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Recommended Citation

Cronin, Daniel R. Interview by Megan DeFries. October 13, 2016, in Carnegie, Pennsylvania. Transcript. Duquesne University Oral History Initiative, Pittsburgh, PA. <https://dsc.duq.edu/vohp/4/> (accessed Month Day, Year).

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Oral Memoirs
of
Daniel R. Cronin

An Interview
Conducted by
Megan DeFries
October 13, 2016

Collection: Oral History Initiative
Project: Duquesne Veterans'

Duquesne University Oral History Initiative
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Interview History

The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed in the offices of the Oral History Initiative (OHI) and University Archives, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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Final Editor: Megan DeFries

Project Detail

The purpose of the Duquesne Veterans' Oral History Project is to record, preserve, and make available the stories of Duquesne's student and alumni veterans in order to highlight the many ways they have contributed to our country and to Duquesne University.

Daniel R. Cronin [1925-2018] was a veteran of World War II, serving in the US Navy from 1943 to 1946. He attended Duquesne University following his service from 1946 to 1950.

Megan DeFries was the oral historian for the OHI.

Daniel R. Cronin

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Megan DeFries
October 13, 2016
Home of Mr. Cronin
Carnegie, Pennsylvania

Collection: Oral History Initiative
Project: Duquesne Veterans'

DeFries: Okay. This is Megan DeFries, I am here with Daniel Raymond Cronin. He is a veteran of the United States Navy and World War II. This is our first interview for the Veteran[s'] Oral History Project. It is Thursday, October thirteenth [2016] and we are at his home in Carnegie, Pennsylvania. Hi Dan, how are you?

Cronin: Hi Megan, fine, thank you. It's awfully nice for you to come and visit. I really enjoy it.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Thank you for having me.

Cronin: Appreciate it. Yes, it's wonderful.

DeFries: I just thought we would start by you briefly telling me when and where you were born and a little bit about your family background.

[00:00:33]

Cronin: Okay, my name is Daniel Cronin, many know me as Dan, those that know me well. And I wanted to start—start this little conversation—start with the beginning. I was—I was born in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, Westmoreland County, and on the—I was one of nine—of eleven children, born to Michael and Mary Anne Murtha Cronin. They were married in 1913 in Mount Pleasant. Dad died in 1935 during the height of a Great Depression at the age of fifty-two, leaving my mother, who was only eight—forty-eight years old, to raise nine children, ranging in age from seven to twenty-one. My mom died at the age of eighty in 1967. Two sons, James and John, (coughs) died in infancy. (coughs) My—Marie, my youngest sister, was a nurse and died in 1960 and she was only thirty-two years old, leaving three young children. My father was a bricklayer and worked in the coal mines, building stoppings. He worked in water and developed rheumatic fever, which affected his lungs and he died of what is known today as COPD [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease]. I was ten years old, the third youngest and going into the fifth grade. My mom kept the family together by reminding us that unless we worked together and worked hard together, we could end up in the county home. At that—at that—my age I was not quite sure what the county home was or what it meant, but I knew it was not a pleasant

experience—would not be a pleasant experience, but it didn't happen. We followed her counsel and we all graduated from grade school and high school.

[00:02:31]

Of the nine children, six served in World War II. There are other members—two other members of the family, which made a total of eight, who—two—the two were in the Korean conflict. Three of the six were in the European and three were in the Pacific theaters. Five of the six were commissioned officers. My mother—sister Helen, who will be 100 years old on the nineteenth of this month, was born in 2016—in 2016 [sic 1916], was a lieutenant in the Army Nursing Corps. I was the odd man non-com, a petty officer, and I've been fairly petty ever since. (DeFries laughs) I entered the US Navy in December of 1943, after graduating from Ramsay High School. I went into boot camp at Samson Naval Training Station on Lake Geneva. That's north of Syracuse, New York [ed. note: Sampson, New York is on Seneca Lake, east of Syracuse]. After boot camp, I was sent to Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania for five months of the naval radio school, known then as Keystone Radio School in the Bedford Springs Resort Hotel. (chair creaks)

DeFries: I just wanted to back up for—thank you for all of that information.

Cronin: Yeah.

DeFries: And it's really impressive that six of you served in World War II and two in the Korean War.

Cronin: Yeah.

DeFries: I just wanted to back up just a little bit before we go too far. (laughs)

Cronin: Too—too fast?

DeFries: (laughs) We'll just slow down just a little and—and go over some more information. You said your father died when you were ten and then your mother said you all had to work together. And I'm sorry if I missed this, but what—what kind of work did she do after your father passed away?

[00:04:27]

Cronin: She never left the home, never left the home.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: What happened, all the brothers—I had older brothers—continued to find some sort of a job—

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: —small A&P job [ed. note: A&P is The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, a former chain of grocery stores], you know, different jobs. Some working down in the coke ovens—we had—there were Standard [Shaft] coke ovens here right near us and

whatever's—whatever—and there was one glass factory, which was right across the street from us, Bryce Brothers, which became Lennox Glass. Anyway, some worked there, but they got little jobs and they kept working. My one brother Ed, left high school just to work, but he went back and finished after things settled down and anyway, he was in the National Guard when the war started. He had been in—he was mobilized in—I think probably in 1938, Ed. But no, she never left the home, she stayed in the home and we all did something. We—I delivered papers, we all did—delivered papers. We—I worked, I played ball, but we took part in school, in high school, and in grade school. Whatever activities went on, baseball, basketball, football, and we also worked at like a little restaurant—sandwich shop—just to—and everything—everybody contributed and it actually got us through it. So—and really there was no insurance or very little insurance. Now we owned the home that we lived in and in those days you didn't call it a duplex, it was a double house. It was a double house and the people next to us had eleven children and they weren't able to pay any rent because they weren't working, it was the same thing.

But in any event, we got through it and Helen was the first to graduate, I think, from college, after she—she graduated after she come back from the service, from the war, and then I followed and then my brother George, who went—also went to Duquesne [University], but he left after he—after the war—he was there before the war, left after the war and went up to Cornell [University] and graduated from Cornell. So anyway, as far as my mother, she just kept the things—everybody in line to do the right thing and made sure we got to church and dressed properly. I think there's a picture in there of when I was in first grade and one of the—in the yearbook—there's nothing like that in my script here, but in the yearbook they said that I was girl-proof and I kiddingly say this, that in our graduating class—and I think I have a picture there, it was in the newspaper. See if there's a picture of a graduating class [Refers to photos and papers on his dining table]—(papers rustling) yeah that's it.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: There were thirteen girls and three boys and I said, “Who wouldn't be girl-proof after being chased for eight years by thirteen girls? You're going to be girl-proof.”
(DeFries laughs)

[00:07:28]

Cronin: So anyways, it was a—that was a—Saint Joseph's School, very—and what was unique about Saint Joseph's School, like many schools at that time in that town that I lived in, Mount Pleasant, there were actually three Catholic schools. There were four Catholic churches, but there was a non-Catholic church—there were about seven or eight churches in that town of 7,000 at that time. But anyway, we went on to high school, some of us went to the borough school, which was Ramsay, and some to the township school, which was Hurst High School. Now today, they're both joined in Mount Pleasant area. But anyway, the kids were all—everyone went through that school—oh, I was going to tell you that in the school itself there were only four classrooms, but eight grades. So that meant you have two classes in one and the nuns—we had all nuns—the nuns—they were [Sisters of] Charity nuns—had two classes. It'd be like first and second grade in one, second and third in the other, fourth and fifth in another, and sixth and seventh and eighth in another, but there'd be one nun teaching. So whenever she was teaching the one group, you would be like in a

study—study group and that’s the way we went through eight years like that. So it was a little different, it was like we’re in a schoolhouse where everybody—but it was—and then we got into high school and it was a large—it was only about 500 in the high school, but the closeness, like teacher to student relationship, was so small. I mean, there was only—like as I say, there was only sixteen in our class and the other classes there were just about the same, so you could maybe have thirty in a room, but it was a vie between first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, and seventh grade and eighth grade. And I’ll tell you one thing, as far as discipline, those sisters—(both laugh) that was the major part of your education was discipline. Really it was. And a lot if it was, I can—I remember grade school was pretty much—I was an altar boy, there were—there’s one picture, there were two—four of us—two families, Manzano and our family, who were altar boys. I think it’s in there someplace [refers to picture]—(clears throat) that was all memorization, and when they talk about it—let’s see, maybe—(rustling papers) is there—is there a group thing in there, with the—(rustling papers) I thought it was in there.

DeFries: Well, that’s okay.

Cronin: That was Nancy’s year. No, I think it’s in here. I think there’s a picture in here. My grandson did this work, by the way. And I—

DeFries: That was nice.

Cronin: Yeah that’s it [points to photograph]. There were four of—this is the four Cronins here. He was in high school, still in high school, Chuck, and was an altar boy and there are four Manzinos there, but that’s all—and that was—that was done in this book, Megan. And he—this is him [points to grandson’s picture], when he was just a second year of high school, sophomore in high school—

DeFries: [Refers to scrapbook] Your grandson made this?

Cronin: Grandson—grandson did that.

DeFries: Wow.

Cronin: But I—I took the—that and made copies, so that’s why—see how he did it—and this way—dedication and then he did the introduction, I guess, table of contents. Then he did through activities and the childhood activities—[Begins going through his scrapbook]

DeFries: Very nice.

Cronin: And then—he did a beautiful job—and then this is the—well, that’s one where he showed the—this is when we made a trip with Ed—and if you deliver papers, if you got seventy subscriptions, you won a trip to Washington, DC. And this is my brother Tom, myself, and another fella that went to Washington—four of us went to Washington, DC just for a tour.

DeFries: That’s great.

Cronin: And this is my high school. Remember I was saying about—notice how serious you were then? Well, it was a serious time. (DeFries laughs) And then he—here's the United States Navy, he has all that—but you have all that, don't you?

DeFries: I do, yeah, thank you so much. This is great.

Cronin: And then this is—he did a pretty nice job there—this is when I got out of school at Bedford Springs. Ten percent of the class was on the honor roll and the honor roll meant that you went from a seaman second class, which I was then, to a petty officer.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: As I say, I've been petty ever since. (DeFries laughs) And then this is Duquesne and you have that. Yeah, he did a pretty nice job.

DeFries: This is great, he did a very nice job.

Cronin: And this is a picture when I was—went to work with MSA [Mine Safety Appliances]. That was 1974.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Is that Mine Safety Appliances?

Cronin: (speaking at the same time) Mine Safety, yeah.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Is that—okay.

Cronin: It's called The Safety Company today, but it was MSA then. And that was in 1954, so by that time I was smiling.

DeFries: (laughs) Life was good?

Cronin: Yeah, and this is about the family and this is a picture taken when we went on our honeymoon. We went to Cape Cod, [Massachusetts] and this is—oh, the picture's right behind me of the three trips we made up there, but in that same area. This was taken at—oh, right outside of Cape Cod and we went back for just a vacation trip. And then this is—he—he did (laughs) a timeline of on—that's pretty neat.

DeFries: That is great.

Cronin: Yeah. And then this is the—what do they call it, the ninety-nine—your—

DeFries: Is it your—

Cronin: Naval service and your—

DeFries: Oh, okay.

Cronin: Discharge.

DeFries: Separate—your discharge papers.

Cronin: And this is a picture, you see, he has it here—a picture from a passport photo. (DeFries laughs) And then he did a little bit on himself, (both laugh) there it is there, and he showed when he played football—

DeFries: Very nice.

Cronin: At West Allegheny which is right outside of—

DeFries: How nice.

Cronin: But he did a beautiful job.

DeFries: He did, that's a great thing to have.

Cronin: Um-hm.

DeFries: That's really wonderful. Now—

Cronin: Oh here's that, maybe that's—that's another picture, I think you have that.

DeFries: I have the copy, yes, I do.

Cronin: Yeah, you have that. Maybe I have —

DeFries: Now are you—this—this one or this [Pointing to Cronin's grade school photo]?

Cronin: No, I'm sitting—that's me right there.

DeFries: Oh okay.

