

Oral Memoirs

of

Dick Groskey

An Interview Conducted by

Joseph Morris

October 28, 2011

Linda McKnight Batman Oral History Project

Historical Society of Central Florida

Museum of Seminole County History

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Interview Histories

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The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Museum of Seminole County History, Sanford, Florida.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Dick Groskey is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 28, 2011.

Abstract

Oral history of Dick Groskey, conducted by Joseph Morris on October 28, 2011. Born in Springfield, Ohio, Groskey migrated with his family to Orlando, Florida, in the early 1950s. In the interview, he discusses migrating to Florida, growing up in Ohio, how Orlando and Central Florida has changed over time, his experience contracting with various companies and government institutions, the metalworking industry, business taxes, his service in the Air Force during World War II, and his wife and children.

Dick Groskey

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Joseph Morris

October 28, 2011

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Morris It is October 28, 2011, and I am talking to Dick Groskey in his place of residence. I am Joseph Morris, representing the Linda McKnight Batman Oral History Project for the Historical Society of Central Florida. Sir, could you tell us a little about yourself?

Groskey What?

Morris Could you tell us a little about yourself and your life?

Groskey Well, what would you like, what would you like...

Morris Well, where were you born, sir? Where were you raised?

Groskey Springfield, Ohio.

0:00:22

Migrating to Florida

Morris And when did you come down to Florida, sir?

Groskey Well, right after I got married in the early [19]40s. I got out of the service in '46, and we got married the same year, and we came to Florida in the real early '50s.

Morris Okay, sir. And did you move originally to...

Groskey No. We—we were going to Miami, and I blew out a tire. It was over on U.S. [Route] 1, and we blew a tire out on the car, and it was late at night on Sunday. We stopped in a motel over on U.S. 1. The next morning, we got up and I asked where the local garage was, and they said, "Oh, it's clear over in Bithlo. Over Dave Shaw's garage." So there happened to be a fellow there that was going that way, and so he took my tire, and we threw[ed] it in the back of his truck, and he took me over Dave Shaw's garage, which was right in the middle of no place. Well, Dave got the tire fixed, and one thing another.

And in the meantime, while he was fixing the tire, I thought, "Well, I'll look at the local newspaper." So I'm just thumbing through it. There's an ad in there: "Machinist wanted." So I asked Dave Shaw, I said, "Well, where is this place?" "Oh," he said, "That's over in Orlando, which is short ways from Bithlo." So I put a dime in the telephone—it was a dime at that time—and I called this man

up, and he was from Youngstown, Ohio. And I told him, I said, "Well," I said, "I've been a toolmaker all my life." And he said, "I got a job for you." He says, "Come on over!" So I said, "Well, wait 'til I get my tire fixed, and I'll come over." So he gave me the directions, and I came over to Orlando, and I went down on Sligh Boulevard – and Tool Engraving on Sligh. It was Trade Tool Engraving – was the name of the place. And he said, "I'll let you run a screw machine second shift." I said, "Great." [inaudible] easy. I'd run one before. So I went back to Titusville, told the missus. I said, "Well, we're gonna have to stay here tonight, but," I said, "tomorrow we're going to Orlando." And she said, "Well, what's the matter with going to Miami?" I said, "I got a job." She said, "You got a job?" I said, "Yeah. I go to work tomorrow night." And I've never been out of work since.

Morris Wow, sir. So, why were you going to Miami?

Groskey I don't know. I just thought that was a place where it was warm and there was a lot of something going on.

Morris Got distracted by Orlando?

Groskey And well, we got stuck here and been here ever since.

0:02:37 **Starting own business**

Morris Then how long did you work at the...

Groskey At Trade Tool?

Morris Yes, sir.

Groskey Only, well, best part of a year. And that's when the Martin [Marietta Corporation] company came here, and I helped build the Martin plant. Then I went to work industrial engineering. And I stayed out there about a year and a half, I guess, and then I started my own thing, and been keeping it going ever since.

Morris Okay. And how did you start your own business, sir?

Groskey One tool at a time.

Morris And how long have you been in business?

Groskey Oh my gosh. Never [laughs] – I've always had a shop. We moved the shop down when I moved down from Ohio.

Morris Oh really, sir?

Groskey Yeah.

Morris So you were doing this up in Ohio as well?

Groskey Yeah.

Morris The, um...

Groskey I had a shop in Brookville, Ohio, and then we left Brookville to come to Florida, and I had our furniture in the shop in a – on a semi. We was gonna move it down here, and we moved, after we had the blowout over Titusville, and I got a job there, we went over here on [U.S. Route] 17-92 and rented a three-room apartment over there.

And I had all the shop equipment come down then after we got established, and I rented a place over in Altamonte Springs. It was a little – about a four-story – I mean a four-office little building that Merris Walker – he owned the whole town practically. He built this building – just a little commercial building – and I rented one of the offices in there. We put all the machinery in there. And at that time, I was working at the Martin company, so we got our little shop going. So I went, quit the Martin company, went back out there, went to purchasing, I said, “I’d like to bid on your work.” And we’ve been going ever since.

0:04:13 **Growing up in Ohio**

Morris Okay, sir. And could you tell me a little about the place where you grew up? I know it was in Ohio, correct?

Groskey Mmhm.

Morris Have you been back?

Groskey Only when my dad died in 1966. I haven’t been back since.

Morris Okay, sir. What was it like growing up out there?

Groskey It was right prior to World War II, and things were tight, but it was a lot – a lot easier. Better times than what it is now. It wasn’t near as fast-paced. People had more of value than they do now. Smaller things meant more. Our – we lived in a middle-class neighborhood where everybody worked, and everybody went to school. Everybody had a car. And we played croquet at night in the backyard. We played football down at the local park. We played baseball at the local park. We played horseshoes. There was always something to do. The local park was just a matter of trees, a drinking fountain, and a shelter house, but there the city provided ball gloves and tennis racquets and things. So you’d go in there, sign your name and get a ball, go up and go play ball.

Morris Okay.

Groskey And that was kind of the center of activity of the whole community. We lived in what they called Walnut Hills. It was a very clannish type situation, because at

that time, in that area – National Cash Register, General Motors [Company], Frigidaire, Dayton Rubber [Company], and those bigger companies – a job was something that there was nothing to be concerned about. That was something that your dad – your dad’s dad probably worked at these same companies over the last three or four generations, because that’s the way things were. You didn’t have to hunt for a job. Shop like I got now – a job shop – there was[sic] hundreds of them in that town. You’d pick up the phone call and say, “Hey, what do you got going? You got 30 days’ worth of work? I’ll be over this afternoon.” And you had another job. That’s job shopping. But if you wanted to go to the major companies like Dayton Rubber, Frigidaire, or one of the big ones – Master Electric, where they made motors – you’d go in there, hire on. They’re expecting you and your kids’ kids to work there. It was job security, which of you have none today. Today, it’s feast or famine. We get a job today, you finish it up two o’clock, goodbye. Go home. There is no security in jobs today, unless you create your own security.

Morris Right, sir.

Groskey There is nothing that – you can’t depend on the other man for anything.

0:06:43 **Decision to migrate to Florida**

Morris Okay, sir. And how – so you left. You just wanted a change of scenery? You came down to Miami for that reason? Or you were on your way to Miami for that reason?

Groskey No. I spent – like I said, I spent a lot of time over in China and Burma and India. And it was all hot weather. Very hot. We came home in February, and it was just kind of the tail end of the winter, but there was a lot of snow and ice on the ground, and after being in the tropics for that long, and coming in to snow and ice on the ground – and I got married, I told her when we got married, I said, “Look, we’re going someplace else.” I said, “I’m not gonna shovel snow.” I said, “I’m not used to this.” My later teens and then early twenties, I was overseas, and I said, “Boy, I’m not going home and shoveling any snow.”

So we told her parents, we told my parents, and my dad says, “If you take her and them[sic] kids out of Ohio, I’ll disown you.” Which he did. We never got one dime from him, and he was a wealthy man. When he died, I got just exactly nothing, because I took her and came to Florida with the kids.

Morris And that was your dad or her dad?

Groskey No. That was my dad.

Morris Wow.

Groskey No. Her dad was more lenient. He was from Georgia, and was a farmer from Georgia. He had a pretty nice business going, and he said, “Well,” he said, “I can

understand why you're doing what you're doing." And he says, "If we can help you, we will."

But my dad was from the old school, and if it ain't his way, it's no way. It was that, but, he said, "You don't know what you're doing. You're leaving the whole security and this and that and everything else." I said, "No. I'm not." I said, "Now I was in the service. I've been clear around the world." I said, "I've seen other places. I've been other places and done other things. I'm not gonna sit here and shovel snow. I'm going someplace else." "Well, if you do, you're disowned." And he did.

Morris What did your dad do for a living? Did he work in one of these...

Groskey He was vice president of the [International] Typographical Union.

Morris Okay, sir. I can definitely see why, after going to the tropics, that Miami might have come to mind.

Groskey That was the only – Orlando – it was just a wide spot in the road, like Kissimmee, that was just a few cars walking up and down the road. But Orlando did have a name, but it didn't have a name like Jacksonville or Miami. Now, my wife's from Georgia, and some of her relations – her dad, or her uncle – was warden of the Duvall County farm up there. So we came down – prior to moving, we came down here and visited, and we talked to her uncle at great length, and he was a very, very, very knowledgeable man, and he knew basics of life right here in Florida. So I asked him a lot of pointed questions. He gave me the answers. He says, "It's gonna be up to you." He said, "There's[sic] opportunities here. It's up to you to make them." He said, "You can go out there and hustle around." He said, "You'll make them." He said, "Florida's growing." He was born and raised there. I figured, "Well, you know what you're talking about." So that changed our opinion on going to Miami. After talking to people who had been there and back, and one thing another, salesmen and people who had went down there to live, and got out of the Little Havana area – whatever – they said, "Stay up in Orlando area." Been here ever since.

Morris Okay, so after you moved here, you were still thinking about going down to Miami afterwards?

Groskey No.

Morris Just talking to these people.

Groskey No. That was it. That cancelled that out. I only went to Miami one time since we moved to Florida. We had a subcontract on the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] building in Miami, and we supplied a lot of the high-pressure ductwork down there. We built it. And we had to get down – as owner of the shop, we had to get down to physically see that our work was in that job. It was a government job. Our work was in that building and that contract – blah blah

blah blah blah. And I had to go down there about three different times. Other than that, I never went back.

Morris Okay, sir.

Groskey That's where Miami and me[sic] ended.

Morris That's where you and Miami have just parted ways?

Groskey Yep.

0:10:31

How Orlando and Central Florida has changed over time

Morris Okay, sir. Well, how has Orlando changed from when you moved here to now?

Groskey They have ruined Orlando.

Morris Really, sir?

Groskey Yeah.

Morris In what way?

Groskey Due to the fact that the people that were responsible – once Orlando was established as a town, and the multitude started moving into that town – the way Orlando was originally set up was a farm town that was easygoing and whatever. As soon as it started to grow with a vast amount of people, which happened in the '50s, it really blossomed, and when it did, they lost reality with what Orlando was all about.

When we moved here, you could drink the water out of Prairie Lake. You could go along, there was water along the ditches on every main road out at the main area of the town here. There was[sic] fish in these ditches. People would be along the side of Route 50¹ fishing, and water wasn't that deep, but there was fish in them. I worked at the Martin company, and when I'd come home at night, I'd take the boys, and we'd go over to Lake Monroe and sit there on the seawall, and in an hour's time, I'd have a bucket so full of fish you could hardly pick it up. Where'd they all go? Where'd the mullet go? Where'd the blue crabs go? Everything has been polluted.

They ruined Central Florida. Now we've got crime. A lot more. A shooting in Central Florida back in the '50s – unheard of, unless it was a hunting accident. Somebody pulled out a gun and shot his own foot. It was unheard of. Now it's an everyday occurrence. You go to Pine Hills today and somebody's gonna shoot somebody before you can drive through it. They have ruined Central Florida, because that is the element that follows growth. There's that type of person that

¹ Florida State Road 50.

will follow growth, and try to reap what they can off it, and they have ruined Central Florida.

Central Florida—I won't even go to the coast. You used to be able to go anyplace up and down the east coast. You could pull off the side of the road, cross the dunes, and go fishing. It's all barricaded off. Chain-link fence. "Keep out." Don't come here, don't go there.

When we first moved, when we first got ourselves established in Altamonte Springs, I went to a council meeting, and several of the management meetings Downtown—city of Orlando. And most of the people down there—a lot of the people down there were from Baltimore[, Maryland]. Baltimore entered big in Central Florida, because the Martin came here. Martin company came here. They brought all their people with them. And come to find out, most of the people that came with the Martin company from Baltimore were the odd falls they wanted to get rid of anyway. And that's how the Martin company started here. Well, I went—I helped build the building, then I went to work in it, and I know firsthand.

But, at any rate, I had a shop in Altamonte Springs. I had the first screw machine in Seminole County. So I went to one of these meetings down there, and I got a chance to speak my voice. I got up and I said, "Well, you fellows don't have any manufacturing base here." I said, "You got high-acreage use plant." I said, "You got two or three big packinghouses. One Blue Goose [Growers packinghouse]." And I said, "You've got another packinghouse over in Maitland, but," I said, "you don't have anything that's making anything. You don't produce any. You don't have any sawmills. You don't have any manufacturing, no welding shops, no nothing. Why?" "Because we're tourist-oriented." That's the famous saying: "We're tourist-oriented." And still to this day, they're still leaning away from manufacturing. They don't want any manufacturing in Central Florida. I tried to explain to them how the economy in Cincinnati and Dayton was based on all these little job shops that was doing something. Now what have you got? Blacks running up and down the ladder picking oranges. That ain't gonna help the economy. Not one nickel's worth. The grove owner's gonna make money, but you and I aren't. I said, "You have to have diversified activity in that community." And you know, they said, "Well, you've probably got a pretty good idea, but we don't wanna hear no more." And that's where they shut it off, and I said, "Well, to hell with you. Goodbye."

And it's still today the same situation. They want tourists. Get them in, fleece them, send them on a plane back home. They don't want nothing here permanently. Go downtown. What have they done for the people who live here? If you go someplace, you're gonna pay money dear for it, because you're gonna pay just like a tourist. They don't give the local people anything. They don't say, "Hey, show me your driver's license. You come in for two bucks." "Hey, it's \$28.00? We might charge you \$30.00, because you live here." Uh-uh. I'm soured

on [inaudible]. Believe me. That's why we're out here on our own little domain. I have nothing to do with them.

0:15:15

Contract work with large companies

Morris Okay, sir. So, um, this kind of might be a little bit of a weird question, then — so you're not a — you don't go to — or have you ever gone to any of the theme parks that attract the tourists?

Groskey I have never. I have done work for [Walt] Disney World and Universal [Studios Orlando] and everybody else, but it's always on a bid-item basis. The only reason I will go there is to take a job out, give them a purchase order, and hope I get paid. That's the only way. As far as spending my money to go to their park, I wouldn't spend a dime.

Morris Yeah. They are expensive, sir.

Groskey I wouldn't spend a dime.

Morris When you say "hope" you get paid, have you ever had a problem with receiving payment from these companies?

Groskey Martin company and Disney started out the same way. Thirty days on invoice, 60 days on invoice, 90 days on invoice. Martin company got 120 days on invoice. I took the last invoices right down to personnel, right into payroll. I said, "I want to get paid for these." "Well, we're a big company, you know. It takes time." And I said, "Now, you're not that big." I said, "I'm a little guy. We started out 30-day invoice, okay. 60, I can live with. 90, I'm hurting. 120, I can't do it. Anymore work we do from you, COD [Cash on Delivery]." Now I'm a little guy talking to a big guy, and I said, "That's it." They needed us at that time more than we needed them, because there was nobody else except Martin [inaudible] out here that had a shot.

Morris Okay, so they kept trying to put you off?

Groskey That's right. They kept stringing us out, stringing us out, and stringing us. "Well, we're a big company!" I said, "Yes, you ought to be able to do it twice as fast. Because you have more facilities than we do. You ought to be able to make your pay the same day."

Morris Right, sir.

Groskey So, I said, "C.O.D."

Morris So your business work with these companies has not been the — all you wish they could be?

Groskey Well, the Martin company, as you know, right now is one of the largest defense contractors there is in the United States. And had we — at that time, had we had

somebody on our side that could go internally there, today we'd probably be a multi-million dollar corporation. Because they made some big companies out of what happened at Martin company throughout the United States.

Morris Okay, but because you couldn't get anybody, or you didn't have anybody to work with you there...

Groskey We—as an outsider, we had nobody on the inside.

Morris Gotcha, sir.

0:17:39

Working with government organizations

Groskey Now, when the shuttle's arm² came up at the Cape [Canaveral], when the shuttle's arm came up, the robotic arm, we were doing NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] work at the time. So I went out to procurement, and I said to them, I said, "Well, we'd like to bid on this robotic arm." And he said, "Okay, fine." He said, "You're qualified. You're DoD [U.S. Department of Defense] and checked out and everything. Fine." We got a set of drawings, we come back, and we figured it out. We could make the complete thing except the one base had a milled slot about 12-14 feet long. We couldn't mill it. I had a friend in Winter Haven that had a big Niles Planer [Machine]. He could do it.

We submitted our bid. We were second—number two. Now, we're a little shop, and that was a big job. There was only, I think, four of them to start with, and they were over a period of two or three years. The man out in IOA [inaudible] got the job. We went out and protested. He don't have enough money in his bid to buy the material to do the job. The purchase agent out there on that contract was a woman. She said, "Well, Mr. Groskey," she said, "I'll tell you. We can't control where he gets his material from. He may have a warehouse full." That's the only out I got. He may have a warehouse full. We had to buy it. He had a warehouse. I said, "Okay." Less than 30 days, they came back and said, "We want you to pick up the contract. He went bankrupt." I says, "Goodbye." That's what I told NASA. I wouldn't touch it.

Morris Oh really, sir? But you worked with NASA afterwards, right?

Groskey Yeah.

Morris Just not on that contract.

Groskey Not on that one. Nope. We dropped that one right by the wayside. They wanted us to come back and pick up the ball, and clean up the mess, and sweep the dirt. I said, "No dice." We don't get it going in, we don't want any part of it.

² Shuttle Remote Manipulator System (SRMS), also known as Canadarm 1.

Morris Okay, sir. Could you tell me more about the work you've done with NASA? Because that does a lot for the local community and the local area.

Groskey No. The only thing that we got out there was small stuff that they couldn't buy it for here [inaudible]. Onesie-tvosie things that, like certain types of bearings and special screws, and just little nit-picking stuff. Nothing big.

Morris Oh, okay, sir.

Groskey Nothing big. No big contracts. Nothing. Biggest contract we had was from the Navy over here – the [Orlando Naval] Training Center. And we did Navy work, but there was too much red tape in all that work. I'd rather have work off the street. The last Navy job we had, they made four change orders on it. They went through a nuclear submarine. And there was[sic] four change orders. And after the second or third change order, the fourth change order went right back to the first change order, and that – we'd already scrapped it. We had to do it all over again. They don't know what they're doing.

Morris Gotcha, sir. So, um...

0:20:25 **Metalworking industry**

Groskey We're very, very, very selective if we take work out that we don't know the people that we're gonna do it for. I would rather do a hundred percent commercial work. 100 percent. But right now, the customers we've got – we've got all the good customers in Central Florida – that they bring work to us. If we take something out to one of those customers, and it's not according to what maybe they think they want, or they really need, they've already given us okay to do it, or purchase orders behind it. We make it, we fab it, we take it out, and if it's not exactly what they want, it goes right in the dumpster and we get paid for it. Because that's the way we do business. This is what you wanted, and this is what you got. Now, if you can't use it, that ain't my problem. You got what you ordered. And that's the way we do business.

Morris Gotcha, sir. Okay. Could you tell me a little more about the business here then? I know we discussed earlier, but could you tell me more about what kind of work you do, and who you do it for?

Groskey Well, we do sheet metal work, welding, and machine work, general machine work for the complete population. No matter what industry or what kind of a business they have going, we make. We've made everything you could possibly think of. We've made parts for outboard motors, typewriters, telephones, fishing equipment, hunting equipment, dies, jigs, drill jigs, fixtures, screw machine parts. You name it. If it was made out of metal, we made it. We make high-pressure ductwork, sheet metal ductwork. We make low-pressure ductwork. We make all kind of turning veins, fittings, the whole gamut. Whatever there is in small metalwork, we do.

Morris Okay, sir. And, could you tell me how...

Groskey We've only been stymied once or twice, and that was when we had something that was a—it was more of a compound angle, and we didn't have facilities to do it with, but I have a friend out in Apopka that's got a water jet machine. We took it out there to him, and he water-jetted it, and we went merrily on our way. So we have an out. We take them all.

Morris Gotcha, sir. Okay. Can you tell me how your business has changed over the years or grown?

0:22:38

Business taxes

Groskey The business—we try to—according to the tax structure—the way it's set up—we're allowed a tax deduction to amortize a piece of machinery over a five-year period. And I understand [Barack] Obama has allowed small businesses to amortize that machine in one year. And I like when we bought our big boring mill down there, that's a \$12,000 machine, we could take a tax write-off in five years for that machine for the \$12,000. Well, if you happen to have a good year, that \$12,000 would mean a lot if you could deduct it, but you can't deduct it except for in a five-year period. So you wind up paying more taxes for spending more money, and that's not right. If you're spending more money, you should be able to deduct it.

Morris Okay.

Groskey If it's shop equipment, it's capital equipment. But now—I think they got it set up now to where you can deduct that in one-year or two-year period, rather than a five-year period.

Morris And you said "amortize," right?

Groskey Yeah.

Morris What does that mean, sir?

Groskey The government would only allow you to deduct off of your taxes—say I bought something for \$1,000—a piece of machinery for \$1,000. Every year I could get a \$200 reduction on that piece of machinery.

Morris Okay.

Groskey A tax write-off on that machinery. And at the end of five years, I had a tax write-off of that \$1,000. Then that machine could no longer be amortized anymore. That machine was a dead piece of equipment in that business. It was part of the business, it made the business worth that much more, but as far as taxes go, you're done. There's no more relief on taxes for it.

0:24:14

Current state of business

Morris Okay. So, well, I know we talked about this a little bit earlier, um, how is business doing these days?

Groskey Very bad. Our little shop down there was doing great up until 2002, and I could see then it was starting to slide, because we'd have customers the whole gamut of Central Florida. We'd have everything from photographic shops to big truck manufacturers, truck garages, and the likes of that. The whole gamut. We made parts for everybody. And all of them now have started slowing down, slowing down, slowing down. Because I'm interested enough to ask, "Well, Bill, how's it going? Is your business going?" "Yeah, we're up about 10 percent." "We're up 15 percent." And it's this way across the board.

There's only one person that's got a business in Central Florida that's got more business than he can handle, and that's the auctioneers. Now, Don [M.] Dennett in Sanford — [D. M.] Dennett Auctioneering — has been a friend of mine since he was in high school, and Don is running a very good business today. We went to a sale last week over here in Casselberry. [inaudible], a multi-million dollar company, a beautiful shop, bankrupt, up for sale, it went on the auction block. I said to Don at the sale, I said, "Don," I said, "Why in the world would something like this happen?" He said, "There's no volume." There's no volume of work. He happened to have an Air Force contract that kept him going for the last two or three years. When that contract ended, he was done, because he had so much invested in big equipment, nothing to do. He had to sell out. Don says, "I could have a sale — an auction a day, if I wanted to. There's[sic] that many people going bankrupt." But he only has one a week, because the market will only handle so much. Otherwise, you'd have people there buying shares for a dime and the likes of it. He waits until the smoke clears, then he'll have another auction.

Morris Okay, sir.

Groskey But he is busy all the time, believe me. Right now he's ready for two more auctions. I talked to him yesterday. He got two more shops that went out, and a bunch of restaurant equipment again. A couple more restaurants went broke, and he's gonna sell them at the auction. But he has got more work than he knows what to do with. Because that's people's downfall that he's advantaged — he's taking advantage of.

Morris This is not a problem you're having though, sir?

Groskey No. We're sitting tight. We're solid. We don't owe a dime to anybody. We have one thing. We buy steel on a 30-day basis. We buy sheet, plate, angle, and beam, and bar from three different companies. We pay our bills at the end of the month, every month, religiously. Every 30 days, we pay our invoices up and they're done. We run no credit with nobody, pay cash for everything.

Morris Okay, sir. The proper way to run a business, right?

Groskey And 90 percent of the people—I'd say 95 percent of the people that we work for appreciate that fact, because their paperwork don't carry over month to month to month. When they deal with us, and come out, if we don't have a prior agreement of 30 days on invoice, they pay cash and bring a check with them, because that's the only way we'll work. We won't chase any money. You can't spend your time chasing bad debts. And over the last 40 years, I don't think we've lost a hundred dollars, and that's because somebody died, and there was no heirs. That's the only reason.

0:27:50

Positive changes in Central Florida

Morris Gotcha, sir. Well, I know you said that they ruined Central Florida.

Groskey Yep. That's right. Yep.

Morris Would you say there's anything good in Central Florida, anything that—I mean, you discussed what had gone wrong. Would anything in your mind have gone right?

Groskey Well, sure. What Florida did, by them having all of their eggs in one basket with tourism, they've helped other industries and other things grow with them. The motel industry grew, the restaurants and the stores, the retailers and one thing another. A lot of those people now have picked up to where they rely on all of these people that's coming in. But when people come out of the airport, and they go to Disney World, they're more or less captive at Disney World. Now, most of them are here say two days, three days a week, something like this. their money is limited to what they can do, and when they have to spend \$75 to go up to that gate, they're gonna think twice about having to go outside to buy something. Disney's smart enough to know this. That's why they've got them captive. Restaurants, hotels, motels, the whole nine yards. Get them in the gate and keep them.

But there's[sic] still a few people who want to see Central Florida. They want to get out and look around. "We haven't come out here." But that—Central Florida in that respect has grown along with all the tourists, and it's helped the people that did stay here by giving them more of an opportunity to do things. Bowling alleys, and your arts, and a lot of your museums have grown. Your arts and science have grown. Everything has helped the local people, and I consider myself to be part of the local people. But they have given us an opportunity of more things which weren't here.

Morris Okay, sir.

Groskey So you can give them the benefit of the doubt. They—their finances and their establishment created an environment that people wanted. So it kind of rubs off on us local people. We're able to go take advantage of it too.

Morris Okay, sir. That's a—I was going to say, that's a very interesting perspective, because you never go to those parks. You never do any of those things.

Groskey No, no.

Morris But the benefit—the side benefits they bring with them...

Groskey Right. Right.

0:30:15 **Serving in the Air Force during World War II**

Morris Gotcha, sir. I know before you mentioned you were, that you had served in the military.

Groskey The military?

Morris Could you tell us about that, sir? Like what branch? Where? When? What were you doing?

Groskey Well, I was in the military prior to—oh, what the hell they called it? Well, when the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor.

Morris Okay.

Groskey And I was in Fort Knox[, Kentucky] in the regular Army before the Japanese hit Honolulu and Oahu[, Hawaii]. Now, when I went into Fort Thomas, Kentucky—I went from there to Fort Knox. I went to Fort Thomas, Kentucky, there wasn't enough of us in that barracks to keep the fire going at night. We had to take shifts to keep the fire going at night. They declared war. The next day, they were standing in the hallways. They had to have so many people pouring into that place. There was a mobilization overnight. Believe me.

Well, when I enlisted in the service—I enlisted, I was never drafted—I enlisted in the Air Force. There was[sic] no openings. So I left Fort Thomas, Kentucky, and went to Atlantic City, New Jersey, for basic training. Well, when we got out there, of course the wartime conditions and everything—blackout at night and the whole story, everything was all window-curtains [inaudible] and the likes of it, no headlights and everything. Well, I left there and went out to Chanute Fields,³ Illinois, and joined the Air Force. They had an opening, so I got transferred from the Third [United States] Army into the Air Force, which I had enlisted for to begin with. I wanted to get in the Air Force. So I went out there to Chanute Fields and went through tech school, graduated from tech school, and got assigned to a regular Air Force unit, and was with them for quite a while. And then, well, we stationed in California, and stationed in Texas, and stationed in New Mexico and quite a few places.

³ Chanute Air Force Base (AFB).

And then, as the [World] War [II] progressed, they took our unit and broke it up into four units, and made air combat cargo units out of them. So what we done was to air-drop supplies, ammunition, and equipment to the troops that were on the ground. That was our main – we were a transfer. I'd say an airborne trucking outfit. But on our mission, whenever we took what we had there, if there was another outstanding hospital in the area, we went to that base and haul a load of wounded back. "Litter patients," we used to call them. So, we'd take a load of supplies over wherever we were going, and bring a load of litter patients back to the next general hospital. And that was our total obligation. And I did that in China, Burma, and India.

Now, when the war ended, we were flying into Chongqing[, China] when the war ended, from Myitkyina [West], North Burma. That was our last big U.S. air base in that part of the world. And when I say "big air base" – it was a grass, dirt strip with landing mats, but that was still – in that part of the world, that was a big air base. We flew [Douglas] C-47 [Skytrain]s, [Curtiss] C-46 [Commando]s, and [Douglas] C-54 [Skymaster]s. And when the – when the Japs – we had moved out of Myitkyina and went down to Bhamo, Burma right at the war's end.

And we were flying in into Saigon[, Vietnam],⁴ and when the war ended, then our orders – the way our orders were written that, at the war's end, we will be dis – our organization, equipment, will be disbanded by the most expeditious means. And our colonel, who was Colonel Scannel[sp] [inaudible], was a 36-year-old [United States Military Academy at] West Point man and a full-command pilot. Now that's a hard nut to crack. That's as good as you can get in the Air Force. We were all sitting down at what they called the "bomb crater." We had a movie that night. Just a big bombed-out hole in the ground. We was all sitting around. They suddenly flashed the lights on the camera, and he says, "Boys, it's all over." And it took about a minute for it to sink in – the fact that the war was over. And it was. And then two days later, we pulled out of there, loaded our planes, we went back down into Tasgaon, India. But when we left, all the tents, all the equipment, the toolboxes, everything that was left on that strip, was either given to the hill tribes or was destroyed in the fire. We closed the base up, and that's the way we left.

Now, one story that vividly sticks in my mind was at Myitkyina – that's M-Y-I-T-K-I-N-A⁵ – Myitkyina, North Burma. Before the war, it was a big town. Well, the Japanese, in order to go on their route from Japan – through China into India – that's what their object was. They'd already just about taken over China, and they were into India pretty deep. Well, our object was to see that they didn't get any further. We were kind of stopped dead [inaudible] in the middle. MARS Task Force and Merrill's Marauders [inaudible] were the ground troops, and we'd get everything they had – ate, fed, shot, and whatever – we supplied them – air-dropped whatever to get to them. Well, one day, on the south end of our strip, was[sic] two fighter groups that supported us as air cover while we

⁴ Present-day Ho Chi Minh City.

⁵ Correction: Myitkyina.

were flying and dropping supplies – the 82nd and 93rd fighter group. There was [North American Aviation] P-51 [Mustang]s and [Republic] P-47 [Thunderbolt]s. Now, most of these fighter planes, they were bombing down at the – in the Mekong valley [inaudible], and they were down around the bridge over the River Kwai.⁶ That was one of their last bombing missions.

Well, the line chief and I were standing alongside the strip, and we was[sic] watching it. They'd take off about five, six, seven planes at a time. They'd fly together as a group, low-altitude bombing on these targets, like roads and bridges and commercial buildings that was of value to Japanese. So, Master Sergeant Hinky [inaudible] and I were standing there with a hot – typical hot day – and we was watching these P-47s take off, one right after the other. Well, when a fighter plane's carrying a thousand-pound bomb under the belly of it, they got a load. Well, they would start up there at the end of the strip, and they'd tow [inaudible] them. They were full-throttle. By the time they got halfway up the strip, they'd be just about off the ground. And at the end of the strip was rice paddies and jungle. Well, we watched these planes – one, two, three. And the third one coming down the line on all of a sudden, he went straight up in the air. And line chief said to me, said, "Well, look at that damn fool." And I said, "Yeah, but look at there." And a thousand-pound bomb had let go of the bottom of that plane, and here he was coming down the middle of the strip tail first – a thousand-pounder. So Hinky looked at me, and I looked at him, and I said, "We better duck." And we went under the first thing that was there, and it was a big truck, and we went under it. Well, that bomb went right at the end of the strip, went right out in the rice paddy, and just settled down as nice-you-please and didn't explode. It went "poof" right in the mud. We crawled out from the trunk and Hinky said to me, he said, "Damn, that was close." I says[sic], "Too close." And I said, "Yeah, but look where we were." And we were underneath a tanker full of hundred-octane gasoline. Oh, boy. That was a nice experience to have. That was just one of the little things that happened throughout the war.

Morris When did you, what age were you signed up, sir?

Groskey My 21st birthday. I was in combat.

Morris Okay. When did you, uh – but you said you signed – you enlisted prior to World War II, correct?

Groskey Yeah. I was 18.

Morris Oh, okay. And did you enlist right after high school?

Groskey Yeah.

Morris Okay, sir. And, um...

⁶ Khwae Yai River.

Groskey Matter of fact, about—I went to trade school.

Morris Oh.

Groskey That’s how I got my start to shops [inaudible]. I was going to trade school, and we had just finished. The way our school worked—it was called Dayton Cooperative High School. They had—well, all the instructors were professional people. They were professional in their trade. Well, the shops is what I was in basically, and of course, all of the instructors were master toolmakers. Well, when the war started, my class was just about ready. We went to school two weeks and worked two weeks. That’s the way co-op[erative] was set up. You had to carry a[sic] 80 average to go to school. If you didn’t maintain your class grades, as well as your shop grades, you got pulled out. You had to go to a regular school. You could no longer become a craftsman. You had to be interested and have a know-how to what you wanted to do. You had to want to know what you were doing. Well, at that time—that was in—oh, I think we graduated in December that year—and I went into the service September, just prior to that. And I’d say 90 percent of our class—males in our class—all went in about the same time. The whole class of ’41 just about all went in the military just about the same time. And I don’t think—of course, we lost track of all of them—but I don’t think after graduation—that year after graduation—it wasn’t more than a handful that even graduated after that because they all went in the service.

Morris Was that very normal at the time, sir?

Groskey Yes. Very much so.

Morris Oh, okay.

Groskey The patriotism was extremely high. They had—Japanese had submarines out off the East Coast, they had submarines off the West Coast. They were at our back door.

Morris Hm. Okay, sir, and you said you served for five years?

Groskey Mmhm.

Morris And did you—was that when the war was over, or...

Groskey Yeah. Yeah.

Morris And you came...

Groskey I was in the 1348th air combat—air drop unit. And, when that—our orders were cut in North Africa before we left Algiers[, Algeria], when we was sent into the CBI (China-Burma-India) Theater, the general that wrote our orders for our outfit said that, “You will be there for the duration plus six months.” Now that’s just like a life sentence. How long will it last? You gotta be there, and six months

more. But luckily, when it ended, we was gone out of there off of our former base in two days – three days at the most.

We went what they called “down the valley” into India, then we stayed there to be “disoriented” – is what they called it – to be re-civilianized. We had to turn in our guns, and all of our grenades, and all of our fighting equipment, and try to be civilians. Well, that didn’t – took longer than that to do. But anyway, we stayed there, I’d say, for a period we was in Tasgaon, India – for about a month. And then we got on the [USS] *General [M. B.] Stewart* and came home. We came home first-class on a big general ship, which was a well-relief. We could have hot meals. You had a bed to sleep on. I mean, you wasn’t[sic] sleeping on the ground. I mean, we’re civilians now. Yeah. This is really living.

Well, anyway, we got back into Camp Atterbury, Indiana, which was a discharge center. And the man in charge of the center – our whole outfit was there. We had 1,300 men and officers with our whole complete unit. All of our pilots were drafted civil pilots – Delta, Eastern, all of them were commercial pilots. They hated the military. Between them and us, the ground people, we got along fine, because we didn’t like it either. We got along great. Well anyway, when we got into Camp Atterbury, we got all the shots and all the rest of the stuff, and turned everything in, and got all the paperwork done, the commanding officer of that base had our commander, General Scannel – or Colonel Scannel – stand up, and he said, “Colonel,” he said, “we want to offer you people, your outfit, 1,380 men, all an increase in rank, one rank, with a one-year contract.” The Colonel says, “I would like to speak for our men, in behalf of them.” He said, “We have 1,500 hours, most of us, of combat flying.” He said, “We want to go home and stay there. It’s your baby. We quit.” And that’s the way it ended. There wasn’t one man re-enlisted. We had it.

Morris You had your fill?

Groskey We had it. Don’t want no part of it. But I’ll tell you still today – still today, there’s[sic] things at night flash through my mind of what we had done and what we did.

Morris Well, thank you for your service.

Groskey It sticks in your mind. At that time, and the way the elements, and the way everything was, you don’t forget things like that. No, I don’t care how old you get, you will not forget them. You try to, but there’s[sic] things that always come back, like things that got blew[sic] up, and things that got burnt out, and stuff. You don’t forget it. I don’t care what you do. I’d be down running lath, and sometime you remember that time or something like that.

We changed an engine [inaudible], and we used to call him “Tokyo Joe.” There was a zero. He used to come over about two o’clock every afternoon, and he’d drop what they called cluster bombs. Small, little ones. Just enough to worry you. Well, one of them hits your tent – boy, you got a mess. Blow everything up.

Tokyo Joe would come out every afternoon two o'clock, and he'd drop a few cluster bombs, and back over the mountains he'd go.

Well finally, one day, we had a [Lockheed] P-38 [Lightning] group that was going into Saigon. And this one pilot, he said, "Well, you know," he said, "I'm gonna get that S.B." He said, "I can fly higher than he can." So here come old Tokyo Joe over one afternoon right after chow, and we seen[sic] this boy fire that P-38 up and he went straight up in the air, and Tokyo Joe knew something was happening. He turned tail and started to run, and before he got over the base of the Chin Hills, he blew him out of the sky. That was the end of the Japs. That was the last time we had him.

Morris No more Tokyo Joe?

Groskey No more Tokyo Joe.

Morris Well, what would you do with your afternoons after that, then, sir?

Groskey Oh, we worked, we worked round the clock. We had them — our planes flew seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

0:44:00 **Returning to civilian life**

Morris Okay, sir. How long after you got back before you moved to Florida? How long did that take? Did you have to shovel snow for a winter?

Groskey No. It wasn't too long. A couple years. Yeah.

Morris Oh okay, sir.

Groskey Well, I was just feeling things out to try to become a civilian again, and decide which way I wanted to go. I knew I wanted to be into metalwork, but I didn't know how I wanted to approach it. I didn't know exactly how I wanted to do it — how I wanted to really get things started. And then, as we got married, and we had a couple kids, and one thing another started, I said, "Well, I gotta get my own business going. That's all there is to it." I just can't — I can't work for somebody else, because he's not only going to take the cream of the crop, and I'm going to do all the dirty work. I want to be in a position where I can do the dirty work, take the cream of the crop, and try to establish some new business. Try to build a new product. Try to do things.

Morris Makes sense, sir.

Groskey Without being a number in somebody's shop. So that was the way it started, that's the way Reg Co. came about.

0:45:00 **Wife and children**

Morris Okay, sir. Can you tell me about your family?

Groskey Yeah.

Morris Like who they are, how old, what year were they born?

Groskey Okay. Well, we got married in 1946. And Larry [Groskey] – Larry is the oldest one. He come along a year later. And Ronnie [Groskey] was the next son born, about a year or two later. Then the twins came along about two years later.

Morris Two boys? Two girls?

Groskey Karen [Groskey] and Sharon [Groskey]. And then Rusty [Groskey] came along about a year after that, and then that was the end of our family. We had five children.

Morris And what's your wife's name, sir?

Groskey Mary Ann [Groskey].

Morris Oh, okay. And what are your children doing now?

Groskey Well, the oldest one, Larry, is up in De Leon Springs. He's got a rat farm. He raises rats commercially. These people that have reptiles and all kinds of weird people – they – he's got a steady stream. He's got quite an operation going, many buildings full of these rats. And he sells them all over the world. Now, there's that many kooks out there, but he's got a real good business going.

Morris Okay, sir.

Groskey Now, the other son, Ronnie – he's got a drywall business. He does drywall work and painting. The girls – Sharon, my one daughter, is a schoolteacher over in Sanford. Karen is an expediter for Fed Ex downtown. And Rusty works in the shop with me.

Morris Oh, okay, sir. And, do you have a – how did you meet your wife?

Groskey Well, that was a long story too. At – we both worked at National Cash Register. When I came out of the service, I went to work for National Cash Register, because my dad had worked there all his life, her dad had worked there all his life. So it was just a simple matter of walking in, getting a job, because that was where you – if you decided to work there, you had a lifetime job. They didn't hire people and fire them the next day. There was enough business in that company. It was self-sustaining. When they made National Cash Register, they went all over the world and there was boxcar loads of material coming in every day. It was its own entity. When you went to work there, you quit looking for a job, because if you couldn't make it one department, they'd transfer you to another department. There was 38,000 people working in that building – in that factory. They could find something for you to do.

They had a huge restaurant. So at noontime one day, the fellow that I was kind of running with at the time—he was a Navy man. We got along real good. He was running screw machines. So was I. So one day at noontime I said—well Friday, they always had fish fry, and boy, it was good fish. So Friday we'd go to the mess hall and eat lunch. Well, while we were sitting there eating lunch, Annie and her girlfriend—she worked up in Building 4. It was assembly—some kind of assembly job. Well anyway, her and her girlfriend was down there eating too. One of them had dropped a spoon on the floor. And I don't know whether Mike picked it up or I did, but one of us picked it up, and we handed it to them, and we got to talking, and that's how it started.

Morris Okay, sir. Something as small as a...

Groskey It was obscure as obscure can be. So I said to her, I said, "Yeah, my name's Dick." She said, "My name's Ann." And she said, "I work over in Building 4." I said, "Well, we work in Building 27." And we got to talking there for a few minutes, just at lunch period, and I said, "Well," I says[sic], "where do you live?" She says, "I live out off of Smithville Road." And I said, "Well, I live out in Walnut Hills"—both parts of east Dayton. And, I says, "Well, what are you gonna do Friday night?" She said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, you want to go bowling?" She said, "Sure." I got her phone number, and that was it. We started going together. We got married, and she got laid off, because at NCR, you couldn't have two people in the same family unless they were married, and once they got married, you couldn't hire them. Two people can't work there.

Morris Okay.

Groskey She got married. She got laid off. Well, that's how it started. So we got married, she got laid off, and I went out, I bought a little piece of property, and I started building a house, and over a period of about two years, I got the house built, and we had all the children then. Well, most of the children then. And one thing led to another, and we outgrew that, and we went out in the country, and I bought five acres and built a house out there, and when all the children were in school, that's when we came to Florida.

Things got real bad up there, up there in the '50s. You couldn't buy a job. It got the same way here, except it was localized. And I went to Indiana, went to Kentucky, I went all over. There was[sic] no jobs. Nobody was hiring. So I said, "Okay." I said, "We're not shoveling more snow." I said, "We're loading up and we're leaving." So I hired a local trucker. I said, "Now, I want you to move my shop." We took just the prime equipment out of there, just enough to know we could make a living. Drills and saws, a couple laths, and one thing another. Everything else, had a public sale. Sold the house, the farm, everything. We got in the truck and we moved, come to Florida. Been here ever since.

Morris Had a lot of reasons to come to Florida.

Groskey Yep. And like I say, when I went to work at Trade Tool Engraving, we've never gone out of a job since. I went back to the motel in Titusville, I said, "I wanna pack a sandwich and a couple apples or something." I said, "I'm going to work tonight." She says, "You're doing what?" I said, "I got a job over in Orlando." She says, "You kidding me?" I says, "No. here's the paper." And looked at it, and she said, "Well, I'll be damned." Been working ever since.

0:50:18

Closing remarks

Morris Well, there you go, sir. Do you feel like there's anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about?

Groskey No. We're just about as plain as you can get. Everybody in this part of the world knows us and knows what we do. We've got a reputation for doing a good job quick at a fair price. We—I don't think we've had more than one or two disgruntled people that needed something done, and that was the fact that they were the type of people that nobody could satisfy. They have never come back, and I'm glad of it. Now, as you see, we have no advertisement whatsoever, yet we're busy all the time. That speaks for itself. We do good work on time at a good price. And people always come back.

Morris The ones you want to come back [*laughs*].

Groskey And they will tell somebody else. I always give them a business card. I said, "Now, your neighbor wants something done, here it is." That's the only advertisement we got.

Morris Okay. Well, thank you, sir, for taking the time out today.

Groskey I'll show you one of my cards here. Yeah. There you got them right there.

End of Interview