

University of Illinois Student Life 1928-1938
Oral History Project
Alfred J. Kamm – Class of '34
Atwood, Illinois
June 13, 2001

START OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Ellen Swain: This is an oral history interview for the University of Illinois Archives. The interviewer is Ellen Swain, the narrator is Alfred J. Kamm, an alumnus from the class of 1934. We are at Mr. Kamm's home in Atwood, Illinois and the date is June 13th, 2001.

Could I ask you your full name and birth date.

Alfred J. Kamm: My full name is Alfred Jacob Kamm. I was born on May the 12th, 1911 on the farm. Dad was planting corn and they told him something was about to happen, so better come to the house. I don't know whether they knew they were going to have twins or not, but I have a twin brother, who is a few seconds younger than I am. He passed away about 6 years ago.

ES: Did you have brothers and sisters too?

AK: I have an older brother and a younger, and a sister who is the oldest of children. She went to the U of I, and was a school teacher for many years. Then she fell in love with a pre-Med student and married him and he came and practiced medicine in Atwood then for many years.

ES: So you grew up in the Atwood area?

AK: Yes uh-huh.

ES: Had your parents gone to college?

AK: No. That's kind of interesting. Back in those days, the farm boys only went to school when there wasn't anything to do on the farm, if they were harvesting or planting they stayed home. So, it was not unusual for some of students being older than the teachers [*laughter*]. I guess they all turned out pretty well, however, I don't remember any of them going to jail.

ES: So you went to Atwood High School?

AK: Yes.

ES: You were talking a little bit about that, about the basketball team.

AK: Yes we were members of the Okaw Valley Conference, and that was the original Okaw Valley. And we were one of the smaller schools. We had the county seats of Sullivan and Tuscola and Monticello, and that part of the conference. Our junior year we didn't have enough players out for two football teams, so the coach invited some of the alumni in to rough us up, and

they did. But we got a few more out and we won the conference at Okaw Valley. And we won the basketball conference two years, and also the track two years in a row. I don't know, we had a real good group of boys, part of that was due to a science teacher, E. Dale Trout, who started the Junior High basketball team. They played at Decatur and Champaign-Urbana schools, and beat most of them, so when they came into high school, they were pretty well versed in basketball. It took a little bit although for us country boys to catch up, but we had a basketball team too. The coach and teacher down there was Harry Bruson. He put up the basketball goals outside, of course, with his own money. And he'd book a game with some other country school, and we'd leave the last recess and he'd leave the school in charge of the oldest girl, that way we'd go and play basketball. That wouldn't go over very good today, I don't guess, but it worked alright then.

ES: Did most of the students at Atwood, or some of them at least go on to college?

AK: There were quite few, most of them I remember. Probably the most famous of the Atwood alumni would be Kenneth Tug Wilson. You may not have heard of, but he was actually director at Northwestern for many years, and he was commission of the Big Ten for several years, and he was probably of the first sturdy athlete at Atwood.

ES: How was it that you got to go the U of I, how did that come about?

AK: Well, my sister had gone, and my older brother, he went for a little while until he fell in love, and he got married and stayed home. We decided we wanted to go, of course, we were interested in athletics as well as getting a degree in Agriculture. And so it worked out pretty well at that time they, and still I think we have some county scholarships available, and each one of us got a scholarship, which was worth \$400, which didn't seem like very much, but it was in those days because it makes me think of the first job that I had away from home. The man who had sunflowers, and we finished about 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon. We had a good lunch, and I was to get \$1 for a day, the owner wasn't home, so I thought I'll go back. Before I got back he took bankruptcy, so I never got paid. Later he worked for my dad, but I never asked him for the money. I thought he needed in worse than I did.

ES: So you said you got a county scholarship to go to school?

AK: Yeah.

ES: Did your brother?

AK: Yeah, each one of us got one.

ES: Were there a number of those available?

AK: I think there were about four for each county at one time. I don't know what it is now and of course it has to be considerably more money now. We got into a fraternity our second year and we got a job working for our meals, so it didn't cost very much, mostly your books and

course everybody dressed in a very dirty manner, and most people wore corduroy pants, and they said that if they weren't really [dirty] enough to stand up you still kept wearing them [*laughter*].

ES: I wanted to ask you too, was education important to your parents? Why did you decide you wanted to go on to school?

AK: Well I think they were very interested in this, probably as much as we were, and neither one of them, of course, had more than a grade school education, but my dad was very alert. He entered a spelling contest at the old country school, and won it, and I don't think he went past the 4th grade. Interesting thing, he was President of the Board of Education when my brother and I graduated from high school, and he gave us our diploma. And I was President when I handed the diploma to my son.

ES: Oh that's neat. So they really wanted you to go to college?

AK: I think so.

ES: Rather than just staying on the farm?

AK: Well not necessarily that but they wanted us to get a little more education. Now my younger brother, he didn't go to college, but he enlisted in the Air Force without consulting his parents [*laughter*], which kind of shook my folks up a little bit.

ES: Did you go to the U of I with a career goal in mind?

