

Doug Pugh Transcript.

From the Special Collections Department on the 2nd floor of the Alpena County Library this is Cindy Kus speaking to Doug Pugh on December 16th, 2015. Doug's father, Sid Pugh. Sid started playing music professionally in Alpena in the early 1920's. We'll start out by asking Doug to give us a perspective of the Pugh Family Tree and where Sid fit into it and the t-, get a sense of the timespan that he- when he was born and the period of time that he played music in Alpena. Thanks for being here, Doug.

DP: Thank you for the opportunity. Um, my grand-, I guess I'll just start off the top of my head and go along here, you can direct me as-

CK: OK.

DP: -as you think. But my grandfather, ah, was an orphan. He was ah, in an orphanage in London, England- he and his two brothers. His mother had passed away and then his father died when he was I think, seven, ah, from a brain tumor and my cousin Ralph ah, got the death certificate on that. He died in Guy's Hospital in downtown London. But my father came, or his, my grandfather, was placed in a, in a home in London by a program called The Homes, The Home Children Program. And he was moved from Little Wanderer's Home Orphanage in London, England to a home in ah, outside of Toronto. It was a farm at that point, now it would be part of the Toronto city. My, my grandfather was seven. He stayed there until he was seventeen and then there were problems. He didn't get on with the people, or I don't know if he'd been abused, who knows? There were, there was a one year report from a social worker that would visit the home and file a report and such- ah, and those were available. My cousin Ralph found those. And ah, and then he was placed in another home and he stayed there until he was like seventeen and then he, I think, ran away from there, and worked his way up to the Soo, to Sault Sainte Marie, Canada, ah, where he met my grandmother for the first time. Her father had a brickyard up there. But then they lost touch with each other.

My grandfather went to work as a sailor. Ah, we have a picture of him, ah, as a wheelsman. I think Ralph identified that.

CK: Kid wheelsman.

DP: Kid wheelsman- yeah he was on a couple of different boats- I forget the names of them- Ralph probably identified them there.

CK: And your grandfather's name was Sidney H. Pugh?

DP: That's right. And he was on a ship delivering the mail and stuff on Lake Superior, whatever; but then he went down, and my, reacquainted himself ah, with my grandmother, who at that time was living in Buffalo. And one thing led to another and they married. At that point he was working as a, as an ironworker, and ah, and he was traveling all over the country and Ethel, my grandmother was going along with him and my father was born- he was born in Manistee, Michigan. But um, they didn't, they kept moving; because my grandfather was in that, was in that business. I think he got up to a rivet inspector, although I'm not sure exactly what he was doing other than he was an ironworker and they were building, working with steel.

They came to Alpena to build the Ninth Street Bridge. Which is no longer there, but it was a, a wrought iron, it was an iron bridge-

CK: Oh, ok.

DP: - and the wells were there, I remember it vividly. The bridge that is there now, is not all that old. Ah, when I was in high school, the bridge that my grandfather helped build was still there. And then he also, his, the company he worked for built the, ah, railroad trestle out at the, at the cement plant. That trestle has since been torn down. So that's what brought the family to Alpena. My father was seven years old at that point and had never been to school. And my Uncle Ralph, who was a year younger than my father had not been to school, and my grandmother took the position- she said to my grandfather, this is my father telling me this, "Sid, you can go ahead and continue to travel; but I'm staying here. These boys need to be in school."

And so the line was drawn, (laughter) and ah, they rented a place on Second and my father stayed here, started school, as did the rest of the kids and my grandfather continued to travel for a couple of years I think, and then he got a job as the steam shovel operator, at the cement plant.

CK: Oh, ok.

DP: And he worked there for the rest of his working years. Ah my, my, father, the reason I'm telling you this I guess, is because my grandfather had a pretty tough life, you know? He was on his own, when he was, you know, a young child, and probably had some pretty rough experiences in some of these places. It was kind of, almost an indentured servant sort of a thing- placed on a farm and then he got his room and board and they raised him and he worked. How much education he got I don't know. In my head, ah, my, I can, I think my father said, or maybe it was grandmother, that my grandfather had like a third grade education. But, I think he must have been a fairly sharp individual because he could read, write pretty well, had a set of encyclopedias in home and that sort of thing; but, he had a pretty tough go of it. And my father being the oldest, ah, in the family, I think was the brunt of some of that. I don't think there was a real close father-son, um, what's the word, um?

