

ORAL HISTORY

DRAKEAPEDIA

JACK WATSON

Matthew: Hello, my name is Matthew McGowan, today is November 10, 2011 and we are here in Cowles Library with Drake graduate, Jack Watson. All right, for starters, what was your childhood like?

Jack: My childhood was really good. I am the only child, born in Des Moines, born at home in Des Moines that's kind of unusual these days and it was kind of unusual when I was born. I lived here all my lives except for World War II , I was in the Air Force from 42 to 46 and the, that's the beginning, you want me to go any farther?

Matthew: Hmmm, yes, you can keep...

Jack: keep going?

Matthew: Sure

Jack: I went to school in Des Moines, great school; we called it Callahan Junior High and now they call it Middle School Callahan which is here in Des Moines, and 1938 graduate from Roosevelt High School, and I continue here at Drake and my 4 years at Drake, and at December 7, 1941, we got awoken that our future is going to be changed, so we knew soon that we will be going for service, I went in early 1942 until 1946, ahhh, I got a service in England with the bomb group B24, we came back, those of us who made it came back, and I was home for Christmas in 1945, and our whole bomb group is changing from Britain to this country, going to B29 with the idea of going to the Pacific, you know about the Pacific. We didn't get there because the war ended that was good, the ground operation did go on, I came home. Do you what two bit is? Two bits is a quarter they use long long time in the country, two bits will be two little bits of a coin. I worked thousands of hours for two bits an hour. He didn't realize how tough it was and he was unemployed for about a year and a half. I got a lot of experience from whatever job I can get to earn money. I carry papers from house to house; as a paper boy, I started to deliver papers to 145 customers, and I would make 14 trips per week, they paid 25 cents for newspapers those days. My profit was 5 cents, 14 trips for 5 cents. It was a good experience though, they talked about this is a good business training for the youngster. Some people who collect on Friday night said you have to come back because my wife paid for this. All the kinds of

things like that. I paid my bill, rushing home for another job. While I was in college I didn't think that really during my junior year. Is it too much detail?

Matthew: Oh no, that's okay.

Jack: Okay. Because I was carrying 235 Sunday newspapers, that's a lot of newspapers to deliver. I was making it as part-time. Things were so different back then; my folks lived in my grandmother's house on the 24th Street. The house next door they were desperate to sell it. I bought it for 600 dollars; well I couldn't buy that house. My dad bought it. I love Drake. I had great experiences here. I could have been a better student. I was a B+ student but I have friends shooting for A's all the time. I was busy with other things. I got a scholarship to Drake which I didn't use because I got involve with working and I, the circulation manager those days. You what was the tuition fees back then?

Matthew & Safwan: Nope

Jack: You wouldn't believe it. It was one hundred and fifteen dollars per semester.

Matthew & Safwan: Wow!

Jack: Hahaha. Everything else is a privilege. I think these young people in college nowadays what they are dealing with, what their dad is paying is a tough challenge. I had wonderful experiences working at the register, even though the money wasn't that great. I did everything back then, I was a goffer, I started out when I was 13, by the time I was 15, I was working promotion for part-time, and that time was one of the biggest for the Sunday paper which was ranked top 25 in the country. They used to say Iowa depends on that and those days were glory days for the newspapers. I was fortunate in another way because I didn't thought about it. One time, the boss of promotion called me because one of the employee's wives came up and said "You know you're in charge in the promotion department, you should do something for my husband. We're not making enough money". What's the difference? We're promoting newspapers. I worked in promotion part of that time. I have a lot of great experiences. Wire photos! Do you know wire photos? That's when they first transmitted pictures electronically. It was a miracle because you watch those pictures come out of that thing. The Register, I don't want to talk about them, I had wonderful experiences there. We had other topics to talk about. They had a sport section called

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the Ten Page Pitch section they put up every year. They went to Big Ten match and came back to write about it in that section. The Ten Page Pitch was really something and sportsperson around the country knew about it. After service time, I was in the service, I rounded up my education a little bit, I was an arts guy, my major was History and English, and I had wonderful team of people in the Botany department at that time, a person that subsequently became acting President, hmmm, my goodness, George, George! He had an assistant named Shawhan and I know another person but I'm not going to pull off any name but they were like family in the classroom. I just finished college and I got my degree probably in May and they were looking for someone with degree. I went to radio school and then to cadet school. Another great experience for me. I went to Scott field which is the radar school to Valley Forge Military Academy. I had great experience there. Then, I got my commission at Yale and that was a wonderful thing. You know about Glenn Miller right? At Yale, we have Glenn Miller every noon and every night he's playing the orchestra. Later, he went to England and he didn't last long because they crashed. I was lucky because we took the southern route to Europe, that time we were operating submarines, the Germans had lots of submarines. We went to southern route which takes me to the Caribbean and we landed in Georgetown, and then flew overseas to Africa. My dad was born in England, he came back when he was 11 years old. I had two brothers and three sisters plus a lot of cousins. So, England has been a focal point like a magnet for my wife and I to go there and visit my family. I had no particular experiences in the service except for I am glad to get back with everything that I left with. When I came back, I have a blind date and that was in January, we were engaged in February and married in March that was pretty fast. When we were overseas, if you're gone for a while they give you 30 days for rehabilitation and we went to Orlando, Florida for our honeymoon. I just lost my wife last week; we were married for 66 years which was a long time. I mentioned earlier that my life changed a little bit educationally because I add scientific compliment. In school, radar school, electrical engineers gets all the basic stuff but I was able to pick up electric trek. When you are married and you have a house, you always have something to do around the house and we bought the house and did the new chimney. I came back and went to the Register, I got a scholarship but I didn't use it because of my connection with Drake. Hmmm, when I came back, if you got a scholarship as a news carrier and you have opportunity to work at the Register. I love Des Moines. When you grew up in a place, you don't appreciate so much until you see the replacement. I spent a lot of

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time in Mexico. The opportunity I had were really great, I enjoyed the Register, I was there for only nine months, I had a new boss, I was always pretty easy to get along with but he was a tough nut to crack. I left for Bankers Life with that firm it soon became Principal Financial Group and I was there for 39 years, and that was my basic advertising career started out. I retired in 1985; I had the opportunity to be back at Drake for a lot of reasons. I'm on-campus right now because we met a whole semester this fall for the thing we call the Race society. Bob Gray was the Governor here for a long long time. He did many things until we could make a whole story on him. It's a lifelong learning group; they have a curriculum in the spring and fall and I attend classes here. We have our own room now; it's in the Dial Building, it's on the Carpenter, just off the 25th Street, we had a meeting today which I couldn't attend at the church across the street on the 25th. It was held by Tom Rote, he's a terrific guy, we learned from him and he learned from us. That brings us up to date, I do a lot of voluntary, and my wife was a consulante as a volunteer. She did not work because we agree that her role can be at her desire to just help people and so she did that. I did some of it but not as much as she did because I was trying to bring some money into the house. Would you like me to go any farther, any deeper?

Matthew: Ummm, we are wondering what highlights do you have from the first week of classes here.

Jack: Highlights? Uhhmm, I had the most wonderful History teacher, she was a good teacher. One of the best experiences I had I just try to think George last name, George Huff was the Biology teacher, Lee Johnson was his right-hand person.