



INTERVIEW WITH DONALD J. SPITTLER, SR. - OCTOBER 1987 (conducted by MacLane Merk, Mr. Spittler's great-nephew)

■ **EARLY LIFE**

Q. Where were you born?

A. Lake View, N. Y., at home, before it became common practice to give birth in hospitals. (1919)

Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have, and did you like your position in the family?

A. I was the youngest in the family and enjoyed the attention of my two older brothers and two older sisters.

Q. What did you and your family enjoy doing together?

A. My father ran a country store - groceries, meats and general merchandise. The thing we all took part in was WORK- there was never a time when there wasn't work to be done! We had few of the pleasures we know of today, such as vacations, weekend travel, ski resorts, boating, summers on Lake Erie's shore, etc. These were reserved for the very wealthy, of which there were few in our community. Most of the people were poor by relative standards. Some of my most pleasant memories are: gathering wild mushrooms or black walnuts with my father along 18-mile Creek, rabbit hunting with my father, Uncle Jake and Mr. Murjohn, (a neighbor) and ice fishing with my father and others on Lake Erie. As for vacations, the only one my parents ever had was a visit to Fort McClelland, (AL) in 1940 when I was stationed there in the Army.

Q. What chores did you have?

A. Chopping wood for the kitchen stove, weeding and cultivating a large garden, making hay for the family cow, sorting pop bottles, (an-endless job!).

Q. What hardships?

A. Really none, but some inconveniences and unpleasant experiences.

Q • How did your childhood differ from childhood today?

A. Until my parents built a new home in 1931-32, we did not have running water or indoor toilet facilities. Try an outhouse some time in January when the temperature is near zero! You will not tarry to read the comics! Baths were usually restricted to Saturday night - heat the water on a wood stove and pour it into a wooden tub.

Q. Tell of an early experience that stands out in your mind.

A. The night we moved into our new home- even though it was just next door to our old home, it was like entering a new world- centralized heat (coal furnace), hot and cold running water, electric refrigerator, bathroom with a built-in tub, a gas stove in the kitchen (no more chopping wood!) - just fantastic!

Q. What do you remember most about your mother and father?

A. I remember them best as extremely charitable - they spent their lives going without things to give to their children and to needy folks in the community. During the "depression" of the 1930s, when welfare was considered a disgrace, Mom and Dad provided many families with endless credit and even outright gifts of food to tide them over that difficult time. Some eventually repaid and some just moved away and never repaid. But Mom and Dad seemed to derive pleasure from those who showed appreciation for their charitable acts.

■ **SCHOOLING**

Q. What was your first school like?

A. It was a 3-room country school. During the first two years - 1924-25, there was no running water. Out back were two large outhouses - one labeled "Girls" and the other "Boys." In 1926 they installed a water system and indoor toilets. Never knew the well water to be tested but no one ever got sick. Today the regulations would be endless to install such a system in a public school.

Q. What subject did you like best?

A. I liked sciences and language, especially French that came in high school. We had no buses, so in order to go to high school we rode a train from Lake View to Lackawanna (about 2 miles). At first we had to pay for our own monthly ticket, which was \$6.45. This amount prevented a lot of children from going. In my sophomore year the school district paid for transportation and tuition, which was \$10.00. The train left Lake View at 7:30 AM and returned at 5:30 PM. Many children walked as far as 3 miles to catch the train.

Q. What subject was hardest for you?

A. English literature was hardest for me, because I could not force myself to do the required reading.

Q. Describe a teacher that you especially remember.

A. I especially remember a grammar school teacher who would flail my hand with a heavy duty 2-ft. ruler whenever I would indulge in some prank, which was quite often. She would beat harder if I laughed.

Q. What were you proudest of accomplishing?

A. Four years of perfect attendance in high school and 99.5% on my Regents Geometry test.

Q. What sports did you enjoy?

A. Baseball.

Q. What, if anything, do you regret about your school days?

A. Not being able to participate in sports because we had to catch the train after school when the teams held practice. And I probably could have done better if I hadn't "horsed around" so much - but the latter has provided some good memories!

Q. What did you like to do with school friends?

A. Roller skate on Lake View Rd., the only street with smooth pavement!

Q. Tell about a school prank or adventure that you recall.

A. The school principal in grammar school kept a rubber hose in his desk. If the other teachers couldn't tame you down with a ruler they would send you to the principal. There you usually had to bend over in front of the 7th and 8th graders, (who sneered and chuckled) and Mr. Haley would flog your behind with the rubber hose. Once, during the noon recess, another boy and I took the hose out of his desk and threw it behind a picture of George Washington. The location of the hose leaked out, but old man Haley never knew who hid it!

Q. Tell about your best friend.

A. My best friend lived across the street. His family was very poor and after school he couldn't play until he walked along the rail-road tracks and picked up enough coal to feed the kitchen stove. So I would go with him and sometimes we would walk a mile or so before we would find enough coal, which fell from passing trains. Afterwards, we would play ball, go fishing or in the late fall, set traps to catch skunks and muskrats. Good pelts would bring 75c to \$1.00, but many as little as 25c.

Q. Describe a good friend of the opposite sex.

A. Don't recall anyone in particular. In our small community we were all good friends-especially the ones who rode the train to high school.

■ CAREER

Q. What career did you choose?

A. I chose to become wildlife biologist because of my deep interest in the out-of-doors, which was nurtured by my father.

Q. What preparation did you make?

A. NO preparation prior to going to college. Vocational guidance counselors were not "invented" when I was in high school, and no one in our community had gone to college. So I just applied, was accepted and as a green 17 year old, went to Cornell University and felt my way around for the first year.

Q. What have your duties and responsibilities been?

A. After college (June 1940), I entered the Army in September and did not get out until December of 1945. I took a job as a fisheries biologist in 1946, at \$2400/year. I later shifted to a game biologist and specialized in waterfowl. I remained in the Army reserve until 1975. During the 1960s, the government wanted biologists to go to Real Estate Appraisal Schools and prepare to acquire land for the state for wetland preservation, reforestation and upland hunting. This started a new career for me and I eventually attained one of the highest designations in the appraisal field – a member of the American Institute of Real Estate Appraisers. After serving as an appraiser with the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), for 14 years, I retired in 1986. I still work as an independent appraiser.

Q. Tell about a problem, challenge or hardship in your work.

A. I was a Battery Commander in Europe, engaged in four campaigns including the Battle of the Bulge, and was wounded in central Europe just before crossing the Danube. I think the hardest challenge was being a soldier during a very severe winter – nothing like the Russian front – but still very cold. For months we lived in holes in the earth, almost always with wet feet and wet clothing. Each day we wondered how many more days it would be before spring and warm weather would come.

Q. Would you advise young people to consider your occupation?

A. Probably not, unless they placed dedication above financial gain. At the time I entered college, the Great Depression was still with us, and our thoughts were with a job - period! At our graduation the President of Cornell referred to a recently completed survey of Cornell graduate income levels and he told us if we reached \$5000/yr by the time we were 40 to consider ourselves quite successful. While wages are much higher today, wildlife biologists cannot claim the salaries of engineers, MBAs and other professionals. Hence, one must make a choice between money and a way of life.

■ DAY TO DAY LIVING

Q. What is your daily schedule now?

A. I am retired now and work seven days a week

Q. What season is your favorite?

A. I like all the seasons, but probably like spring the because all things are coming back to life - the migratory birds are returning and the climate is most invigorating.

Q. What has been your worst experience with storms and other disasters?

A. My worst experience was being marooned on an ice flow on Lake Erie. We were ice fishing, and an east wind opened up on the lake and blew us towards Cleveland (southwest). After many hours we were rescued by the Coast Guard.

Q. How do you take care of your health?

A. Hard physical work and moderation in food and drinking habits.

Q. What modern conveniences do you appreciate the most?

A. Indoor plumbing and centralized heat.

Q. What do you read?

A. Financial journals, daily papers and historical documents.

Q. Where have you traveled?

A. Hawaii, Alaska, France, Germany, Belgium, Scotland, England and most of the US.

■ **PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY**

Q. What is your advice for getting along with people?

A. Always assume the other person knows more than you – listen and give them the opportunity to speak their opinion.

Q. Who do you think is the greatest person in this century?

A. Winston Churchill.

Q. Of past centuries?

A. Alexander Hamilton, Ben Franklin, Thomas Edison.

Q. Which invention or discovery of the 20th century do you think is the most significant?

A. Electric light bulb and all allied conveniences.

Q. What do you think of schools today?

A. They are too big with not enough personal contact and too much pressure to succeed. Every college wants only the best students and athletes. What is left for the average person? Faculty leaders seldom get down to students' level and most instructors are graduate students or lower-ranked faculty. In my day the person who wrote the book was also your teacher – I learned from the "greats" in their fields.

Q. In what ways are they better or worse than the schools you attended?

A. Of course the schools have much better physical facilities.

Q. What is your philosophy of education?

A. My philosophy of education is to teach people to think clearly and without bias - to appreciate the total environment and to place cultural values above material gains- to instill a keen sense of ethics. Too many institutions stress job qualifications and preparation for the requirements of the job market.

Q. What do you think are our biggest problems?

A. Destruction of the critical elements of the environment, international conflicts, over-population of the human race, hence poverty and war – in competition for limited resources.

Q. What can each person do to help solve these problems?

A: become more humble, demand less in material wealth, put less emphasis on personal attainment and the craze to do your own thing - dedication to one's country rather than to oneself.

■ **HERITAGE**

Q. Do you think that arts and crafts are an essential part of good living and tell which ones you enjoy most.

A. Definitely! I enjoy using hand tools, indulging in the building crafts of our ancestors, such as hewing timber, blacksmithing, furniture building and tin smithing.

Q. What old time values and customs do you think should be kept and honored?

A. Helping your neighbor, work ethics, satisfaction in producing something of value, pride in workmanship.

Q. What did you learn from your parents and from your experiences you'd like to pass on to young people?

A. Thrift and self reliance, less dependence on the government to solve our problems and provide a secure way of life.

Q. What advice do you have for young people?

A. Work hard and cultivate a strong sense of moral and ethical values.