CK: Bond, relationship.

DP: Yeah, yeah, a relationship certainly, but not a, not an ideal one I don't think. And I got some stories that would go beyond that. I mean my dad wasn't abused really, that, but, but had, had a tough time. He, however, had a musical talent, and he got that from his grand-, from his mother.

CK: OK.

DP: Ethel could play the piano. How, why she could play the piano, I don't know, if she, she obviously was given an opportunity to have lessons or something as a child; because when she married my grandfather, she was able to play then, and, and, and, my grandfather provided her with a piano and with an organ. There's a, I played on it as a kid. A pump, pump organ, it's up at the museum, um, The Jesse Besser Museum now. But my grandmother had, again according to my father, she had very good pitch. I won't use the word perfect pitch, but she could play by ear. She could, she could do, she had a better ear than my father, ah, from what he told me. But my grandmother made sure, and I'm speculating here, a little bit-

CK: Mm, ok.

DP: -just makes sense, that she was the moving force between my father getting the music training that he did. And she maybe saw an early aptitude in him, you know, I don't know. Um, none of the other

boys, none of my ah, my father's other brothers, seemed to have the aptitude. I mean, I think they all liked music, and appreciated it, but my dad was the only one that the family invested in, in the sense of, you know, sending him off to Professor Burgard and getting violin lessons.

CK: Right.

DP: And my father ah, was by all indications, a very good student; because he and Professor Burgard ah, stayed friends throughout my, throughout the remainder of Professor Burgard's life. I think my dad was one his star pupils, if you will, you know.

CK: Was, where did Professor Burgard teach?

DP: Ah, I'm, I'm gonna speculate in, at Memorial Hall- that he rented the facilities, but I don't know that.

CK: And do you know, anything about him, as –

DP: An old German gentleman, um, wasn't married, that I'm aware of, maybe he had been and his wife died, I don't know. Lived by himself, um, rented an apartment, ah, I'm, my dad told me, you know there was no social security then, there were no benefits, the professor ah, probably made a pretty good living, I mean by the number of kids that were here; but, ah, as he got older, his abilities ah, waned, and then other opportunities came up for the kids to get an education. So um, and, and I'm speculating about all of this-

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: - but, what, when he came to an end, he came to the end of his life and had only modest means, and he told my dad, he said, "I get sick, I fix." And he did get sick, I think he got cancer; but I'm not positive of that. His obituary, Bob Lyngos found his obituary, I just don't remember what it was. But the professor committed suicide, and my father always told me that he was the one that found the professor, because he would check on him from time to time.

CK: Oh, my.

DP: But the obituary, it's, it's, the report in the newspaper a little, varies from that a little bit. So, I can just tell you what my dad told me. Ah, the newspaper has a slightly different version, but he did, he did commit suicide.

CK: And then a time frame for this, what year was your dad born?

DP: He was born in 1908.

CK: OK. So this, he would have been taking lessons in-

DP: Well, he was seven before they settled here in Alpena, and just by looking at him, he's not, maybe, what is he? Not too much older than that- maybe he's ten.

CK: Yeah, I'd say nine, ten-

DP: Yeah.

CK: - somewhere in there.

DP: So, so, it wasn't...

CK: 1917? Something like that.

DP: Yeah. That would be-

CK: That period of time.

DP: I'd guess, yeah.

CK: And what instrument did he take up initially?

DP: Violin.

CK: Violin.

DP: Yeah, violin, and he, my dad loved the violin, and he would tell me about how he'd practice for hours on violin and you know, how, what's the word for that, the tremolo, with the hands, and how, and how he worked to perfect that. And I, I think, as is so often the case with us, if we, if we're good at something, and we get praise from people, that reinforces it. And I think my dad received some pretty early encouragement, not only from his mother I'm sure, but from others, probably from Professor Burgard. And so, he, he did very well at it. And when he was 14, he played his first dance job at the German Hall, that's now Nowicki's, across the river.

CK: Oh my goodness.

DP: And made, if I remember correctly, ah, my dad telling me he made five dollars, playing violin at a dance. OK, so, he's playing a pretty good beat, I don't know what other instruments he had ah, to back him up, but that was the start of his professional music career, and my son Jonathan, almost matched him, but Jonathan played the first time for money when he was, just turned 15. I was hoping it'd be 14, because his grandpa would've been proud of him, but anyway.

CK: And so that would have been around 1922 if I'm doing my math correctly-

DP: Yeah.

CK: - at the old German Hall. OK.

DP: My grandfather ah, did not like my father playing outside the home. Where he came up with that, I don't know; but he took strong objection to my father going out anywhere and playing an instrument. He was to stay home, in the parlor, my grandmother could play the piano or organ, and she could come accompany my father and they would play in the parlor, and that was fine, maybe he'd let them play in churches or whatever, I don't know. I don't think they were, you know, especially religious- went to the Methodist Church I think, but don't think my grandfather did. But he had this bug about dad, my dad not playing outside. Well that, that festered, that never settled. That, my dad had too much, too much of a combination of talent, and he's young, and he wants to get outside, and, and, and I'm sure the girls liked the fact that he could play, you know, all these things are coming in his adolescence and, ah, when my dad turned 17 um, he had a, a row with my father, my grandfather rather, and my grandfather kicked him out of the house. And that was the issue. That was the main issue. And so my father, um, my father got a day job, and also was playing, he, he taught himself to play saxophone and clarinet and um, quit school. Had to quit high school, which is something he *always* regretted. And um, and started making his

living as a professional musician from the time he was 17, complemented by you know, working at other jobs- he worked in grocery stores, he pedaled ice-

CK: Mmhuh.

DG: -for Nelson Vroman, Clyde Vroman's father. Um, but that was, that was the start.

CK: Wow, that's, that's interesting, cuz in some way, there's a little bit of a parallel with both their lives, in terms of your grandfather, going out at a very young age on his own-

DP: Yeah, yeah.

CK: - and your dad-

DP: Yeah.

CK: - was doing the same thing.

DP: Yeah, tough, it was tough times then. But...

CK: I'm curious about- in their house, when he was younger and his mom played the piano, were there, what were the other sources, would you imagine, of music that he heard? Did they have a radio, did they, how else would he, did music come into his life do you think?

DP: Well, he, he sought out music and I can say that because my father would tell me- he and my, he and my mother dated from the time that they were very young- like 14.

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: And um-

CK: Maybe she was at the German Hall (laughs)

DP: Yeah, she may very well have been, and my father says he used to take here to dances on the handlebars of his, his bi, bicycle. So there were other, you know, there weren't a lot of radios, if there were radios, I suspect that there was a radio in, in their home; because my grandfather made pretty good money, I mean he had steady employment and, and had a skilled trade and had worked in, in a pretty lucrative business. But I don't know that for sure. But I, I know that my father went out into the music community such as it was here in Alpena at the time, and went to dances, and got to know other musicians and just became involved.

Um, jumping ahead just a little bit, not when he was 14; but certainly after seventeen and into his twenties, he had his own, started his own band in the '20's. He, he, my mother would tell me, he thought he was pretty, pretty special. Well he's a young guy-

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: And ah, you know, he had his picture taken just so, and he had his hair slicked just so, and he used to sign his name S-Y-D, with kind of a flourish. My father had beautiful penmanship. And you know, he was a normal guy that was in a position where ah, he could attract a little of attention.

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: And my mother had to, I think, tone him down- a lot- so he didn't go off too far and get carried away with himself or get into things that he shouldn't be doing. But he was involved in music right from the get-go.

CK: Ok.

DP: Not just in taking lessons, but in, you know-

CK: Performing.

DP: Performing and the, the broad spectrum of music- he played, (coughs) excuse me, he played in the, ah, in the Rotary Club productions. Ah, Rotary Club would put on a big production every year down at The Maltz Theatre, now The State. They had a big stage there and they had an orchestra pit. My dad played in those sorts of things. I don't know when he started doing that, but I imagine fairly young; because how many people were there that-

CK: That-

DP: -in town that played? So he was involved in all that kind of stuff. There weren't rade-, as many radios, there weren't record players, there weren't, there was no television- so live music, that was, that was the deal.

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: And it was a big deal- people loved the bands. My dad, they'd take the train down to Harrisville for a dance job, you know, again, speaking probably in the '20's now, maybe into the '30's. He said the whole village would be out to meet the band. "The band's here! The band's here! The dance is going to begin!" It's fun- people didn't have a lot of, a lot of opportunities for fun-

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: - as much as they do now. So-

CK: Right, right.

DP: -he was in the middle of all of that, you know?

CK: It was pretty exciting.

DP: Pretty exciting.

CK: Yeah, so when was, when did he form his first band?

DP: Well, I can't tell you exactly, other than, um, I want to say in the '20's.

CK: Ok. And-

DP: Cuz he had, as we talked about earlier, I mean, he just had a lot of different bands. Ah, Sid Pugh's Band, Sid Pugh's Orchestra, Sid Pugh's Matchless Masters of Rhythm- played all over the place, played with different people; but he had his own band pretty early on, and ah, I don't know, I just, I can't tell you exactly when he started. It just evolved.

CK: And did he have, I noticed in some of the letters that I've seen, that he played at a lot of school functions, end-of-the year proms-

DP: Mmhuh.

CK: - that sort of thing, did he have any regular gigs that you know of in Alpena during the early years?

DP: Oh yeah, when my, when he was in his twenties and thirties, I think he played every night. I mean, he was making his living doing that, supplemented by, supplemented by working on day jobs. And when, when, my mother and father married, I think my dad was 26, my mother was like 24, within a year, and they'd been married for a year and they were living in The Sparrow Apartments, and my mother, after a year, the conversation was, "Well, are you happy?"

And my mother said, "I'm miserable." And she was miserable because he was gone all the time. And my father was a pretty conscientious fellow and he loved my mother dearly. And he ah, he was working in the day, he was working at night in the bands, I mean, he just work, work, work, trying to make enough money so that they were, they were comfortable; but-

CK: He was never around.

DP: -there was no playtime. So, I, I, I, you know, he, he was playing *all* the time. Then, as he got ah, he got other jobs, he got more skillful jobs, let's see the Depression was in ah '29, '30, '32, '31, '32- so in the later part of the 20's, early 30's, my dad got a job as a, he was a timekeeper for the, for WPA.

CK: Oh! OK.

DP: So, he had a steady employment during the recess-, during the Depression. My mother was working as a sec-, secretary, for Cecil Bradford over at Thunder Bay Milling, which was where Abitibi is now. She was the, the gal there.

CK: What was the name of that?

DP: It was Thunder Bay Milling. Um, Cecil Bradford owned it and my mother worked for Cecil. So my mother was working, my father, is working for WPA and playing dance jobs, although he may have backed off from this intensity that he had earlier. My dad said during The Depression, they did very well- my mother and father, I mean they were fortunate; because they were working all the time.

CK: Mmhuh. And when were you born?

DP: I was born in '43.

CK: OK. So it was a while later.

DP: Yeah, it was a while later. My mother, the story there was, I guess, that my mother had rheumatic fever when she was young, and my father was always afraid that if she got pregnant, and my mother was too, I guess to a degree, ah, that it would be too much for her. I think, you know, they didn't have the medicine they do now-

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: - and the people didn't... So there was a real hesitancy there. And um, and I think they had a good life, I mean they were both working, my dad's playing in the bands, they didn't need any kids for gods sakes, so that maybe, was a big part of it. But, as they got older, I guess they decided maybe they better have a child, so I came along; but then they stopped (laughs). One's enough.

CK: So, your dad, in addition to his own, his own bands, he played with The Elks Band?

DP: The Elk's Band is, you've seen pictures of the Elk's Band- that was quite a dynamic organization back then. Ah, these guys travelled all over the country and they were, they were, they all dressed up and they'd be in drag which was a very unusual thing back then. But they went to Seattle, Washington; they went, they went to Miami, Florida-

CK: And they were based in Alpena?

DP: And they were based in Alpena; but The Elks Club was a lot more active back then, than it is now, as, as, all of those sorts of organizations were. And they had a national convention. And these guys, all, and they would raise money for it during the year, and the band would go out to the national convention and march in the national convention parade and they won awards- from little Alpena. And they had a, and they had a lot of fun, too. They just had a ball. My dad spoke, you know, glowingly of the Elks Band trips. There were at least two; because they were in Seattle and they were in Miami; but I'm thinking, and I don't know this for certain; but I think they went to Miami twice.

CK: And what year would you guess this was?

DP: Oh, it was just before I came along, so I think we're in the '30's-

CK: Late 30's?

DP: Yeah, before the war.