[00:13:54]

Cronin: And—no, the fellow behind me is Dutch Steiner and he went to become a priest, but he left—he didn't go—and this is Jim Burns and he's—these are all—they're all passed away, but there was six—yeah, sixteen in that class, thirteen girls and most of them are passed now, gone. This—she's still living. The only reason I know is we have some reunions, high school reunions, and some of them come back. She used to come back, but now she doesn't even—the last one I had was this past June and it was like a joint—all graduating classes in high school and from this—Ramsay High School. And there's only one other from my class at that one. I'm not saying they're all dead, but many of them were unable to travel. And this—but this was a grade school class and most of these [refers to picture of eighth grade class]—Oberdecker, Father Dugan, Jim Burns, Peggy Donnelly, Mavis Moore, Mary Kelly, Marie Jackson, Dutch Steiner, Dolores Urban—what was her name, Hostoffer—and this is Peggy Walsh and this is—she lived in—I think she's still living, Ann Marie [sic, Anna Jean] Mullen, then this is Skurgen, and this is—oh, I can't remember her name—and her name is Jackson, I think, and Patty Kelly and Mavis Moore.

DeFries: That's amazing that you remember almost everybody's names. (laughs)

Cronin: Yeah, they don't have that down there, but this is nineteen—we graduated in 1939.

DeFries: So when you—you started high school—close to the start of high school, we entered World War II.

[00:15:40]

Cronin: I was—yeah, we went into the war in '41—

DeFries: Right.

Cronin: —December '41, and I was in—a sophomore in high school.

DeFries: What was your—yours and your family's reaction to Pearl Harbor and entering the war?

Cronin: We were very sad and very patriotic. And actually my one brother, Ed, was in the National Guard at the time, so all the others—and they were mobilized and he was the first to leave. And then Joe was the oldest, went right in—they all went in in '41—'41, '42, and then Chuck and George. George went in, he was at Duquesne during the—he was a sophomore at Duquesne. No, he was finishing his freshman year and then when he went into the—what do they call the—not ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps], but it was a group of—

DeFries: Is it SATC [Student Army Training Corps] at that time still?

Cronin: Now I forget, I'm trying to think of what it was called, but anyway, he ended up at a catholic university in Washington for about a year and then he went into active [duty] and he was in the service though, but—ASTP they called it then, Army Specialized Training Corps. And then he went on active duty and he was in Germany, then he was wounded in the—in the war and he actually had a Purple Heart. We—he's buried at Arlington, George, and—but the others were all—well, the only ones that are living now are Helen. I told you she's 100, will be 100—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) That's amazing.

[00:17:27]

Cronin: —this month and the rest of them that were in the service, in World War II, are passed away. And—but there were nine of us and Marie was the youngest and she was a nurse. Helen was a nurse and Marie was a nurse and she had three children. She died very young. She died in 1960 and was born in 1929, so she was only like thirty-two. Yeah, anyway, she was the only one left home with my mother, during the blackouts and so forth. They used to go through blackouts and—

DeFries: This—oh, I'm sorry.

Cronin: Go ahead, I'm sorry.

DeFries: No, no, I don't want to interrupt you, I'm sorry, go ahead.

Cronin: No that's all right, but Marie was the first past and she actually died of—let's see what was it—brain tumor. She had a brain tumor, but they didn't diagnose it right away. And she was a nurse, but they were giving her—treating her for—I don't know what else they were treating her for, but by the time they found out it was too far—too far gone. She was operated on twice, but only to—for relief, not to—they couldn't take all the tumor, brain tumor.

DeFries: That's too bad.

Cronin: Yeah, it was sad and she had three. In fact, the youngest was just six months old and they're all—well no, I was going to say they all—the one daughter, Marie's, would be my niece—let's see, Mary Jo—Mary Jo, still living, and Dave, still living. She had three children and the other one though was—had—had a—they diagnosed her with—they thought she just had back problems, but she had other—cancer and by the time they found out, it was too far gone and she died just in 2008 or nine, I think it was, but three children, yeah. Three children, they're still living, but that was—that was sad. Anyway, what were—

DeFries: You were talking about Pearl Harbor and then—

Cronin: Pearl Harbor.

DeFries: And about getting into the war and I was actually going to ask you what your—

Cronin: Go ahead.

[00:19:58]

DeFries: —what your home front life was like while you were in high school during World War II? You mentioned some blackouts. Were there other things you experienced as a result of the war?

Cronin: Yeah, actually in—normally when you were in school, you were in preparation to go on to school. Well, that wasn't the era at all except for the—especially the boys, males in school. So we took courses to get into college, but knew that in most cases we weren't going into college. Never thought about what it would be after, you don't know. So most of us were—it was an atmosphere of preparation to go into service and most everybody did, unless it was something physical that you couldn't go. And I was—went in in '43. I mean, I graduated in '43 and then I went into the service and I came out in '46, but I had—I went in late, I actually graduated in the latter part of May and then I went into—no, I didn't go in until December because I had had medical problems. I had some—it happened playing ball, hernia. I had a hernia and I had to be operated on, so that delayed my going in, but right after that I went in to the service. I went in late, 1943.

[00:21:34]

DeFries: And you were drafted in?

Cronin: That's true, yeah. Now being drafted, you say we're going into the army. At that time, then they were looking for more to go into the navy and I didn't know at the

time, but when I went to the draft, they said, “No, you’re not going into the army, but you’re going into the navy.” And—and it meant that I—you had to go to boot camp. Well, and you had training in the army too, but I went in late in December and I went into camp or—up in ocean—what is it, up in New York?

DeFries: Samson Naval Training Base?

[00:22:18]

Cronin: Yeah, Samson Naval Training Station, for eight weeks, and then you come out of there and went to school into—to radio school up at Bedford, which is kind of neat because Bedford is close to my home, but we only got off—out of—you had to have—make the grade or you had—didn’t get liberty, what they call liberty. In—it was only every two weeks, but I was—I was in the—able to go home every other week while I was in school and that was radio school and I come out with a third class radioman, as opposed to a second class seaman.

DeFries: Okay. So you were promoted higher?

Cronin: Yeah. It was a ten percent deal; ten percent of the class, depending on your grade, (door creaks) was able to get that—that rating. And so anyway, we—after—right after I went, I tried to go into submarines, you had a—you gave your choice of service you wanted to go into and I tried to go into the submarines and they—they wouldn’t, didn’t—I was down to the last eight though. They only took four out of that class into submarines and I think of my size at that time and still today and it was a little bit too much for submarines. So they sent me to amphibious, out on the West Coast. I went to Camp Pendleton [California], really, which was really a marine base and I was there for two months. Really a very intense, tough training; it was like land—beach landings and things like that. But I got into communications—

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: —and when I come out of there, I—I did have a rating, but I come out of there with—after two months and they put me into—oh, it was, PT [Patrol Torpedo] boats. It was really a squadron, I think they call it PT squadrons. That was in forty, ‘43 now—no ‘44, that was ‘44 because I went through five months at Bedford as—for radio and then I went there for two months, so it was late in ‘44 when I come out and went to—and it would’ve been an amphibious, but ended up going onto PT boats and PT squadrons, and things like that.

DeFries: Can—can you describe a little bit more about your amphibious training? Like, what was—what was rigorous about it? What kind of things were they making you do?

[00:24:56]

Cronin: (speaking at the same time) Okay, well actually, every day it was what they call—when we go through training, amphibious training, you have, like, very difficult training. It was all hours of the day and night and then—and we did that for two solid months. We had to do fighting and boxing and beach landings and it was really difficult training, day and night. And as I said, two solid months and then I think that was probably the roughest training I had while I was in the navy. And when I come

out of there, instead of making amphibious landings, I went and they put me with PTs and so that was—really PT boat training wasn't bad. And then I went into—but it was the most on—on the islands in the—I went to—then to Hollandia, New Guinea for a few months, for my first overseas. One solid month on a ship to get to Hollandia, New Guinea.

DeFries: Can you tell me about that travel from California?

[00:26:08]

Cronin: (speaking at the same time) Oh, that was really—well, it was a troop ship. I was on with a lot of other—I was going to say it was army, navy, and marines, really, some were going to be in—making beach landings and so forth. And we got two meals a day and it lasted thirty days and pretty rough at times. Although the Pacific wasn't nearly as rough as was the—that's the—[refers to picture of ship] (papers rustling)

DeFries: That's the [USS] *Harry Lee* [APA-10]. I found the picture online. Do you—does it—

Cronin: That's it.

DeFries: Do you remember that? (laughs)

Cronin: Yeah, that's the ship we were on for thirty days. How about that? And as I say, two—you got two meals a day and you were happy to get that, but it was—actually not—it wasn't—the seas weren't rough. We didn't hit many storms. I did coming back, but not going over, and landed at Hollandia, New Guinea and then spent probably two weeks there just sort of getting ready to go up to the Philippines.

And it was strange, I—I said to—to this day I don't know why, but I was on a number of different ships. I was on an army boat at one time, small—had a small crew and I was on a Coast Guard Cutter and I was doing—and when I was in communications—so I was being—in the radio room and then whenever we got onto—I was on the Coast Guard Cutter, I think, whenever we hit a bad storm going in and we did the same thing coming out; had a tidal wave coming out. But anyway, I went through like different—we actually were attacked by the Japanese going up through from Hollandia to the Philippines.

[00:28:07]

We were attacked by torpedo boats—torpedo planes and there was a—what they call a Liberty boat or a—it was a boat that carried troops, a large number of troops—was hit. So I was in a smaller ship and I think I have it written in there, but anyway we circled that ship all night and picked up survivors, as many as we could, and the next morning, then we had air coverage. These torpedo—Japanese torpedo planes—we had air coverage and the—an officer on the ship I was on, communication officer by the way, was killed on that ship and I was actually a litter bearer to bring him through and he was buried at sea. But we were under air attack—but our planes then, P-38s and so forth and other fighter planes, knocked the Japanese planes out of the air. They were torpedo planes. And he was buried at sea, Constantine his name was, lieutenant, he was Lieutenant JG [Junior Grade], I believe, and he was killed and buried at sea and I still remember—that was—I made that point that I remember that

very vividly because *Taps* was blown. They blew *Taps* and you remember that how it happened and—we were under attack and that he was buried at sea because there's no other way to do it, that was it. So that was the probably most vivid memories I had of what went on during that time, that were, you know, of what happened. And then we had to continue on, but he was buried at sea and then we went on up to the islands and that's something that sticks in your mind. Well, that was what—how many years ago? Eighty-some years ago or seventy-some.

DeFries: Was that your first experience with combat—was that your—that—

[00:30:19]

Cronin: Yeah. That was a first, but we were—after we got in onto the islands, that was in the Philippine Islands, we were under attack—and how to hit foxholes and so on because there were still, being—it was still —when I went into the Philippines, General MacArthur had left the Philippines because of the—they were under attack. And he, whenever—I have some pictures when he came back—he come back actually—we were there for at least, I would say, close to a year when MacArthur came back because we had taken the—regained the Philippines, Bataan, and so forth, some of the battles, but I was actually on boats and I was on tenders and I was on bases during that time. I was there from, I would say, the fall of forty—got into that part fall of '44 to—I left there in spring of '46, but the war was over in forty—late '45, August of '45. And—but I was young and you left depending on how many dependents you had, how many—you had so many points for dependencies and I was only—I went in when I was eighteen and I was then twenty, just going on twenty-one. I was twenty-one that July, that July of '46.

[00:31:53]

And so I was late getting out and people at home, (laughs) all the other brothers and my sister, they're all home and back in—because they got back in forty—'45 and I didn't get back until March of '46, so it made a difference. And my one brother George, who passed away who had got the Purple Heart, he met me; he's the only who met me in this little town and I came home on a trolley car and I said, "Boy I'm glad that's over with," something like that, I said, "I'm glad that's over with," and, it's—those memories are something that stay with you for the rest of your life, there's no doubt about it, but it was an experience. I—I was very fortunate, and there was times when it was dangerous. There were other times when it was just monotonous and you had to do something to keep your head on straight. Keep busy and make it through and some had difficulty doing that after the war, you know what I mean. There was a—got out right at the end of the war. Now the rest of my family, there were six of us, but five of them were out, and—but George was the only—he was there to meet me at the—it wasn't at—it was at a trolley station in Mount Pleasant and I had to come through cross country by train; they didn't fly you home in those years, so that was about a week on a—a train trip.

DeFries: What was that like?