AK: Well, actually both of us qualified as Ag teachers, but I never taught because I went into soil conservation work. My brother, he did teach, and he later became a farm advisor, and there was a little kid in Monticello, and back in those days, why 75 bushels to the acre was a pretty good corn yield, so he organized the 100 bushel club, which went over with a bang you know. But shortly after that, why hybrid came in and anhydrous ammonia and the yield went right up, through the roof you know. So of course, back in the Depression days, when you sold your hogs for 4 cents a pound and then corn for 10 cents a bushel, why if you had 100 acres, you only had maybe \$750. And now you probably have 15 or 16 out of the same number of acres you know. But of course expenses are way up, seed corn \$89 a bushel, and anhydrous is probably 25, \$30 an acre. So everything bought and taxes are higher, so each thing you sort of bounce up I guess. Now the farmers are little bit pressed again for trying to make a profit.

ES: What was the Ag department like when you were in school? How big was it?

AK: Well, I don't remember how big it was, but I think that everybody seemed to be pretty friendly and one old gentlemen there that was in Ag department, he said he'd been accused of grading too high for his students. He said "They had never considered the quality of teaching, because I think I am an excellent teacher." And I think I'm sure the classes were smaller than they are now, and maybe got a bit more closer supervision. I wouldn't know about that of course. I think that some of the students were very fond of their instructors.

ES: Did they have a relationship outside the classroom? Did you know your professors on a personal level?

AK: Not especially. The one thing that might be of interest, one of the ladies who was . . . in one of the classes was making a term paper, studying of twins. And when she discovered that I had a twin brother, she wanted to know if we would agree to meet with her a few times and discuss twins and we did. And we were getting close to the end of the semester and she said that, "Here's something that I want you to have," the old professor is sort of single minded and this is what he had been thinking about lately. And they proved to be the final exam questions [laughter]. But we did pretty well, and the boys we studied with did pretty well on the final exam.

ES: Did you have any favorite professors in Ag or in any other subjects?

AK: Not especially. I suppose that one or two, not in particular I don't believe. But the Doctor Snapp who was in the Animal Husbandry Department, I think he was rated very highly by all the students. And he was a very fine gentlemen.

ES: What do you think were the main strengths or weaknesses of your education?

AK: Well, I really don't know. I suppose Agriculture has changed so much since I was in school that all we thought of probably was trying to do a good job in, whether it was teaching or whether in was in Agriculture, soil conservation work or whatever it might be. I don't think we thought too much beyond that because we didn't have any high financial expectations. I think, when we started out in soil conservation at \$35 a week, finally got raised to \$40 and when I resigned I got a raise after I resigned, which I couldn't understand, but I accepted it, with accrued vacation time that made it possible for it to be paid about 60 days after I resigned, so I got the benefit of the increase in wages for a little while anyway.

ES: Did you feel like you were prepared in your later jobs by your education?

AK: Well I think perhaps as we went along that we became better qualified as workers because we realized more and more was expected of us. I don't know that we really discovered that in school. So of course I remember one of the fraternity boys, after I came home, they worked the DU fraternity, and they were having a bull session, and he said he just hoped when he got out of school he made enough money that he had to pay income taxes. And I think that probably came back to haunt him a little bit [laughter].

ES: Can I ask you now about rules on campus students. Do you remember anything in particular that students couldn't do?

AK: Well you couldn't have a car unless you got a special permit. And of course the campus wasn't nearly as large as it is now, and I suppose 90% of the students walked, a few of them had bicycles of course, but we all hoped that we didn't have too many rainy days, because most of us did not have a raincoat, maybe we didn't have, but we hoped for fair weather.

ES: Why do you think they didn't want you to have a car on campus?

AK: Well I don't know why, unless they felt that it might encourage road mess or something. I don't know. I really don't know, but I think some of the kids that were on athletic teams were in training over the holidays and the semester breaks, why they very frequently had a car up there, without anybody objecting to it. It was probably a Model-T. Do you ever remember a Model-T?

ES: Uh-huh. Was smoking prevalent in the student body?

AK: Probably not as much as it is now. I suppose, as far as some of the kids when Prohibition became a thing of the past they wanted to test several different varieties of beer the same night, which that got them a little bit trouble, but outside of that I don't think. Of course beer was available, bootleg beer was available, anybody could make a phone call, it would be delivered to your door.

ES: How did that work?

AK: Well, they handed you sack with a bottle in it, and you gave them the money, that's all there was to it, it wasn't very complicated.

ES: Who were the people who were providing it?

AK: Well, that was apparently the authorities didn't know that, but the students did. Knew the number to call. One fellow I don't know what he, he had a bottle in his coat pocket, walking up and down and somehow though it exploded. He had a little too much to drink, he put his hand in there and then he cut his hand, and he came over to the DU house, asking Mrs. Hunt to fix his hand up for him because he was bleeding you know and she did. But otherwise it wasn't too...pretty peaceable people I think most of them.

ES: Do you remember the Dean of Men, Thomas Arkle Clark?

AK: Yeah.

ES: Did you have any impressions of him as a student?

