

TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEWS WITH HARRY A SCOGIN
The day before Father's Day, June, 1973

Section I

Great Grandson Bruce Russell was to marry Mary Ann Hancock June 24 and we asked Dad to give them some advice, the day before Father's Day. He recorded these three answers to the three questions we put to him, and then he went on to talk about the times in which we are now living.

Q. Will you give the young folk some sage advice on how to have a long and happy marriage?

A. Don't fight....It's more fun to rassle.

Q. Is there any special counsel concerning handling of money that they should know?

A. Better give it all to your wife or she'll get mad at you.

Q. Seriously now, Dad, How would you advise these young folk to handle their finances?

A. Spend a little, Save a little, and give a little away.

You know, they tax you for everything nowadays. The only thing they ain't taxed you for yet is the air you breathe and they are getting ready to do that, don't think they ain't. I really don't believe that this air is quite as bad as they say it is...why, you don't notice any difference unless you get close to these engines and cars that's exhausting. Why look how long Californians have lived down in that hollow there, with air you couldn't breathe in; they're still living. I don't know as anybody has ever died from it out there. We went out to see Winnie's brother in the hospital out there in Los Angeles and you would go down in that hollow and see that blue smoke hanging down there from automobiles. It was hard to breathe and it scratched your eyes. The hospital was up on the side of the mountains kinda. You could look down and see that smoke down there but there was none up there. We went to see Helen while we were out there... Fan's daughter. Fan was in an old people's home. We went to see her, too.

Q. Did she mention the earthquake that was out there not long ago?

A. Helen said that she was in one side of her house and it moved her clear over into the other side... All she could do was try to grab something.

Later that night we had a "question and answer" period with Dad, and the following is the main portion... his replies, in Section II

SECTION II

Main portion of the INTERVIEW WITH HARRY A SCOGIN the day before Father's Day 1973

Q. What kind of a job did you start out with when you were young? When you first started working?

A. I ran a soldering machine in a canning factory.

Q. Was that in Bloomington?

A. Yes, the factory is still there. They can corn, tomatoes, beans. From there I went to the Chicago Northwestern as a fireman-- into Chicago. Then I didn't like that so well so I went to Chicago and went to work firing a night boiler for the Chicago Bridge and Iron Works.

Q. How old were you then?

A. Oh, I was about 18-19

Q. When did you come to Omaha?

A. Well, my brother was down here in Bennet. At that time he was painting houses and one thing and another. So from Chicago I went to Peoria, Illinois and worked in a rope factory.. a string factory. From there I went to Bennet, to see my brother and I worked with him for about a year. But one time back in Bloomington I met Bert Miner from Omaha, and he married a Bloomington girl. So from Bennet I worked with my brother about a year, and I said Well, I am going back to Bloomington. So I come up to see Bert Miner first, and he talked me into going to work on the UP. He was an auditor in the UP office. I was about 23 I guess, or 22.

Q. When did you meet Mama?

A. Oh, I met her in business college in Bloomington.

Q. Before you came to Bennet?

A. Oh yes, years before.

Q. Were you married when you came down here?

A. Oh, no, I didn't get married until I was 24 or 25 years old.

Q. Money problems kept you apart?

A. Well (chuckle) probably, yes.

Q. How long did you go together?

A. Oh, 3 or 4 years. Well, we were kids when we went to business college, you might say.

Q. What did you take up at business college. What did you study?

A. Bookkeeping.

Q. Was that in Bloomington?

A. Brown's Business College, yep. I will never forget a lot of those old buddies. Jim Hackett came out here and started a bank where the First National Bank is now. There was a bank there before and they.. Oh, First National Bank... I don't know what bank.. but they went out of business there and went somewhere's else, and Jim Hackett started a bank right

there on that corner at 16th and Farnam. He was one of my old pals from the Bloomington Business College. He only lasted a little while and he sold out to the First-- and they built the new building.

Q. Were you married here in Omaha?

A. No. I went back to Bloomington to get married.

Q. Did you stay out there for a while?

A. No. I came right back here and went back to work on the UP. We came back here from the wedding and we lived with Bert Miner and his wife for a couple of weeks to get settled, and we settled in Pellie's Flats down there on South 11th Street, in the block south of the depot. It was a flat building. There were three on top and three in the middle and three below, and we rented the flat in the middle of all of them for fifteen dollars a month. You furnished your own heat though. Old Steve Clapper, he lived on the floor right above us. He was an old conductor and he weighed about 300 pounds, and every time he walked up stairs you could hear the floors squeak.

Q. Did you move from there to this house?

A. No.

Q. You moved down by Margaret Boyle?

A. Yeah, I forget what the name of it was, and they threw us out of there 'cause we was getting too many kids. (chuckle) We had three kids then, and we lived there until they threw us out and we moved up to 11th and Williams in a big square house on the corner there. Then that fellow was single and he was getting married and he wanted the house himself, so then I bought this. It wasn't completed. Just the shell was up.

Q. You were just a fireman then, weren't you?

A. Yep.

Q. You didn't get many vacations did you?

A. Not until the last four or five years I worked -- we got vacations. They put it in the contract -- the labor contract -- two weeks vacation at the same pay that you got in the last two weeks before you took your vacation. Of course at that time I was on passenger - as engineer. If you were on a run that "doubles the road" if it come on the first -- you see they doubled up from the first to the 15th, and another double, with doubles in between. I always picked my vacation between the first and the fifteenth, and I worked all of them. I would just get about \$20.00 more that way.(chuckle)

Q. Where did you learn to do all these things on the side that you do -- when you were a kid at home, or did you pick them up while you were with the railroad?

A. What?

Q. Fixing your plumbing, building, etc.

A. Oh, I just tinkered at it and it just come naturally, I guess. (chuckle) Opening up that back door where it is now, and closing up the one where the lavatory is, I done all that. That saved a lot of wear and tear on them stairsteps.

Rita: Then you cut through the kitchen out here, too...

A. No, Winnie's brother-- sister's husband done that. He was an old fellow about 80 years old...Building is out of the question. I wouldn't build nothing. That

back porch is another good thing that I built. It is nice and cool out there every night.

Q. Got any more squirrel friends out there now?

A. Yeah, but not so many. Gramma would set out there and the squirrels would sneak up and run out from under her chair and scare the heck out of her... and she run them out. But one comes up there once in a while. I see him out there and I say "Come on... come get it," and I give him a peanut when he comes up. That's all I gotta say - "Come get it" and up they come. They used to crawl up my pantsleg and set on my knee.

Q. Were you born and raised out there on the farm at Bloomington?

A. Yeah, just about a mile southwest of the city limits. My grandfather had a whole section of land out there a little farther, and he donated a plot of ground for a graveyard. They call it the Scogin Cemetary. I didn't do any big farming. It was mostly gardening on about twenty acres. We used to raise green onions and berries -- blackberries and raspberries. There is a highway runs through it now. I got 350 dollars out of it. My brother -- they sent me a deed to sign -- the lawyer who was handling it. I wouldn't sign it. My brother got the deed and he had all he wanted anyway, so he signed the deed. He didn't get nothing. He was mad at himself when he found out I wouldn't sign it and got the \$350. But this lawyer, I think it was Pearl, she was still living at the time---No Pearl was dead -- it was May. There was a clipping in the paper there, where I was being sued to clear up this estate. That's how I got in on it. So I was on a little business over in Des Moines for the bank -- just a little errand, you might say, and while I was over there I went over to see another lawyer and he says "Well, it's a government deal; they are gonna figure on putting a highway in that neighborhood." So this lawyer there that was handling the..he says "You will be notified and be sent what you got coming to you as long as you answered them." So it went on for quite a while. Finally I think I was over there again and I told this lawyer "I haven't gotten anything out of that estate yet" and he says "You haven't? Why," he says, "It's over there at the courthouse for you." Well, I went over to the courthouse and they were as busy as a cat on a tin roof and they said "We'll send this to you... as soon as we get cleaned up here a little, we will send this to you.." And they did. But I was going to get beat out of that by somebody in that court house if I hadn't a tailed it. Oh, yes, Bernie Boyle -- I showed this little clipping that May sent me, to Bernie Boyle, and Bernie writes back there and gets the dope -- the whole dope. Ed Brown, that run the 20 acres there before I left and after, until he died... I never got a nickle around there, only, of course, I did get a little schooling. But I never got paid for any work I done or anything, and he got it all. That's the reason I left home. I needed a new suit of clothes for something and I went to him and asked him if he would buy me a suit of clothes... You could buy a suit of clothes for \$15.00 in them days, and he says... "Huh, buy your own clothes, I ain't buying any clothes for you." But he was getting all the money. So I says "Alright, there will be no more work from me here." The next day I rolled a few clothes up in a bundle and left home.

Q. And went to business college?

A. No, I had already been to business college. That's when I went up to Chicago, I think. Then my mother bought an old house in Bloomington and fixed up a place for us to live in Bloomington in town. We lived in Bloomington for a while. That's right... she came in and bought this house and I went to work for the canning factory. She came up there to live in town a while, and then live in the country for a while. When I went to Chicago my mother was there in the house alone and the state senator... What the heck was his name.... he was a state senator. I can't think of his name now. He had a sister that was kind of "off in the head." He had to have a place to keep her. He couldn't keep her at his house, so my mother kept her for about a year, and this senator paid her. What in the heck was his name.. Thurston, Senator Thurston.. that was his name. Them two old women got along pretty good together. My mother bought that house -- it was a five or six room house all on one floor, for twelve hundred dollars... so I guess she made a little bit of money when she sold it. I don't know.

Q. What occupation did your father have before he passed away?

A. Carpenter

Rita: Oh, well, you inherited some of your abilities then.

Dad: He built a couple of buildings as a contractor, for the St. Louis World's fair. Small buildings. He died in St. Louis. I never... After he left, I was about six years old, I never saw him but twice before he died. All those years... I was about... He died in about 1913 or 1914. I was an engineer when he died; so I wasn't an engineer until 1912.

Q. He died before you moved her, then?

A. Yes..... Oh, I had quite a little experience bumming around from one job to another before I settled down. I used to bum my way up to Chicago from Bloomington, on freight trains or anything I could ride. Charlie Harding, who lived in the block east of us there in Bloomington.. He was going to medical school there in Chicago. I would go up there and visit him once in a while. I don't know what ever become of him, whether he got to be a doctor or not. He used to take me over to the medical college and show me what you had to do the first year. They used to get their dead bodies from the Cook County Hospital. A lot of the patients from the Cook County Hospital, that is, to practice on. At one time he had an old stiff laying out on the board that he was working on. What he was doing was, he was cutting all the meat off of that dead body, down to the nervous system, leaving the nerves bare. He introduced me to old Doctor murphy, who was the president of that hospital there... big shot anyway... Murphy patented this appendicitis button. No stitches... you just, after they get done they just slip this button in the hole and that is it.

Q. Do you watch the late news? It is about time for the news.

A. Yes, but on Saturday night it's about 10:15. Gramma's way late here.....

End of June interview, 1973

SECTION III

Taped at home the afternoon of Winnie's funeral, July 21, 1973. All of the family at home with Dad. He was unaware of this taping. All of the conversation is not typed verbatim. Some is omitted, leaving enough to lead into Dad's contributions to the conversation. He was evidently in the middle of a story that maybe some of you heard (I didn't) when this tape was started.

".....for Christmas... I was going to buy my wife a Christmas present... but I got a couple too many drinks on the way home... And I felt so liberal I just gave her the whole money and all.

Maybe this ain't no time for jokes... I don't know....

Bob: I can't believe that... just look at all of your children.

Marian: Yeah, just one joke after another.

Dad: Well, there's one thing.. with all these kids around here, from the old times.. there will never be this bunch again..... a lot of us won't be here.

Lois: That's right, Very very true.

Clare: Will somebody prime the pump here... and get him going?

Jack: Where did Dr. Smith find the whiskey.

Dad: I told him how to find it.

Jack: In YOUR coal pile? Downstairs?

Dad: Yep. I had a coal bin over in the corner.

Jack: How much was there?

Dad: I had ten cases.

Jack: That ain't bad.

Orva: The coal man buried it though, that was the thing.

Clare: Will you tell us about the bottle that you hid down there before they put the cement on the basement floor.

Dad: Oh, I bored a hole in the dirt floor... and put my bottle of whiskey in there.

Clare: Why? Why did you put your bottle of whiskey in there?

Dad: "cuz your mother was a kind of a prohibitionist.

Clare: Uh..huh. I better go put this away. So then what happened?

Dad: I was gone out on the road and the contractor come in and laid the cement floor in the basement and sealed up my whiskey in there.

Clare: That was a terrible tragedy. You couldn't even tell her about it then, could you?

Dad: No! Oh, No. No, I didn't dare. She would have knocked my ears down.

Clare: How many years ago was that? When was that, in 1911?

Dad: Yeah

Clare: Where is the bottle now?

Dad: It's still there.

Clare: GET ME A SHOVEL. You've got to be kidding! Nobody has gotten it?

Dad: No Just leave that whiskey there.

Clare: Aged in the wood.

Dad: It will be there a thousand years from now and it won't lose a drop.

Clare: Wouldn't you like to taste it now?

Dad: I'll bet it's good.

Lois: That would really sell your house some day.

Dad: Say, that's an idea. It might be worth a thousand dollars more.. Well, it got so that you could get plenty. I didn't need it any more so I didn't have to dig it up. I was tempted.....

Clare: This was before you got the ten cases? at a bargain rate. The ten cases in the coal bin. Which came first?

Dad: That wasn't in prohibition when the bottle was buried. That was in the old time "wet" days. Then the ten cases come in prohibition. when prohibition was coming in. Old Pete Bertelson run a wholesale liquor house.. and a saloon, down on sixth street. He told me.. I used to stop in, see, to get a drink once in a while, and he says, Harry, you'd better get your supply of liquor -- it's going to be hard to get...

Clare: You got it! at \$10.00 a case.

Dad: At \$10.00 a case-- 12 quarts -- FULL QUARTS -- they wasn't fifths -- they was quarts.

Clare: Well, I bet you cured the whole town of Omaha from the flu then.

Dad: Before prohibition you could buy a full quart for \$1.25 and \$10.00 a case, wholesale.

Clare: Where is the coal bin now?

Dad: I don't need it. I tore it out. My work bench is over there now. It kinda tickled me though, the way old doctors was scarce and hard to get during the flu rush... but I had a doctor... EVERY MORNING....

I got that watch in 1905.. and I carried it with me all the time I was on the railroad, and it keeps perfect time yet.

Orva: You had to have it inspected every so often too, didn't you?

Dad: Yea.. had to have it cleaned every 18 months whether it needed it or not.

Orva: Have you had to have any work done on it since you retired?

Dad: Never had a bit of work done on that main spring.. since I retired. Never been cleaned. 20 years... 1947... never been cleaned.

Orva: You ought to write to Mr. Elgin and tell him about that.

Orva: Do you want some more ham?

Dad: No... I'm a kind of a slow eater.

Dad: I just wanted to show you a little

this watch - it was a brand new watch in 1905 when

I went to work for the UP.

Jack: And it doesn't work?

Dad: When I first went to work for the UP in 1905. They used to make you.. have that watch cleaned every 18 months.. and I had to have it inspected every 30 days at a jewelers. Now since 1947 that watch has never been cleaned or inspected and it keeps perfect time yet. Look at the money I had to pay out for cleaning, in all those years.

Jack: They pay to have it cleaned now. You just didn't have a good Union in those days.

Dad: Oh, do they? Another case where I was born thirty years too soon.

Jack: Incidentally, Dad. This is probably not the appropriate time, but that would be something that I would love to have because of our association with the Union Pacific.

Dad: I think I will ask the company for a rebate.

Jack: You will have to get it through me.

Dad: Ha.. I'll have to get it through you.

Jack: Yep, there is no other way.

Dad: Well, see what you can do about it.

Jack: Say, will you put that in the will for me?

Dad: Every 18 months I had to have that cleaned while I was working for them.

Jack: Ok, I'll pay for the cleaning if I can have it.. and remember we'll be going back to those past days prices, too. There's a little "sheeny" in you also, you know.

Dad: Oh well, let's forget about it.

Jack: No, let's keep it open for negotiations.

Dad: I see why you are where you are. You've always got the answers.

Jack: Not always, not always.

Dad: Here's one you will get a kick out of. We used to have an old engineer... his name was Boots Smith. He was the roughest engineer they had on the railroad. We handled the Harding funeral train from Grand Island to Omaha.

Jack: He was a "Mishandler" is what he was. You said a rough engineer. That means a mishandler.

Dad: Oh, yeah. If you was standing up when he started, you'd better set down and if you was sitting down, he might stand you up... Anyway a bunch of us was washing up over in the wash room after this special went through, and Scoop Miles was kind of a half wit, or whole wit, I don't know which, and he says "They ought to have called Boots Smith for that train 'cuz he'd have him sitting up before he got to Omaha. (President Harding) You know all about that... setting them up and knocking them down.

Jack: Yeah, we've got a guy by the name of Bill Fox that is vice president of operations now, and every time he goes over the railroad it is like he's got a black cloud over his head... the engineers just rough handle him all the time.. He is thinking about putting in plastic dishes in his business car... How about the Gandy Dancers.

Dad: Well, we didn't have much to do with them.

Jack: But you had to look out for them, didn't you?

Dad: Oh, Yeah.

Marian: Tell us about the snow storm. When you got stuck in the snow drift.

Dad: Oh, that month I made \$600 on Snow Plow.

Fat: ? You haven't got a bottle hidden someplace have you? I could stand a drink.

Jack: I'll bet we can fix it.

Dad: Thanks for coming ----- (I believe Middleton's were leaving)

Dad: (continuing) I wasn't stuck in the snow but they had a snow plow out at the branch north of Grand Island.. Columbus.. the branch.. and they brought a rotary down. A Wedge wouldn't go through.

Jack: What were you doing off the main line?

Dad: I was an extra engineer. I had to go to Grand Island to work extra board. Anyway, the wedge we couldn't get through. So we took it around the snow branch, and heck, we was clear off the right of way when we got stopped. This was a good many years ago. Well, they brought a rotary down from out West, and we still worked on the snow plow night and day, three shifts. Two shifts would be resting while one shift was working, and 'n the.. of course they had some chair cars along, to take a nap in, or lay down or whatever you could do... and sleeping in them coaches was the Gandy Dancers. I got the itch.

Jack: Now where was this itch?

Marian: What are Gandy Dancers?

Dad: I had to get a leave of absence to come home after we got out of there, and come home and get rid of the itch...

I was born thirty years too soon.

Marian: Where would we be if you were born 30 years too soon?

Dad: Well, I don't know though... I don't think I'd want to live it over again.

Jack: I'll tell you what.. What do you want to come back reincarnated as? Not a RR engineer again.

Dad: What do I want to come back as?

Jack: I'll tell you what, I want to come back as a paper salesman, 'cause this whole world runs on paper.

Dad: I don't think I want to come back.

Jack: My second choice would be a poodle and my mistress would be a widow in Burlingame, 'cause those poodles get pretty good care up there.

Dad: Well, I don't know, 'cause if its like old Bob Ingersoll says it was in heaven, I don't know whether I want to go there or not...

? Why?

Dad: What the heck, I can't think. Well, I guess I lost that one.

Jack: You haven't lost too many things in life. You've been a real good father too.

Dad: Can't think of it now.

Jack: When is your next trip to Las Vegas.

Dad: No, I am not gonna. They'll have to get along without me. I still have some good friends out there though. At the Fremont.

Jack: Jackie Gaughan, Snorts Wireman..

Dad: No, No -- 'tain't them big shots -- it's the help. Floor manager and some of the bankers, bank clerks and so forth.

Jack: Well those are the important people anyway.

Dad: Winnie wanted to cash a check out there one day. We wuz getting a little short on ready cash and we went over to fix it up with the banking department and they had that punch system where they can punch anyplace in the country and they called Omaha on this thing and the answer come back-- "Give him anything he wants."

Jack: That's pretty good for a guy that doesn't do any business with the banks.

Dad: They must have done that with the First National Bank.... You know what Ernie Tanner told you... I can tell you why he told you that. Jimmie Fadden, down there on the corner had an account with the bank at South Omaha and he had several run-ins...they sent him too much money than what he asked for in cashing checks down there and he sent it back to them. The next time he comes up short and they wouldn't do a thing about it. He says "to heck with that bank. Says he was honest and the bank was crooked and they wouldn't fix him up." He says "If I had known you was that kind of people I would have kept what you sent me "over" well, I took Jimmies accounts down to the bank and his first deposit was \$14,000, and you was talking to Ernie Tanner who was in the good business department. That's why Ernie Tanner told you that he wished he had fifty more like me... that's why he told you that.

Dad: (about the watch again) It hasn't quit since 1911. Hasn't quit running only once. Had a power failure. Main spring broke down.

Elva Buick: Pop, I am going to say Goodbye.

Dad: You ain't leaving"

Elva: Yep, we better get home, we don't have the beds made. Jim and I will see you.

Dad: Thanks for everything.

Jim: So long Pops. I gotta go home and read the paper.

Dad: You are doing all right. You look pretty near as young as you always did.

Jim: Think I'll make it?

Jack: He hasn't changed an awful lot. I'd like to have perpetual age like that.

Dad: I'll tell you, if I would have went to work for the bank in 1905 instead of after I retired, I believe I would have had more money than I've got today. I wouldn't have as much social security or railroad retirement but I would have had the cash before hand. I just learned how to make money when I went to work for the bank... but it was too late... too late.

Clare? How about teaching your kids?

Jack: I tell you what I'd like to do... I'd like to dig in your basement 'cause I think there is more down there than booze..... Bud says its time.

End of all tapes.