[00:33:32]

Cronin: Oh that was tough, you know, and it was, as I say it was difficult, but you had—and then George, who had been at Duquesne—and we talked after I got home and then I talked about Saint Joe's [Saint Joseph's University] in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] and—and Temple [University] because I had a brother [who] lived in—who already settled in (chair creaks) and living in New Jersey and I went out to see him after I got back. And it was a decision about where to go to school, but ended up—ended up at Duquesne. And I was happy that I did, it was a great—a great experience because—and there were—I think there were, in my class—I don't know how many are in your class, but in my class there were, I think, around—it was under a thousand, but many of them were veterans and the non-veterans that were the minority in—the year '46, that was. And so I lived up on the Bluff and I—well, I was playing ball then and I was into more—more than I could handle, I'll be honest with you, in academics and I was in pharmacy and it was too much. I had been away from school too long, so I switched and went into the school of education and I didn't play any more football because the studies were more important and I was on the G.I. Bill [Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944]. And—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Okay. So you had to finish within a certain amount of time?

[00:35:14]

Cronin: So the only thing I wasn't getting was room and board, when I wasn't playing football and I could concentrate more on studies and so forth. I lived up on the campus though, on Vickroy Street, from the time—I lived on—in Canevin Hall, no not—next to Canevin Hall. The head—the big building, red building.

DeFries: Oh, the—Old Main?

Cronin: Old Main.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Oh did—so you were among the students that bunked in Old Main while they were—

Cronin: I was on the fourth floor.

DeFries: Oh my goodness.

[00:35:43]

Cronin: Yeah, for a year and then I moved into—on Vickroy Street, into a—I don't know what building is there now. It's not there, the building I lived in is not here, but I lived [there] the rest of the time. Then I moved off in my senior year, lived with a family on—on Vickroy Street. No, it was on Locust Street right down, right down below. They were all graduates of Duquesne. Lived there and then—but anyway, the experience at Duquesne was great. It was a big adjustment, but everybody was making adjustment. In those days you had more priests as instructors than you have today, naturally, in—in class and also, Father O'Brien was the dean of men and Father Harcar—Father—let's see, taught—taught philosophy. I can't—Father—what was his name? But anyway, there weren't too many lay professors, but there were some, there were some. And it was just a time of adjustment. And then I went off in

my last year and did student teaching at East Pittsburgh High School. Then I taught then for three years at Oakmont. I don't know if you're familiar with it. Where was your home originally?

DeFries: Buffalo, New York.

Cronin: Oh, that's right, Buffalo. I never taught up there, (both laugh) but I've been to Buffalo. I had to—I covered Buffalo, but then I went to—we had more—it was a small school that I taught in, at Oakmont High School. It's up on the Allegheny River. And then I left there in three years. I coached there, in basketball, for three years.

[00:37:43]

And then I went to MSA and trained for about six months and then was assigned to—became an office manager in Philadelphia—or in Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania] and then went off into territory, did territory work for about pretty close to fifteen years. And then I went into management and I did about twenty-some years as an assistant manager—mining, I was in mining—and then manager [of] mining for about ten, eleven years. Then ended up, the last year—nine years—sort of going district to district and doing different work with training people, but it was interesting. I spent thirty—thirty-six years with MSA and it was three years at teaching, but I still fall back on that teaching and that training prior to—at Duquesne. It was the greatest because it was a tremendous adjusting. The adjustment was unbelievable, not only from being in service, but getting into school and then getting into a profession because it was so—and then, some business was difficult at times. We had some—were having what they call bad years. And in fact on that picture—why did you do this—there were some—they were some bad years; things weren't so good business-wise in the whole country. And then actually it changed and by the time I finished, which was in '90, 1990 is when I retired, 1990. And that'd be now—what—twenty-six years, and I've enjoyed every minute of retirement. (both laugh) But it was—it was actually a good experience at MSA and I was in many different jobs, just dealing with people in business and adjusting, a lot of adjustments made because things were changing, things have changed and are still changing today. And when I went into a territory, we used to call and—major industry in the United States do direct calls and we shipped and did everything correct. And it was a great experience, as I said, mining experience and just regular industrial experience. And then whenever—changing in the ownership at MSA, as in the—it was a family owned company. The Ryans owned it and the third generation was running it and so things did change to where we didn't have direct contact with the customer, but had to manage it. That was a good experience, so that went on, as I said. My last, oh, probably ten years was dealing with management of a different type and customers not on a direct basis, but on a distributor basis, indirect basis, but it was a very true adjustment. And even in the way the company still operates today—and they're in pretty good shape, too, but a lot different when I grew up in that company because we had direct contact with the customer. Now it's an indirect, but very important contact, and they do more with their—through distributors.

DeFries: Do you maintain contact with people in the company still today?

Cronin: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I have one fellow, (DeFries clears throat) he's still living. He's—I'll be ninety—I'm ninety-one now, but he's eighty-eight and he was in my district when I was a district manager, and we talk back and forth. He's very funny, but it was difficult—he went to Notre Dame [University], by the way. He was a—he played football out there, but worked—we worked together for—well, he had about as many years as I had, so probably thirty years. And there aren't too many left in that group, either. There's some, but not many. It's—you deal with change and cope with change, I guess. You'll find that whatever you do in life, there's going to be a change. Right now we're going to have a change in politics. (laughs)

DeFries: Right. (laughs)

Cronin: I was watching Michelle Obama speaking and boy, she has some pretty profound views of what has gone on and what could go on if things go on, but we won't get into politics. (laughs)

DeFries: Okay. (laughs)

[00:43:28]

Cronin: So anyway, that brings us up to—I worked at—for thirty-six years with MSA and a lot of change, but good change. I mean, you got to cope with change. I'll teach you a lesson, things are going to change. Things aren't going to stay the same. There's going to be difference, change in life, and change in economy and change in politics and you just ride with it, but do the best you can and understand why certain people have the viewpoint they do. It may differ from mine, that doesn't make me right though, not necessarily. (laughs) But it is—young people today—I keep saying this about young people today—it's most difficult, most difficult because of the changes and things that change so radically at times.

DeFries: The technology and things.

Cronin: Technology and philosophy and—well, look at politics, how things have changed, but you have to cope. You have to look at the other person's viewpoint and there's always a reason. But I think today it's difficult for young people raising a family trying to make ends meet because costs are so high. Education is important, but it's not taking—not getting as much emphasis as you think it should be and I think it's a difficult time for anyone raising a family. I really do because so many distractions. My background is from a small town, maybe five thousand people, large family, where you learn to give and take, contribute and take—what you did was important and you better—I often say, my mother used to say this—my father died when I was only ten and my mother would say, “What you do is—” [speaking to his wife] Shirley, are you having something? Are you still recording, dear?

DeFries: I'm still recording. (Cronin laughs) I can pause it if you like.

Cronin: No, no, no, that's okay. (both laugh) But it was a—even back in those days it was difficult raising a family, but it was actually a simpler life. You didn't have the complications and distractions and especially in a small town because everybody else knew what was going on and you better be on the straight and narrow or it was—somebody else was going to step in and let you know. And it was true of most

families, (coughs) and large families were very prevalent at that time, excuse me. (noise in the kitchen) But anyway, life was simpler, but yet was complicated and you were involved in what was going on at school and in the town and were raised, as I say—everybody had a pretty good idea of what you were doing and they used to say this, if you got into trouble at school or in town, you were in trouble at home. In other words, you're not going to be backed up and you always thought that way and I think it meant, because everybody—and it was more older brothers and sisters helping younger. That's what was nice about a large family because now those families today are smaller and there's a good reason for that, but still the influence that you had from your brothers and sisters was very important and you didn't want to let them down. You know, I'm not saying we didn't get into trouble, we did, but you found out that you were not—they're not going to back you and say—like some today (coughs) that say that because their children get into trouble, then something's wrong with the system. It may be, but you have to recognize the importance of authority and that's what we were always taught, authority's important and to do—listen to what your teachers had to do or say and, but it was—it was an interesting life. When I look back on my childhood, it was actually a very pleasant time of life. It wasn't the easiest time—[speaking to Shirley, who is placing drinks on the table] oh, thanks hon, thank you—wasn't an easy time, but it was—for anyone to get that experience, it was beneficial. It helps you make a—understand that everything's not as easy as—it takes a lot of hard work, persistence, and stick-to-itiveness to be successful. And you can be successful if you want to be, anybody can be. It isn't how much money you have—oh wow [Shirley places cookies on the table].

DeFries: Thank you.

Cronin: You can be sweet (laughs) and you can be sour, but you can—you should recognize that what you do influences other people. When other people look at you, you don't realize how much they look to you, especially your children and your neighbors and how important that is that you maintain a good reputation and try to set a good example. So that that's probably as important as being a good teacher or being a good mother or father, brother or sister, and family member. So anyway, those things, I think, because of the close-knit group that you have in your family and—I'm not saying they were all very pleasant. They had their faults, as we all have faults, but the positives far outnumber the negatives when you come from a small town and large family. And that's what I had, a small town and a large family and everybody in town knew what was going on and everybody in the family saw to it that you did the right thing both in—with regards to who your friends were, what kind of habits you were developing, and what you were doing in school and church. Very important—church was very important because of the—believe it or not, in Mount Pleasant, there were, I would say probably eight, maybe ten churches in a town of five thousand people then.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: Yeah, and it was very religious. And there was (clears throat) ethnic groups, for instance—like we used to say, we were the Irish group or you were the Polish group or the Italian area. It wasn't meant to be wrong, it meant that you had your roots and you had certain beliefs, but we all got along; we got along. We got into school, we worked together. Never had any problem that way. But there was like a Dutch town and there was a group that—I mean the Irish group and the schools were even that

way. They were pretty much ethnic and that was not a bad thing, but now today, you wouldn't be able—that wouldn't exist today. You couldn't have that, you couldn't have that because we're all US citizens and that's the important thing, that we be good citizens. And in those days it was smaller groups and we learned to respect each other and we were taught respect—respect for authority, respect for the rights of—and what other people had, the problems that other people had, and [to] be helpful. That was a—one of the things that we—if you could be helpful to other people, that was great. That was the way to be. And I'm not saying we were perfect because we weren't. (laughs) We had our problems, but they weren't like some of the—you talk about drug problems and you talk about things that are going on today, I'm not saying they didn't go on, but they weren't of the magnitude that they are today.

DeFries: You had expectations and connections to your family that kept you on a certain path.

Cronin: Exactly. And if you were in trouble at school or within the community, then you were in trouble at home. In other words, you weren't given license to—because everybody was against you. You were to be for everybody; that was the attitude that was taught. Be for everybody, be helpful, brave, kind, and resourceful and use your time to good, to not only your benefit but those around you, that was important. And it was something that stays with you the rest of your life. You never lose it.

DeFries: That's a profound lesson to learn.

Cronin: It is a good lesson to learn.

DeFries: Did you—did that—were you taking those kind of feelings or experiences with you when you entered the navy and you were in the war? Was that something you carried with you while you were, you know, with your fellow servicemen?

[00:53:36]

Cronin: Absolutely, they were. That background of being—treating people the way you want to be treated, that was carried over into my service life. In other words, if you could be helpful to somebody that needed help, then be helpful. Now don't be critical, don't be tearing people apart, finding fault. Be positive about other people. Other people have their problems just as you have. And it was true that we got along. I got along in the service because at home, I think, we got along very well and in the community you got along very well. Now I don't say that you just did that to be respected, but you wanted respect and you gain respect by being fair and treating your fellow man and that carried through the navy. I had never at any time—when I was in training at boot camp or in radio school at Bedford Springs and went on to the West Coast at Camp Pendleton to beach land—make beach landings. It was difficult, but you knew that if you worked together, you could do this. It could be done and it took cooperation and not finding fault, but finding—looking at the best that somebody had to offer. That was the thing that was important and I found that to be true later in my business life. If I find fault, just found fault, rather than working together, you never accomplished a whole lot. To accomplish, really accomplish, you have to work together, have an objective, and work toward that objective and not, as I say, just do the pleasant things. There are unpleasant things you have to do as well. So you have to do that, take part in activities and give your best—the best effort you can and respect your fellow man and I think that was important. We learned to do that and I

think it was a good lesson to be learned. That's a lesson in life that you never—you remember the rest of your life, yeah.

DeFries: That's great. Well, do you think on that note we'll take a short break?

Cronin: Certainly.

DeFries: Okay. (laughs)

Cronin: How're we doing on time?

pause in recording

[00:56:14]

DeFries: Okay. So—I'm sorry, you were starting to tell me a story about 1946 at Duquesne.