AK: Well I suppose no more so than many other instructor up there or people. But, I know he was highly regarded as a fine man, and I think the Ag boys had a real warm feeling for nearly all the people in the Ag Department, whether they later on, or they kept in contact or not, but I think that the fact they were talking about things on the farm and the kids were from the farm too, most of them, but they had a bond there that held up pretty well.

ES: Did the students who majored in Ag know each other pretty well, so it was a contained community kind of thing.

AK: Well I think so. One thing I'm sure has changed is there are quite a few girls that are in Ag school now, but then it was very rarely that there were any girls in the classes, unless it was chemistry class or something like that. But a strictly Ag course, why it was nearly all boys.

ES: Do you remember any women in your classes?

AK: No I don't remember. They had a variety of instructors of course, some of them were very pleasant and some of them were pretty sharp [*laughter*].

ES: So in regard to Clark, you never had any personal contact with him? You were never called into his office for—?

AK: No. The only office I was ever called in to, the old gentlemen who supervised U of I athletics, called me in and said, "Kamm, why were you playing basketball at a certain place the other night?" I said, "I see you're a high point man." I said, "That is correct, but it was my older brother," I said, "It wasn't me." But he's going to call me on the carpet you know for violating the rules and regulations of an athlete. He had the wrong Kamm.

ES: And why did that violate the rules, if it had been you?

AK: Well you were being considered a professional.

ES: Oh I see.

AK: And you weren't eligible then to compete in amateur athletics.

ES: Tell me about morals on campus. Was there a high moral code, or was morality regulated?

AK: Well, a lot of people maybe have a different view of fraternities but I think all the fraternities tried to maintain a pretty moral atmosphere. Of course there's always one or two kids that have to kick up their heels. By and large I think they seldom used a paddle back in those days, and an upper classman could give a freshman a black mark for most any reason. One little fellow, a freshman, Freddie Lynn, he was a fine young fellow, but he was sort of careless about combing his hair. One of the seniors, Nick, said, "Freddie, I have hair dressing on my dresser. I want you to use it, and if I catch you on the campus again with your hair uncombed, it's going to be a black mark!" Well he caught Freddie, and the black mark with 3 paddles on the bottom. You could give it anyway you wanted it, you could make it easy or you could make it hard. Well, he hit him a couple times pretty easy, and the second time, why, you had to lean over and grab their ankles, and he almost put him over on his head on that last blow, but Freddie combed his hair after that. So there is a seed of understanding [*laughter*].

ES: And that was an older student keeping a younger student in line?

AK: Yeah. But I think that probably the paddling is out the window now. I don't know how, or what else they, just about persuasion I guess.

ES: Were there rules about dating?

AK: No, not that I know of. I expect the dating was at low ebb because of the financial status of most of the students.

ES: What kinds of things could you do on a date? Did you have cheap dates?

AK: Well, basically we'd go to the movies I think, and if you walked in the campus uptown where the Virginia Theatre is, you had a pretty good walk. Your date better be willing walk unless you could afford a cab [*laughter*].

ES: I wanted to ask too you about religion. Were students involved in the foundations on campus?

AK: Well, I wasn't, and of course I think most of the farm kids in those days they attended church and Sunday school at home, but some of them attended it on occasion, but I don't know any that were really regular in attendance. I guess the most prominent member of our fraternity when I was there was Scotty Reston, the newspaper man. Scotty was a soccer player and a pretty good golfer, and I know he, one spring when the weather was nice, he picked up his clubs and went out to the Urbana Country Club the first he had played that year and he set new record at the Country Club. But he was a very interesting young man. Sally Fulton, the gal he married was dating with Freddie Lydall, who was an English, by birth, and they had a dance there. Sally and Scotty sort of eyed each other a little bit and pretty soon she was dating Scotty. And Freddie says, "I just don't believe that was cricket." You figure he was being undercut you know. I guess he was, but then that was his problem. I was happy to find out later that they, Scotty and Sally did get married you know, apparently very happy.

ES: Now how did you know him, tell me that again? How did you know Scotty Reston?

AK: He was President of our fraternity.

ES: While you were in the fraternity?

AK: Yes.

ES: So you were friends, you knew him?

AK: Yeah, uh-huh, oh yeah. He was very studious and had a good sense of humor, and he was pretty solid in his viewpoint, and pretty serious if you talked to him. He was always pretty serious, you know, he knew what he was saying.

ES: Was he active in journalist activities when he was in school?

AK: I think he was. I'm not sure exactly what activities he was in at that time, but I'm sure he was.

ES: So you have a favorable impression of him?

AK: Uh-huh, oh yes.

ES: Did you know who the President was when you were in school, or did students have much contact?

AK: Well yeah, we knew who he was but I don't know that he had too many contacts.

ES: He wasn't a very visible person to the student body?

AK: Probably not so much, maybe, certainly not the publicity that we have now of all the officials. Much, much closer news coverage of everything that goes on at the University now, than I'm sure there wasn't at that time.

ES: Do you remember President Chase? He would have been there in 1930.

AK: I remember the name mostly, yeah, uh-huh.

ES: But you didn't have an impression of him and how he—?

AK: No, no.

ES: Okay, when you first moved up to the University, where did you live?

