the job."

**JS:** Good for you.

**CB:** So he gave me the year and a half, and that was the best year and a half I ever spent.

**JS:** Great.

**CB:** I had public relations. Every time I went to a plant or a sales office, I had a chart with people's faces and names, positions. I could walk in and call almost everybody by their first name, the first time. I gave them drinks, I told them jokes, and I told them I

wanted to hear what their problems were and I would promise them that I would never reveal the problem in any way that would come back to them.

**JS:** Good for you. That's called trust.

**CB:** And it was the best year and a half I ever spent in the company. It was just wonderful.

**JS:** Wonderful story. By this time, Rawlings was in public--

**CB:** Rawlings at this time was commanding general of Wright-Patterson Field.

**JS:** He didn't come to General Mills then?

**CB:** No, no.

**JS:** Later.

**CB:** Not till '30. He enlisted in '28. He had thirty years to go. It was '58.

**DW:** It sounds like that year and a half was almost the management equivalent of the first time spent around the mill operations and looking at various levels there, too.

**CB:** Yes.

**DW:** Is that where you got some of that idea? That was a brilliant idea to get to know what you were going to have to manage.

**CB:** I'm just the kind of a person, I can't sit back and deal second and third-hand with problems that you don't know anything about. Can't appreciate them and understand them.

**JS:** You already had, by the time you assumed that chairmanship, an enormously valuable investment in personal contact with these people whom you could call by their first name.

**CB:** Oh, yes.

**JS:** And refer to these conversations in the past about opportunities and problems and things like that.

**CB:** Yes. And, you know, I was very fortunate. I had wonderful relations with these fellows down at the mill, the head millers. When I saw them at the Excelsior Amusement Park, at the big events that we had every year, we were close friends, in spite of our

difference in positions and everything else. I had wonderful associates. They were all older than I was--Walter Barry, Spike Kennedy, Cullen Thomas, Don Stevens. They were--God, I was a punk. [Laughter] I was forty-two when I took over. They were in their fifties and sixties, and yet we had a wonderful time together. We had great fun together. They had wonderful senses of humor. We had a wonderful relationship.

**JS:** That's a description of a very wonderful situation, Charlie, in a company.

**CB:** Spike and I were great friends. He was the kind of a person that you could go and talk to and talk about your problems and your worries and your concerns, and you knew it wasn't going to go any further, that you were always going to get good advice. It was very important. Spike was a very important guy to me.

**JS:** That kind of a bond is important for all of us.

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** Spike wrote a history of the company, didn't he, after he retired.

**CB:** I guess he did. I don't know.

**JS:** It's kind of an anecdotal history.

**CB:** I used to play a lot of golf with him at Minikahda (Club), but I don't remember anything about his writing. He did do some writing, though. Yes, he did do some writing.

**JS:** I think there are three histories that I know of. James Gray wrote a history.

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** And Spike Kennedy wrote a history, and there's a--

**CB:** Did Walter Barry write something?

**JS:** I don't know.

**CB:** Sam Gale did.

**JS:** There's a book called *Business Without Boundaries*.

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** I think that was describing Canada, wasn't it? Maybe not. Anyhow, Paul Parker was my boss early on at General Mills, and he was assigned to the sales force in Canada, and

he said that there were times when things were so tough in the sales force in Canada that he thought that book should not have been titled *Business Without Boundaries*, but *Boundaries Without Business*. [Laughter]

**CB:** Paul would say that.

**JS:** Paul's irreverent sense of humor.

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** Can you say anything, Charlie, that comes to mind about the opportunities or problems during the time that you were president and chairman? Anything about competition or new products? When Rawlings came in, did Rawlings' background in the military have any bearing on any new ventures?

**CB:** No. I think one of the things that Ed did--I like to think that somebody would have had the courage to do it eventually, but Ed did it. With his very deep perception of situations, understanding of situations, forced the closing of fifty-five percent of our mills overnight, which Ed Boyer and Spike and Walter Barry and I and Don Stevens would have--I like to think we would have eventually done it, but it would have taken us a long time to do it.

**JS:** And the rationale for that?

**CB:** It was a losing business. There wasn't any money in it. The production was great and the bakery associations had enough clout that they could put one against the other and get the price down. It was a commodity product that didn't have any benefit in it, couldn't make any money. So Ed shut down fifty-five percent overnight. I mean overnight.