Cronin: Yeah. Well, because the enrollment was rather high and classrooms were crowded—like in chemistry, you could have as many as three hundred in a class—chemistry. And in lab—we had labs in a Quonset huts. Do you remember—did anyone tell you about Quonset huts?

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Yes, were they on top of the building?

Cronin: Yeah, they were, well pretty close now to where the field is.

DeFries: Oh.

Cronin: Rooney Field.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: In that area.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: They were Quonset huts and when we practiced though, we practiced in that area, and that was hard ground. I mean, that wasn't stadium—that wasn't artificial turf back then and it was tough, but we had large classes, fairly large classes, and they were in—in Quonset—labs were in the Quonset huts, but in the Canevin Hall, they were fairly large classes. And also in the—pretty sure we had classes in Old Main too. Some small classes, there weren't many. But anyway, that's all changed today and the—but you went to school there you—you were either in a dorm or in an apartment on Vickroy Street, which is closed off. That's the Academic Walk today, isn't it? The Academic Walk?

DeFries: Um-hm. Yes, I believe so.

Cronin: Yeah. That's where—I think I have a picture of that—that's where this—it's on Academic Walk. Anyway, the campus hasn't changed a whole lot, although there are more things down on Forbes Avenue than there were back when I was in school. It

was mainly confined to the Bluff, which was—now we get down into—although, oh, I must tell you this, there were classes down on Fourth Avenue at the—on Fourth Avenue for the—what was it called?

DeFries: Fitzsimons Building? Is it the Fitzsimons Building?

Cronin: Fitzsimons Building on Fourth Avenue. And there were mainly law offices—or classes down there and there were business administration classes down there. So there was always a walk up from Fourth Avenue up to Vickroy Street and if you had classes back to back, one downtown and one on Vickroy Street, you had to move. (both laugh) You had to be pretty fast to be there on time. And boy you used to kiddingly say if the professor was about five or ten minutes late, you figured he's not going to make it and that was the end of that class, but if you were late, that was a different story. (DeFries laughs) You better be there on time. And the classes were fairly large at that time, especially in business and education. Kleyle, Mrs. [Helen] Kleyle, a professor in education and we would go back and forth. Sometimes I had some classes down in the Fitzsimons building, but as I say, we were young and you could move about, like making—we didn't have any transportation, that didn't happen. Fourth Avenue, you couldn't—you couldn't park down there anyway and probably couldn't afford to, but anyway, you made it back up on the Bluff and—

DeFries: Now were there stairs that you had to climb, that you—or did you walk up the hill? Because I've seen pictures of stairs up the side of the—

Cronin: No, we—we walked up.

DeFries: Oh, okay.

Cronin: There were no stairs then, there might have been now.

DeFries: Okay, okay.

Cronin: Back then there were—this was in the forties.

DeFries: Yes.

Cronin: Forty-six to '50, and the classes were large and—but anyway, the—and there was a large group [that] came in. I think there were like nine hundred, close to one thousand in my class. I don't know how many graduated. (airplane flying over house)

DeFries: Nine hundred sixty-six in the year of 1950, is what I—what I read was in nineteen—I'm sorry, 1950, yeah, you had nine hundred sixty-six graduates, which was the largest to that point.

[01:00:35]

Cronin: That's exactly—at that point, yeah. Well starting out there, it was even larger than that, but naturally people fell off because of various reasons. I mean, what—it was a struggle and—but as I look back, it was a pleasant struggle because from what we had been going through the previous two and a half to three years, as being overseas and so on. And we had an advantage, really, over those just coming—and there were

those that were just eighteen coming out of high school in our classes and we were twenty—like we were old-timers at twenty-one. (both laugh) And—but as far as academics though, they had it on us because they were more familiar with getting back into study habits and things like that, which took a little bit of doing and concentration. I don't care what your aptitude was, you still had to—that having difficulty doing that, getting back into that routine of study. And I'll tell you what my feeling—I had a classmate and I won't name him, naturally, but he had—he didn't study and yet he was an A student, but he had more problems than those, like myself, who had to do some studying to make the grade, especially in the beginning. As it went on, it wasn't as difficult, but in the beginning it was a difficult—the adjustment. And—but he had no problem, so he actually got involved in other things that was detrimental to him like carousing. And he—he made it through, but by the skin of his teeth. Even though he was a straight A student and I mean, he had one of those photogenic [sic, photographic] minds, I guess you'd call it. He didn't have to study and he thought everybody else was that way and he wanted you to go out and socialize, be sociable, but you can over-socialize. It's like doing anything to an excess can create problems. And he did, he was very lucky to be able to finish that. As I say, I'm not naming him.

But anyway, there were younger students, eighteen [years old], and this happened of course playing ball because they were just out of high school and had been going through what it takes to be in athletics at that time. And if you were out of school for a few years, you didn't—even though you were active, you weren't doing calisthenics, you weren't doing sprints, and things like that. So that's a little adjusting and it wasn't an easy adjustment. It—it took a lot of determination and you could do it if you had that determination and there was some that didn't make it. You know, some really mentally did—as far as academics could have done it, but just psychologically it was a difficult thing for them. And I—this one gentleman that I had in my—one of the three in grade school was there and he had trouble. He never did make it. He got through maybe the first semester and that was it. He had to leave, he just wasn't able. But—so there was a tremendous adjustment at that time, going from being away from classroom studies for, like, two and a half, three years and—versus those who were just coming out of high school and it was an easy transition for them, very easy, and they were good. But actually, it was like anything else, after a period of time, the difference gets nearer and nearer, there's a blend there. And—but it was interesting, as I say, because I enjoyed the stories that were told by those who were in education and those who were involved in the academics, throughout, especially the priests, Holy Ghost Fathers. And they were very understanding and they understood that you were making an adjustment and that that took some good thinking on their part, and you could have discussions and go over things. If I—probably if I had been to a larger school, in a different environment, I would have never made it. I don't think I would have made it, not because it wasn't academics as much as the adjustment of a—

DeFries: Different environment.

Cronin: The environment, yeah, I'm sure. Now George, my brother, he was a pretty good—very good student. Had been at Duquesne (clears throat) and came back after the war and stayed a little bit, but then he went on to Cornell. And he didn't have a problem like that. He—because academically, he just—it was easy for him. It was true, certainly was, tests didn't mean that much. They weren't that difficult. To me, I had

to prepare (laughs) and—and if I wasn't prepared properly, that's probably what—in early years, my first semester maybe, I wasn't preparing properly. Well, I was involved in football for one thing and you were tired and you didn't feel like studying. (clears throat) And I had to switch—I did, I switched from pharmacy—I was in pharmacy—switched from pharmacy to education.

DeFries: Is that in your first year?

Cronin: First year, after my first year.

DeFries: Oh, okay.

[01:06:15]

Cronin: And it was much—I don't want to say it was easier, but it was much more enjoyable (both laugh) because it was enjoy—it was suited—I was suited to it. And the professors—I can still remember taking Spanish and the professor understood and I—Father Maroney—Father Maroney, I think it was, I had for Spanish and he understood. And many other—the other, Father Holt, I had a priest, taught psychology—very good, very good. Father Harcar, there's a name you wouldn't—Father O'Brien; Father O'Brien was Dean of Men, then. And that was important because they—they took—and the size I think was very, very—being in a smaller group, even though that was large for Duquesne at that time, the increase in numbers, but it was still small compared to—if you would go to, like, University of Pittsburgh or one of the other city schools—Carnegie Mellon [University], of course. (laughs) That might have been something else, but anyway, that's—that was a good experience when I look back on it. That—that is—that's helped me to adjust.

[01:07:43]

Well, I—I do say this, I have a little philosophy of my own, that life is a series of adjustments. Really, when you get right down to it, when you come out, leave home, like in our days, it wasn't in kindergarten or preschool. It was first grade, six years. You had to adjust being in a group where you couldn't do everything you wanted do when you wanted to do it. Things—discipline—you had to learn discipline as you went through grade school and then you had to go to high school and then you had to adjust then, adjust to different—a different environment and different, of course, teachers and different course of studies. And then when I went into the—into the army—navy, why'd I say army? I was in the navy—I almost did go into the army—that was a good adjustment. Many, many had a difficult time adjusting to that life. You say, how could you adjust to that life? Well, you just made up your mind you're going to do it. And—and I did a lot of adjusting in education, during my time in the service studying for different promotions and things like that. It took a lot of—I guess you'd call it—what would you call it? Discipline, to do some of the things that maybe somebody else didn't want to do. Maybe they wanted to do something else, but you said, Oh I have to do this and then I went—I adjusted at Duquesne and it wasn't an easy adjustment, but it was an adjustment and I was happy to make it and I had good backing to make an—that's what I'm saying, I was given a good—

DeFries: Support?

Cronin: Assistance, support. That's a good word, support, to make those adjustments. Some other people may not have been interested and in fact, I know one professor there that had no interest, "If you don't understand this, that's too bad," hey get out, you're finished, yeah. I won't give his name because there might be some relatives of his at Duquesne. But anyway—and then you got into adjusting after—after school, finishing school, I went to Oakmont. Had to adjust there, teaching and so forth, coaching. And then I adjusted to business and then the big adjustment is when you are married. That's a big adjustment.

DeFries: How did you and Shirley meet?

[01:10:18]

Cronin: At Duquesne.

DeFries: At Duquesne, okay.

Cronin: At a dance at Duquesne and—Friday night dance they had. I don't know if they still have those or not? Used to be in the gym.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) I don't think so. Yeah, I don't think they do.

Cronin: You know, right down on Boyd Street there? That was the gym [ed. note: Father Hehir's gymnasium, now the Rangos School of Health Sciences].

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: It's not now. That was—we played ball there—

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: —in that gym and now there's a library across from that, isn't there? That building? [ed. note: Referring to the current School of Law, which is the site of the former library]

DeFries: I'm trying to think.

Cronin: It was a library at one time.

DeFries: Yeah, it's no longer. The library, yeah now is—

Cronin: Way up on the hill.

DeFries: On the main part of campus, yeah. (laughs)

Cronin: Well, that's where we met, it was a Friday night dance. And my wife was a—went to [St. Paul's] Cathedral High School [ed. note: Now Oakland Catholic High School] and they—she and her cousin used to come to those dances and sometimes I'd go, sometimes I wouldn't. And it was a Friday night dance and [we] met and then we dated after that and then—I bet for about two years—and we were engaged in about a year afterwards and we married—that was in 1949, I guess—fifty-one we were

married. And, as I say, it was—it was great, the things they had—Tamburitzans, you could go to that, and things you could do on campus. We didn't go downtown too much. On the weekend maybe we went into a bar or something; not as much, not as much. Some went more than they should, couldn't make it back up the hill, (DeFries laughs) but anyway, so that's how that started.

[01:12:05]

And then the—whenever we were married and had our first child, it was a tremendous adjustment, naturally. And then at work, there was always a series of—I was going to say, it was—your whole life is a series of adjustments. It's how you make those adjustments, how you cope with setbacks and how you—there are negative things that happen as far as going into—when I left teaching, that was an adjustment. I liked teaching, but I couldn't make any—wasn't making—I was working at another job. Actually, I was working in insurance and I was going to graduate school to Pitt [University of Pittsburgh] and then lived in Oakland and traveled to Oakmont, which is a drive down the Allegheny River and in bad weather and things like that, but I—and I was coaching, that took time. And I went to an insurance job, which had an office downtown. So that—of course you had to be not only—you had to be young to do that because it was—you didn't do much sleep—didn't sleep much in those days. So anyway, at one point, I thought, if I can find a place to live in Oakmont—we didn't live in—we lived in Oakland, not in Oakmont—if I can find a place to live in Oakmont, I will stay and teach. Really, I enjoyed it, liked it and still would've liked, and—but I couldn't—and I couldn't—couldn't afford to buy out there, even couldn't find a place to rent. So then that's how I got into industry, MSA.