AK: We lived in a private home, a rented room, for the first year. I had a cousin that was a member of the Sigma Pi fraternity and he encouraged us to become members. They promised us a job working for our meals, so that was a pretty good inducement [*laughter*]. We didn't want to miss any meals if we could help it.

ES: So you worked in your own fraternity or—?

AK: No, I worked right across the street with the DU fraternity.

ES: And you're a member of Sigma Pi?

AK: Yeah, I was a member of Sigma Pi.

ES: I see.

AK: Anyway, the rule that Mrs. Hunt had...if we had a substitute worker come in and work on Sundays, when the regular workers were off, why that person was entitled to two meals. They get a meal that day, and then they would be back Monday night. So the fraternities were having trouble during the Depression getting members. There were times when there was just as many eating in the kitchen as there was in the dining room. Funny things happen, a man named Olsen, who was an excellent waiter and also in advanced military. And he came in a little late, as a waiter one night, and no one thought to tell him that they had just waxed the dining room floor, and he had his hard rubber, or hard leather heeled boots on. And he went through the swinging

door with little pea bowls on the tray, and his feet went out from under him, and I don't think there was a square foot that didn't have a pea in that dining room. And he came back out and his face was just as red as any red could be, because, "Opie, I cannot go back in and work tonight." And she said, "Go on home, we'll take care of it."

ES: What kinds of things did you do in you job at the DU [house]?

AK: Mostly doing the dishes and I think we had to bring the dirty dishes in out of the dining room, and Mrs. Hunt had been a waitress, and some of the youngsters were having trouble all of the 8 people seated at a table, getting all those pieces on a tray. And she said, "I can show you how to do it but I don't want you to try to do it." And she started piling them up on her arm, and she kept piling everything up and come out with everything on her arm. Of course, she is a pretty husky gal too.

ES: And you just got your meals for that, you didn't get any money?

AK: No, just meals. Uh-huh. And one of the things that made it a little difficult for some of the athletes, and I expect the same thing is true today, we had frequently had Monday, Wednesday, and Friday classes. Well with the major transportation in that day, it was either by bus or by train, and if we had probably two games over the weekend, one on Saturday and one on Monday night, then we leave on Friday and miss Friday's afternoon class. And we wouldn't get back until Tuesday, so we'd miss two classes that way. I know we were having an old commander of the military, everybody had to take a little military work, he was complaining about the absences in his class, and he said, "Kamm I know you've got an excuse, but these other people don't have."

ES: Did they keep role in the class?

AK: Yeah, uh-huh.

ES: They kept track of that whether you showed up or not?

AK: Oh yeah they had a big military parade every year and the head military men would ride horses you know, and make a lot of fan fair out of it. I don't whether they still have a military parade or not, I don't think so.

START OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

ES: Could you tell me what it was like to live in a fraternity in the 30s? What kinds of things you did, initiation and—?

AK: Well, of course you had some pranks of some kind for initiation. Of course they all slept in the dormitory, and of course in the winter time it got pretty cold with the window open hopefully why you weren't by one of them at that time.

ES: Why did they have the windows open?

AK: Wanted everybody to get fresh air, I guess [*laughter*]. I think one of the fascinating things about being in a fraternity is that, with 40 or 50 kids there you only get a wide variety of attitudes and personalities, and some of the were very military like and others were very funny. I remember one young fellow he said, “My father looked at me and just shook his head, and I said, ‘Dad what’s wrong.’ He said, ‘Well I don’t see anything, I think my only chance for you is to send you to school and develop your mind.’” Well he became later, his father was involved in progress manufacturing at Arthur and he became President of the firm down there and he is still living in Arthur. Was very frugal, we’d play ping pong in the basement, and I could beat him if you had a nickel on the game, but otherwise we were pretty even, tried to tighten it up a little bit. At one of the Illini outings down at the country club they added \$2500 prize if someone made a hole in one on a par 3 and Everett made a hole in one, then he complained because his bar bill was \$375.

ES: Did you make close friends in the fraternity?

AK: Well, two or three is about what I would make. Of course, when we didn’t get into the so called bull section because we were, the time we got back from work over at the other, across the street, they were all ready to hit the books you know. But we didn’t have quite as much time as the other kids had.

ES: How many people had outside jobs like that, had to work for their meals?

AK: Well, there was usually about, I think we had about 3 dishwashers and a nearly 2 waiters in each fraternity. Now but anybody who had some other, maybe worked regular hours. But I don’t know how many fraternities and sororities there were at that time, but I suppose some of the other. I know a kid or two, they’d work down at the clothing store, and he’d get a small amount pay and he’d get a discount on his shirts and trousers and such.

ES: Did many of the students in your fraternity have to work?

AK: I suppose there was maybe a half dozen besides those who work for their meals. There were probably 5 or 6 who worked for their meals. I think most of people who got the meal were the ones who were interested in some extracurricular activities, whether that be the athletics or the band or something, whether they were favored a little bit because they had competition between the fraternities for a lot of different things, like soccer and boxing, and one thing or another. They’d give a little extra effort to satisfy by giving them a job if they needed it.

ES: Tell me about your activities in the athletic department. When did you start in sports and—?