**JS:** His habit of command persisted.

**CB:** Yes. His habit of command and his ability to analyze a problem clearly and then act on it, which would have been very, very difficult for any of us with our backgrounds.

**JS:** Yes, who had grown up with it, so to speak.

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** Charlie, was there a correlative part of this proposal, "If we close this down, we do this, do something else"?

**CB:** No.

**JS:** What was the focus of the business then after fifty-five percent were shut down?

**CB:** They kept enough to service our Gold Medal Flour and our internal needs of Bisquick and cake flours and so forth. And there was a little left over, second-hand flour things, that we could still sell to the baker as a volume thing, but there was no money in it.

**JS:** Sometime in this period of Rawlings' chairmanship, we got into the business of--I don't know how to characterize it, but stratospheric balloons in research.

**CB:** I don't think Ed had much to do with that. That was mostly Art Hyde.

**JS:** Would you say a word about what that was?

**CB:** Well, it started off very innocently. Art Hyde had put together, in the late thirties, a group of young engineers, most of them draft age, brilliant, as a research and development group to do manufacturing processes for small packages, produce new machinery, new, quick labor-saving devices and so forth in that field. When the draft came along, he tried to preserve this group by going to Washington, thinking he could get some gas-mask canister contract, some little thing that could justify keeping these guys away from being drafted.

They get down to Washington, and somehow or other they got mixed up with Bill--

**JS:** Donovan?

**CB:** No. The guy that ran the big company here.

**JS:** Honeywell? 3M?

**CB:** No. Cray.

**JS:** Cray Research. Bill Seymour?

**JF:** Bill Norris.

**CB:** Bill Norris. And somehow or other they ran into--in the process, these kids were curious about what was going on, and they ran into the fact that the Navy was having a hell of a time getting anybody to design a good torpedo director and indicator for destroyers. They tried the naval aircraft factory. It had failed to make one. They had tried, I think, two or three business corporations. Nobody had been able to make them. These kids said, "Oh, hell, we can make that." [Laughter]

So he came back here. He came back, and Art persuaded Harry Bullis and Father to let

him put this group together. And, by God, they designed and built the first torpedo directors and indicators for the destroyers. And that's how the Mechanical Division got started. Then they had all these brilliant guys, you know, and they got involved in balloons and underwater vehicles for research and so forth. It was a kind of an accidental thing that had nothing to do with the rest of General Mills at all. Of course, they had a guy there and he designed the best pressure-cooker that had ever been designed. Steam iron, coffee-maker, toaster.

**JS:** So eventually General Mills made these products.

**CB:** We made the products, sold them, but we didn't have the marketing branch that could handle them. You couldn't handle small appliances without the big appliances successfully, you see. Rather than try to buck the big appliance manufacturers, we decided to get out of that business. I forget what the years were. But I don't think Rawlings had anything to do. As far as I know, he had nothing to do with any of that stuff.

**JS:** Just kind of grew up inside the company.

**CB:** Yes.

**DH:** I heard at one point you were even designing some machinery for handling nuclear material somehow. Do you know anything about that?

**JS:** Handling in the sense of storing inside an enclosed case?

**DH:** Something like that. I don't know.

**CB:** I don't know whether they had anything like that or not.

**JS:** I seem to have a memory--you know, I'm at the age, Charlie, where--I think it was Mark Twain who said one of the great things about growing old is that you remember with perfect accuracy several things which never really happened. [Laughter]

**CB:** Well, that's possible for me.

**JS:** You're doing fine right now, but let me reveal something that comes up on my screen. When I was in school--I don't remember if this was early in college years or when--but I remember reading a story in maybe *Life* magazine, that showed a picture of this enormously elongated plastic balloon, vastly larger than the lighter-than-air balloons we think of now, which carried not persons, but carried sensitive recording equipment into the stratosphere, including cameras. It was featured in *Life* magazine in a great big spread, maybe two pages, with a photograph. The balloon had ascended from Rapid City,

South Dakota, and it was so high when it took this picture, that it was the first photograph that mankind had ever made that showed the curvature of the Earth.

**CB:** Oh, really.

**JS:** And I remember thinking that was such an exciting piercing of a new frontier. My memory tells me that General Mills had a hand in the design of that plastic balloon.

**CB:** Rapid City. Rings a bell. I wouldn't swear to it, but it wouldn't surprise me if that were true. There's something about Rapid City that just rang a bell when you mentioned it.

**JS:** Sounds right. Maybe if I do enough research in *Life* magazine, I can find it.

**NA:** I'm just curious, going back to your traveling to the plants and getting to know the people and to understand their problems first-hand. You had that kind of approach to management, and then went through plant closings overnight and the impact that on the families and workers at the fifty-five percent of the mills that were closed overnight. I'm thinking from your perspective, knowing people as you did, which was your own style of management, how you thought about the impact of those closings on the people who worked in those mills, and what the company did to somehow ease that for those workers.

**CB:** I can't recall exactly what we did, but I know there was a philosophy that they had to be treated in some special way, and I don't know how that was done. It was a fundamental policy of the company that they were not to be dropped out. Whether we shut the mills down and then kept these people for a certain period of time, or whether we gave them special retirement programs, they were pretty well taken care of and there was very, very little fuss about it. It was pretty well handled, but I don't know exactly how that was done. I can't remember the detail of it.

**NA:** But there was concern for those workers?

**CB:** Oh, yes, definitely. And Rawlings had a very deep feeling about people. He was very sensitive to that whole situation.

**JS:** Charlie, going on in your life, before your retirement from the company you were on other corporate boards, too. Is there anything there that comes up on your screen about the tenor of the times or opportunities or problems in the economy? You were on the U.S. Steel board, for instance.

**CB:** I was on the Steel board for twelve years. Frustrated.

**JS:** You were frustrated?

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** Because?

**CB:** Goddamnedest organization that ever came down the pike.

**JS:** [Laughter] That's a clear answer. You mean they didn't see the signs?

**CB:** They had a chairman of the board, the president, the chief financial officer, and a legal counsel that all reported separately to the board of directors. And what you could get out of one, you couldn't get out of the other three. And what you could get out of that other three, you couldn't get out of the one. They were all jealous, all had their own protective bailiwicks, and I finally resigned.

**JS:** It seems to me, as just a bystander and a citizen, as a classic example of an industry that didn't read the signs early enough for its impending demise, early enough to make some changes in direction or focus or emphasis.

**CB:** Yes. You see, they'd always been headed by a lawyer. Well, starting with Judge Landis, who started the steel corporation back in the 1910s somewhere, and everybody all the way along the line, you know, they were fine people. Roger Blough was a fine person. He just didn't have any marketing sensitivity or experience. Got into a dogfight, losing fight, with the president on price increases. You remember?

**JS:** Yes.

**CB:** And did some very dumb things. It was a very frustrating experience. I was the oldest director in line of service. I think I shocked everybody when I resigned. And they had some good people. John Meyer was frustrated. David Packard was very frustrated, just as I was.

**JS:** That's the Packard from Hewlett-Packard?

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** John Meyer from here?

**CB:** John M. Meyer, Jr. from Morgan Guaranty Trust in New York.

**JS:** What about your service on the board of the Burlington Northern?

**CB:** Well, I was on the Northern Pacific board to start with, and that was very

interesting, fun. One of the fun things was dealing with Norton Simon, who was a director of Northern Pacific and Burlington. Mind like a steel trap.

**JS:** Say a little bit more about why it was so interesting to work with him.

**CB:** He was impossible. He was absolutely impossible, but brilliant. Norton and I became very good friends in spite of the fact that there were things about him I didn't like at all.

**JS:** Was it eccentricity or wild ideas or contrarian ideas?

**CB:** Contrary, had his own agenda. Dan Bull<sup>1</sup>--this story happened just before I went on the board of Northern Pacific. I don't remember what Norton was doing. Of course, he was mixed up with Diamond Match and got involved in Diamond Match arguments somehow or other. Northern Pacific had something to do with it and Norton had something to do with it. I don't remember. Anyway, Dan jumps up and he pounds the table and he says, "You son of a bitch! If you don't keep your goddamn mouth shut, I'm going to kill you!" [Laughter]

**JS:** Really. This is to another director?

**CB:** To another director at an open board meeting. [Laughter]

**JS:** That's clear enough. Who was chairman of the BN at that time? Was it John Budd?

**CB:** Bob Macfarlane<sup>2</sup>. No, John Budd was Great Northern.

**JS:** Yes. I get mixed up. Good.

**CB:** Bob Macfarlane was chairman. Louis Menk was second in command, I think. Then Northern Pacific and Great Northern came together and made the Burlington Northern.

**JS:** Yes, as James J. Hill had predicted early in his career.

**CB:** Yes.

**JS:** Charlie, tell us a little bit about the Belwin Foundation and about your interest in environmental studies and the program out there. First of all, for the record, give us the entomology of the Bel and the Win in Belwin.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel F. Bull, Chairman, The Cream of Wheat Corp., Minneapolis.

<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Macfarlane, Chairman, Northern Pacific Railway Co.

**CB:** Well, my wife was a Winton, so we took the "Win" from Winton and the "Bel" from my name, Bell. We dropped one "L" and put the two together, and it just worked. It flowed. David [Hartwell] could tell you more about it. He's running the show, has been for years. I can tell you the beginning of it. Hmm. When is the beginning of it?

**PH:** Well, 1953.

**CB:** When I came back from the Army Air Force, my wife and I decided we wanted a weekend place to get away from the pressure of things, but we did not want to drive the four or five or six hours to Beaver Bay, where all of our friends had homes.

**JS:** To go "up north," as they say.

**CB:** Up north. Go up Friday afternoon at five o'clock, drive till seven or eight o'clock or nine o'clock at night and start back Sunday afternoon. So we decided we wanted a place within eighty miles of Minneapolis. We wanted pine trees on it. We wanted water. And we didn't specify whether it should be a stream or a lake. We had the General Mills pilots, who had a private airplane, they were flying around all the time, they were looking. Chris Nelson, who was vice president of purchasing for General Mills, had looked back in the early thirties for Father, for a trout place, fishing place, in the Minnesota Valley, and had not found anything. So I got Chris involved, and this thing dragged on. We didn't find anything.

In 1958, I guess it was, Chris came to me one day in January. "Oh," he said, "I have a friend of mine who's got a fishing place, and he's asked me to extend an invitation to you to come down and fish." And I said, "Chris, you know I'm not a worm fisherman. I'm not a plunker. I'm a fly fisherman. I'm a dry-fly-fisherman. Just forget about it." He says, "No, no, no." He says, "No, you can catch trout. You can catch trout on a fly." I said, "You're out of your mind." He said, "No. Elmer Smith, of Smith Welding Company, has a place down on the St. Croix. He's also got a place on the headwaters of this stream that flows into the St. Croix on the Minnesota side, and he wants you to come down and have a fishing day."

So, kind of reluctantly, decided to go down on Saturday and I told my daughter about it. Oh, God, she was so excited, she could hardly stand it. Well, I think it came either Thursday afternoon, it was 34 below zero, it was blowing 20, 25 miles an hour from the northwest, and I said to Chris, I called him up and I said, "Chris, forget about it. I am not going to go down in this kind of weather. I'm sorry. Tell him I'm very sorry, very appreciative, but I can't do it."

Well, Friday noon, I walk back from the Minneapolis Club after luncheon, and here in my office were Chris and my daughter. "Oh, daddy, daddy! We've got to go! We've got to go!" [Laughter]

**CB:** So they talked me into changing my mind, and we went down there. About two miles, two and a half miles, something like that, up the Minnesota side is the headwaters of Valley Creek that Elmer Smith owned, with a cabin on it and so forth. It had a pond about five times the size of this room, and it was open. There was a bubble, a spring about that big and about that high above the level coming out with hot water, and it kept this place open at 24 below zero. I gave the fishing rod to my daughter and I said, "Okay, cast out." So she cast out and, gosh, on her first catch she got a fish. She brought it in, and I took it off the hook, and, God, it was cold! Oh, jeez. [Laughter] So she threw back out, she got another fish, and she said, "Daddy, daddy! What'll I do?" I said, "What's the matter?" She says, "The line's frozen in the guides." [Laughter] I said, "Just keep walking backward. Bring the fish in." Well, we caught a mess of fish. I don't know, we had twelve or fourteen little brook trout, maybe ten, twelve inches or less.

So we closed up and started back down to Elmer's house on the St. Croix, to cook the fish and have luncheon with him. On the way down, we came off the side road and got on to Number 21, and they said, "Oh, stop here a minute. We want to show you something." So we got out, and the snow was about that deep. We started trudging through this place and, I kept looking at it. The stream was flowing down through this thing, and the whole valley was a big wide open valley, with very high peaks. I said, "Jeez, this is a nice place." They said, "Do you really like it?" I said, "Yes, I certainly do. I think it's wonderful." "We want you to buy it." I said, "What do you mean, you want me to buy it? How many acres are there?" "Well, there's sixty-eight acres." And I said, "Why do you want to sell it, for heaven's sake?"

Well, Spike Spreeman's family had homesteaded this piece of property back in the nineties. Spike, growing up as a young man, had the habit--he was a jeweler, in the jewelery business--but every morning he got up early and he had a quiver, an Indian quiver, on his shoulder, and he had it filled with pieces of willow. He'd go along the bank and jam a willow stick in, jam another one in, jam another one in, and he had built this property up with big shade for the stream and wonderful fishing. The water stayed cool. He was being hounded by the developers who wanted to buy this place, and he didn't want to sell it. He said he wanted to find somebody that had some swamp water in their veins. So he decided that I had swamp water in my veins. [Laughter]

**JS:** What a compliment. [Laughter]

**CB:** So I took a ninety-day option, and my wife was very reluctant about the whole thing, only because she said, "You'll use it as a General Mills retreat and you'll go down there with all these men and so forth." I said, "No, it's our place. I'm never going to use it for General Mills," and I finally talked her into it. On the last day of the ninety days, I took the option and bought the sixty-eight acres. We put a cabin on it. We opened the cabin around the twelfth of January 1959, and went down there often--it's twenty-two minutes

from downtown St. Paul. It had pine trees, it had Norways, it had white pine, it had red oak and white oak and had everything on it. We finally decided, jeez, you know, this is going to develop around us. We'd better get a buffer zone to keep this place quite and peaceful. So I started looking for property, and I started wandering off into the woods here and there. I'd see a new piece of property on a woodland pothole and a cattail marsh, and I'd find out who owned the property and I'd buy twenty acres here and forty acres there, another twenty over here.

We had a maintenance shed for equipment and so forth. So then what do we do with it? The girls kept saying all the time while I was buying this property, "What are you going to do with this, Daddy? What are you going to do with this? What do we need more property for?" I said, "I don't know what you need more property for. I just know that some day this is going to be an important thing to have this kind of property this close to a downtown metropolitan area. I don't know what we're going to do with it, but it's got to be saved."

So we started looking around. I had been involved with Hennepin County Park Reserve District, with George Crosby and--

**DH:** Cliff French?

**CB:** Well, yes, Cliff French and so forth, but the guy that lives--David, he's dead now, but he was trying to save that whole marsh between Woodhill and Ferndale. Anyway, he was one of the principal guys in supporting the whole program of the Hennepin Park System. Cliff French was very interested, came down, and they were dying to take over the place. They finally decided politically it would be something that would be almost impossible for them. They were west, they were southwest and north of Minneapolis, but they didn't think they could go all the way around east, east around St. Paul and pick up into the St. Paul community. So they dropped it.

The university wanted it for ecological twenty-year research. They came down. Somehow or other, that didn't appeal to us, and we sat on it for a long time. I got hold of the guy who became head of the Interior Department in Washington. He was running an environmental organization along Sixth Avenue, North, somewhere. "Oh," he said, "I was looking for help finding a rationale for use of this property." He finally said, "Jeez, you know, St. Paul public schools has got a man looking for a piece of property to teach environmental education. You'd better get hold of him. He's down in the St. Croix Valley, looking for property right now. They want to teach every discipline in the St. Paul school system by the teachers, not necessarily by biologists."

So we got together with Rod Frye, who had been assigned as one of the teachers. He'd been assigned this job by the St. Paul public schools. We argued it back and forth and talked about leasing the property, paying rent. Finally came down to a cooperative

agreement with the St. Paul school system. No money to change hands. We would provide the property. We would manage the environment. They would not tell us what to do with the environment. They would manage the educational program and we wouldn't try to tell them what to do with their education. We finally put a cooperative agreement together and we had an advisory committee, pretty high-powered. I think there were three outsiders, one from the school, one from our foundation. We set up Belwin Foundation.

**JS:** To have title to the property.

**CB:** Oh, yes, and put the property in the name of Belwin. We started out kind of fencing a little bit. It was a good program, but they weren't sure whether we wouldn't interfere with their education program, and I wasn't sure they wouldn't interfere with what we wanted to do with the environment. We finally found out, after about three or four months, that we were going to get along all right. I think we had two meetings of the advisory committee and we've never had one since. It's supposed to be a committee basically to arbitrate difficulties between Belwin Foundation and the St. Paul public school. We've never had a confrontation in twenty-eight years, between the two facilities.

**JS:** That's a real tribute.

**CB:** So that's how it got started. We set a limitation of about ninety-five students a day. We built two towers where they could do athletic triangulation, put a collar on like a deer and go out in the woods, and they can triangulate and follow these people around. We eventually built about two miles of blacktop path for the handicapped. We still have about five and a half miles of trails running through this whole property, and we've got prairie that's beyond anything you've ever seen--native prairie. We've got almost everything you can imagine. So that's how Belwin got started. It's an environmental education program called the Belwin Outdoor Education Laboratory, I think. We have a 6,000-square-foot building where the kids come in and get warm or have their luncheon, but basically they're to be out on the trails with their teachers.

They have a staff. They have a director. They have a custodian for the building. Even though we own the building, they run it. They have three or four full-time employees, educational employees from the school. They've never cut their budget in the twenty-eight years that we've been operating. They have a volunteer group. I don't know, it will run anywhere from three to ten or twelve, depending on the year and so forth. We have a summer program. We're operating eleven months a year. We're down for the month of August for trail maintenance and everything that needs to be done when you really have to have heavy equipment out and so forth.

So that's the start of Belwin. What David can tell you is what's happened since then, because he's been running it for about eight or nine or ten years, and he's up to 1,200 acres.

**JS:** Twelve hundred. Really?

**CB:** It's all under Minnesota Land Trust so it can never be used again for any other purpose.

**JS:** Charlie, that's a success story in itself, it seems to me.

**CB:** Yes, it's very exciting. It's very thrilling to think about.

**JS:** Yes. At the end of this month of October, I shall have been retired from General Mills for ten years, and in that ten years I've served as what they call a senior consultant for the Council on Foundations. I'm kind of a circuit-riding troubleshooter for foundations around the country. Eight out of ten calls that gets me or one of the other two consultants to visit a site, eight out of ten times we are being called to arbitrate or to referee a fight between an executive of a foundation and his or her board of directors who didn't do sufficient due diligence up front to outline the terms of the contract the way you did with the city of St. Paul. Typically it's the fault of the board, not the fault of the employee. We get called in when the employee is on the slippery slope and doesn't even know it. Sometimes he is very surprised. But the real tribute here, it seems to me, to you and to the family and to your associates is the wisdom and the foreknowledge you had of how to make this thing work long-term, cohesively, running smoothly. They've never had a need for an advisory committee meeting. I get called in most of the time where I should have a degree in psychiatry.

**CB:** I'm sure. I'm sure.

**JS:** I'm not being facetious. I think it's a real tribute to you and--

**CB:** I think we've been very fortunate.

**JS:** David, do you want to add anything about the current--this is a great story, it seems to me. Maybe this is my bias, coming out of foundations as I do, but that's a very creative use of family resources.

**DH:** Well, it's an unusual use to find a cooperative type of program that's compatible, and it's worked amazingly well in our state. The community is pretty good, even though the community doesn't have access to the property, because the community wants to see the property not be developed. The school system has never cut the budget and continues to enjoy the program and look for ways to expand it.

**JS:** Is there a pedagogical program beyond the schools? I remember Ruth and my being invited to dinner with you one night at Belwin, and we heard a lecture on the killer bees

and their march.

**DH:** There's a "Friends of" group that supports membership contributions. Essentially it is the PTA fund-raising mechanism for Belwin, since there is no school there that parents can have bake sales and support, that buys that extra piece of equipment.

**JS:** What's the closest municipal community entity that you would deal with? Would it be Afton?

**DH:** Afton.

**JS:** And those relationships are smooth, I take it.

**DH:** As smooth as a relationship with a government agency can be. [Laughter]

**JS:** In a free democratic society.

**DH:** Afton isn't known for having smooth politics.

**CB:** David, explain for them what your arrangement is in the election and selection of the educational director.

**DH:** The educational director is a full-time school system employee.

**JS:** And this is a full-time job for that person?

**DH:** It's a full-time job nine months out of the year or ten months out of the year. Because it's a union job, you get into all sorts of interesting union discussions. But we have had one or two seats at the table in every hiring process they've gone through for the director, in spite of all of that, and we've never had anything but a unanimous decision as to what the choice should be. And they don't have to do it, but they feel it's appropriate to do that. We sit down, sort of top administration, to me, at this point, a couple of times a year, just to say, "So what's going on that's good, that's not good? How can we make adjustments?" on both sides, to attempt to avoid that building of frustration from down below that ends up becoming something major. It's worked. A thing like that never works perfectly, but we've been able to work cooperatively to address concerns that both sides have had over time.

I remember one of the really stupid moves the school system made when they were having real financial trouble in the late seventies. They essentially were seeing a declining population of students, and they had plenty of teachers. That tends to lead to problems in school districts because the budgets go down. So they made some choices of cutting teachers back, which today seems ludicrous, since they can't find teachers. But one of the decisions that they made was to cut the director out at Belwin. He was a

teacher who didn't have enough seniority, so they cut him and never bothered to let us know.

My grandfather and I went over and asked the assistant superintendent at that point if he thought that was the wisest way to handle the relationship, and somehow they worked out something with the union, where the educational director stayed. We never demanded anything. We simply asked the question of why they had handled it that way, and they realized that they had probably not handled it well. But, you know, the follow-up to that is, that assistant superintendent went on the Friends of Belwin board and became the chairman of it, has been a great friend and continues to be.

**CB:** And we've been through three or four heads of the St. Paul school system, different people. It just carries on. We had one problem. About the tenth day of our operation in 1970 or '71, it was a senior group--I don't know whether they were sophomores, juniors, a little bit older than we usually have--and they came down and started picking up the trail signs and throwing them out into the woods and raising hell with the thing. Dr. Benny Kettelkamp, who is a retired professor at the University of Wisconsin at River Falls, was our environmental director. He had been a guard out in Glacier Park for quite a few summers, and he caught up with this group and he threw them out of the property instantly. Then he wrote a letter to the headmaster of that school and said, "You will never, ever, be allowed to bring people from your school. You're through. You'll never come to Belwin again." Then he sent copies to every other headmaster of every school in the system, but not the administration. And hell broke loose.

We went back over there and, God, they were mad. They were upset. I said, "You're absolutely right. This is a wrong procedure. We'll never do it again. But I want to tell you something. It was the best thing that ever happened for us and for you. You would have taken two weeks to discuss this goddamned problem with about six different committees, and by the time you got down to finishing off, you would have lost the whole thing. Nobody is ever going to understand what Belwin is going to stand for and what they're not going to stand without that. Thank God Dr. Benny Kettelkamp had the guts to do it his way."

**JS:** There's a great parable here.

**CB:** And it was the greatest thing. You know, in that building, the 6,500 square feet, there has never been one--stroke of graffiti.

**JS:** That's a tribute. That's a tribute. I think you got their attention.

**CB:** Oh, yes. [Laughter] No question about that. No messing around on this property. David has gone on and he's got big, big projects in mind for 1,200 acres. We run three and a half miles of property all off the tax rolls, all under Minnesota Land Trust. So it

will never be developed under any condition except for something very similar.

**JS:** It seems to me it's very timely, too, because of the constraints now on public school budgets for things that are not strictly 3R, the 3Rs, like athletics, music, drama. These things are all being trimmed, and environmental studies would, I think, fall in that category if there weren't an option such as yours.

**DH:** It's a pretty low-cost option for the school system. We operate 1,200 acres with three people, one of whom is a property manager and supervises. We go between three and four--all of the trails, all the exteriors of the buildings. If the school system were to do that, the committee to run it would be bigger than that, and you'd have all these people, but they could never afford to buy the property or to manage the property. So they've got a facility that essentially only costs them their teachers.

**CB:** David, tell them a little bit about your hope, what looks like it's going to work on your athletic facility and how it's going to tie in. This is a very unusual thing.

**DH:** We started buying property in 1990, after about five years of negotiation, because it became evident that the neighborhood was going to be developed and the farmers that were there were not going to be farmers; their land was going to be houses. We started buying property and we've picked up 600 acres of property in the last ten years. Some of it, we bought property that went all the way up to Highway I-94, which is kind of the northern boundary of where we could go to. You could argue that an environmental foundation buying property along the freeway probably isn't the smartest move ever made, but, in our mind, it was a great place to start and a buffer from development.

The question becomes, what do you do with all this property? It's great to protect it, but Belwin isn't around to just buy land and let it sit there. We've done a lot of restoration work and fixing some past problems, but we've looked for compatible uses of the property. The school system doesn't need more land and more property. So we've talked, and continue to talk, to a myriad of groups about ways that we may be able to cooperate. We've worked and are very close to announcing a deal, subject to City Council approval, which always gives you a moment of panic.

**CB:** With how many political entities? Seven?

**DH:** Well, at least seven that are kibitzing. But right along the freeway, we don't ever see putting in nature trails and hiking trails and picnic areas. It just isn't our vision of the best way to manage it. But the community out there in Washington County is growing so fast, people move in to get into the country. There are no facilities for the kids recreationally that have been built and are historically there. The school systems can't afford the land either. So there really aren't facilities. The Little League kinds of stuff for kids are at a point where they're starting to limit participation because of playing areas. And on the

other side, we've got this property right along the freeway that is relatively flat, that's a corn field. We've put together a cooperative agreement to allow our land to be used for four baseball fields and eight soccer fields, two football fields, to be managed by another group, but owned by us. There are certain things they can and cannot do.

**CB:** Parking facilities, too.

**DH:** There has to be parking. Trust me, there have to be road studies. I'm not sure, in today's political climate, if we could permit Belwin. It's incredibly difficult. We would have to have a road going up to our facility that was thirty-five feet wide and paved, with shoulders and emergency this and that and the other thing. All of that is intended well, but it is a little overkill from time to time.

**JS:** You've been grandfathered in on things like that.

**DH:** Sure.

**CB:** But then he's going to tie in another piece of property that's east of that with nature trails out of this athletic facility so that you can move out of the athletic facility into our private environmental trails and up and down in the woods, and all kinds of environmental areas.

**DH:** We, in essence, get a headquarters for a trail system for the rest of the property out of the ball field development.

**JS:** Is the tenor of this going reasonably well politically?

**DH:** I think it will go. I mean, it ain't over till it's over.

**CB:** We've got money. We've got half a million dollars out of the Andersen Foundation to launch this program.

**JS:** Wonderful.

**CB:** It's going to take about two million dollars.

**NA:** Starting back, Jim, where we were, when we talk about the development of what strikes me as a very creative agreement with the St. Paul public schools, I am increasingly impressed as I watch your operation at Belwin and I watch what we're doing (at the Minnesota Historical Society). What we're seeing is that as there is frustration in some ways with the schools, and the schools struggle more, there is a sense that somehow they need to be able to use other wonderful things in the community, that all the education doesn't have to happen right there within the schools. There need to be other

entities. When you talk about the fact that schools have less and less money, and I think there is truth in that, and if you look at what happens with our programs, we have burgeoning use by the schools because they're recognizing that here is an institution, as you have with Belwin. The Minnesota Historical Society has resources, has creative people like David Wiggins, who can interact with young people and so what the school has to offer is greatly enhanced at relatively low cost by, in our case, 110,000 school kids coming to the History Center for programs that are very, very high quality.

What we're anticipating, one of the big things that we anticipate in this museum that we want to put into the (Washburn Crosby) A Mill is that a lot of kids, particularly in the Minnesota public schools who know nothing about the history of this community, will learn about it's foundation and why it's rich and why it is a good place to live and why it's here and why it isn't a suburb of Omaha. That's our intent, to provide the kind of education program that's cooperative with the schools, so that we enhance what happens in the schools and give these kids a much richer education than they get by sitting within four walls all day long.

**CB:** David has got programs for the University of Minnesota's Bell Live! museum program (at the James Ford Bell Museum of Natural History). We've got research programs with the University fisheries. We have relationships with the Science Museum (of Minnesota), in addition to all these other things that we're in.

**NA:** We're losing boundaries, which I think is a good thing. I was thinking, as we were talking, about a site that the Historical Society runs down in South Central Minnesota, where we start with a site that is a magnificent and very historically important ancient carving site for Indian people. There's probably 4,000 years worth of carving there, but around it is about fifty acres of totally unturned prairie and fifty acres of restored prairie. So the educational responsibility that we take on is not only the responsibility for understanding the history of these rock carvings, but also that prairie preservation. We work with other groups and when people visit there, it's the interaction between the land and the environment and the humans that is the story that we tell. So I like this boundaries going away between subjects, among subjects, and among institutions where the public and the private sector can come together and make some good things happen.

**CB:** That's exactly what we're trying to do.

**JS:** Charlie, thank you so much for this interview.

**CB:** It's been a real pleasure.