[01:13:47]

And I went in—and went into training there and I went—worked a—well, I worked for twenty—thirty-six years—but I went in training as an office manager and then into territory and these are all adjusting now—adjustments. And we moved six times—moved a family six times, while I was with MSA and I kiddingly say, I was either a troubleshooter or a troublemaker (DeFries laughs) moving that much, but they were always advancements. And then—except it's funny how, again, you adjusted to different things in life, but I worked there at the Cleveland [Ohio]—went into Cleveland as an office manager. Went up to Syracuse as a—then a sales engineer, which I was not an engineer, but they called it sales engineer in the beginning and then they changed that because I guess that was a misrepresentation. We weren't engineers. And then we worked up in Syracuse, then came into Johnstown [Pennsylvania]—that's when we got into mining—adjusted, and then into Pittsburgh as an assistant mining manager, big adjustment because there's a lot of politics. Then I got to be in manager mining; did that for about ten, eleven years. Then I went back into managing, into a district during—remember the Three Mile Island [ed. note: A partial meltdown of a reactor occurred on March 28, 1979 at Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania]?

DeFries: Yes.

Cronin: Nineteen-ninety—nineteen—

DeFries: Seventy—

Cronin: Ninety—

DeFries: Was that in the seventies? Or is that—

Cronin: Oh, I'm sorry, '79, 1979.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: Yeah, '79. So made some changes and moved about. We moved six times anyway, moved the family six times. And time went on and then when I finished my work, I came back to Pittsburgh and that was, again, a big adjustment because we had actually had sold, I think, three or four homes. Johnstown we sold a home; Syracuse, New York, sold a home; Pittsburgh we sold a home. And then we got into—I went into a—one of the last times we come back into Pittsburgh, but—because the family was all finished school and married or either finished college—so we went into an—interest rates in those years, when I came back, were around 12 percent on property, on real estate. So we said, “Well, we won't buy right now,” but we had owned three or four different homes—five different homes—four different homes. Anyway, so we got into a townhouse and—up in Westmont. I'm sorry, Westmont was outside of Johnstown—up in Wexford; Wexford, Pennsylvania. Now this was just temporary until things settled down because I had a—that was back in 1982. So I had about eight—I wasn't thinking about retirement, to be honest with you. Retirement never entered into my mind. I was enjoying what I was doing, so why retire? And at one time at MSA, you didn't—you weren't forced to retire, then I got into it. They wanted—before it was over, they wanted me to go early (laughs) and I didn't do it, but anyway, I go back in '82, so we went into a townhouse and I rented it. People say, “Why would you rent?” and I said, “It's just temporary.” You know how many years we were there? Thirty-three years.

DeFries: Oh my goodness.

[01:17:23]

Cronin: Just temporary. (DeFries laughs) We went from five hundred and fifty [dollars] a month rental, to one thousand four hundred and fifty [dollars] I think it is a month, before we came here. We came here in December of last year and now, we own here. It's different, a little bit different, but anyway, the reason that we stayed there so long [is] everything, all maintenance was done. We were in—everything was right at hand, all shopping, churches, school, everything we needed was right there. [It] was in Hickory Hills, was where it was. So anyway, went on year after year after year. We looked at other places, tried different things, there was always something, whether it was the location or whether it was something that wasn't right and so it got to the point then, where due to health, was really the reason. I had too many strokes and they said you better get out of these, all the steps. Well, it was true. So anyway, we found this and made the change and I kiddingly say, “We were only there temporarily,” but it was thirty-three years and—but things do change. Just the way it worked out. We didn't—we enjoyed it, everything was convenient, shopping. In fact, the area, they call it McCandless Crossing now, I don't know how many new restaurants, four or five new restaurants, a new theater, late—all those late model

theaters with the stadium type chairs and all this—and everything you could expect, but yet because of health, there was—not the right place to be. So then we made the switch to here—here in Carnegie, or in Cloverleaf, and I said—a sign said you had to be fifty-five or older to be a resident here. I kiddingly say, “We just made the cut,” (both laugh) because we—it has been so far very pleasant and they have a lot of activity here. They have what they call a clubhouse, so you can go and take—take lessons in different things, they have a library, they have a small fitness room, which I don’t go there very much. I used to go to fitness every day, five days a week. I used to, when I was at—

DeFries: Wow.

Cronin: —Wexford, but I was able to go down, drive. I’m not driving as much anymore. I’m driving my wife crazy, but that’s about it. (DeFries laughs) But anyway, it’s—it’s been nice and the people are very nice. The people—some of them are here since, maybe, fifteen years. That’s pretty long because it’s pretty much over fifty-five when you can come in here. And—and the properties are nice, they’re all cared for. The activities are great, you can go to something twice a day if you want to. If you know, [inaudible] trip—they have a transportation. We haven’t used it that much, but anyway, there’s a library up in the clubhouse and people that are—different groups get together, play cards.

DeFries: It’s a nice community.

Cronin: Nice community atmosphere and a lot of—always a lot of activity, especially now. It’ll be around Halloween there’ll be things in October. But, they been—in around the holiday—we’ve been here for the holidays. We come in here, believe it or not, on the fourth of December, which is a strange time, but there was a—this was available and closed on—we closed right before that, middle of December—I think it was the thirteenth of November, but moved in in December. And actually, everything went fine, it couldn’t be better I don’t think.

DeFries: That’s great.

Cronin: Yeah, we enjoy it. Nice people and actually the neighbors are—they—they—you move in and you get to know them and they have their things to do and we have our things to do and that’s the way you like it. You know that if you wanted to call—had to call them, you could do it and they know that too. And so it’s been a pleasant experience and we’ve been in here now just about eight months, not a year yet. It’ll be a year in December, so that’s—

DeFries: So that’s still new, still—

Cronin: Still new, yeah.

DeFries: A new experience. (laughs)

Cronin: Yeah, yeah. And we—we’ve been, Shirley’s been taking part in—she plays cards, she played cards before. She’s been in book club and they have a meeting once a month or something like that and they discuss books and things. She likes to read. I

read, but I read mostly newspaper, magazines, and I'll read—I don't read nonfiction, I read mostly—I mean, I don't—I read nonfiction, not fiction.

DeFries: Not fiction.

[01:22:57]

Cronin: Just something that's enjoyable. And that's about it, but what it boils down to as far as the present time, it's been nice—family—oh, I have two, a son and a daughter. One lives in Imperial [Pennsylvania], Jack, and another who lives—Beth, who lives in Hickory Heights, she has a townhouse. So they were real happy that we came here because that way they didn't have to travel all the way to Wexford, which is about forty-five minutes away. So—and they come in and do things together and we're going to be going to my sister's, Helen's, birthday this Saturday at the Sunrise [of Upper St. Clair], over in South Hills Village. It's right near the South Hills Village [Mall].

DeFries: Okay, yes.

Cronin: She's been there three years now, but she will be 100 years old.

DeFries: And she was the army nurse?

Cronin: She was the army nurse, Helen. And you see her, she'll say, "I'm perfect. I feel like I'm nineteen years old. I eat three meals a day and more if I can get it. I sleep like a baby." Now she doesn't say what I say, "Sleep like a baby, I wake up every hour crying." (laughs) but anyway, she says, "I sleep like a baby," but when you leave her, she doesn't remember you were there. She's in that, what they were saying, early dementia, but now it's total dementia. Now I don't think it's quite Alzheimer's, but she's approaching that. But she's healthy and she's content and we'll go and see her and she'll be thankful and go on about it, but she won't remember it then. It's kind of—it is sad, but that's what—that's things that happen in life.

DeFries: How much older—oh Helen, so she's nine years older than you?

Cronin: She's ninety—she's nine years older than me.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: Yeah.

[01:24:55]

DeFries: Now when you—she was stationed in New Guinea, also you had said?

Cronin: Yeah, she was with Hollandia for a while, but she was always a little bit ahead—see she was there a little ahead of me. She ended up in Manila [Luzon, Philippines].

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: And I was in—on Waiti [Bay, New Zealand] and Samar [Philippines] and was in a town called Tacloban [Leyte, Philippines]. Ormoc [Leyte, Philippines] was a little town, but I was more south of her. We communicated, but we—in those days you couldn't tell where you were, you had to—you couldn't identify. You had to be—you could give a signal and so on because everything you wrote was censored; everything you wrote out was censored. And so, we knew—had a pretty good idea because I was—I never did—only time I went to Manila was when I was on my way home.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: I went up there in March of 1946.

DeFries: So you didn't see your sister when you were in the vicinity of each other?

Cronin: No.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: No, and she was in Australia and I was down there. I was north of Australia. In fact, they said to—what they called R&R [rest and recuperation], we were scheduled to go. It wasn't a definite schedule, but they were saying we would go there for R&R to Australia. Well, it turns out once the war ended, which was in like '45, all that R&R was wiped out. They said, "You stay where you are," (laughs) and I never got to Australia, but she had been in Australia, Helen had been. And she ended up—she was in Hollandia and then she was in New Guinea. So our paths were—she was always a little bit ahead of me. See, she came in in '42 and left in '45. I came in forty—late '43 and left in '46, so being that much younger. (coughs) But anyway, she came out and went to—she was a nurse naturally when she was in, but she went to Pitt then and got her degree and she ended up an anesthetist and worked at Veterans [Administration] Hospital in Oakland until she retired. And that was in—she was I think sixty-two or maybe even only sixty when she retired. But she's been in very good health for the most—lived in green—Greentree [Pennsylvania]. She lives in Greentree and sold—sold her own home and went into Vanadium Woods [Village], which is down on Vanadium Road there, which is a USPM—what do you call it—USP [sic, UPMC] facility today. But when she was independent—and let's see—a senior center, senior area—and she was there independent, very much so, for sixteen years and then—now she's been in this—what do you call it—Sunrise [of Upper St. Clair], which is total [care]. She's in the—in the upper level care. I guess you'd call it care of—of a nursing home, pretty much, but for three years. She moved in there in December of nineteen—2013. So she's been there thirteen—three years and—but the other one, she was very independent. Had her own car, she had a bad accident in that and her—driving a car. She had an accident in Mount Lebanon [Pennsylvania]. It was a really bad one. She says her brakes went bad, but I think she hit the—happens a lot—accelerator instead of the brakes, but anyway, it was—it was a bad one. Nobody was killed, she was injured, but not—she almost ended up in a swimming pool.

DeFries: Oh my goodness.

Cronin: Yeah.

DeFries: Well, thank goodness that she didn't.

Cronin: She could swim, but not very well. (both laugh) You don't swim out of a car very well. But she's—that's what we're going to do. Then go to have her—have a celebration and it's not going to be a large celebration, but I have a niece—remember I was telling you about Marie's daughter? She lives over there in Upper—and she lives in Upper St. Clair, where you live. So she is—goes in to see her and so forth and keeps—but, you talk to Helen, she doesn't even remember that she was there. It's sad. In fact, she said to me once when she first moved in there, I went over to see her and she said, "You look like one of my brothers." I said, "Yeah Helen, I am," but I said—and I told her and then she said like she did. But, now it's gotten to the point where she—you go in, I call—I call her and I'll get her; she doesn't—doesn't have a phone, but I'll get her. They call him the lead, that person that's the lead on that floor will go and get her, then she'll get on the phone and I'll tell her who I am and this and that, ask her how's she doing, "Oh fine, I just feel everything's great," and this. So she knows we're coming, but she doesn't remember till we get there, it's one of those situations. That's what old age will do, but she's—she predicted she'd live to be a hundred. She predicted that.

DeFries: That's amazing.

Cronin: And I think she's going to make it. (both laugh) It's the nineteenth. She will be one hundred on the nineteenth of this month [October].

DeFries: That's great.

Cronin: We're going to see her on the fifteenth. That's on a Saturday.

DeFries: That's really nice.

Cronin: Yeah.

DeFries: That's great.

Cronin: Yeah.

DeFries: I think that's so interesting that you were both stationed in the same area—

Cronin: We were.

DeFries: —and kind of just missed each other. Do you mind if I ask you some more about when you were stationed in the Philippines?

Cronin: Not at all, go right ahead.

DeFries: Can you tell me some more about, like as a radioman, what—I know you did—you said you did Morse code and signals, but can you tell me more about your duties and what that meant?

[01:31:02]

Cronin: Sure. Well actually, I was trained in what they call CW, carrier wave, which is Morse code, and also was trained in lights, signaling and lights, and semaphore, which is using flags. And we—I had a lot of that in Scouts [Boy Scouts of America], by the way. I forgot to mention that, I used to be a Scout when I was a kid in grade school. Anyway, so I—they—and then we had what they call theory, which was—had to do with equipment really, transmitters and receivers. And that's what communication is, transmitting and receiving and how to set up on a frequency, how to change frequencies. And you're in a radio room, usually a shift was usually about eight hours and you go on—and on duty eight hours and then you'd be off eight hours and go on eight hours, so you'd be on through the night sometimes. But anyway, most of it was what they call CW, carrier wave, taking code and the code was like five characters, letters, and then it would be broken down and decoded. But you would have various speeds and they had like—you could have a key where you operated with your hand and then they had other types that—where you—a key where you went like this way [taps on table], but with a hand. This key was fast—faster. So you—and then you were judged on that, how much you could take, how fast you could take it, how—we took in training—we were—had to—they called it mills instead of typewriters. And then we had theory and code and we had all the other communications, voicemail—a voice communicator—voicemail—voice communications. There's procedures for all of those. And whenever you got on board ship, you had pretty much all—mostly it was CW, carrier wave and we took what they called Fox [ed. note: The Fox Schedule, a continuous stream of communication broadcast from naval headquarters to all ships in a fleet], which was communication, mutant—very rapid, very fast communications by carrier wave or Morse code—and then you recorded that and turned that message in to the officer in charge. But you were on duty and usually, as I said, normally eight hours; you didn't get many breaks. And it was earphones and—but whenever you were off duty, you had things you had—you had station—you had places you had to be on a ship, on a boat. You had duties on a boat. And—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) What were your duties on—on a—

[01:34:04]

Cronin: Well, just going over equipment like—depending on whether or not you had—whatever you were assigned to. I was actually assigned on one as a litter bearer—make sure you had all of your equipment if something happened that you were ready to go and whenever something—they got a notice, a signal, and the call and—but that was, you had something to do, you never got bored, I can tell you that. You were never bored. You were always on the go, doing things. Time went very quickly and then, of course, [you] had time to have—eat and had breakfast and you had—now there, we did have three meals on those. I was on a staff ship, by the way, on the USS *Hilo* [AGP-2]. It was a converted—oh is it that, yeah [DeFries shows Cronin a photo of USS *Hilo*], a converted yacht. I don't know why I was assigned to that temporary company, but it was again to take code. It was very rapid code.

DeFries: What part of your time in the Philippines were you assigned to the—to the *Hilo*? Was this the entire time?

Cronin: I was probably—I went in on that ship two days before Christmas, nineteen forty—

DeFries: Forty-four?

Cronin: Hm?

DeFries: Forty-four?

[01:35:13]

Cronin: Forty-four, two days before Christmas [December 23, 1944] and I was on there probably three months. Then I went into this convoy on Leyte Gulf [Philippines], but this was on the—in Leyte—Tacloban, Leyte—and it was a staff ship, all mostly officers on that ship, commissioned officers. So the food was unbelievable. I went from C-rations on—on the islands I ate C-rations, to fresh food on a—on a ship. That was the difference between being on a ship. So I was on the ship sometimes and I was on PT boats. There you had refrigeration, see, wherever you had refrigeration. PT boats you had fairly good food, but on the islands you had like, not particularly good food—rations. So I was—I had a—and there, I can't to this day tell you why I was told to do this or do that, these are just the orders you took. And I was—but I was on there and took rather rapid—they called it Fox, F-O-X. And that's funny because Fox Station now on—nothing like that, (both laugh) but it was very rapid and some of them were very high priority, urgent messages and you could tell by the signal on it on the address, when it was addressed, whether it was urgent or high priority or just routine. And if it was high priority or urgent, you got out of there—the message—out of that shack or radio shack, quickly. You knew to do that. And—but anyway, I did that for about, I would say, three months. I don't remember the actual dates, but I went in two days before Christmas and I was—it was probably spring when I went up into Ormoc on this—it was on a—I went in there—it was on an army boat, which they called boat—in the navy it was a ship—and then I was on a cutter—Coast Guard Corvette and I was on oil carriers and—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) This is all after *Hilo*?

Cronin: Pardon—pardon me?

DeFries: This all after being on the *Hilo*?

Cronin: Yeah, I was on the *Hilo* pretty early—

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: —before I went up into the Philippines because this is at—that was at Tacloban, which is in the south part of Leyte—Leyte Gulf and—but mostly officers, commissioned officers, so you get pretty good food, and then on the islands and then on to tenders. And many of the tenders, like converted LSV [Vehicle Landing Ships], LSC's [sic, LCS, Landing Craft Support]—LSV, landing craft—landing craft tenders, which had that front that would go down, but these were converted to PT boat tenders.

DeFries: Okay.

Cronin: *Willoughby* [AGP-9] was one of the names, *Willoughby*. Then I was them and then on this ship, on the islands, and then on the PT boats. Most of the PT boat though was voice communication, it wasn't a—

DeFries: Morse code?

Cronin: —wasn't—couldn't have been. There were messages, coded messages, but it was all on voice—on TV—or on CW, carrier wave, Morse code. And then—so the town of Ormoc, old town of Ormoc, which was completely leveled from—bombarded by the ships out at sea. That was before we took over, that's while the Japanese were still there and they were still around us. We had—we had what they called a perimeter. You were not allowed—some did get out, but got into real trouble, took chances like that and I never did; that was risky. They could've been killed or what they—what happened, they almost were killed. They were pretty close, yeah. And one fellow was on duty, that was supposed to be on duty with me in the radio shack, and here he got out and they brought him back in a stretcher. He lived, but he was almost—he was close. Some of the—some of the Filipinos got them—or Japanese got them and—but he—they made it back—some made it—I think that's it, a Filipino brought him—the Filipinos brought him back, the Japanese got him. That was it. Can you imagine though, leaving your base? This was at Ormoc, too. Anyway, we went there, then to Samar. I got up into Luzon [Philippines], but just the total end of my time, that was merely to—to leave. I left from Manila.

DeFries: Oh, you left from Manila? After—okay.

Cronin: Yeah, but I was on the other islands, Samar or on Leyte. Borneo wasn't too far away. Remember Borneo? (laughs)

DeFries: Yes.

Cronin: I never was on Borneo, but I was close. I was close.

DeFries: What was—what was it like while you were on the islands? What kind of things were you doing when you were off ship and you were on the islands? (cuckoo clock chimes)

[01:40:33]

Cronin: Tried to stay sane, you know. You had various physical activities. We never—I never played cards. I wasn't a card player. Played basketball because I played high school basketball and I played—this—I can still remember this was a building with the walls [that] were pretty much knocked down and there were pretty much holes in it, but you had to be careful, but I played basketball on a course—basketball court, which was a building almost totally demolished except for the concrete bottom, but there were holes, so you had to be careful. I remember I turned my ankle and it really swelled up on me and I had to go on—they didn't take me off duty, but I was—it got swollen, but I was able to—I wasn't on a stretcher or anything. I mean on a—what do you call them?

DeFries: A cot? Or a—oh I'm sorry, crutches?

Cronin: Crutches. (laughs)

DeFries: Yes. (laughs)

Cronin: Crutches. I wasn't on crutches, but I was able—(clears throat) but I twisted—stepped into a hole. My ankle went and—but that's—that was some of the activity. And then we did our running on our own, just to stay in shape, (coughs) conditioning. (coughs) He was in radio—what's his name? Not Sullivan—John Day. He was from Denver [Colorado] (clears throat) and he was a corpsman and played football out at San Francisco [California]. So we used to get together and run whenever we could, just wherever we could go, just run, but stay within the perimeter. You didn't dare go out of that, but some went out and they really got into—I mean, they could've been killed. I mean, they would've been shipped back or buried there, I guess. But we didn't, we stayed within the perimeter and did our own physical activity. And he and I used to run when we could and it was never a level—you weren't on a track or anything like that. You—just over terrain, but it was good, it kept you in shape, kept you—we all—on any island you slept with—on a cot, but the cot had net to keep out the mosquitoes and that was all that was dangerous. We took Atabrine [ed. note: quinacrine, an anti-malarial medication]. We didn't take quinine, we took Atabrine to prevent the—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Malaria?

[01:43:12]

Cronin: Malaria. (clears throat) And we took salt tablets, those were the two things we took, but it got to the point you couldn't stand salt tablets anymore, you know, you got just—and we—but we always took the Atabrine. It always made it look like a greenish-brown. We were tan, but it had a yellowish to it, tinted. It was tinted. (laughs) We were tinted when we come out of there. But anyway, we had to have that because of—because of malaria, dangers of malaria. We had first—what they call first—what do you call it? Ship's company and sick bay—we had sick bay and any time you got a headache, problem like that, you come and any doctor there I think and maybe a corpsman would take care of you. And I did go with the ankle and I also had dysentery and what was the other? There was two things I had and I said that to the doctor, he said—he said, "I don't usually agree with patients," but he said, "I think you're right." (both laugh) Just dysentery and food poisoning, I think that's what I had.

DeFries: Oh my goodness.

Cronin: Two things. So I lost a few pounds. (laughs) That'll keep you in shape. That'll keep your—keep your weight down. (laughs)

DeFries: Yeah, that will. (laughs) My goodness.

Cronin: If you have it for a long time, well, it can be fatal.

DeFries: How long did it take you to get over having dysentery?

Cronin: (speaking at the same time) Probably about a week.

DeFries: Oh, okay.

Cronin: Yeah. I never was off duty, though. Even with that ankle, I wasn't off duty.

DeFries: They couldn't spare anybody to be off duty?

Cronin: They couldn't—nobody to replace me. (both laugh) That's one place where you didn't worry about somebody taking your job. (laughs)

DeFries: True.

Cronin: There weren't too many backups.

DeFries: (laughs) What were—not to—I don't want to interrupt you if you were going to—

Cronin: Go ahead. Go right ahead.

DeFries: Can you—were you involved in the—the main landing in—in Leyte Gulf, like the—October twenty-third to the twenty-sixth, when the—the Battle of Leyte Gulf took place? Were you in that or did you come after that?

[01:45:21]

Cronin: I was—I was in a convoy on the Leyte Gulf when that was going on. I was—because we were attacked in convoy by Japanese torpedo planes and the big ships in that convoy were what they called Liberty ships and they were mostly army. They were jammed and I was on that one, whatever—a Liberty ship was hit and the torpedo planes come in like that and hit, drop their torpedoes onto the slowest ship they could get. We were on a fast ship, but anyway—and stayed with that ship that got hit and took up survivors and—as many as we could—and then stayed with them all night. And then the Japanese torpedo planes came back, but we then had—we called for coverage, air coverage. The PT—oh, they were 703s, they were P—not PT boats, but they were planes—

DeFries: Aircraft carriers?

Cronin: Fighter planes—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Oh, okay.

Cronin: —that came—US fighter planes knocked them out of the air. And then—this was like the next morning. So then we—we stayed along with these—as many as we could get, these survivors, and then—and then once that was clear—now to this day, I don't know what happened to that Liberty ship because it was—couldn't move. It was just sitting there, a sitting target.

[01:46:58]

But then we went on up and into the Philippines, up into Leyte. That's where we went up—it was a place called Tacloban and then we were there for a period of time.

Then I went to—we went to Samar and then—mainly those two islands, main islands, but Tacloban was where I was mostly active. And we were still—there was still bombing going on while I was there and we were within a perimeter and we were staying within that because [of] guns and kind of cannons going off and if you see those buildings—I have some pictures—there were big holes in like churches and places like that, just knocked off. But, so I was actually on the—this was '44, 1944, and the war didn't end until '45. So I was there about, I would say, from fall of '44 to March of '45, so that would be about—about six months while the war was still going on.

DeFries: Those times when you were under attack—

Cronin: (speaking at the same time) Well, I was down in—down in Hollandia and New Guinea while the war was going on too.

DeFries: Oh okay. Oh okay.

Cronin: (speaking at the same time) So about a year.

DeFries: Okay, okay. So after forty—so I was going—I'm sorry, I was going to first ask you, the times when you were under attack, how did you—how did you deal with that?

[01:48:20]

Cronin: Actually, you were so darn busy, we hit the—we had foxholes, we had to go down—down to the foxholes and just did—whatever the siren, whatever the signal was you followed it and even though you were on duty—like I was on—at the radio shack on duty, there would be a siren that'd go off, I stayed on duty, but if I was off duty and a siren went off, I hit the foxhole just like everybody else. And there was some shooting going on, on the island, I was very close to it. Brick—some bullets—bullets ricocheted very near me. Now, where they came from and where the—I have in there where the commanding—the communications officer was killed. I was part of the—retrieved his body and I saw his body and it was—he was hit at pretty close quarters and where that came from, whether it was from a plane that come in or what—but he was the only fatality on that ship and as I mention in there, he was buried at sea. I—I still remember, any time I hear *Taps* I think of that because that was so imprinted in your mind. It was such a sad situation. A young—he was a young officer from California, Constantine was his name, lieutenant, and he was killed, but on that ship and—but it had to be from a plane that came over because we just—actually, you had a place to be—you had—you were on guard duty at certain times, but whenever there was an attack you had to be on—you had a certain duty. I was a litter—litter-bearer, pick somebody up by—the wounded, you pick them up and I picked him—we picked him—there was two of us, picked him up. Well, he was dead. We just covered him and that certainly made an imprint that will never go away. But the thing about—I still see that when he was buried at sea. You've seen that movie, the things like that, but this was the actual thing. And then they play *Taps*, the bugler played *Taps*. It was something—something that made an impression that you never, never, ever, ever forget, you know what I mean.

[01:50:40]

You know, you don't want to dwell on things like that, naturally. It's like anything—I keep saying that you shouldn't be living in the past or dwelling in the past, but you should draw on the past, draw on your experiences in the past and try and—because they were good experiences and you can't be thinking only about the negative. That's what I'm trying to say. If you think about the negative, then you're going to have a personality that nobody'd want to be around you. (laughs) You have to be pleasant. There's good things, a lot of pleasant things that happened, but you can't—you don't—you don't forget the unpleasant, but you don't dwell on it or you continue to live in it, live in the past. Live in the future—live in the present and look forward to the future, that's the important thing. Things are going to get—I would always—I think, my mother, I guess—things will get better, just do your best you can and things will get better. That's what—I think that you learn that living through a depression, a real depression, [ed. note: The Great Depression]. You're depressed, we've all been depressed, but this is a—an economic depression in the—in the twenties [sic, thirties] and I do remember those. It has made an impression on me that—to be thankful for what you have, be pleasant, and not be negative all the time and looking at the—being—spreading down the things that are negative. Be pleasant and up—uplifting, I guess is what I'm trying to say. That's important in life. To the younger generation, the younger people, and they have—although you might say they have—I'm speaking to you, the younger generation. (laughs) You might think that your life is a lot different than mine and it is, naturally, generation to generation to generation, but there was good in my generation and there were good experiences. There were good people, more so, and even today there's good people, there's good things going on, but there's more greed today, I think, and more people wanting financially to get ahead and think that's success, [that] financial success is success. It's a success, but that's not the only success. The only success is to live a life that you're helping others, being helpful to others, and that you get some real satisfaction. Actually—actually, you can go out and you have a good meal and you can go out and go up on a—on a trip someplace and enjoy it, but that's not the ultimate paradise. That's not the ultimate. The ultimate is being good to other people and helping other people and seeing that they have at least a chance and that's what, I think, is lost today. Not by everybody, but by a number of people that think that the most important thing is get ahead financially. Be the—be richer or have a nicer home or nicer this, nicer clothes. That's important, but it's not the only thing, it's—the only, the things that are really important is how you treat other people, how you help other people, and if you want real satisfaction, it isn't the satisfaction of having a good bank account. Real satisfaction is you help somebody that needed help, you know what I mean. That—that's true and if more people saw that and felt that way, I don't think we would be having any of the problems we're having to—I'm not saying that we didn't have problems. (laughs) We had problems back in the Depression, certainly, but there were more people helping people then, at least that was my experience. You want to know that those that were the elite, during the Depression—and think of this—were people like teachers, people like professions that were fortunate enough that, like—like a nurse, that had a job. Now I'm not saying they made a tremendous amount of money and then the teachers didn't either, but they had the satisfaction of doing something that was helping others that needed help and I think that's important. And so they were really well off, I mean, their outlook on life was a lot different from those who were thrown out of a job and jumped out of a window and committed suicide because they didn't have a—they lost their—

DeFries: Their money.

Cronin: —money, their—their worldly things, like bank accounts and stuff and a lot of people who were in—I don't want to get into politics because if they were—had that experience, they would absolutely have a different outlook today than those that are running for office, I think. You know what I mean. Now, I'm not saying they're all—they're all bad or all good, not good, I'm just saying they'd have a different outlook and be sincere and not just know—a lot of talk and no action. There's a difference between just talk and then action and as they used to say actions speak louder than words. (both laugh)

DeFries: That is true.

Cronin: Yeah.

DeFries: That is true. Thank you for sharing—

Cronin: You're very welcome.

DeFries: —all of this. Well I—I know we're coming close to the end of our—our time.

Cronin: I haven't been watching my watch. (both laugh) Oh, we're doing fine.

DeFries: Okay, I don't want to take up your whole afternoon. (laughs)

Cronin: Shirley is enjoying it. (both laugh)

DeFries: Okay. As—you mind if I—do you mind if I ask you a few more questions?

Cronin: (speaking at the same time) Not at all, go right ahead.

DeFries: Okay. Well, I guess—I, when—when you came home from—from the Philippines and you said your brother had met you at the trolley station, what was that feeling like to now be discharged and come home? Were—did you feel relief? Did you just pick up your life and continue on? How—what was that like?

[01:56:59]

Cronin: You want to know what my exact comments was to my brother when I got off the trolley and we met? I just said to him, “Boy I'm glad that's over. I'm glad that's over,” and I was. You know, one of the things before we were discharged—and that was at Bainbridge, Maryland we were—had interviews with recruiters, I guess you call them. I wouldn't—didn't know—didn't know that they were recruiters and they wanted you to, what they call, sign over and stay in the service. And my—I said my experience—I appreciated my experience while I was in the navy. I did learn some things while I was in the navy, but what I did learn is that I wanted to be able to make my own decisions and I didn't want to have to be concerned that what I was doing was not in agreement with somebody that was in command or over me, and that's what it was. And sometimes—I'll tell you this, to be honest, they took advantage of that command just because they had a higher rank than you and that to me is not proper—is not correct. Whether it was because someone was older, maybe a little older, and had a little more time because you had to be at a certain length of time,

take certain tests, to get a promotion. And they were—they were, I thought, very slow. I actually went from an apprentice seaman, to a seaman second class, to a petty officer third class, to a petty officer second class. That was in like—I was in under three years, but it seemed slow to me. (laughs) But you—and you had to—they—you were tested, but it just seemed to me that there was—it boiled down to not class discrimination or anything like that, it was more like, “I know more than you, I’m your superior.” And even in your daily work, you don’t like to have somebody that’s hanging over like they were your superior. Maybe they are, maybe they aren’t. In most cases, I didn’t think they were superior, (laughs) but I couldn’t let them know that. And it was—it just didn’t seem like a normal life and I said I would rather get out and make my own—have an opportunity to make my own decisions. If I make a mistake, I made a mistake.

[01:59:36]

But I did want to get—in fact this one—I’ll tell you the truth. This John Day I just spoke about from Denver, he was older than me probably by about—I was just nineteen then. I was eighteen when I went in, but I was nineteen and he was probably in his later twenties and real nice, John Day. And I remember him telling me this, “Dan,” he said, “Go out and get a good education.” I’ll tell you the truth, he said, “Catholic education,” that’s what he said. He went to the University of San Francisco and [he said], “I know you’ll go,” and I said, “I’ll do the best I can,” but he—that was his advice to me. When you—“If you were fortunate enough to get out of this, finish your education. It’s important,” but he said, “Catholic education,” and I—I followed his advice.

DeFries: Would you like me to pause it?

Cronin: No. But anyway, that’s what I—that’s the way I ended and when I met George, my brother, at the trolley station my comment, “I’m glad that’s over. I’m just happy that’s over,” that’s all.

DeFries: What makes you feel emotional right now?

Cronin: Thinking about people that you—you worked [with]. It’s very vivid now. I haven’t felt this way probably for many, many years. But he’s—he’s dead. He gave me good advice, which I tried to take, but there were others that were different, that—that had other ideas, but he didn’t. He was—he was actually killed in an accident. He wasn’t killed in the service. He was killed in an accident. I’d wrote to him after we—he lived in Denver and I wrote to him afterwards and one letter I got back or—his family told me that he had been in an automobile accident, was killed instantly. But I’m sure, he was a good man—wasn’t married. Now whether he married—and as I say he was like twenty-eight, I think, twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. John Day was his name. And then, I’m—I’m just thinking what—we used to go out and run together and you talk and he played football and I had been playing football, but he was older than me. And I don’t know that—I think he—whether he was finished at San Francisco University, I don’t remember, but I know he was a—a student there and very—he was a corpsman, he—he did first aid and all this and that. (laughs) He had a good sense of humor, but he had good advice too. That was—that’s what made—I guess made me emotional. I hadn’t thought that much for a long time. It’s been—well, I got out in 1946, how many years is that?

DeFries: That's—

Cronin: Quite a few.

DeFries: —seventy years.

Cronin: Seventy some years, yeah.

DeFries: My goodness.

[02:02:54]

Cronin: Those were good years. And there was a year after that—and I'll tell you the truth, the years at Duquesne, coming off those years [in the service] was the best thing that could happen to anyone, as far as adjusting. As you—I could've said I don't want to have anything more to do with school, I had enough of that. And I had some school in the navy, I was in school almost five months. That was very intense school and very competitive, by the way, and could've—but I—I thought of his—well, and my brother, too. George was at Duquesne and I—he was recommending Duquesne and then he ended up (laughing) leaving Duquesne and going to Cornell. But anyway, it was a—not an easy time and you could be—you could be swayed at that age. I was just eighteen going on nineteen when I went in and was in through my—I wasn't yet twenty-one. I was twenty-one that following July when I came out, so—but I was in to close to three—about two years, two and a half years, I guess. So—and there was a—a lot of—[Shirley enters the room]

Mrs. Cronin: Excuse me, would you like some more tea?

DeFries: Oh, no thank you.

Cronin: What is—what?

DeFries: Oh, she just asked me about the tea.

Cronin: Oh, (both laugh) I'm talking, not—I'm talking, not drinking, hon, thank you. Might be a signal. (laughs) (ice clinking in glass) But anyway, that's the reason I felt that way.

DeFries: Oh, thank you for sharing that. Sounds like—

Cronin: Pardon me?

DeFries: Thank you for sharing that. It sounds like he was a good friend to you.

[02:04:42]

Cronin: Yeah, and it just came back to me. He was a good friend. He was—he was—took a liking—took a natural liking to each other. And he was older than me by seven or eight years (clears throat) and he was a good man. He was a good—just a good man, and that's all he did. I'll tell you one experience we had together. As I said, the

churches in that area were pretty much—in Ormoc, in the Philippines—were pretty much knocked down, but we went and we found a church—he and I did—and it was rainy season and I can still remember this road going—you knew it was like this and mud and water and we went and waded through that. And we went to Mass at a Filipino church and we hadn't—didn't have a chaplain with us. Sometimes you did—if you were on a ship you did, if you were in a group or a crew, but we didn't. And we walked to this island and got on and went into this church and there was a Mass. And we worked our way back and I thought—I remember that very vividly. If you—there's times when you ought to be thankful that you're here in this country and be able to go to Mass if you—if you want to. But we always looked to see—in fact, even here, whenever we're looking at—like I said—not Our Mother of Sorrows, but holy—Holy Innocence. No, that's in—

DeFries: I'm sorry, I'm not familiar with the churches that are near here.

Cronin: I'll tell you, which one it is in a minute. I had the same nuns in grade school. Elizabeth Ann Seton, that's it, Elizabeth Ann Seton. But anyway, there's an [Our Lady of the] Immaculate Conception there in the Philippines that we got to, but we weren't able to get to a regular mass, but we did go and we had a difficult time getting over there and a difficult time getting back, but was makes an—and he was the reason I would say—he wanted to go and we did. There weren't many of us that—I don't know whether—I do know that he was there and we—kind of a struggle to get there, but it was important to get there, that's the way I felt. That's why I remember him, I guess.

DeFries: What was that Mass like? Was it different from home?

Cronin: No, no. Very much the same, very much the same. I don't know if it was Immaculate Conception or not, but it was a mainly Filipino [church], but the priest, I can remember, spoke in English. Now not as—not the way you and I can speak, but you could understand him. It made an impression and, of course, those people—just imagine them being in those straits, under that condition, but they were—they were—I don't remember now how crowded it was, but there were Filipinos there. It was a Filipino church. So we did, we went there and—and it made a tremendous impression, not only how we got there, but when we were there and how we got back (laughs) because we left our camp, our—where we were. It was like—Ormoc was a little town, but it was flattened. It was—there was a church there, but it was nothing but just walls, yeah. Anyway, that's the way it was and that's—that certainly makes an impression. And there was—wherever, on bases now, when you visit [Naval Station] Treasure Island [San Francisco, California] and at difference bases and Bedford at the—I was at Bedford Springs Hotel, by the way. I lived there for five months. You say, boy that's good duty, that duty.

DeFries: At the Keystone's Radio School?

[02:08:54]

Cronin: At Keystone Radio School. I was at—and we—we go there every so often. It's still Bedford Springs. In fact, we were just there couple weeks ago and it's owned by—it's a—a chain of restaurants, but it's beautiful now. And it was nice then, but it—it deteriorated. You know, there were Japanese prisoners there after we left?

DeFries: I didn't realize that.

Cronin: Yeah, they made that—kept Japanese prisoners there.

DeFries: Wow.

Cronin: So that wasn't bad—bad imprisonment. (laughs) Although, it wasn't like a luxury hotel. I think when we—there were four of us in a small room in—when I was at Bedford Springs. Four of us in a room.

DeFries: Wow.

Cronin: Two double beds, but I'll tell you—we enjoyed—when you look back on it, you enjoyed it. And we had a lot of fun, lot of activity, and kept your—it kept you busy. Oh, I'm sorry. [Shirley enters the room]

Mrs. Cronin: It's almost 4 o'clock.

Cronin: (gasps) Wow.

pause in recording

DeFries: Okay. Well, I apologize. From where we left—we were talking about the church in Ormoc—

Cronin: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, yeah, Ormoc.

DeFries: And that sounds like a really special—

Cronin: (speaking at the same time) I think it was the Immaculate Conception, there in Ormoc.

DeFries: Oh, okay. What stands out to you overall from your service? What—anything—what stands out to you the most in terms of just how you feel about it or the people or—what stands out to you from your service?

[02:10:32]

Cronin: Well see, I went in at eighteen and naturally I—five in the family already in service, so I had a pretty good idea of what service was like. I was a bit surprised when I went, I didn't actually volunteer to go into the navy. I was drafted, but I was drafted into the navy and that was a bit of a surprise. And then I had some—one brother who didn't pass—I was—there was nine of us in the family, seven boys and two girls, and out of them, eight were in the service, but two went in later, and the one that went in later was—didn't pass. I forget now what it was that he had—heart murmur; I think it was a heart murmur, yeah. But later they took him when they got desperate, I guess. Anyway, so I—that was—I had no thoughts about going into the navy. Now, going in there, I was—I was actually a bit excited because it was different. We didn't get that much to go out on a boat, ships and that, and I was—I had been involved in athletics, so it wasn't that big a deal. The training—the training wasn't, to me—wasn't that

difficult. You know, of course, it's the age too. Anyway, so, it was most new to me and I—I can't say, I won't say I enjoyed it because I didn't like the—don't mind the discipline. I know there's need for discipline. I didn't mind that at all, but you get a little bit—sometimes when somebody takes advantage of being in a position to give discipline, you know what I mean. So that I didn't care for. Went through the training, boot camp. Went through the training as far as communications and that was interesting, really, because in high school it was just—the courses you took—you took chemistry, you took different courses that didn't seem to have much relation, didn't hit you right now that it was going to be useful, that you were going to use it. You know what I'm saying? But there, when you—the things that they were teaching you, you were getting taught, you knew you were going to be using it. It was going to be something that would be a skill. You were learning a skill, almost like. So that five months I spent in training there was easy, I just enjoyed it.

[02:13:23]

And then another, most difficult training was when I went to Oceanside, California. It was a marine base [ed. note: Camp Pendleton]. And then it didn't matter to me, I had been in training, but it was very rigid training, physical, and I didn't expect it, but it didn't bother me. I just figured this is what they want, I'll give it—I'll take it. And I met some great people there. That's how I met John Day, by the way, in that training and then we ended up being in the same—he was in medical and I was in communications. And he was a strong man, I mean, he was a physically and mentally strong man and I'm not saying he was a perfect man, (laughs) but he was—and we clicked off pretty well. And he was older than me, he was about nine years older than me. Like—like my older brother, I guess I'd say. But anyway, went through that, and I didn't—I wasn't disappointed when I didn't—I don't know why I thought I could go into—I wanted—I put in for submarine, I told you that—and I don't know why, but I don't think I would have fit in the submarines, physically or mentally. (laughs) But it turned out I didn't, so that was the right choice. And whenever—when I was there, this—I was active in doing things, so that training was fit—fit right in.

[02:14:57]

So that didn't bother me. I'm sure some others—I—we had—I could tell you some stories that was really sad, some of those who couldn't adjust. You talk about homesickness or being physically unable to do certain things that they would require you to do. I will tell you those things that happened because—but it happened. And then when I got through that—and then even in going overseas, when I was assigned, it seemed I didn't have a problem adjusting. It just seemed like it was another step, another thing of—I looked at it that way. And I did learn a lot. You learn a lot about the positive things and learn a lot about the negative, and how to cope with both. You have to cope with positive things and negative things. It's not—it's just not all just the good things that you can take, you have to take the bad with the good, as they say. Anyway, we did that and then I went through and I didn't have any trouble, maybe a little bit, as far as interacting with others. I never—didn't have that—didn't have that problem at all and some did. Some were very backward or some were very reluctant to—could've been maybe, they thought they were more intelligent than—and this is demeaning or something. I don't know, but I never felt that way. I felt that you're going to have to get along and this is true of life, you have to get along with people. Even people that disagree with you. And you're going to find that in marriage, (both

laugh) but anyway, I did what I had to. I thought—but I enjoyed—this sounds strange to say I enjoyed it, but it was adjusting, adjusting, adjusting. A series of adjustments and that's what you find out in life. Life is a series of adjustments and some of them are good and some of them aren't. Some of them you take readily, easily, and others are difficult, but it's adjusting. Now, whenever we were talking about this, being in a certain branch or being in—experiencing certain things, it took adjustment to do that. The bad with the good and there are some good things and a lot of things that are negative. Positive and negative. So you just—you just hold on to the positive and get rid of the negative, that's all. Simple. That's life, that's life. (both laugh) And there's going to be things—I don't care who you are, I don't care how much money you have, I don't care how much education you have, you're going to have—to find times when something doesn't go the way you want it to go or the way somebody else wants you to go. So you—you adjust to that. You'll ride it out and I think I learned that there.

[02:18:08]

Wondered—when my father passed away when I was ten years old, that was adjusting. And I give my mother credit because she let us adjust and didn't—didn't abandon us. She could've abandoned us. She was only forty-eight years old, beautiful woman, but she didn't abandon us. She adjusted and saw that—and there was no favoritism. It didn't matter. Actually, as far as getting along in school, I had two brothers who were very outstanding in grade school and high school. One went on to college, the other didn't. One went on to college and ended up [receiving a] Purple Heart and all these other things, but the other because of obligations—he was older and had a family. He couldn't—after he got out of the service, couldn't go on and didn't go on. He would've—he would've done well if he could've gone on to school, but he—he was excellent in school and I talk about George, he was excellent in school, but he had other problems. He could be too—not too smart, but too—education—one who thinks education is so important. It is important, but it's not the only thing in life. There are a lot of other things in life, to live life and adjust to others and you have to be able to do that. And that's what some do and some don't. And that's what I learned, I think, that being in a large family, you had to adapt, be adaptive. And things don't go the way you want them to go, stay, hang in there and go with it because it will go the way you want to go if you are strong enough, you just go. And as far as education, very important, but it's not everything. It's understanding that we all have a purpose and we all have a life to live. We can't say how long it's going to be, we can't say how easy it's going [to be], how—as far as politicians they can—they all like to be very positive, but some of them aren't. Some of them get involved with things—so it was—they were all things that happen, but if you do the best you—always do the best you can and take whatever you have to work with, work with it, that's all. And as far as—now in my case, as far as longevity, I've had brothers died before they were seventy and a sister who died before she was forty, she was only thirty-two. I have a sister now who's going to be a hundred. So we have no control over that. Now you can say one's better off than the other, who knows? I don't know. Helen, that will be a hundred is (buzzing noise)—is that your buzzer? [DeFries' phone sound]

DeFries: Sorry.

Cronin: Now she's happy because—it's a different happy though. She is, you know. Things deteriorate and her mental deterioration has preceded her physical and—and that's not easy, not easy. Might happen to me, who knows? I don't know. Maybe you will, maybe you won't, but you can't—you can't predict and you can't be biased or be negative about it, it's the way it is, that's all. And—but I think we have so many things going for us, if you just do the best you can. And that's what I say about education, as far as there's a lot to be learned, but you have to—a lot of it's common sense, just knowing that—make good judgement. Judge—be able to judge, get along. And there's no reason not to get along; it's not that difficult because in the end we're all going to—just think about what that's going to be like. Who knows? But anyway, that's—to answer your question, I think that education is important and I think that you look at it from different—some viewpoints—some think that that's the only thing, education. Yet experience is important, how you handle your good and bad experiences, that's important and it makes out—makes you what you are. Watch how you handle those, whether or not you're—throw up your hands in disgust and then do terrible things or whether you say, "I can improve on this. I can change. I can do something to change this," and you can. I don't think there's anybody on the earth—we weren't put here to be destructive, we were put here to be—help, improve. And whether or not—it doesn't end with us either. You have somebody else coming along that's going to be in the—maybe in the same position as you are and can use you as an example of how things should be, could be done, and can be accomplished. That's important, yeah, yeah.

DeFries: Yes.

Cronin: So what do you—have you gotten all that?

DeFries: This is still recording. So—but I just—before we conclude today, is there anything we haven't discussed or that you'd like to share?

Cronin: No, no I think it's—what is interesting to me is reflection. How you—we don't always reflect and I guess we should. We don't want to live in the past, no. Don't live in the past, but benefit from the past, your experiences, whether they're good or bad, and don't deny within yourself—deny that this is not real—real, you know what realism is. You'll be kidding yourself to deny it if you—and you can improve—anything can be. Nothing's perfect. A lot of people think they are, but there's no one perfect. We're all imperfect, right?

DeFries: Right.

Cronin: We're born that way and we're going to be that way, but you can build on your strengths and be helpful, (coughs)—helpful to others, rather than tear other people a part, tear people down. You don't benefit by hurting somebody else. I don't understand—it's hard to understand how people—but then a lot of people that do that don't think that way. It's the way you think. But there are only—I won't say they're greedy or what it is that they have, but they aren't thinking like, what they do and how that affects other people. Very close—people very close to you, not necessarily a stranger, but you shouldn't be—even a stranger; I don't see there's any reason to be harmful to a stranger. If you can lift somebody up, lift them up, and who knows? But that, I think, I got—found out very young because it was a struggle in a large family to have just a mother. We didn't have a father and it wasn't his fault he didn't have

good health. And so, let's just say there's a reason for that; that makes some others maybe a beneficiary of that experience, that they were able to overcome setbacks. Things that are—maybe don't go the way you'd like it to go. Everything doesn't go the way you'd like it to go. I don't care who you are, whether you're wealthy or the smartest person on this earth. They've all had human problems and try to do the best they can with them. I guess—I guess the word is tolerant, be tolerant. Be tolerant to yourself and to others and I don't care—it doesn't matter to me what school you went to, what degree you hold, and it isn't that you have to cope with everybody, but you have to—you rub elbows a lot and you're affected by a lot of actions that people take, maybe that you don't agree with, but you still have to say, "Well, that's their opinion and that's the way they are," but you can't let that affect you to where you become like that, like them. So it's—that's the way I look at life. I think it's a day to day thing. You do the best—do the best you can, be as good to yourself and to others as you would like them to be to you. That's important.

DeFries: Thank you Dan.

Cronin: Yeah, thank you.

DeFries: Thank you for sharing your stories and your memories, it has been an honor to be here with you today.

Cronin: I appreciate you coming.

DeFries: Thank you for your service, too.

Cronin: Thank you, I appreciate it.

DeFries: Thank you.

end of interview