AK: Well, when I was a freshman we couldn’t compete, and we had four freshman teams. And we had a round-robin tournament, and you just sort of settled down, finally my brother and I ended up making the varsity—

ES: Now what sport is this?

AK: Basketball.

ES: This is basketball.

AK: But that was back in the...you wouldn't recognize that game if you saw it then, because the 25 or 30 points was a pretty good score, very deliberate set plays and passing. They didn't have the 10 second rule and they could make an extra foul, and they eliminated the center jump, they used to have to center jump after every score. If you could control the center jump, why that was worth about 5 or 6 points in game you know. And it probably was. I know when Huddy Helmick was the center on our team, and we had a timeout and he was talking to Craig Ruby the coach and Craig said, "Now when I chew on my handkerchief you change the defense." "Well, that won't work," he said, "You're always chewing on your handkerchief." [Laughter]. But we had one big fellow, I can't remember his name now, but he was a real good eater and the last game we had that season was Northwestern, the coach said, "We've got a little money, you fellows can order anything you want." And he ordered a big steak, when he had it about half devoured why he said, "You know I think I'm going to get full!" [Laughter].

ES: You said a little bit about his, but you had to travel throughout the Big 10?

AK: Yeah, uh-huh.

ES: How did that affect your school, you said you missed class?

AK: Missed class.

ES: Did it make it hard?

AK: It made it on some. It depended on how tough the course was that you missed, you know. This guy Andrew, we were over at Purdue and playing at Purdue and Ruby came up and says, "We're not going to be able to afford a room for all of you fellows and I don't think we'll be able to use either one of you tonight." So my brother and I went down to the movie. Then later on why, we were in there, and the I had the honor of playing against the great Johnny Wooden, and I thought I did, while I was guarding him, I held him to one basket. I thought I was doing pretty good.

ES: How did you travel around, did you have a bus?

AK: Well went to Purdue and Indiana by bus and that happened to be that the bus driver was Dick Stall, he was cousins of the cook at the DU house. This is a little side track. He said, "If you get a job on this camping tour, you can drive the cook wagon." Well I never drove a truck and Bill Parkhill said to Dick, "Take Jake out on this shake down," and well I knew Dick pretty well, because he drove the basketball team around and the old wheel speed wagon, he said, "You have to double clutch it." I didn't know what he meant. I didn't want to cut up the transmission. I got back and Bill said, "How did you get along?" Dick said, "Just fine." I think I got half way to Denver before I could shift gears on that old truck. But it was a fascinating

deal. You put a crank in it and powered it, and you opened it up with a 3 foot walkway, in the middle of the top went up, and the right hand side were kitchen cabinets and the left hand side were two gas stoves, 8 top burners and 2 ovens, behind the driver seat was a 32 volt, a Koler light plant, and gas refrigerator on the other side. And the tents were put up in a horse shoe shape and the cook wagon in the opening of the horse shoe and of course we didn't use a power plant if we could hook into regular electricity. But anyway, we had a few weeks tour out through the mountains of the West.

ES: Now you'll have to tell me again what that was about, that was right after you graduated?

AK: Yes. That was a so called educational Geography tour, put on by one of the professors in the Geology Department and Geography Department. One of the highlights was a buffalo round up in the Black Hills. That and climbing, the boys were supposed to go climb Long's Peak in Esson Park, but I was located with the girls camp, and they forgot to tell them that we were supposed to pick up the boys to go on that hike, so we went on a horseback ride, that was kind of interesting. But anyway, that was first chance to a Rocky Mountain, later on I went back hunting many years.

ES: But it was a cheap way to see the West?

AK: Oh, it sure it was.

ES: In 1934.

AK: They had, most of the students were high school seniors and the teacher in those schools had sold enough tickets for this trip, why then they came along as chaperones. Got a free chaperone trip out of it. But it was pretty interesting, especially when, we only had a single tire on the wheel of the truck, and one of them blew out and that night when they opened it up why everything begin, they opened up the cabinet doors and everything began to fall out. The only thing that was really messy was when the flour fell out. The rest of it was pretty good shape.

ES: Tell me, getting back to athletics, did the athletes on campus have a higher social status, did they—?

AK: I don't know if they did. Some of them may have had. I don't think I had. *[laughter]*.

ES: Did a lot of people attend the basketball games? Was there a good attendance?

AK: Well, the old gym, Huff Gym they called it, would only hold about 4500 and of course they didn't have to have so many people in those days because they didn't have any scholarships to pay.

ES: You just tried out for the team when you were a freshman then and made it?

AK: Yeah, might have not. I don't know, the coaches may have talked to a few people, but all that was ever said to my brother was when they came into the locker room when we were at the state tournament. Of course you'll got to Illinois if you're interested in Agriculture.

ES: So they knew about you before you came, they had scouted?

AK: Oh yeah. An interesting man came down from Notre Dame, talked to us, and we really appreciated that, and the folks invited him to stay all night, and he had breakfast, and we told him the next morning we weren't interested in going to Notre Dame. And so he was a pretty good promoter though for Notre Dame.

ES: What about being in a fraternity, did that give you higher social status do you think? Did people want to be in the Greek system?

