

ATTENTION: © Copyright The Iowa Blind History Archive at the Iowa Department for the Blind. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976, as amended must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to the Iowa Department for the Blind. Excerpts up to 1000 words from the oral histories may be quoted for publication without seeking permission as long as the use is non-commercial and properly cited. Requests for permission to quote for other publication should be addressed to the Director, Iowa Department for the Blind, 524 Fourth Street, Des Moines, IA 50309. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Iowa Blind History Archive at the Iowa Department for the Blind. All materials cited must be attributed to the Iowa Blind History Archive at the Iowa Department for the Blind.

**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Ted Hart, 70, Mount Pleasant, IA
Mike Hicklin
Mount Pleasant
1-27-11**

Mike Hicklin: Well, good morning. Interviewing Ted Hart, who lives at 706 South Adams Place, Mount Pleasant, Iowa. It is January 27, 2011. I am Mike Hicklin. Ted and I, I guess, have probably known each other for 30 years or more. The

purpose of this interview is, this interview is part of the Iowa Department for the Blind's History of Blindness, an oral history project. At this point, Ted, I need to ask you if we have your oral consent to have the interview recorded.

Ted Hart: Yes, sir.

Hicklin: Okay, would you like to go ahead and start?

Hart: Ok. I guess the best place would be to go back to when I went blind. I was ten years old, living on a farm outside of town here, and I was kicked in the face by a horse. And, I was blind before I hit the ground. Something very remarkable is that I got up and started walking back to the house. That just comes from, I think, having a spirit inside you to live and not quit; don't lay down and be done. I don't understand all that, I guess, but I do know that God gives you something inside and you're expected to use it. That's what I did at that time. So, that was October 22nd of 1940.

My folks didn't know what to do with a blind child. They went and talked to the superintendent of schools and he said take me to Vinton to the school for the blind, Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School. That's what they did right after Christmas. So, less than three months I was taken out of my home that I never knew anything different up to that point, and put in the school at Vinton with all these strangers and a whole new world; not only blind but a whole new world as far as people and surroundings go and all.

From there it...graduates on up to I actually graduated from the Vinton school as a senior in 1958. After that, that fall I spent a short time in college over in Illinois, which

didn't work out. Come back home and I was just around home for a while, and then the Department for the Blind got a hold of me. My field guys, I think, were probably Bob Rutker and John Taylor. They would come down and took me out on a couple of...three different places. And, I worked at a couple of different places in Burlington and they didn't work out and I'd gone with them quite a few places to try to get a job down here. And, in 1960, '59 or '60, that wasn't particularly the easiest thing to do for a blind guy to get a job.

So, I went from here to the Department for the Blind Orientation Center in Des Moines. I went in there in April of 1959. I was the fourth one in the Center. There were three girls that were in there when I got there. They got me into Tech. high school; into a machine shop course, which I spent a year at or so, and then I went from there to work at John Deer in Waterloo. I also worked on the maintenance crew there at the Department for three or four months as a training experience. And, I worked at John Deer for about six months and got laid off. That was about 1966, and I had gotten married in the meantime and had three boys, young boys. At that time, one of them was about four years old and I had twin boys that were two years younger.

So, when I went to Des Moines this time, I went into Mitchell's Transmission downtown. I was doing on-the-job training and learning how to rebuild transmissions, and I did quite well at that. In fact, I did very well at it. The guy that owned it, Lee Mitchell, told me himself that I was one of the best that he had had. And so, I thought that I was pretty hot shot at that time. That went on...I was there for better than a year and then I moved from there back to Waterloo and got my job back at John Deer. What had happened in their recall

after the layoff there were a bunch of us, at least a hundred that did not get the recall letter. So, consequently, I didn't have that job for about five years. I went back in, in October of '65 and got the job back again. So, then I went from there and, well, I'm retired now. I'm soon to be 71 in February and I retired at 55 with 30 and-a-half years in at John Deere.

It was a fight to get through it. I had problems with the supervisors and had problems with other workers and, you know, the same old issues. You know, "You're a blind guy; you can't run this machine. You have no right to," and so on, you know, and, "You need to let somebody that can see and got a family do that." Well, I didn't quite understand that, because I had a family, too. I wanted to work like everybody else. I wanted a car; I wanted a house, you know; I wanted everything that anybody else had, and so I was...I had a situation with several different people and I wasn't the kind of person to take things like that laying down. So, I fought back and when they told me I couldn't run a couple other machines, I said, "Where do you get your experience? How many years have you been blind?" "Well, I've never been blind." I told him, I said, "I've been blind 33 years, what makes you think you know all about what I can do and what I can't do?" Well, obviously that was won pretty easily, but I had a lot of different things like that happen and it's going to happen.

I'll go back to the Department for a little bit. I think the major thing that the Department did for me was to help me believe that it was alright to be a blind guy. And, they taught me and gave me a inside strength that I could do in the world whatever I wanted to do, no matter what the world said. I could do it and if I ran into problems I had people at the Department for the Blind, and at the Orientation Center,

that I could go to for help. I actually had a Counselor in Waterloo and I could go talk to them, and I did. I went back a number of times and talked to those people. How do I handle this? What do I do about this? It took me some years to get all of that experience under my belt and know how to handle things, but they were always there. Every time I went back, which was several times, I'd call them sometimes and talk to them for an hour or two. I would just be frustrated and really upset, and they would tell me how to deal with the situation. But, mostly they were teaching me to know and use what I had learned already from being in the Center.

It took a while, but I finally got hold of that and when I did then nobody could stand in my way. It didn't matter what they did or what they said; I would stand up to them. And, I believe that if you take your training serious, which I did; very serious. I think if you take that really serious you're going to get the grit and the guts to do in life what you choose to do. You'll absolutely refuse to let people tell you that you can't do this! You can't do that! They don't know; you're the one that knows. I don't even know about some of my blind friends. I don't know what they can do and what they can't, except I tell them, you do what you want to do. And, if you need help with it then you go back to the Center or you call somebody and talk to them about it, because they will still be there. There's other people, other blind guys around that's got jobs, call and talk to them. Get ideas from them. Get some more knowledge and keep putting that down in your memory bank, so that you'll be able to use that, because you've got to face it and deal with it. Otherwise you'll get nowhere. Life will kick you down and that's where you'll stay.

So, if it's a matter of giving up and a matter of quitting, you already know what kind of life you're going to have. It's not going to be happy because you won't like it, because you won't have a job and you won't be bringing a pay check home. You might be married, but if you're living, like, on Social Security, it's a tough way to go, because you don't get a whole lot of money necessarily when you're on that. I don't knock it, because I spent my share of time on it. I was on it two or three different times; even when I was off on medical for two years. After a year I had to go on Social Security, because medical didn't pay it anymore from Deer's. I didn't let my pride get in the way. I went back and got the help I needed until I could get my...I had to have both shoulders worked on and a knee. And, when I got those straightened out, I went back to work. But, I used that public assistance through Social Security as an assist to me to keep me going so I could go back to work. You have to find something in yourself that gives you the strength to go ahead. I hope you'll excuse some of my brash statements, but it just plain takes guts. If you don't have them, if you don't get the grit and the sand in your craw to do it, then you're not going to do much. I can guarantee you life is a lot happier when you're working.

When you get married, if you do, and when you have a family, life is a lot happier because you think better of yourself. You feel much better about yourself because you are accomplishing something in your life that you want to do. Basically that's get a job, have a family, own a car, own a house, go out and use your snow blower, go out and mow your own yard. That's where all that grit comes from and it's where you use it, because there's nothing you can't do if you wish to. It's there. If you want to do it, then go ahead and

find a way to do it; I had to many, many times. And, I didn't always have somebody around that was either blind, or previously that I had gone to school at the Department or the Orientation Center with. And, I had to figure out things for myself; but the experience in your life is what does that. With that experience, you keep drawing on what you learned before, if it's there, use it and then it will come to work for you. But, if it's there and you don't do anything with it, then it's not of much value to you; it's just there.

I had things, again, back to the Orientation Center. We had quite a regiment of exercising that we did. I was good in exercising. I wrestled in school; I was a good wrestler. I was really good in the exercising area both in swimming and in the gym class, and there were other people there like Bill Cappern, Bob Cappern, Gene and Mickey Newman. There was a bunch of us guys there that were good in school, and so on, that I knew and had gone to school with. Creig Slayton was there.

15:00

Hart: I excelled in those areas, but I knew I was good, too. I got out of Vinton with that idea and so I went ahead and excelled in those things, but it's because of a base that I had under me. I was taught those things, helped to understand those things and all of them kept coming back to as making me feel better about myself in spite of being blind. I usually use the word in spite of the fact that I'm blind, I still do this. I go fishing. I have run a boat. I used to work on cars a lot; I did a lot of transmission jobs. While I was working at John Deere I had a machine garage at the time and mechanic's work that I was doing at the time, and I

wound up doing work on some of my supervisors' cars; some of the very same ones that would say, "You can't run that machine!" And yet, I fixed his transmission for him.

Hicklin: Not a lot of common sense there.

Hart: (Laughter) It doesn't make a whole lot of sense, no. It would just fluster me. I would say, oh, for Pete's sake I fixed the transmission in your car. Yet, you're telling me what I can and can't do on machines? Come on! At Vinton I was helped with people that knew about blindness and knew how to help blind kids go on with their life in spite of being blind. I didn't say it don't bother. I didn't say that it doesn't make a problem of it at times, but in spite of it you can still go ahead with life just like sighted people do.

I know all kinds of sighted people that have had problems, so in spite of the problems in their life, they went ahead with life and accomplished things; whether it was going to college; whether it was taking special training. But, they went ahead with life. They overcome the problems and they got their family, and they got a car, and they got a house, and they were much happier when they accomplished those things. Well, as a blind guy we're not any different. We want the same things that anybody else wants. So, you go to work after that and you don't get it in a year or two or maybe ten, but you have to keep at it; and with the help that you've got and have had.

Like, going all the way back to my high school years, I had help with people there that encouraged me and told me that I was doing well. And, that I could do well and that I could do better. Always rely on what you learn that projects you into life and what gives you the knowledge, and the

know-how and the confidence in what you have learned from people. Well, at the school, of course, nobody goes to the school anymore, or very few; it's all but closed. And, the same way with the Orientation Center, and at the Department for the Blind, if you weren't in the Center. You take all of that and wrap it up into one and use it and you're only going to get out of it what you want. If you don't care to get much, then you won't get much. I wanted all I could get and I went after it. Mr. Jernigan was one of my personal guides. He was a person that I went to and talked to, and sometimes he came and got me. He was truly a good mentor. John Taylor was a good mentor of mine. There's several other people, even after I left the Center, and after I was working at John Deer, I still called back and talked to some people.

While I was there...I joined the...when I was there in school in '59 I joined the Iowa Association for the Blind, which were holding their yearly conventions at the school for the blind in Vinton. And, it became later it became the National Federation of the Blind. I think that was in about '69 when they changed their name to the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa. So, I belonged to it to start with in '59 and I've been a member since, so that's been a lot of years. I've not always been active in it, but when you got three or four children, which I wound up with four children.

I had a full-time job plus overtime and had a family; had a house and a yard to work in. I think I said earlier I worked on cars besides working at John Deer. I'd come home from work at 4:30 in the afternoon and get a quick bite to eat, and I'd go out at 7 O'clock and work on somebody's car till midnight. And then, I'd go back to work the next morning,

leave home at 6:00 to go to work. I enjoyed it. I loved doing it. I grew up with my kids. I took them coon hunting. I carried my youngest boy on my back; two years old took him coon hunting, using dogs and running coon at night. It was a sport for us and my kids really enjoyed it. I rode motorcycles and bicycles with them. We usually had a pony. I rode pony with them and I grew up with my boys and went swimming in the river; that's where they learned how to swim. We used to climb trees and we cut wood for a number of years. I started teaching them how to shoot guns and take care of them when they were five, and running chain saws when they were twelve years old.

I had been told I couldn't run a chainsaw, too, and I bought one anyway and I talked to a few different guys that would answer some questions for me. And, other people would just say, "Well, you've no business running one. There's a lot of sighted people that have lost a hand or fingers or even a leg to chainsaws, and you have no business running one." So, I learned and I would go in and talk to guys that would sharpen the chain for me. It took me about five or six years to figure out how to sharpen a chain and be able to do it out in the timber. They never questioned whether I could run one or not; they just sharpened my chains and I'd ask them questions and they would tell me. So, I would go back home and I would use what they told me. Some of the people that didn't think I should be running chainsaws came to me later and asked me to cut a tree out of their yard. That was kind of a little bit ridiculous when they actually knew I was running one and I wasn't dead yet. (Laughter)

Hicklin: Sounds pretty neat. And, for the record you still have all your arms, legs and fingers.

Hart: Yes, yes I still have all of my fingers. I still have everything. I've been banged up. I've broke a lot of bones, but I've lived a long life and I was very active in my life.

Hicklin: Certainly the key to enjoying life.

Hart: It is! It is! Oh, I've been told by a number of people over the years that I was arrogant and I think that's because of my attitude without a doubt, but the attitude I have I don't care if I'm called arrogant or not; it doesn't matter to me. But, I know who I am. I don't have to ask. I don't have to have somebody come and tell me, "Well, Ted you really are doing well and just keep up the good work." They do, but I don't have to have that. They just realize that I have accomplished life and I have won over life. Good heavens, I've broke all the ribs on one side when I fell with the ladder out of the attic of a garage I was insulating. I got up and walked and went to get help to get me to the hospital. Six weeks later I was back to working on the garage. I've got one knee that I have had to have surgery on. I got hurt working on a car one time with it, and I broke an elbow and a wrist in school wrestling and I put an ace wrap on and went out and wrestled anyway, after three weeks with a broken elbow. We're back to the guts and the grit that I'm talking about. We're going a little, well, I'm going a little bit far out on some of this.

Hicklin: Certainly key ingredients for getting things done, though.

Hart: It is! It is. You're going to get hurt! You're going to get hurt if you stay active. I know sighted people that are worse off than I. I'm not worse off; I'm in good health yet. I am still doing things. I still work on my own vehicles. I work on my garage. I work in my house and do stuff. There's some things I can't do anymore, because of my age and my injuries.

Hicklin: That's true of us all.

Hart: Oh, yes. Oh yes it is, but if you get down and you don't get up, you're done.

Hicklin: Certainly.

Hart: You have to get up. I don't care how many times you've got to keep getting up, and if you do that you will know who you are and what you are. You won't have to wonder. Oh my, I quit wondering, oh, I don't know, probably by the time I was 30, I quit wondering who I was and where I was at in life and what I was good for, or whatever. I didn't be concerned about that any more. I just went ahead and did what I wanted including teaching my boys at five to shoot guns. I caught a lot of flack over that one, even from my own family; some of them didn't think I should. But, those three boys that I did that with went to the Marines and came out with expert marksman.

Hicklin: Excellent.

Hart: So, I would say that it paid off for those boys. They all can hunt. They have hunted. I got a bunch of grandkids that I have helped shoot guns and taught them about wrestling, and worked with them riding bikes, and taught a couple of my grand-daughters how to ride a bike. I got a lot of them; I got 19 grandkids and 9 great-grandkids right now, and there's more to come. (Laughter) I got six more grand-daughters that aren't married yet and about four grandsons that aren't married. God has filled my quiver. He gave me a lot of girls in my grandkids. I only had four boys, but I got four good daughter-in-laws. I've had a happy life. I've had some unhappiness in it, but you get up and you go on.

I've been divorced after 28 years, but I still kept going to work. I still kept doing what I needed to do in life. That might have been the worst thing that happened to me. That probably got on my bad side more than anything else, but I still didn't go down with it. I didn't give up; I didn't quit. I don't know if it's a matter of getting back up. I just never went down to begin with. I just refused to let that stop my life that I'd worked all those years to have a good life. So, in doing that I go back, again, and I think of the times I was in the Orientation Center and the times that I had Ruth Schrader as a Home Ec. Teacher; and her and I had some problems sometimes in teaching me how to cook.

(Laughter) Well, it was usually me that was wrong, obviously, but I needed to learn and she taught me. I had Counselors that I had problems with at times, and invariably, it was because I was not thinking in the right direction.

Well, I was 19-years-old when I went into the Center. Heck, I knew it all. (Laughter) There wasn't anything I didn't know, and I proceeded to tell them. Well, they proceeded to show me why I didn't know it all, and it paid off. It was hard

to get through to me, but it paid off and I can go back and thank those people and there's a whole string of them. A lot of them are still alive that weren't much older than I was at the time. I can go back and name a lot of those people. Mr. Jernigan and Manuel Urena, Jim Valiant, Revanne Duckett, Jim Omvig, and Jan Omvig; his sister was there when I was.

30:00

Hart: Jim Witte. Oh gosh, there's some others and even a couple of three of the students that I was there with. Neil Butler, he really helped me out an awful lot. Him and I were really good friends and he helped me grow up; he helped me get my head on straight. He was somewhat older than I was at the time, but and that was good, because he really, really helped me in my life. Jim Glaza, he's out of the Waterloo office and, of course Bob Rutker was out of the Cedar Rapids office at that time. Joe Balderston, he also helped me a lot. The people that were in the library; I've known Louise Duval for years and I worked under Mrs. Grannis. That was way back in the middle or late '60s. I was there for a while and worked in the library between jobs.

I've just been really active and done a lot of things in my life. And, here of late, three and-a-half or so years ago, I had a massive heart attack and that the doctors gave up and said I'd either be dead or brain dead the next morning. Well, God showed them different, because I wasn't dead and I wasn't brain dead. I was able to talk by squeezing my boy's fingers. I had a breathing tube in and I went in the hospital to get a cyst off my spine and had the heart attack before they could do the surgery. So, I was in there for two weeks and had three more heart attacks and they decided after

two weeks, if I was still alive, they'd better do something better. So, they did bypass on me and I proceeded to have another heart attack after the bypass and I was in there three weeks and I walked out eight days after the surgery. I was using a walker, but I walked out and since then I've had a stroke. A year and a half ago I had a stroke, but it was a very light one. I was by myself. I was out in the garage working and I was on the garage floor four times before I was able to stay up on my feet long enough to get to the house. So, you just don't quit! I just don't have any quit in me, I guess.

And, I've got to thank God to start with for that, but also my family when I lived on the farm. The people at the Department for the Blind at the Orientation Center, and there were places like John Deere that in that 30 years I had a lot of discrimination grievances and that. Once again, was because you're going to have a number of people that will still tell you that you can't do this or you can't do that, and they don't know. They don't have experience enough to know in the blindness field, to know what I could and couldn't do. So, I'd proceed to show them or proceed to tell them and what it did was just strengthen me all the more. Every time I had a disagreement with somebody in life, I drew strength out of that, whether I won it or lost it. I still drew strength from it by the experience of it and I put it where I needed to have it in my mind and placed in my life and I used that. It worked in my life to help me keep going on with life.

Some of the things that I've done, well I guess, probably uncommon for a lot of sighted people for that matter, is I still hunt. I have a rifle that I had an offset mount made for my scope, so I can still put my cheek down on the stock and

the guy that I hunt with I've trained him. I've got two or three that I hunt with and I trained them to look through the scope over my shoulder; to stand behind me and look over my shoulder and in the scope. And, they don't put their hand on the gun, and they tell me up and down and right and left. That's the way they zero me in. In hunting like that I have shot a number of things. I shot an antelope in Montana. I went out elk hunting one time, and didn't get a chance to, but I shot a mule deer and he was running belly down with his doe. He was running as hard as he could run and that was over two hundred yard shot. And, I shot a wild boar in Georgia with a hand gun at about 12 or 15 feet distance. Went to Canada and shot a black bear in Canada. Matter of fact, Mike can see it. Its right over here on the back of my couch right now, and you can see the deer head and the antelope head up on the wall.

Hicklin: Yes, I certainly can.

Hart: And, that's something I chose to do, but it all goes back to what I learned and that was it was okay to be a blind guy. If you want to do something you can find a way to get it done. I think if anything that's the thing I would like people to know and that's what I teach. I've always taught attitude in my life. I've always worked with people. Oh, good heavens, there's been a number of times in my life I didn't have a good attitude; I can tell you. But, attitude, what you think of yourself and what you think of life in general, is what's going to make the difference for you. It did in mine and I just kept hanging in there. I just, like I say, I was no quitter. I just never quit. You had to knock me down and knock me out, or put enough weight on me I

couldn't get up, or I'd be getting up again. I believe that's what life is all about.

It's not just blind guys. I know all kinds of sighted people including people in my family, and I come from a large family that have had cancer. They've lost a leg; they've got severe diabetes, a number of things. But, you can't just quit because of one of those things. Some of them, I understand. I know that some things are just so bad that physically you can't live a normal life, or what we think of as normal. Maybe I should say average life; that would probably fit better. But, the bottom line is what do you want? What do you want out of life?

39:17

(End of Recording 1)

(Beginning of Recording 2)

Hart: Well, Mike and I took a little break there for a couple of minutes. I'll try not to be redundant in this and repeat a lot of things, but sometimes we just have to hear something a lot of times before it really clicks with us. I believe in my life, and probably in everyone's life, that your attitude and what you think about yourself, and how you think about other people, where you want to go in life; I just believe without a doubt it's your attitude that's going to do all that. Of all of the things I've been telling you about like the hunting. Oh, heck no, most blind guys don't go hunting, but that's nothing. That doesn't make any difference. A lot of blind people don't do computers. I don't, yet at least, but a lot of people do. I know a lot don't work on cars. Well, I

come from a family background where that leaned me toward being able to do mechanical things.

And, here we are again, in spite of being blind, like my brothers are not and my dad was not. In spite of my being blind, I still have a knowledge of mechanics and I'm still good at doing it. It doesn't matter that I'm blind, I can still do it. I have built a house. I have built several garages. I've got a little yard shed sitting out back right now that I built just this year ago after I'd had the heart attacks. Life goes on and I believe without a doubt when the horse kicked me and when I had the heart attacks...I about drowned a couple of times. I've pulled other people out that were about to drown. It's just a matter of being active in life. If you go home and sit down, life is over except your TV and your music, or whatever. It's just about over and I know how boring that is, because I've done my share at times. After the heart attacks I thought it would really slow me down, but two weeks after I came home I had a brother-in-law get me a deer. And, I cut that deer up, well, like I normally do. I skinned and gutted the deer and I carried it in and laid it in my sink and on my kitchen table, and I cut that deer up and packaged it, and put it in the freezer myself. And, I had done that before I had the heart attacks, too. But, just because I had the heart attacks didn't stop me from doing it, and being blind wasn't the issue either, because I had skinned coon and rabbit and hogs before. I'd helped skin deer before. I done a lot of cleaning fish; and it's attitude again. I just believe, and I probably belabor that a little bit, because it's your attitude that's what's going to make your life.

I've reached a point in my life where I probably don't have a whole lot of years left. However, it doesn't stop me from going ahead and doing things. I went out and shoveled

snow here about a week or so ago, and I took my time about it. I was careful about it. I need to be now that I've had the heart attacks, but it didn't stop me. I still do it and I went out and worked on my truck. I cut some steel siding to put on my building, and so on. So, its...in fact, I still mow my yard.

I get my push mower out and instead of pushing it, I pull it and it works fine, still does. A lot of that I had to figure out myself because I didn't know any blind guys that mow their yard; so, I figured out how to do it myself. I live in the country. That gave me a little up hand on it, because I didn't have to worry too much about what it looked like, and I still done a pretty good job most of the time. I would miss a place here and there, and I'd have one of my boys go out and pick up the little spots that I missed, but other than that I did fine with it. You take a-hold of life by the horns and you run with it. That's what everything is about as you go through life. It doesn't matter if you wrestle in school. It doesn't matter if you are a musician, everything you do in life, or that we do, is going to make a difference in life. I've had a lot of fun in my life, I kid you not.

I used to go to Wisconsin salmon snagging. I went up there and slept under a picnic table one night, and there was an inch of snow down when I woke up the next morning. A lot of things like that. I've caught a bunch of salmon up there. I had a lot of fun with the guys I went salmon snagging with. Used to swim in the river a lot and did a lot of boating with my kids. I just did whatever there was to do. Being blind did not stop me. I figured out how to do it anyway, whether it was right or wrong wasn't even the issue. The fact of it was that I did it anyway. I fish. I don't let being blind stop me from fishing. I've dug trenches and

put in sewer lines. I have roofed houses and barns, and I put both steel and regular roofing on. It's just a lot of those things, but I have to keep going way back to when I went to the school for the blind at Vinton, and when I went through the Orientation Center. And, I met all these people that told me it was alright to be a blind guy. Well, I went on with life and I proved that it is; proved it to myself and I proved it to the world. Being blind is not the issue what-so-ever; it's what's inside that makes the difference.

I could point out a lot of other blind guys that think and feel the same way, and that's where I got some of mine from. That's why there is such a thing as the National Federation of the Blind. We draw strength from each other. We can be one big family and we all have a lot in common. And, you can call and talk to, oh, any number of thousands of people and you can get information from them. They can give you a lift or they can explain something to you that you don't quite understand. But, I think most of it is to give you information that will continually help us to know it's okay to be blind. And, I can go on in my life and do whatever I want to do.

Oh, and cane travel! Oh, my goodness gracious! I hitchhiked a lot when I was first out of school, and I left my cane in a friend's car one time. And, he was gone and I was wanting to go up to Ottumwa, which is about 60, 50 miles from here. I got underneath the cabin that he and I were living in down on the river, and I got a piece of quarter-round out. Most of you probably wouldn't know what that is. It's a two-sided flat board. It's only about a inch by an inch and the other two sides are rounded and they go up at the top of the ceiling and the wall to close that gap where the ceiling and the wall meet at the top. It's a trim board. So, I took a

piece of that quarter-round and cut it off to about the length of my cane, and I hitchhiked to Ottumwa anyway. I had people think I was pretty nuts for doing that and some of my family said, "What in the world did you go up there with that?" And, I said, "Because I didn't have my cane." (Laughter) But, it worked. I didn't let not having my cane stop me.

And, I started cane travel in school. Skeet Powers taught me some cane travel when I was a junior and a senior in school. I still got the original cane that I started travel with. It's a wooden, crook handle with a steal tip on it and it stands about six inches higher than my waist. And, when I grab a hold of that and think I'm going to use it for the fun of it, my goodness, it's absolutely ridiculous. But, it worked for me to start with. It got me in to knowing I could use a cane, but once again, if I had my cane, people were going to know I was blind and I didn't want them to know I was blind; I tried to hide that. Well, if you don't go with a cane, you're going to be a stumble-bum and they're going to know you're blind anyway. In fact, it will even be worse without the cane, because they'll think there's really something wrong with you, besides the fact that they can tell the way you're acting that you are blind. I don't go very many places walking with people without my cane anymore.

And, I got some real training with it when I went to the Orientation Center, and I was one of the best cane travelers that ever went through there. I had the best on the travel route. That's changed from what it was when I was there, but I had the fastest travel route on our passing test of everybody that went through at that time, and for quite a while after that. And, I was proud of that, but I was a good traveler. I wanted to be a good traveler. I needed to be for

me, and if I could do it for me then the other people that were my teachers and my friends they would see that I was a good traveler, and that was pride.

You got to have some pride somewhere of what you can do. And, my pride is, I will do whatever I choose and I don't care what anybody says. If I want to do it I will find a way of doing it and I think that's really...I guess we have to dig inside ourselves and find that. You have to develop it. It might just be laying there. If you can get it woke up and get it going, you can develop that to where it will make your life so different. I traveled all around John Deere and that place covered acres and acres. It had a lot of five and six story buildings. I ran the elevators myself. I used to run the one at the Department when I was there, because it was the old kind that had the handle that you flip back and forth to go up and down, and I stuck a screw driver through the gate and I'd flip the handle and we'd start going up. And, I'd catch the floor with the tip of the screw driver and I'd know where to stop. And, I did the same thing at John Deere.

I had people tell me I couldn't do that and I still went ahead and did it. Nobody ever came and told me, that had any authority, nobody ever said I couldn't. They didn't make me quit it, so I went ahead and did it. They have a industrial relations office there, and they've got personnel, and they also have a safety department and a bunch of other...and I got to know all those people pretty well. I was turned in for safety for walking around with my cane and going to other departments and all. My supervisor told me I couldn't do that; I had to stay in my own department. Well, I went down and seen my buddy, Ray, at safety. I asked him about that and he said, "He can't tell you that. He can't do that." So, the word was put out in the whole area of John Deere that if

Ted Hart was out traveling with his cane, you let him be. Otherwise, we're talking discrimination.

I only fought discrimination when it was becoming a strong factor in my life and was going to keep me from doing something that I wanted to do. Now, granted, there are things, very few, that a blind guy shouldn't do and one of them is get on the road and drive a car. Well, I taught my boys how to drive out on a gravel road. I taught my wife how to drive out on a gravel road. I did not get out on the highways, which also after, remember we're talking about back in the '70s and the '60s and there were a whole lot less cars out there than there are now. I would not get out on the highway on a bet, sitting under the wheel of a car and let somebody steer it for me. Not anymore I wouldn't; just too much traffic. And, I probably got better sense now than I did back then, maybe; I don't know.

Hicklin: I'm sure we all do. (Laughter)

Hart: I lived over on 14 acres of what was left of the old home place after I retired from Deere's in '95. My folks gave me the last 14 acres, and I went down to live on that in about '96, I guess, it was; a year or so after I was retired.

15:00

Hart: I have a four-wheel drive, big three-quarter ton Dodge that I bought from my Dad and had fixed up and I had it out there on the farm and I put that truck on that 14 acres anywhere I wanted it and I didn't care who liked it or who didn't. It was my truck and my place. If I busted something, I'd have to be the one to fix it. I put it in and out of the

garage. I took it in the backyard. I had to do a lot of work on the farm, because it was just kind of let go. Folks weren't living there for about the last three years. They weren't able to take care of their self and we had them living with one of my sisters and I did a lot of work around there. Dad just let things go the last few years, of course. Now, we've got to remember, too, in, well let's see, in '97 Dad was like 85-years-old or so. So, he wasn't doing much around the farm, and neither was Mom, to fix things up.

They didn't have a garden and they didn't trim trees. Used to have a fence around the yard and I had to take that all out, because it was growing up with sprouts and weeds. There was just a whole lot of stuff. I had to do a lot of work on the outside of the house. Had to re-roof it and put new siding. It was an old log cabin, which I was born in, in 1940, and had to put new siding on it and a wall in the basement had fell in where a ground hog had got under the house, and were digging holes. And, the cement wall that we had built ourselves way back in, well, I guess it must have been '52 or 3, fell in. And, I took all that stuff that fell out off of the wall, carried it outside, cleaned it all up, got all the dirt and cement off of them and carried them back down, and mixed the sand up down in the cellar, and put that wall back together. I had never done anything with a wall like that before, but I could look at the wall and know what needed to be done. I had been around when my family were doing stuff like that. So, I decided I'd go ahead and do it, and I did and did a good job of it, too.

It's things like that that you have to set your mind to if you want to do something you figure out a way to do it. Well, I figured out a way to do it. Same way with driving the truck around on the old farm; I would get out and I would go

up front of the truck and check how far it was to the corn crib, or how far it was to the garage, or how far it was to the light pole at the corner of the garden fence, or whatever. And, I'd get back in the truck and I'd move it ten, fifteen, twenty feet and I'd get out and go look again. Make sure, you know, what was in the way, or if I was going the right direction, or how close I was to things. It took time and patience, but the point of it is that I did it regardless of who thought I shouldn't; I did it.

My family never cared, because they knew I would do stuff. They knew all these years that I was doing things and I worked as a machinist and mechanic, and I'd worked on some tool and dye at Deer's and I ran chainsaw. So, it didn't surprise them to know that I was going to move the truck around on my own place. And sure, I banged in a fender or two. So what! I just bought new fenders and put on it. It was my truck, so I just went ahead and did it. Didn't matter how bad I banged up the truck; just an old beat up farm truck any way.

So, I had fun. I enjoyed doing the truck, I enjoyed running chainsaw and taking out all those trees and the brush. I hooked onto the fence with the truck and put it in 4-wheel drive and tore the fence posts and everything out with it. About, oh, I don't know probably 30 foot at a stretch or more, and I just tore the whole works out, weeds, saplings, posts; everything come out. I piled it up out in the drive, had my brother to come over. He lived about half a mile. I had him come over with his tractor and a blade on it and push it down to a big pile where the old barn was and that's where I'd burn stuff. I could of took it out there myself, but he told me that he was more than willing. If I just wanted to pile it

in the drive that he'd come over and push it down there for me, so it saved me a lot of time.

You know, I went swimming in the ponds while I was there and I used to go down to the river; used to go fishing by myself. I got to where I knew the banks of the river very well, and the dam. I used to walk across the dam. I knew the bottom of the river about as well as I knew the top.

I used to do a lot of cat fishing by hand. Most of you probably heard of that. In some of the southern states they call it noodling. I forget, there's another word, too, but I can't remember what that one is. It's legal down there. I'm sorry to say it was not legal here in Iowa, but I was doing it anyway. (Laughter) I had a lot of fun. It was really enjoyable. It would have probably cost me a hundred dollars a fish had I got caught. And, I caught 30, 40, 50 feet many a time, fish, in one day. It was something that I enjoyed doing and I was able to do it. You get down at the bottom of a river where it's dark. Whose world are you in? You're in my world; that's where you're at. (Laughter) So, I really was good at it. Just all of those things, every bit of it I had a lot of fun with my kids, like I say, going back coon hunting. We got lost a couple of times, once in a snow storm and one night when it was foggy we got lost. One night it took me four hours to find our way out. We were way down on a river bottom over by La Porte, and I was four hours getting us out of there. I got back home just in time to get in the car to go to work that morning. (Laughter)

I just have done a lot of things like that and I enjoy hearing other people talk about things that they've done. I've taken my kids to Adventureland. I enjoy hearing people tell about it. I enjoy hearing these blind guys that tell about going on the bumper cars. I get a kick out of that. Been

there and done that and it's a lot of fun, but its something that most people would think that a blind guy couldn't or wouldn't do, but we do anyway. I know a lot of us that's done that; a lot of us that rode bicycles. I've done a lot of unusual things, maybe blind people...but bicycles, a lot of them I know rode horses. I used to milk cows, and I had goats when my kids were growing up. We used to milk goats and use the milk from them, of course.

There's a lot of blind people that do most all of this stuff. Old Joe Clausterman, he used to be a teacher at Vinton. He and his brother both were blind, and somebody called the cops on them one night about midnight because they were roofing the house. (Laughter) They called the cops on them, because they were making a lot of noise. The same thing happened to me in Jessup about 11 O'clock one night they called the cops on me, because I was putting roofing on the barn. Obviously, I was making too much noise with all the hammering going on, and I never thought about it anymore than Joe Clausterman did, but that's one of those kind of funny things. Wasn't very funny at the time, but I go back and look at it now as being funny. It all melts together.

We used to swim there at the Department, too. I go back to the Orientation Center. We used to swim in the pool and Mr. Jernigan and Manuel Urena, Jim Valliant and 3, 4, 5 of the teachers go in there and there'd be half a dozen or ten students. We used to go in there and swim and try to outdo each other all the time like normal. We were seeing who could hold their breath under the water the longest and I said, well, I already know I can do that, because I was used to swimming in the river and I used to do it with my brothers and other guys. We'd see who could stay under the longest and see who could swim the farthest under the water. Of

course, now we were either in the pond or in the river at that time. So, everybody took their turn at it and I went down and Manuel Urena, he was counting the seconds for me, and I hung onto the gutter of the pool and held myself down, so my head would stay under. And, he kept counting and I could hear him counting and he started counting in Spanish when he got to about a hundred (Laughter) It about made me laugh. I almost had to come up. By the time he got through he'd counted to three hundred counts of a second. If you figure that out in minutes you'll find out it was something like five minutes that I stayed under and I was dizzy before I came up. I mean, I pushed it as far as I could possibly push it and many a time I stayed under two and three minutes, lots of times in the river.

Used to scuba dive quite a lot; had a lot of fun doing that. Had a couple, three of my boys take scuba lessons; we used to scuba dive in the river. Lived real close to the river at Littleton, North of Jessup a little bit and I used to take them down there all the time and taught them how to swim and got them up on the dam, which is probably about eight foot high. And, that's something that I can't explain to a blind person to make sense out of it, but I would have to have some things for uses, objects to build something that kind of looked like the dam and then explain the angle of the face of the dam and to be able to explain the apron that's at the bottom of the dam where the water goes down and hits. I was in there. I had my hands all over that stuff is why I know about it. We were down there swimming and my boys were, I think, the twins were eight and the oldest boy was ten. I was standing up on the spillway at the end of the dam and the boys were out there swimming and I had taught

them that if I holler at them you'd better answer me the second time and it better be mighty quick.

Somebody turned me in for having the kids down there and me being blind and this guy come up and stood beside me and said, "Those your kids out there?" And, I says, "Yeah." He asked me my name and I told him. He said, "Well, we got a call into the office that said you were putting your kids in danger." I said, "What do you mean in danger?" He said, "Well, it's child neglect and danger." I said, "How do you figure that?" "Well, you're letting them out there swimming by their self." I said, "Well, they know how to swim and besides"...He asked me how I knew where they were and I said, "I'll show you." And, I hollered at each one of them by name and they would answer within six or seven seconds and I said, "Is that good enough for you?" He said, "Yep." And, that was the last time I ever had any trouble with it. Found out later who turned me in. (Laughter) I won't tell you that, but I found out later who it was and that was a pretty bad set, too, when I talked to them about that. And, you're going to have that kind of thing, you know, that's part of life. It was funny later. I laughed about it; it was pretty funny. All the neighbors out there in the country, they knew. They knew I took the kids out on the road and taught them how to drive. They seen us riding motorcycles and bikes on the road, riding horses on the road. They knew we did all that stuff. But, that was the only complaint I ever got about any of it.

Hicklin: Sounds like you handled it very well.

Hart: Well, it worked. (Laughter)

Hicklin: That's the key.

Hart: It is, yeah. And, a lot of it is having your head into it. You got to get your head into that stuff to be able to deal with it. I lost some arguments that I didn't deal with very well, but that's the way you learn. The next time, then you'll know how to handle it. I can't even begin to tell you how much fun I've had in my life. I now have the privilege of enjoying my grandkids. Since I retired, I've been going south to visit my grandkids and I'd stay two or three months. One's in Florida and one's in North Carolina. One's in Spain. And, I went to Spain and spent some time over there. My twin boys are both missionaries and I have one boy that lives here in Iowa by Ottumwa. I go to visit them and I got to kind of grow up with my grandkids almost, because I spent a lot of time there after I retired. I think I said a while ago I helped some of them learn how to ride a bike. I'd get right on the bike with them and coast down the hill by their house, you know, and show them how to get balance for it and so on. Got to go fishing with them; we did a lot of walks and swimming with them and played a lot of games. I had a basketball with bells in it, and I used to play basketball with them and just did all kinds of things with them; a lot of the things that I did with my own kids. Now, they don't live in an area where we could do some of that. You couldn't go coon hunting where they live and, well, you couldn't really have a horse in town where they live either.

30:00

Hart: But swimming, that was a little more difficult, too. Down in Florida you didn't go swimming down there,

because there's too many alligators all over the place. I've fished a lot down there. One time I was with my boy fishing, out of a boat of course, and within a hundred feet of us he counted 14 alligators laying on the bank. So, you know, you don't go in water like that.

Hicklin: Probably wouldn't be a good place to go noodling would it? (Laughter)

Hart: No! No, because that gator would noodle you first! Yeah, that's right. I've really enjoyed life. I've had a lot of fun and I took care of my babies. I know husbands that will not change their baby's diaper or dress them. I did, because I wanted to...It was part of my job. It was part of me. I wanted to help take care of my babies, and I did. And, I changed a lot of diapers. That one boy was two years old when the twins were born, and it was like having triplets. And, we had a lot of diapers to change, and I helped out with them and I gave them baths. It's not anything a blind person can't do. Gosh, I know a lot of blind women that have babies and have taken care of them. Once again, being blind is not the issue. The issue is, "Do I want to do it?"

Hicklin: Yes.

Hart: You know, it isn't "Can I do it?" It's, well, I'll figure out how to do it and I do, if I needed something answered, I'd ask my wife or somebody, you know. You can always find out how to do things if you don't know. There were many things I didn't know about like the chainsaw. I didn't know anything about running a chainsaw. Knew what they looked like, but running one is a whole lot different than holding one

in your hands and that's just everything. I was very fortunate, I know, I got to do a lot of things, but I worked it around to where it worked for me. It wasn't that I didn't even ask anybody, "Could I do this?" I just told them I'm going to do this and then I would go about asking them how to do it. Then, of course, like with the hunting, why, I taught the guys what I needed. Two of the guys that I hunt with are better at helping me than what my own kids are. I'm not sure why that is, but they are. They can help me aim a gun and shoot better than the boys can. I guess it's just one of those things.

Well, I don't know where to go to from here. I'm afraid I'll get too redundant and repeat too much.

Hicklin: Well, Ted, certainly you've had quite a good life and you've made it for yourself and that is so important.

Hart: It is, yes. You got to make it for yourself. Somebody can't make it for you. You got to put your own effort in there and then you can be proud of what you got.

Hicklin: Yes.

Hart: You know, you can be proud that you got where you are, and I don't mean pride to where it's a bad thing. You can just be glad. You can be happy that you can talk with other blind guys and tell them of the experiences you've had and tell them why. Tell them where you got all that knowledge from, you know, and how you made it work.

Hicklin: Well, its super that we're able to get this recorded so the future generations can hear that same thing.

Hart: That would be great. Yep, because I'm not going to be around, probably, a whole lot of years yet. (Laughter) That will be pretty cool! That will be pretty good.

Hicklin: Yes.

Hart: I hope a lot of those names are recognizable, too. Some of you know...have met me through when I've worked at the State Fair from about '95 on. I stayed at the Department, so I got to meet a lot of the students and, oh my, I mean I met a lot of the students. And, just because I had been there before, even though I was an old guy to them...I mean, here I was, you know, 55, 60, 65-years-old and these kids were 18, 20, 25 and they would invite me to go out to supper with them, and we'd go out and just have a blast; just have all kinds of fun. I'd sit and talk with them in the Rec. Room and tell them about times in my day and what it was like, you know, 40 years ago and how much it's changed today to what it used to be. We used to play cards; we would play cards in the Rec. Room. I'd go down there in the evenings and we had a lot of fun playing cards and just talking, you know, just...Well, you guys know how it is. You just kind of gather around and start talking, and one thing led to another and just talked about a lot of things and had a good time and enjoyed each other. And, that's the way you get strength in life. You hear from these other people, and after all, we're all brothers and sisters in that respect as far as being blind and just knowing certain people. There's always certain people that will impress you in life more than others. I had a lot of people in my life that did; a lot of blind people.

I used to go to the, well I can't afford to anymore, but I went to the National convention for the NFB and I admit, oh, I probably met...I probably in my lifetime have met 20,000 blind people. I met a lot of them through the NFB. There's a lot of them, 2,500 or 3,000 a year at the convention and I was what they call a rover. They asked me to just mix and go around and talk to people and if they were having a problem, whether it was being lost, or not knowing how to get to somewhere or finding a bathroom and just talking with people and helping them out; so that the upper echelon that were actually running the organization and running the convention, so that they didn't get pulled away from things that they needed to do and had to do to make it work. There was a bunch of us that went around like that as rovers, and we would work with people and talk with them and help them out, and go to the hotel with them and get things straightened out if they needed to and all of it; show them where to take their dogs out to. There were a lot of people there with Leader Dogs and a lot of them didn't even use canes. They hadn't progressed in life or hadn't had the opportunity yet, at that point, to even learn how to use a cane.

I don't know what I would do without a cane in my life. I ran around a lot without one when I was young. When I was living out on the acreage I never used a cane out there. When I had my four acres back at Jessup in Waterloo area I never used my cane on that at all. I knew where everything was. I spent so much time that I didn't need it and I knew a lot of other blind guys do the same thing. I didn't use it down at the river bank. I never used it down there at all. Never did take one down there, but I learned the river bank and I don't know how to explain how you do that, but you do

it. It just works and you do it. It's like riding a bike down a gravel road. If you ride in the track it works great, because when you get out of the track the gravel starts crunching real bad and you can tell the difference. You get too close to the edge of the road you're going to be hearing weeds, because weeds grow along the edge of the road a lot. I know that, because I've been in a lot of ditches. I went in them a lot of times with bikes and I've walked the ditches a lot and so on, but that's stuff you learn by being active.

All this stuff that I've talked about, you learn it by getting into life and doing things in life. And, everybody has their own choice. There's a lot of people wouldn't want to do any of this stuff that I've been doing in my life, but that's okay, because you've got your own life. Live your life! You know, get a hold of it and ring out of life where you're going. Hold onto it until you get there and try to learn everything from other blind guys that you can. Talk to them. Ask them about things. Did you ever do this? How did you do that? And, that's the way you develop your life. That's the way you can go out and say, I can do anything I want to do and you'll know who you are. Don't worry if you get called arrogant. I could care less, but I know who I am. I know what I do. I know what I can do and it's whatever I choose. And, then I figure out how to do what I choose, if I don't already know, which I didn't a lot of times, but you learn it. I didn't have anybody to teach me how to mow my yard; didn't have anybody show me how to roof a house. I had to ask them, but I went up and did it myself. Nothing wrong with asking how to do things, but the point is you ask and then you go ahead and do it. The better you get at that stuff and the more you do, the more you'll enjoy, because you're really

accomplishing things in life and you'll feel good about yourself.

Hicklin: What role has Braille played in the years, over the years?

Hart: Braille is one of the most important things. I think, Braille ranks right there probably with using a cane, learning how to travel. They both make you independent. Traveling with a cane or a dog makes you independent. You can come and go wherever you want to go. I know lots of people that fly by their self. I do all the time. I ride the bus from town to town all the time by myself. Braille, I have a Braille Bible; it's 18 volumes. I can't carry it to church all the time and a lot of times the pastor is changing from book to book so often I'd have to have eight of the books there in the pew with me; out of the 18 and that's just not feasible, because you can't get into it fast enough. So, I have a battery powered and solar powered Bible, and I'm sure some of you will know about these, that work very well. Now, I've never used one in church, because you'd have to wear earphones with it. People would think I was listening to the Super Bowl, instead of paying attention to the preacher probably. (Laughter)

Hicklin: Probably not a good thing.

Hart: (Laughter) No, it wouldn't be a good thing. I get all kinds of stuff in Braille. I have a Braille song book. I got more than one Braille song book. And, I get, of course, the library itself, you can get tapes and you can get Braille books out of the library. I don't read much Braille like I have

over the past, but when I worked at Deer's the Braille I had was what I made for the information about my jobs. But, when I went home I didn't have much time to read, because I was out with my kids doing stuff or I was out mowing the yard, or I was working on somebody's car, or whatever. I was out scooping snow in the winter time. But, when I need something in Braille I have sent books to the library and they've Brailled them for me and if they're good books, especially, they'll put a copy on the shelf in tape form or in Braille form. The library is one of the best things I've had and I never used it much until the year before I retired. I was divorced at that time, so I had all the time to kill and I went nuts with TV. So, I went ahead and started getting books out of the library to read and that was like in the winter of '94 or '95. When you're underneath a truck changing a transmission, you can't use Braille. So, I would use a talking book machine and listen to a book or if I was in the garage building something I would use a tape recorder and I would listen to books, because you can't hardly build a shelf for the kitchen and read Braille at the same time. But, when I'd come in the house and be on a break, or like in the evening, then I could read Braille.

Oh no, Braille literacy, that's got to be one of the most important things and I'm afraid that...Braille is very important, but I'm afraid the way it's going today, that there are too many students that are mainstreamed into public that do not have Braille for the most part. And, I might be a little limited in my knowledge on some of this, but from what I have gathered you don't get much Braille in school. But, you get these different talking machines and recording machines and use a lot of that. I knew students that went to Vinton, and they got out of there and they can't even use

a slate. They don't know how to use a slate and stylus and it's just beyond me. I don't understand why they quit teaching that. A lot of them have a Perkins Braille at home or some kind of a Braille, and they'll use a Braille. I have nothing against the Braille; I've got one. I hardly ever use it, because I use Braille to take all of my notes down.

45:00

Hart: I have a jiffy slate that takes 3 by 5 cards. I take all kinds of notes down, well, over here by this chair I've got three boxes that are about the size of a shoe box; that's got around 300 cards in them with names and addresses and other information that I want to keep. I do a lot of talking book reading yet. I've got half a dozen here on the couch by my player right now, but I can still go and read my Braille Bible. I've got flip-open slates that you carry in your pocket. I've got a couple of board slates and I've got a lot of stuff in Braille, but the reading of Braille is being left out today. There's only nine percent of blind people that are literate in Braille. The rest of them don't know how to read Braille. But, now a lot of that is, too, because there's a lot of people that are elderly that have macular degeneration and they also have diabetic problems to where they cannot read Braille. It's difficult when you get about so old. Oh my, I would have hated to have to learn Braille now, and never learned it when I was young.

So, it's just a real difficult thing when you get older to learn Braille, and then you need somebody to help teach you. And, it's hard to get a teacher that can spend enough time with you to teach you Braille. No, it's very important, especially, I would say probably in people that are...oh that

got out of school by '80, 1980. Probably, more important to the ones that are that age or older than it is the younger ones in their 20s and 30s, because they just don't get enough of it. It's an independent thing. That's what all blind people want; we want independence. We want to be able to do whatever we want to do, and I hope that's what you're getting out of my talk here.

You can do whatever you want to do, but you got to put some effort to it. You have to put your head to it. You have to want to do it and there's no reason that you can't. I know, because I've been there and done that. I've done anything I've wanted to do. I still do whatever I want to do. I walk around Mount Pleasant by myself as I choose. I'm the only blind guy that really gets out a lot with his cane. There's another fellow, but he's a real high partial and he just carries his; he don't use it. (Laughter) He doesn't make a very good impression, you know. About everybody knows me and my family down here, so they call me the blind Hart boy. (Laughter) That's the way they remember me from way back years ago, you know, when I was a blind kid.

Yeah, I've been lost in Mount Pleasant. It's about 8,000 people and I've been lost in here, just as lost as I've been in Des Moines or Cedar Rapids or Waterloo. Good grief, I got lost in Waterloo a number of times. I got lost at John Deer quite a few times, but that's part of life, you know, it's no reason to quit; it's just part of life. So, getting lost is a part of a blind guy's life when he's out walking around. Big deal! A lot of sighted people get lost, too. They don't know where they're at. My wife couldn't drive...couldn't remember which side of town she was on sometimes. She was sure a good kid and a nice woman, but boy, she wouldn't know where she was at. Her directions were lousy and I used to tell her

where she was at all the time and how to get to where. So, yeah, Braille is very important just like cane travel is. Heads up, got to know where you're at.

Hicklin: Yes. Well, Ted, thank you so much for your time here and telling us about your experiences. Is there anything else you can think of that you'd like to add?

Hart: No, I don't really think so. I've been pretty redundant on a lot of things. I guess I can't express any stronger how important it is to be independent, but there are things you got to do to be independent. There's things you got to do to know who you are and not care what other people think. You just have to do it. You can't think about it. You can talk about it a lot, but if you don't get out there and do it then the knowledge about it...you know, knowing how to read Braille. If I don't read it, it's my fault. So, I don't get to use it very much if I don't go ahead and do it, so it's very important; all these things that I've talked about. And, I have to go back, especially to Vinton at the school for the blind. The people there that helped me out were back of me and the ones at the Department, especially, of course, in the Orientation Center way back when I was there in 1959. I am the last of the first few that are still alive. Well, I'm the last one alive of the first four. All three of the girls that were there at the same time I was, they're gone.

Hicklin: You were in the first Orientation class?

Hart: Yes. I was the fourth one to come in. Karen Clausen, who I went to school with, and Milray Nelson, don't know where she was from, and Joanne Hosavik are the

ones...those girls were in there first. They came in, in the first of 1959 and I came in, in April. We were the first four there, but I'm the last one still alive. Those people were important to me; that Orientation Center. Oh, I talked to a few guys that I know right off hand that just didn't like the Orientation Center. Well, they didn't like somebody that was there, so they wouldn't go there or they would get in there for a couple of weeks or a month and quit and they would leave. Well, I can tell ya, it's your loss. It's nobody else's, it's yours. You've independently, on your own, threw a wonderful training session away just because you were argumentative, or because you were stubborn, or because you didn't like somebody. I was all those above, but I was able to get by until I could get my head straightened out because I accepted and worked with people that I didn't care for; because I knew this was all for me. I knew all of that training was for me. The training of the cane was for me. The training in Home Ec. was for me. I live alone now; I've been cooking for myself for 15 years. Probably good thing I was in the cooking class and learned some things from Ruth Schroeder. Manuel Urena, my goodness that boy used to work me over big time. But, I learned from it. And, I could have quit many a time and walked out. I was so fed up with a lot of it, but I never, because I knew it was for me.

I knew that I wanted something better than what I was and what I had, and that's the way I got it. I got the whole attitude and the whole information that it's alright to be a blind guy from going through the Orientation Center for the blind. They cemented all that. They made it all work. I knew there was something wrong with the way the world thought about me, but I couldn't change that unless I worked at it. So, it all solidified when they got me to

understand and believe in myself, and in them, because they proved...they did it their self. Well, if they could do it, so could I. And, they helped me learn how to do it. So, it all solidified and helped me to know that it was okay to be a blind guy. It didn't matter that I was blind; it was still okay. And, that's the way I've lived my life. Obviously, by this information you'll know that I really lived my life. I went to the ends of my life to enjoy it and do things and that's where I got it, back in Vinton and at the Orientation Center for the blind. That's what made it for me.

Hicklin: Thank you, again, Ted, so much. This has been really interesting.

Hart: Well, thank you for coming and talking with me, Mike. Appreciate it.

Hicklin: You're welcome!

54:14

(End of Recording 2)

Beverly Tietz

2-10-11

[There is a bible verse that Ted applies to his life every day, and he shares it with whomever he can. "I can do all things in him who strengthens me," Philippians 4:13. This verse is important to Ted because it's simple and to the point. Also, it doesn't say, "...unless I'm blind." Blindness isn't a factor in deciding what can and can't be done.]