CK: OK.

DP: Just before the war.

CK: (Looking at Elk's Club photo) And I'm seeing other familiar names here-

DP: Middle to late '30's. Yeah-

CK: There's Leroy Gray, Dolly-

DP: Dolly.

CK: -Gray, um, Austin Deadman-

DP: Yep.

CK: There's a character here Eldred Hall, and I -

DP: Yeah, Eldred Hall.

CK: I'm familiar with that name.

DP: I think he was- and then there was Shorty Greer; Shorty led the band with a toilet plunger. And Shorty was like five foot tall, you know? And, my father was very short, my dad was only five foot two.

CK: I wonder if there are any recordings of this- of their music around?

DP: I never encountered one, my father never said that there had ever been any.

CK: OK.

DP: That's too bad. Yeah, and a lot of the guys that were here, were fellows that played in other bands around town. Because my father's band, and the bands that he played with, were not the only bands. You know, like we, I refer to the garment industry, lots of gals around. Eddie Woerpel came to town, Eddie played piano in Dolly Gray's Band. He came to town with a travelling band, The Mills Band. And met a gal here and stayed. Um, Bill Jerome- whose granddaughter is married to ah, Ray Reynolds who is the director of the high school music, or, or was, I think maybe he's retired; but he certainly was- he came to town in a travelling band. Um-

CK: The Mills Band or?

DP: He came with a different band. Eddie Woerpel came in The Mills Band, Bill Jerome came with another band, travelling band. There were lots of bands moving around the country, bigger bands, you know, than what Alpena, the size of Alpena could put together. My dad having a six piece band, or five piece, was a pretty good size.

CK: Mmhuh. Mmhuh. I think this date's earlier, I found this photo of the Northland Orchestra.

DP: Yeah, that's my dad. Yeah.

CK: Do you know anything about them?

DP: Nope.

CK: That looks like, I mean that goes, that's twenties.

DP: Yeah. Sure is. Look at that hat.

CK: Yep.

DP: Um, let me just- no I can't say who those guys are, I was gonna speculate, um, Cowan or Flewelling, but I don't think it's either one, I don't know who they are. Interesting car, my dad had one of those, when my mother worked out at Grand Lake, at The Grand Lake Hotel, he used to drive out there to see her; but also interesting, he has a violin-

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: - he's playing violin. Yeah.

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: Professionally, he doesn't have a horn. Well, but this horn probably belongs to this guy, and this horn belongs to that fellow, and my dad has two violins out there.

CK: The Northland Orchestra is what we are talking about, um, it's a photo of a quartet here, looks like it was probably one of Sid's early-

DP: Yeah.

CK –earliest bands. So- in a timeline, say we started out with The Northland Orchestra, and then you were saying there were many um, different manifestations of-

DP: Yeah.

CK: there was the ork- Sid Pugh Orchestra, Sid Pugh Band, when did he play with Dolly Gray?

DP: Well, Dolly- that was the end of his career, um, see my father of course started with violin and we see that there and we see it with Professor Burgard. And then he played with a lot of different fellows, and the reason, because – my dad was friends with about everybody that was in the music business in Alpena knew my dad, and my dad knew them. And he played with all of them at one time or another, whether it would be pickup bands or whether they had bands with their own names that lasted for a while; but Al Collin was one name, Roy Flewelling, um, um, Osger-, Osgerby, Osgerby was his last name- Torey, Torey Osgerby-

CK: Unhuh, that is his name, yes.

DP: Ok, um, was a piano player, the other one- Joe, Joe Emerson was another piano player, ah Saul Saretsky, um, um, Kuchemann, Bill Kuchemann, um, you know, I, I'm struggling for names now, but, but my point is, there were lots of people that my father had played with, and he would mention their names and had been with them in different bands or different combinations over the years. But then he, he lost his teeth and-

CK: So he couldn't-

DP: Yeah.

CK: -blow a horn anymore.

DP: Right. And that was, I want to say that was probably after the war. I think my dad had his own band, ah, pretty much up until the war and then he went in the army, he was drafted. And, at, he was 34 years old when he was drafted. And then when he came back, that's when I think he started with Dolly. And Dolly, it was kind of funny, Dolly's, they called it Dolly Gray's Band but Dolly never made any more money than the other guys. It was, it was just, well, let's pick a name, let's call it Dolly's band. I mean, that was the way it went. As far as any business, it was all kind of a consensus thing, where they'd play and do that sort of thing. But I got off track there, I, I think right after, when my dad came back from the war, that's when he, when Dolly Gray's Band started.

CK: Did, you don't need to answer this question; but his losing his teeth, was that a result of the war?

DP: No, unhuh, no.

CK: OK.

DP: You know, and I don't, he, as I say, he lost his teeth- he lost his upper teeth. He had, still had lower teeth, but he, he told me that he lost his, his lip, for the sax and the clarinet.

CK: Right, right.

DP: Lot of people with good fitting dentures still play; but my father didn't pursue that for whatever reason and he started playing the drums and liked it- he liked playing the drums. And ah, that was the way they went, you know.

CK: OK. Well let's talk about some of the places they played at, in addition to events at, for schools, what were some of the local establishments?

DP: Well, I used to help my father carry his drums; because moving the drums around- all the rest of the guys, they could put their horn in a little case and away they go. Where my father had to take the stuff down, drag it around- got to be a pain. So I, when I was in high school, I would help him with that. One of the places they played, that I remember unloading the drums, was over at Sportsmen's Bar. That was right across from The Thunder Bay Theatre. There is a new building there now, a, what is it a paper, paper-

CK: Oh, un huh.

DP: -company in there, paper wholesaler or something? But that was a bar- Sportsmen's Bar- and it was a big bar, big in the sense that it ran down Fletcher Street a long way- it was fair-, you know, maybe, relatively narrow, I'll say that- longer than narrower. And the front part of the bar was more of a bar; but in the back it was a dance hall. And there was a stage back there and a dance floor and a pretty good, pretty good sized room.

CK: Mm huh.

DP: He played there on many occasions. He played, ah, probably, during my life, mostly at ah, it's now The 19th Hole, it was Twin Acres. They played there a lot, um-

CK: The Owl Café, the original Owl?

DP: They played at The Owl, the original owl, ah, my father played there. And I remember as a kid, being down at The Owl with the band, sitting ah, in the restaurant part of The Owl. The Owl was big! It had a restaurant, it had a bar, and then it had this big dance floor and a stage back there and the whole thing. I remember being in there with, with the band. I was young. Why I was there, I don't know; but those were probably the three, the three main venues. And then they played, again, there wasn't any other source for music, really. Um, it, it, it came, of course, I mean the records got more popular and that sort of thing, but um, I don't know if they had a live band at the high school? But every, every home game- football season, basketball season or whatever, they played the band, they played the dance job on Fri-, Friday night.

CK: Mm huh.

DP: They being Dolly Gray.

CK: Un huh.

DP: So that was certainly steady work, they did that continuously.

CK: And they got paid for it.

DP: They got paid, oh yeah, absolutely. And um, I don't, they didn't get rich playing those jobs, but they, they, they did better in other places. And then in the, at Christmastime, um, they were really busy for a couple of weeks, for Christmas, New Years, cuz lots of people had parties- and of course there were New Year, New Year's Eve parties and that, those were booked well in advance. So my father wouldn't be around for a couple weeks in Christmas and New Year's- he was playing every night during that period of time. Um, I look back at it and my, my father looked back at it too- he gave up an awful lot, because every weekend he was gone. You know- every Friday night, every Saturday night, my mother and I were home. And then, he didn't get home til fairly late, so he, he's tired, he slept in, plus he's got a full time job during the week. So Sunday was the only day that my dad really had a, a day off.

CK: Mmhuh. And a day with you.

DP: Yeah.

CK: Yeah, yeah.

DP: And my father was, I always had a good relationship with my dad, ah, for the most part, um, a very good relationship with my dad; but we didn't do a lot together.

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: And he never promoted, and I don't think I'd had the talent my dad did in music; but I always loved music and I always wished he would have taught me the violin; because he never once did, never even ever made the effort to teach me. Ah, gave me the benefit of having piano lessons.

CK: OK.

DP: So I had that exposure; but my father, I'm pretty convinced, didn't want me to get involved with music; because he thought it would goof me up- and he, goof me up, he, he was working with people who had some education- he hadn't graduated from high school. It really bothered him. He went to work every day with a suit and tie and he worked with a lot of fellows who were fairly educated people- fellows and gals. And he wanted me to go to school and to have an education and he didn't want me getting sidetracked. Going down, thinking I was something special cuz I could play a violin and, and, not, and not be channeled with things that my dad thought were more important.

CK: OK.

DP: I think that's what it was. He just, you know, we'll give the kid some piano lessons, if he likes it a lot OK; if not, that's OK too. You know? So...

CK: And I think that's a common situation, really, you know-

DP: Yeah, from his perspective, yeah-

CK: Yeah.

DP: -it made sense. He, he did well and he had a good life, but I think he saw that he had better, other opportunities would have presented themselves had he gone a little different way, and maybe the Clyde Vromen story is part of my dad's-

CK: Tell us the Clyde Vromen story.

DP: Well at some point, Clyde is playing with my father, and for some reason I think that's at The Owl. Um, that's my recollection.

CK: OK.

DP: And Clyde is, Clyde is a saxophone player. And I think my dad had his Six Masters, Matchless Masters of Rhythm then.

CK: I love that name.

DP: Yeah.

DP: So he's got a five or six piece band, and they're playing every night and Clyde is in the band, and after the dance job, he comes up to my father and said, "Sid, I'm gonna be quitting the band."

Which my dad was, you know, disappointed to hear, because good sax and clarinet players were hard to find. So, the reason that Clyde gave, and Clyde was married at that time and had a child and was in his early thirties. And Clyde told my dad that what he was going to do was go back to school- meaning high school; because he didn't have a high school education. And that he was going to make his living selling instruments and giving lessons to kids at the high school- which is what he did- he being Clyde. Clyde graduated from Alpena High, ah, valedictorian of his class; but refused the honor because there was such a difference in age. He went on to The University of Michigan and got his bachelor's degree in music; went on and got his master's degree in music, and then went on and got a PhD in music education. I'm not positive of that.

CK: Mmhuh. OK.

DP: But he, he got to that level and became a professor emeritus at the University of Michigan and was the director of admissions at U of M for many, many years and would appear on national TV. I remember seeing him on national television in Alpena. So, my dad maybe kicked himself a little bit that he didn't do the same thing that Clyde did, or at least got so he could have been a music teacher or something; because he loved music. Um, but that's all speculation.

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: Yeah. CK: And did they have- did they maintain a relationship after that?

DP: No, no, not really. Other than, I remember, and I was in high school I think at the time, Clyde did come back to Alpena. He and his wife and ah, I don't, I don't know why, but my father and some other fellows that he knew in the music, music scene, here in Alpena, um, spent the evening with him. They all had a reunion of sorts. So I mean, Clyde left with, I don't know if there was any hard feelings or anything like that, he went to a different-

CK: OK.

DP: -whole different world, you know?

CK: I'm gonna flash back a little bit- we were talking about different places, venues that they played at. Do you have a sense of where-(looking at a photo) this is a bowling party of some sort, and that's The Dolly Gray Band.

DP: My guess would be Twin Acres.

CK: Can you name the people in that picture?

DP: Sure, there's Dolly Gray on the clarinet, and he played sax too. That's Bill Jerome on the trumpet. That's Austin Deadman on the trombone. And that's my father and that's Eddie Woerpel. Eddie Woerpel came to town with a travelling band. So Bill and Eddie, well, those were the two, those were the two.

CK: Now, did that particular band, were the members fairly steady, did they stay together for a while?

DP: For twenty-five years.

CK: Really?

DP: Well, from right after the war, when this, when they came together, so let's, I mean even if it was 1950-and they broke up in 1970 some.

CK: Wow.

DP: So twenty-five, thirty years. They had almost 300 years of playing experience.

CK: And they played primarily Big Band, Big Band sounds, swing music?

DP: They were, there's gonna be, I, I do a bi-weekly article for the newspaper. And my last article was in yesterday. My next article will be, will mention this band, and um, and mention how it came to an end. And the way, the way that happened, I was home from school, and this is ah, in the middle, later part of the '60's, I suspect, and my father had played with the band, um, a dance job, up in, in Posen at some location. It was a New Year's party, I believe, although I'm not positive of that; but it was that time of year, so it just makes sense, that that's what it was. And the people, at that party, ah, at the hall up there, um, wanted the band to play an oberek. And an oberek is, is a national Polish dance. It's not quite as popular as the polka; but it's right up there. And it's a very, the polka's you swing the women around; but this one, you jump and there's more to it and the beat is faster and it's more intense. The band didn't know how to play an oberek. And the Dolly Gray's Orchestras' pedigree was Benny Goodman and ah, Glenn Miller-

CK: Tommy Dorsey.

DP: The Swing Bands! Tommy Dorsey. The Swing Bands. And um, they didn't know obereks. So the crowd up there, ah, as the night wore on and the beer consumption increased, got more and more belligerent or at least some of them did. And ah, started giving Dolly a bad time and I guess somebody tried to unscrew the front of his clarinet or something like that. Well these guys at that point are, well, Austin and Dolly were the oldest, my dad was in his '60's. These guys maybe were in there seventies. Eddie was the younger one by a few years. And ah, so I, they, they played the dance job and it was over, and so I come home, and my father, it's late at night, I'm young, I'm out late, and my dad's sitting at the, at the kitchen table and he tells me just what I told you. And then he said, "Son, when you get run out of Posen, it's time to hang it up." You know? (Laughter)

So, yeah, so Austin, very shortly after that, Austin had a stroke. And ah, Austin was not replaceable, none of those guys were replaceable- with each other, you know? It was a cohesive group for so long. They never had, there's no music in front of them, they never had any music. But anyway, Austin had a

stroke, and that was the end of the band. And that was, that was in the mid-60's – later, later part of the 1960's.

CK: OK. Did they have rehearsals at home?

DP: They never rehearsed. Good lord! No, they never-

CK: They got together and they played.

DP: They got together and they played.

CK: Alright.

DP: And, and Eddie Woerpel, there's no music in front of Ed, these guys, ah, you know, they just, they'd play anything you wanted to hear. Hum a bar or two and away we go. (laughter)

CK: Oh.

DP: Yeah. That's why you know this was the latter part of my dad's career and these guys are all, you know, older men. Like I said, there's 300 years of playing experience there. Ah, they did it, it was a, it was a source of income certainly, but it was a recreational thing for them, they weren't out ah, make any waves at this stage. They, you know, they, they didn't want to learn any new music. Especially...

CK: I'm doing the math in my head now, and seems like your dad's ca-, musical career, spanned close to fifty years.

DP: Closer to sixty.

CK: Closer to sixty?

DP: Yeah.

CK: He started say, oh, in 1922, I think was the date we put on –

DP: 22. (counts)

CK: 22.

DP: Oh wow, you're, I guess you're right-

CK: To the early 70's would be-

DP: Yeah, yeah.

CK: Fifty years.

DP: Yeah, yeah. You're right. It's closer to the fifties, I guess I added wrong; but if you go, well no, you still you're gonna be, you're gonna be, closer to right, but I would have started it more, if you're talking professional music career, then certainly fifty.

CK: Mmhuh.

DP: But if he's ten there, we can add a few more years to it.

CK: Right, right.

DP: And he quit, yeah- long time. And all these guys, Austin was a little bit older than my father and played, had the same, you know, started when he was young, so if you got fifty years, yeah, 250 years there, even assuming Eddie didn't have quite the fifty years in at that point. He continued to play, Ed did. He was the only one. After the band broke up, Eddie would take jobs playing background music on the piano.

CK: OK.

DP: Yeah.

CK: In a restaurant, or...?

DP: Yeah, he, he did a lot of work that way. They'd hire him, they'd have a meal and a meeting or something and Ed would play.

CK: Alright.

DP: He was an amazing piano player.

CK: Well, it's been really a pleasure to hear about your father. And since I started doing this there's been the Dolly Gray band continually comes up and for the longest time, I thought Dolly Gray was a woman.

DP: Well sure, understandable. Why wouldn't you?

CK: I got that straightened out quite a while ago. And, um, I'm happy to see that we have some music from that band that we'll be able to add to this segment. Doug is there anything else that you'd like to...?

DP: No, I, I-

CK: - talk about?

DP: I think we've covered it very well in the time. I thank you very much for the opportunity to reminisce like this, it, it's been a pleasure for me, um, I, these guys in the band treated me like a million dollars when I was a kid- they were great, they were great people, um, they just, they loved music and they loved playing and it's nice that they're being, ah, being remembered.

CK: Yes, yeah.

DP: So thank you.

CK: Part of our heritage here in Alpena. Thank you.