AK: Well, I don't know whether it did or not. I suppose when they had a, if ever, an agreement with a sorority to have a joint dance, why it might make some difference, but—

ES: Were there some fraternities that were more popular than others?

AK: Probably so, but my cousin got us interested in Sigma Pi. I think we went to two or three other fraternities for a meal, but we weren't interested in going elsewhere.

ES: Did you have contact with George Huff at all?

AK: Only in passing I say yeah, uh-huh. He was a stunning character, no doubt about that. And, they of course, after I think as I remember, there was very little, I don't know when the NCAA was organized, and I don't know when their authority became so powerful, but I don't remember that any school every being in a difficulty, you know, violations. Of course they've got 101 violations now that some of them you don't even know about probably.

ES: But he was well liked by the athletes?

AK: Oh yes, uh-huh.

ES: Revered.

AK: Bob Zuppke... a local boy in Atwood, Dick Fay, he was captain, I think, of the '46. He weighed about 200 pounds, he was about the biggest guy on the team he said. But now why, you'd have to be a defensive back or something if you weighed less than 200 you know.

ES: Uh-huh. Were athletics important, did the students go to the games and—?

AK: Oh I think they did, yeah.

ES: There was interest there?

AK: They had to really interested in that. I was fortunate in going to the dedication of the stadium. My sister was in school at the time. She saw Red Grange gallop to some fame.

ES: He was gone before you got to school?

AK: Oh yes, uh-huh.

ES: He was gone by the late 20s. What kinds of things did you do for fun when you had free time?

AK: Well we went to other athletic events of course, and some us participated in some of the intramural contests. But basically I think we were going to the movies.

ES: The movies were big.

AK: They had some of the houses, I think, there were 3 different theatres at that time, and you buy a ticket, I think, for 25 cents. And the next time, I think you could get in for 15 cents.

ES: Gave you some incentive for coming back.

AK: Yeah that's right. I remember Virginia had a last star attraction, where young fellow, was a very handsome young man, he was a pretty good singer, his name was Buck Done. And he was billed as the singing usher. And of course he'd seat you, you know, and smile and then he'd sing once or twice and I think everybody felt they knew him well but they really didn't you know.

ES: Did you go to any of the dances, or—?

AK: Very few, very few, yeah.

ES: Were they expensive?

AK: I don't remember, I suppose the ones that were held by the fraternities, they were reasonable, all you had to do was be there. I don't know how, there are probably a half a dozen fellows in each fraternity that were probably a little better socializers than the rest of us, and they sort of kept things going.

ES: Did the fraternity kids socialize with the independent kids often?

AK: Only I guess if you met them in sports or in some other activity in school. I know the some of the kids were interested working for the *Daily Illini*, you know and they gave them a pretty good foundation for later if they got in on the newspaper business. They had some strong opinions in those days, just as they have now.

ES: Did it help to be in a fraternity to get in to those different organizations?

AK: I don't think it mattered. I don't know that it did or not, but they had a certain society clubs that were voted on. I don't know whether the student body voted on them or the members of the club itself, I don't know just how they're arranged. But they of course, fraternities are always interested in having one or two shining examples of the campus you know. And of course Scotty Reston, he was one of the big ones.

ES: Was he big on campus too?

AK: Oh yeah, oh yeah he was very popular. A lot of our fraternities, they sort of had liking I think for athletes, and they had a few football players, and basketball players and track stars. That worked out pretty good when they got intramurals. They had a pretty good group to start with.

ES: So your fraternity did pretty well in the intramurals, because you had so many?

AK: I never boxed in my life, but I got a second place trophy in the light heavy weight division, but they had to put me into to a sweat chamber to get me down to 175 [*laughter*].

ES: How did that work, how was intramural sports set up?

AK: Well, I don't know how. They had a committee of sports that supervised everything, and I don't remember just how. The boxing was 3 round bout, 2 or 3 minutes to the round, didn't really amount to a whole lot.

ES: Just, and then I'll get off fraternities, but were most of the athletes in fraternities?

AK: I imagine so, I imagine they were.

ES: Okay.

AK: I know they were, where I worked. Bob Cook, he was a tennis player, and Humbert, he was a football player, they were dishwashers too, so they were all the dishwashers were athletes I think.

ES: Were you in any other student organizations, you mentioned the *DI*?

AK: No.

ES: You were in basketball, was that the only sport you were in, basketball?

AK: Yeah, uh-huh.

ES: Okay, how do you think the Depression influenced student activities? What kinds of sacrifices did you have to make?

AK: Well I'm sure you'd mentioned social activities. I'm sure it curtailed a lot of people's social activities, because they didn't have any money to spend. But I think from most of them probably, were [careful] with their money, from necessity of no other reason.

ES: Did students have to leave school, do you remember that?

AK: A few of them they did. We had one student who came from a well to do family, and no one paid too much attention to him because they found out he spent the whole day in the fraternity and didn't go to any classes, he just had a good time [laughter].

ES: [Laughter] He didn't last very long.

AK: No.

ES: Now you mentioned that you had to come back home, or were going to have to come back home because of financial problems, tell me about that again.

