



WINDSOR
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Chuck Drake:
Share Your Windsor Story

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Windsor High School, Windsor, CT

Interviewer(s): Sulema DePeyster and Jenny Hawran
Interviewee: Chuck Drake
Transcriber: Sulema DePeyster

Chuck Drake

So, do I look at the questions while I'm talking? Do we answer all the questions?

Jenny Hawran

No. Or she can ask you. You know, if you wanted to have a conversation with her as a matter of fact. I mean, tell about – how do you start?

Sulema DePeyster

Yeah, I usually [ask them] to say their name.

Jenny Hawran

Yeah, so we're rolling. So anytime that you're ready –

Chuck Drake

We're rolling?

Jenny Hawran

We're rolling!

Chuck Drake

OK, my name is Chuck Drake and I've lived in Windsor since 1949. My mother was raised in Windsor, down in the Deerfield section of Windsor, and got involved with the Grace Church here in Windsor and went to school at John Fitch High School. She met my dad during the Second World War. He was stationed at what is called Bradley Field now. And after the war, he moved to Windsor and started the family, and I was the first of three sons, and we were raised on Ludlow Road. [00:01:00] So where did I go to school? I actually spent one year in kindergarten at Stony Hill School with Ms. Memory. And then they opened up Clover Street School and I went to Clover Street through the 6th grade. And then they split all those students up and, at that time, Leland P. Wilson Junior High School opened, and half of the students went to L.P. Wilson and the other half came here to Windsor High School. At that time, [Windsor High School] had 7th and 8th grade, as well as the 9th through 12th grades, so I went to school here all through junior and senior high school.

Chuck Drake

What did we do? Let's see. I was involved in a few things, a few sports, but I mostly worked. I worked at Finest Supermarket in Wilson. [00:02:00] They closed down and then we went to Finest Supermarket in Windsor Center, which is where Geissler's is now. And the summers, well, the summers were pretty much, when I was younger, coming right here to the Veteran's pool because at that time, our folks were pretty much working in the factories and their time off was in August. And that's when everybody would leave and go out to further destinations. The destination for us was where my dad came from and that was Ohio. Ohio in the summertime in

August -- don't want to go there. But we did, nevertheless. But the rest of our summers were involved coming here to the pool and spending our afternoons at Veteran's pool, swimming and having fun. And there's a lot of stories that went on with that. But we also worked tobacco. So, when you got old enough at 14, you could start working tobacco. And we had an in because one of the girls in our class, [00:03:00] her family owned a tobacco firm. That was the Huntington Farm, and they had areas up on Day Hill Road.

Chuck Drake

So, I remember catching the truck right here at the end of Sage Park Road, at the intersection of Sage Park and Park Avenue, and we would catch the truck and they would take us up to River Street to get some of the migrant workers who were in the camp at River Street and then take us up to Day Hill Road to start working in the fields. But because we had an in with the daughter of the owner, the boys didn't have to work in the fields for very long because once they started picking, we went into the sheds where all the girls were. So, we spent several summers working tobacco. 14/15 years old, we were able to work tobacco in Windsor. So that's where we got our start. And then, let's see. We went to work in [00:04:00] First National Stores and then went off to college, and we left and came back. I had the opportunity to go to school out of state and I took that up and came back to live here back in 1976. My family had always been here but with college and such, I was away for a while.

Chuck Drake

So, let's see. Impressions of Windsor? What can I say? It was the greatest place to be, especially as a kid. We had dances down at what is the VFW every Friday night, listened to The Wildweeds. Now if you know Al Anderson, Al Anderson was in that with the Lepak brothers who lived on Plymouth Street. Big family down there. And every Friday – no, Friday or Saturday? I think it was Friday. We would go down to the VFW for dances. The place was packed! That was such a great band and of course, they went on to be famous and Al Anderson is still a famous [00:05:00] songwriter who lives in Nashville. And every time he comes back, they always have to play some of those songs from the early 60s that we remember very well. Oh, let's see. So, I left to do different things and I always came back. And when I came back in 1977, I lived with my mom on Ludlow Road and took a job that allowed me to travel quite a bit. From there, in 1986, I got married to a young lady from South Windsor. And we came back here and started our lives together back in Windsor and we bought a home on Marshall Street, which is an old home that's been there since 1932.

Chuck Drake

Behind us is a farm that no longer has dairy cows, but still has some beef cattle, [00:06:00] and we take in the hay there every year, twice a year, and we've been doing that for 36+ years. And we'll probably keep going until we're old and crotchety. Oh, let's see. Community involvement. Well, one of the things that I got started doing is because of my education, I always wanted to be involved with the parks. And an opportunity there is I'm a volunteer at Northwest Park, which is in the north part of town which all old tobacco land. I was able to volunteer up there and that

would have been 1985/86 and I've been there ever since. I'd become involved with the Friends of Northwest Park, which pretty much takes up all my spare time as far as volunteering. [I] enjoy doing the Maple Sugar Program at Northwest Park as well as a music series that helps fund some of the activities [00:07:00] that are supported by the Friends of Northwest Park. Unfortunately, we weren't able to have any children, but we feel that our involvement with Northwest Park and some of the other youth activities here in Windsor kind of make up for that.

Chuck Drake

So, we like to mentor young folks and doing some of the things that we learned to do when we were younger here in Windsor. How has it changed since I've lived here? Oh boy, how's Windsor changed? Well, the high school has gotten bigger. The pool is now inside. There's a lot more folks that have moved in. A lot of old families that were living in the areas that I knew when my grandparents were in Deerfield, those were a lot of immigrant families. Germans and Italian folks, and those have all moved on. And now there are great Hispanic families and [00:08:00] African American families who are living in the homes that I remember in my youth where the old German folks would have lived, and we would have delivered eggs to them from my grandmother's farm. I think it's a great community because of the fact that we are so diverse, and it's great being able to talk to folks and tell them stories, especially about tobacco, and how we got to do tobacco here in Windsor. It's all gone now and that's one of the sad things. Tobacco, it's all gone. Well, there you have it. I think that's what I got. There's probably much more there, but my brain isn't that fast. [laughs]

Sulema DePeyster

That's great!

Jenny Hawran

Thank you. That was great. All right.