AK: Well, a brother, an older brother got a job with the state highway department and was able to give me a few dollars to keep me in school. And so I got to go back, I imagine that was a crossroads in my life really.

ES: When was that?

AK: Well that would be in about my sophomore year I guess.

ES: How were your parents able to keep both of you, two sons, in the University at the same time?

AK: It was pretty difficult. Fortunately we had wonderful parents, and we were busy out of high school during the new years. And we were busy doing chores, and they never complained, and I know then that if you were in debt \$10,000 that was a very heavy debt, that would be more like 100,000 or more today you know. But, I know some farmers, if they could have held on another year or two they would have survived, but they just wore out and gave up.

ES: How did the Depression affect your father's farm?

AK: Well, he had a registered short horned cattle herd, which I think was the interesting livestock at that time, and was pretty good, and I think we did pretty well on that. He'd built a... right after World War I, a house. He had to register to do rock hogs and he had two sales that paid for the house, but that was very unusual, but during that period of time, some of the people were selling livestock, taking somebody's notes. Some of those notes were never paid off. But fortunately, sales were only on a case basis, so he wasn't caught up in that.

ES: He was able to run the farm without help, when you were in college away?

AK: Yeah, I mean he had hired help.

ES: Hired help. Did the bank closings affect him at all?

AK: Well I suppose it did because I know he said that there's a little bank in Garrett, and one in Atwood that closed up, and he talked to the people at Garrett and said, "I just have one question, if I need money will you loan it to me?" They said yes. Those were the days when if you had a note coming due, why you expected to pay it. And I know some people are of the opinion if you have a note that isn't due for 30 days, you don't owe anybody anything now. But that's not true, I don't believe.

ES: That's not the way it was huh?

AK: No. But of course the land prices, there was some land sold for under a \$100 an acre in those days, you know. But of course now a good farmer brings 27, \$2800 an acre.

ES: Did you really have to pinch pennies when you were in school? Did they send you money, your parents send you money?

AK: Well yeah we sent the laundry home to mother.

ES: You sent your laundry home?

AK: Yeah, but I don't remember how. I think we got home once and a while and I'm sure they sent us some money once in a while, but I don't remember about that. But I guess it's a smaller world in those days.

ES: You didn't get home too much? It wasn't too far but—

AK: It wasn't too far but, when my sister was up to school, they had an interurban service from Champaign to Decatur and it went through Bement, and the folks would pick her up at the urban station in Bement.

ES: That's handy.

AK: But I think it was discontinued by the time we got to school then.

ES: Did you come home and work in the summers?

AK: Yes, uh-huh.

ES: Do you remember whether there were black students on campus?

AK: Very few, I don't remember playing against a single black player.

ES: Is that right?

AK: But now, you might say you might not play against a single white player.

ES: You don't remember many black athletes at Illinois during the Depression?

AK: As far as I know, I don't know if anyone that was black was up here at that time or not, I don't remember. There were very few anyway.

ES: Do you remember black students in your classes, or not really?

AK: No, uh-uh. They were, undoubtedly, there were some up here, but very few I think compared with what there are now. I don't know how big nationalities are attending the University now, but I imagine just about all of them.

ES: Was there much diversity among the student body, like Chinese students or other nationalities when you were there?

AK: I don't remember any great controversy going on.

ES: What about Jewish students? Do you remember anything about—?

AK: No, not especially, I think that, what I know there wasn't any racism. I don't know whether the word racism was used in those days or not, I don't believe it was. Very little anyway.

ES: That wasn't something that you were aware of?

AK: No.

ES: When you were in school. Okay. What about Catholic-Protestant relations, were they pretty good?

AK: Actually I don't know that I can identify in our fraternity who were Catholic and who were not. I don't think any mention was made.

ES: There were Catholic members in your fraternity?

AK: Yeah, there probably wasn't any mention made, anything that would abide us in any way, anyway, they were just fellowship.

ES: When you were in college, were you aware of what was going on in the outside world? Did you keep up with current events?

AK: Well I suppose to a certain extent. Of course we didn't have the news media that we have today, if you happened to have time to listen to the radio otherwise you just saw it in the newspaper.

START OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

ES: So you said that you did keep up with national events through the radio.

AK: Pretty well I think. I think that they didn't have the coverage that they have now. And probably didn't hear that there was a disturbance down in Mississippi, we probably didn't hear about it like we hear about it almost within the hour now. And I don't know when we were kids and a neighbor boy was an early electronic wizard, he developed a crystal radio set and we passed the ear piece around and take turns listening and we thought that was unbelievable you know, and it was.

ES: Do you remember the Presidential elections, '32 I think?

AK: The first really exciting, I think was, political conventions. They give a role call, you know, on how the vote was going and all that, and it all sounded pretty fantastic you know.

ES: Do you know what students thought of FDR, or what you thought of FDR?

AK: Well I think most of them were, at that time you know it was a Depression time, and everybody was looking for something to give them a little more hope and a little more confidence. And my father was on the board of review over at Tuscola, and the old gentlemen there was a chairman, he was a die-hard Republican. And he said, "When the President comes on and says, 'My friends,' you almost believe him." And at one time Douglas county was at least 90% Republican I think, but I think it's pretty well divided up now, but I think FDR was rather flamboyant. He had been much more so if he hadn't have been crippled up you know, I think. But I think he always seemed to have a smile on his face and everything was going fine, and I think that made people feel better.

ES: Do you have a sense of what the student body, what the break up was? Do you think they were Democrat or Republican?

AK: I don't know.

ES: Or were they concerned about politics?

AK: I don't know whether they were or not. I think, well I can mention that when the country voted wet that was the most exciting news on the campus when I was in school.

ES: Did they all go out and party that night, or was it—?

AK: Well, some of them went out the, of course, some of the kids didn't have the money to go out and buy very much, but they got enough to have taste anyway.

ES: Were campus politics important or—?

AK: Well, it wasn't to me at that time.

ES: Was the student government prominent, did you know who was in the student government and what they were doing?

AK: Well, yeah we knew who was in there, but part of that was about the extent of our interest at that time.

ES: What about radical student activity?

AK: As far as I know, I wasn't aware of very little of any of that. Of course they didn't have a good press to help promote probably, there might have been some radicals, but I wasn't aware of any major disturbance anyway.

ES: Socialists or Communists or any—?

AK: No, uh-uh.

ES: Wasn't something you were aware of. Did you go you through commencement ceremonies?

AK: Yeah.

ES: Was that an important event for you family?

AK: Well I suppose it was. I happened to get my diploma, but I didn't shed any tears [*laughter*].

ES: You and your brother both went through the ceremony?

AK: Yeah.

ES: Did your parents attend.

AK: Yeah, uh-huh.

ES: But you were ready to graduate?

AK: Oh I think so, yeah.

ES: What did you do directly after graduation? Now you said you took that trip—

AK: Well when that four week trip money came back I had an offer at a soil conservation service, so that's when I went into that then.

ES: Is that through the U of I or is that—?

AK: No that was a US program.

ES: US program, and how was it that you got that job right away?

AK: Because I guess I was a graduate from the Agriculture college, and they, that's when Triple C camps came into being. And I was in the farm planning department, and the engineers and the farm, planters work out a plan for a farm that was subject to erosion. And then what work needed be done, why Triple C boys did it. And they were located in several places, that's one of the first assignments that was really important to me, because I was transferred to Charleston because that's where I met Marion.

ES: Oh I see. She was from down there?

AK: Uh-huh.

ES: So how long were you involved with the US soil company?

AK: 6 years, about 6 years.

ES: And then what did you do?

AK: Came back to the farm.

ES: Then you farmed here?

AK: Yeah.

ES: Outside of Atwood?

AK: My dad had owned land, he made a payment on this and he was able to buy this for \$200 an acre, which he said afterwards that that was the easiest farm to pay for that he ever bought. I bought the farming equipment from him and half the livestock. And I paid him half enough to pay for the farm, so that helped I think [*laughter*].

ES: And you say your brother went into teaching?

AK: Yeah.

ES: In to Ag teaching?

AK: Yeah and then he became a farm advisor.

ES: I see. How do you think your education has influenced your later life?

AK: Well I was suppose that it was somewhat enlightening and that I think it gave a person a little more confidence to do things and they had an opportunity to take part in a lot of community

affairs. I said my father had a registered cattle and I took it over there and had a south central Illinois short horn breeder association, I was sale manager for over 20 years. When things were really booming we were having three sales a year, one in March, one in June, and one in October. And along with the farming, that kept me pretty busy.

ES: I bet. Well do you have anything else you'd like to say about your memories of school?

AK: Well, when the roads were bad one of us rode a mule and the other one rode a horse to high school, or a pony rather. And both of us wanted to ride the mule because she was by far the easiest rider.

ES: How many students were in the Atwood high school?

AK: About 120, 125, and we were fortunate to have an outstanding coach. He'd be an athlete and an assistant coach at Bradley University. And he was a mild mannered, outstanding Christian. And when he wanted read the Riot Act to us, he ended up his speeches by saying, "You fellows can take it for what you think it's worth!"

ES: Well, it sounds like Atwood had a really good athletic program when you were in school.

AK: Yep.

ES: That's amazing. You said you went to the state championship.

AK: Yep, in basketball.

ES: In basketball your senior year.

AK: Yep. We had the smallest athlete in our school was Leonard Harshbarger. I know him pretty well. He was 120 pounds and he was one of the guards on the basketball team. And he was a good hurdler, and he was so short, that when he'd warm up his sweats used to drag over the hurdles. But he wanted to go to () so badly in scholastic for his performance as a best athlete up there [He won high honors in track at Bradley High School meet].

ES: Now you probably told me this, but I missed it, did the U of I people come down and actually watch you play and show some interest?

AK: Well some of them did, but we didn't know about it. They did yeah.

ES: It was mainly at the state tournament that they—?

AK: Eddie Jaquern was one who was the sports editor for the *News Gazette*, officiated at a lot of our basketball games and Cocky Rotz Decatur, also, you only had one official in those days for a

game. But we felt both of them were absolutely fair you know. Very comfortable when they were there.

ES: Well thank you very much for talking to me.

AK: Well thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW.