"Archie" Webber

This interview was conducted in three sessions over several months starting October 1, 2013. It is presented here in the non-sequential order as events were remembered by Mr. Webber. During the second and third sessions Mr. Webber added details to the different times of his life. —editor

"I was born in Rochester June 29, 1926. They locked me up in an orphanage when I was four-years old.

"My father come from England and my mother come from Dublin, Ireland in the fall of the year of the sinking of the Titanic. My mother lived on Love Lane in Dublin Ireland. It's almost like a Cinderella story, isn't it? Her father was a Constable. I don't know how she got the money to get on the boat in 1912, and came to Ellis Island with $2 in her pocket.

"First, she got a job as a housekeeper in New York City. She wasn't married, and her sister was living here and married to a man by the name of **Rooney**.



Fig.1. Archie at a local restaurant in 2013.

"Mom come to Rochester to see her sister. **Rooney** had neckties and shirts that he wanted to sell, so he gave them to my mother, and she walked along the sidewalks and stopped in places of business and tried to sell them.

"She went to Tent City, which at that time was a button factory. She met a man who worked there and had just become a widower. He had buried two wives. His name was **Gershner**, and he was German. My mother married him after a while, and she gave birth to two daughters. One of the girls died of pneumonia when she was quite young. That left **Irene**, my half sister. **Mr. Gershner** had a beautiful home on Lake Avenue.

"My mother never talked much about her life. We had to pry it outa her. After **Mr. Gershner** passed away, she married my father, **Arthur Webber**. They sold the house and everything in it and lived in an apartment. Mom worked two days a week at the button factory, and my father was supposed to be babysitting. But, he just left us in charge of my sister, who was about eleven years old, and he never came back. We were probably a big nuisance so the neighbors complained. When my mother come home from work, we weren't there. She asked the neighbors where her children were, and they said that the investigators took us away. She got us back one time, but after a while, she couldn't keep us. There was not even a crust of bread in the house.

"My father married again later and lived on Lyell Avenue near where they made Ragu spaghetti sauce. I was eleven years old, livin in a foster home in Rochester and hangin around with an outlaw kid. But, I took a likin to him, and his mother always made homemade bread and cooked up a bunch of eggs for all of us, and said that since I didn't have a family, I could stay there. They didn't take me in, though, and I was still living in a foster home.

"This kid said, 'If your father's still alive, we'll go to the library and they got a great big book there.' And, sure enough, he found a **Webber** with two B's on a street off'a Lyell Avenue. This kid and I went to visit my father. I rode to Hudson Avenue on my bicycle in the snow. A woman come to the door, and I said, 'I'm **Archie Webber**.'"

She said, "He's working at Rochester Products and won't be home until tomorrow."

"She never asked a god-derned question, and I never say nothin either.

"I went back to the foster home. The next day I went back, and I saw him sittin on an open stoop with his arm on the table, puffing on a cigarette, and wearing a open white T-shirt. I was nervous, and I don't know what to say. He come down off the stoop, and I said, 'I'm **Archie Webber**.'

"He put his hand out and said, 'I'm **Arthur Webber**. What's the matter? You're not living in Brockport?'"

"So, he know. He was aware of it. I said, 'I've been in several homes since I lived in Brockport.'"

"He could see I was freezin to death, and he said, 'Let's step in the garage.'"

"That day, all the thoughts I ever had when I watched a movie and wished those actors were my Dad were in my head. Like Will Rogers who had a nice easy way about him. I was afraid of

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anyone a little on the tough side because I was already livin with those kinds of people. My Dad never took me back.

"He did show up when I was about fifteen, and I almost got killed in a bad automobile accident. I went through the windshield at ninety miles an hour. I had a bad cut on my face, and my arm was broke. I wasn't able to talk too good and I said, 'What do you want?' I was just being mean.

"He never came into the room but stood in the doorway."

I said, "What're you doin here?"

"He just turned around and headed down the hall.

"I shoulda kept my mouth shut.

"I was living in a foster home with my two-year old brother and my eleven-year old sister someplace in Rochester. We were there about a year and a half, and then they transferred us to the Lynch family in Brockport. I began living in Brockport in 1931, and I started attending the Catholic school in the fall. **Mrs. Lynch's** daughter was the secretary for the poormaster. That's what we called the person who dealt with welfare people. Mrs. Lynch had two daughters, and before she married **Mr. Lynch**, her name was **Hogan**, and her brother was the manager of Duffy Motts in Hamlin. Mr. Lynch worked at the Brockport Cold Storage. He didn't make much money so they took in foster children. There were a lot of foster children at that time because of the depression. Mr. Lynch died of a heart attack when I was about seven years old.

"After we were there a while, the **Lynch's** took in the **Chifaldi** kids, so that made six foster children they had. The Chifaldi children, **Anthony**, **Louis**, **Mikey**, and **Matthew** were there because the Mafia was robbing their father of his money in the cigar box, and they had a big argument one day. The folks wound up in the insane asylum and died there. There was another younger brother in a foster home somewhere in Rochester.

"I stayed at Lynch's about seven or eight years. I was kicked out of the Catholic school and out of the church because I was a nuisance. On Palm Sunday, I tickled the girls in the rump with the palm. What am I supposed to do with that? The old nun couldn't get to her beads. You know how they get to the little ones and then the big ones and they gotta say somethin. So the next Sunday, she stood up in front of me and wouldn't let me slide in the pews. She said, 'You can sit with the grownups wherever.'"

"One day I was sitting behind the **Barry** girls—you heard of Barry Dodge up there? They were all dressed up and wearing stockings with the seams up the back. I was leanin on the back end of those pews, and, you know, you have to do a lot of exercising when you're in a Catholic church: kneel, stand up, bendin over, sit down.

"So one day, **Father Kreig** was up in the balcony; you know what you call that thing that hangs off the wall. The priest wanted paper money in the collection for whatever big reason. And you know the place is crowded and them priests are long winded, and mother wanted to get home before the roast beef burned on the stove and my father's asleep because he was drunk last night.

"The next week, we went to confession and little **Father Tuite** was there. He was a very, very neat fella. My friend went in the confessional, and he came out real quick. I asked how he got out so fast and he said, 'I told him I didn't do nothin, and he went for it.'"

"So I did the same thing, and when I came out, we went to the picture show. And when my mother asked what took us so long, I said, 'The place was full.'

"When I was about eleven or twelve, I was moved down to the city to live with a Scotch widow woman on Lexington Avenue off from Dewey. She was a big, fleshy woman. Another boy about the same age and I slept in the attic—hot in the summer. One day, she was outside by the curb and buying vegetables from a man in a rig, and I was watching. All of a sudden, I looked towards the grass and her bloomers fell off and down around both feet. She leaned over, stepped out of them, took them off, and said, 'Here bring them to the house.'

"I stayed with her about a year, and then they kicked me out of the Dewey Avenue school. The school is still there. Then put me in a home on Maiden Lane with a couple from Belgium who raised vegetables. She made kuchen. I never heard of that before, but I ate it, and it was good. There was another foster kid there. I was separated from my sisters and brother. No one cared—it was all business. Now, I'm not saying anything for sympathy, but I never had a feeling that anybody liked me. You know, like pettin a dog and having him wiggle his tail, and the dog appreciates it. I never had that feeling. I was taken from my mother so young, and I didn't have that love that I needed. It's pretty sad, especially if you have enough common sense to know the difference. I always knew the difference between right and wrong. I was raised with Christians.

"I was sent to a one-room school on Long Pond near Maiden Lane. There was a creek going through the yard. In the spring, I was sitting on a rock smokin a tailor made, and the teacher

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reached over my shoulder and throwed it in the creek. I reached over and got another one out and held it in my hand, and she wrenched my arm. I thought she was going to throw me in the water, but instead she called the authorities, and I got kicked out of there.

"So, then I was sent to Hudson Avenue, and I went to a junior vocation school which was a trade school. I learned to make brushes and brooms in the morning. In the afternoon, we had to repair shoes from the reform school. We fixed them all up; we didn't throw none of them away. We fixed up the back with a piece of leather. My job was to do them kinda rinky dink things and then cut the sole off at an angle and then hand it over for the last thing that was to be done. Every once in a while, we could hear someone screaming. They weren't paying attention when they sewed and that thing was goin rippety snort there, and they'd sewed right through their dog-goned finger. I was kicked out of there before I got to the sewin part. After that, they locked me up for a while and take away all my clothes and give ya a pair of pajamas to wear, I was sent to a farm in Fairport.

"At the farm, I was milkin fifteen cows, and takin care of four horses, and all the rest of them critters in the barn. They didn't even let me sleep in the house. I never got any farther in the house other than the kitchen table. I slept in the woodshed, even in the wintertime. I got in the bed, boots and all. When my year was up, we were putting corn in the silo—you know the old-fashioned way—and the man give me a dollar bill. So when it was clear, I run away and walked all the way from Fairport into Rochester to where the empty railroad cars were, and I sat until daybreak in a railroad car and then walked to Brockport and stood in front of Dobson's Drugstore.

"From time to time after I ran away, I lived with outlaws for a while on Smith and Clark Streets. One of them was the last man executed in the State of New York in Sing Sing—**William Draper**. It was right around 1953. I was in school with him. I lived with his Mommy and her sister. They both lost their husbands. She said I could stay in the house. I was friends with her son, see."

He said, 'Ma, Archie ain't got no place to sleep, and it's snowin like hell out."

She said, "Well, go get in bed with **John** then."

"So I did that. But I couldn't stay there too long cause they were afraid they'd get in trouble with the authorities because I was supposed to be in school.

"Then one day, the man runnin the garbage truck said, 'Come-on, **Art**. I can use the help today. And that's how I got on. And he give me a baloney sandwich. It was just before Christmas, and I had a broken arm, but I went to the garbage man and got a job. I worked all winter with a cast on my arm. The other man had been fired because he was drunk all the time. So I got the job—25 cents a day and room and board. Honest **Tom Dailey** was a mail picker upper. He hired me. I stayed there right up until spring till the warm weather.

"In the spring, I hired out to the Carnival which was where GE later built. I drove a truck, but I didn't have a license. The man told me to be there the first thing in the morning. I slept on a couch by the bridge in Brockport.

"When I was grown up, the poormaster spotted me sitting in a doorway of the poolroom havin a cigarette. 'Do you wanna go to work?'

"Yah. I'm lookin for work."

He says, "Well, meet **Mr. Michaels** at his house. You know where he lives?"

"Yah, I know him. So he hired me out to the state on the canal, and I was gonna live on the boat and have Saturday afternoons and Sundays off. So I lived on the boat and had the weekend off, and I bought a $400 house off the Chief of Police, **Jimmy Costigan**. Four hundred bucks—land and all on Barry Street. And he locked me up twice in the jailhouse. That was back in 45 cause I got outa the Army with about $200 bucks in my pocket.

"I went in the Army when I was seventeen. Somebody in the Landmark Hotel told me I wouldn't have ta go back to work on the garbage truck; if I passed a physical, I'd get in the Army. So I went to the city for my physical, and had to take a test because I couldn't read the test to fill in the blanks. So, the man put me on a time clock, and gave me a magazine that had little strips of pictures on the page, and I had to match things. Well, I went through that like takin a drink of water, ya know. And, then I'm standin up looking through the window, and all these other guys had pencils and pieces of paper. I asked what they were doing, and he said they were doin the same thing I was doin only they can read. So, they sent me to a hobo camp in Albion workin in the peas in Snyder's Canning Factory. We lived in long shacks in the back like horse stalls, and they just had an Army iron cot and Army blankets in them. They paid us cash every night, and when the sun come up in the mornin, if you went back to work you was a brand new employee. I worked seven days a week. I worked in the cookin room where they put the stuff in the can. There was a canal, real low like, and I had ta receive the stuff

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and if I didn't hold the pot just right it'd swing back and forth and fall off—600 and some odd pounds.

"I also worked in a coal yard down by the canal. They called it the Tiger Gas Station. It belonged to two Jewish brothers from Rochester; I think their last name was **Cohen**. They owned places in Rochester where they sold kerosene, fuel oil, coal, etc. I got a job there unloading carloads of coal—me and **Tootie Judd**—and we had to get it off in one day. Then I'd sleep in a car or wherever I could at night.

"I remember one Christmas Eve, I was down by the old Lincoln Saloon—you know where they're building a church now. **Mr. Karge's**, my neighbor, saw me and didn't say you gotta place to lay down Art? I was just on the sidewalk and everybody was gone, and I wondered where the hell I was gonna get in outta the weather. I walked down the street, and there was a grist mill down there, and there was a one-holer at the end of the building so I got in there, and I hold the door open with my foot open to the west, and **Mr. Tuttle's** laundry had a light in the parkin lot, so I could see to roll me a cigarette. As time went on, and I smoked I quit shakin because all I had on was a light jacket and wet feet. I said to myself, I wonder where them three Wiseman are? This is the of sense of humor I got. I said well I got frankincense, but I never did figure out that myrrh. I could sure use them. I had a sense of humor.

"Currently, my brother is dying of bone cancer. The doctor give him the last bit of medication. He's in pain. I called him the other day. My brother was by **Webber**, and my sister was by **Gershner**. My sister graduated from Catholic school and high school. She married a fella by the name of **Battiste**. He was French Italian or Italian French; I don't know which one. They lived on a street near Lyell Avenue—way out this way.

"My sister, **Irene**, married this guy. I never met him, but I wore his coat and shoes. She'd come out and give me stuff. The shoes didn't fit, so I cut holes in the sides so my feet sideways had some place to go.

"When I bought that $400 house, I was sitting with a blind man, **Tom Cleary**. They lived on Barry Street, and the man went blind from some ungodly ailment over the years. He was making me and his nephew a cup of coffee. I felt kinda sheepish lettin this blind man waitin on me. I was about 18 or 19."

I said, "Who owns that house where them children are playin in, over next door? There ain't no windows in it and the doors gone off the side."

He said, "**Jimmy Costigan**, the Chief of Police, owns it and rents it out to men who was workin on farms."

"Tom encouraged me to buy it, but I couldn't talk to **Jimmy Costigan** because I used to fight with him, so I sent **George Smith**, who lived on South Street and was kinda a roustabout. I told him to take my money and go see **Judge Benedict** about the house. **Enos Benedict** had offices above a store on Main Street, and he was born a cripple and there was something wrong with his legs. He went up the stairs with his arms, one at a time, movin his rump to the next step.

"There was no plumin or electricity in the house. No drinkin water; a well in the front yard, and a toilet out in the back. So I bought it and took some boards off the fallin-down woodshed in the back and made a front door. I borrowed the neighbor's claw hammer and gave it back to him in the evenin. I nailed the door on the frame because the frame was all right, but the kids had kicked the panels out. I lived there eight years.

"When I got the job on the canal, I met my wife out here on the Main Street sidewalk. She was with two other girls. I met the girl in the spring when **Mr. Michaels** got me a job on the canal. I come uptown for a while. It was payday, so I got me a pair of overalls. And, I come back home to the old shack batchin it. I was taken the tags off them, and it was **Willy Draper** poundin on the door, and I hollered out to him cause their ain't no winders on the door.

Who's out there?"

"Me, Out."

"Soon as he said, 'Out,' I know who it is, so I said, "Com-on in."

He said, "There's three women stayed with Ma, and two of them stayed there and they work at Lista's Restaurant and another come up on the bus, and Ma says she couldn't handle them and you got a place and ya ain't there all week cause you got a place livin on the boat on the canal. So, why don't ya rent it to them?"

"Well, shoot, I didn't even raise an eyebrow with regard to them bein women and we bein young. So, I was real serious, and this is gospel. I said, 'This ain't no place for women with an outside toilet and an old pump in the yard. That was the end of it, so he stopped talkin to me.'"

"So, I got my new overalls on, and I just put the crease in them and put a nice John Wayne cuff on the bottom, and went uptown and there's three women standin in front of Dobson's with big old suitcases. The oldest one, says, 'We hear ya got a home.'"

I says, "I got a shack."

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She said, "Can we go down and look at it?"

"Well, if ya do, leave your suitcases here, cause when you see the dang place, you're gonna run right back up the hill."

"Well this is all we own in these suitcases."

"Me bein the gentleman that I wasn't, I picked up the suitcase, and we headed up Market Street. I can see the neighbor, pullin the curtains back, and I was feelin guilty that she might be thinkin, 'This is that gol-dang Archie Webber with three women and their suitcases. What's he got goin on down there?'

"I rented to all three of em for no money till they found a place that was proper."

I said,"This ain't no place for these women."

"Then I went back to the canal and went to work and come home on Saturdays. As the weeks went by and I kinda took a likin to the oldest girl—no relative to the others. My wife and the pretty girl worked for **Mr. Lista** waitin on tables, and my wife worked in the kitchen doin whatever you gotta do in a kitchen. One day, someone come in and robbed the cash register. So, she and her family went back to West Virginia in the summertime.

"After about three weeks, I sold a car to **Pete Gallo**, who was in business with his brother, **Jim**, at the Lincoln Saloon. I had an old Ford car, and I owed tickets on it, so I went down and paid three quarters of the tickets cause I hadda get somethin down to get the 36. So, I tore the rest of the tickets up and kept the $200 bucks in my pocket, and my brother had a 36 Ford and no money. **Johnny Galligan**, he had some paper money.

"Four of us went down to West Virginia. We missed the whole gol-darned state and wound up in the tobacco fields of North Carolina. It was hotter than the front gates of hell. We was sleepin in the car and on the car because we was afraid to sleep in the grass because of snakes. We went back to West Virginia where the mountains was, and there was the water comin down the mountain and people fillin up their water jugs. We got our shirts off and washed and shaved and traffic was goin by lookin at these four nuts, but we didn't care. We finally found out where Laurel was—the last god-darned town in the state of West Virginia. It was just a coal town, and we had to drive up a wee grade to get up over the railroad tracks and there were several houses along the mountains.

"All of a sudden, my brother says, 'I can't steer the car no more.'

"The tracks took a chip outa the underside of the car, and it was broken, so he couldn't steer it. We had-ta kick the tires until we could push the car to one side.

"Now, we never met the folks, and she's gotta a great big old stepdaddy. He's comin outa the house with a clean shirt on and his overhalls are clean. I says, 'Is **Edith** here?' That was her name.

"I can't remember where we all slept unless we went back to the car because it was only a four-room house. Well, anyway, those boys got dishearted, and **Johnny** went back and stayed with his grandfather, and the other one went over to the other coal family. She was a widow, and she rented the house out to coal miners. Three or four weeks went by, and Johnny come back over to our place where we was eatin gravy made outa water. No milk cause no one was workin in the mines. We never ate no store bread. We ate biscuits, and they was good biscuits, and saw-mill gravy which was grease in a fryin pan and a little flour or whatever the hell you put in. We was livin anyways.

"One day, back in Brockport, I got stopped for driving without a license. I pulled up in front of the store on Market Street, and the policeman asked me if I had a license. I said, 'No, I ain't got no license.'"

So he said, "Well, you got-a come over and see the judge."

"So, the judge opens a book as big as the bible and says, thirty dollars or thirty days. So, I said, 'I ain't got no thirty dollars.'"

He said, "Don't you have no family?"

"He talked like somebody was squeezin his throat. 'I ain't got no family.'"

"Well, it's thirty dollars or thirty days."

"So, one of the **Drapers** was drivin with me when it happened. He went down and got the old man, and he comes up in his old Model A. He tries to talk the judge out of it cause I hadn't caused any accident or run over anyone's lawn or nothin, but that didn't make squat. He wanted that thirty dollars, so the old man paid it, and he never give me a hard time about it. When it come payday, I got my money and paid it.

"Finally, I met the woman and got married when I was 21.

"I was haulin tomatoes for **Jeff Perry**, who lived on Union Street and had several big trucks for haulin. He had one daughter and a wife, but he liked to drink, so on payday, the wife would come outa the house and fiddle with her purse and say, 'This is all I got **Mr. Webber**.'"

I said, "Well, that's all right if that's all ya got."

"So, I went home with whatever money I got. He wasn't payin me squat anyway. But, I felt like a big man drivin a big truck, and I had a license by then.

"Then, we all went down to Duffy Mott's to work on the apples. The women stayed with us through the summer, and at the end

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of that, when I had a little money left, my wife says, 'Can I go home and see my mother?'

"So, I gave her eleven or twelve bucks, and away she went. Two or three weeks went by and the last week in February I went to **Tony Dillala's** on Market Street for a haircut for 75 cents, so, I had two bucks and a quarter left on Tuesday."

I said to my friend, "By golly, I'm goin to West Virginia."

He said, "Are you nuts? I don't have no money."

"Well, I've got two dollars and a quarter, so let's hitchhike down to Lyell Avenue where they make Delco products. My brother was living in an old shack that they moved down there on an old empty lot for GI's, and one of them GI's was his buddy. So, I told my brother what we was doin, and he gave me some change. He didn't have no paper. So, I came home and set my puppy out for the neighbors to watch and let the cat run loose.

"I walked up to the Lincoln Saloon, and a guy by the name of **Mike** was on his way home to Holley. He gave us a ride to Holley, and then we walked into Fancher where the big turn is, and a truck picked us up—a nice young fella—and he said he was goin toward Medina, but he had to turn off and unload. So we got out and walked inta Medina and went to a diner and sat at the far end. We had a cup of coffee outa all this money in my pocket, and I'm rollin a cigarette and this guy kept lookin at us."

I said, "Hey, fella, you got a jailhouse in this town?"

"Yeh, it's right on the street where the waterworks or somethin is."

"So, we went down the street, and there was a man in a uniform, and the jail room doors were open."

I said, "Is there any chance we can sleep here tonight and get out the first thing in the mornin?"

He said, "I just got rid of my best customers. You got a knife on ya?"

"Yes, sir."

He said, "Put it here and get it in the morning, and make yourself at home."

"My partner couldn't sleep, and he came into my cell three times. Finally, he says, 'Ya know what. I don't think they're gonna let us out.'

I said, "I don't give a damn whether they do or not. We ain't got a job, and you ain't got no money, and I'm darned near broke.

"After a while, the old man hollered at us and told us to get outa there cause there was a new shift arrivin.

"So, we went out and started hitchhiking, and it was rainin like hell, but it was right after the war, so everyone was still riding in everyone else's car, so we finally got to Buffalo and cleaned up in the bathroom and a hobo wanted to join us. He told us if we had any money, we could ride a trolley car out of Buffalo and get out in front of them big steal mills and they always got trucks runnin south. So we did that, and a coal truck picked us up and drove us to Silver Creek. We hitchhiked all that day, and that night, we rode in a big Cadillac in the dark and up the side of a mountain. The man said he'd take us as far as the Greyhound station. He even gave us a taylor made. So he left us at the station, and the cops kept comin in. When daybreak come, we rode the trolley outa there, and the man was breakin in a new driver. He was hollerin at the driver to put the brakes on. When we got out, we hitchhiked again and spent that night in one of those little shacks where the bus picks the children up to go to school. It was cold. The next day we rode with everybody and his brother, and we were sittin on the bank by a big river and saw a paddle boat goin up the river, and that was quite a thing to see. We went through a small town, and there was some coal miners huddled there, and when it was my turn to say somethin, I said, 'You got a jailhouse in this town or a place where a fella can get outa the weather?'"

He said, "Up on the hill, there's a factory. You can't see it from the road, but they work 24-hours a day and a pretty good bunch of boys, and they'll let you stay the night."

"So, up the hill we went and made the wrong turn to a big place all lit up like Christmas and a man walkin around and blew a whistle at us."

"What're you guys doin here?"

"So, I told him about the coal miners, and the guy says we made the wrong turn. You gotta go back a little ways, and there's a driveway. Go down the driveway, and you'll see the building. So sure enough, we found the building, and we went in and a man said, 'What're you guys doin here?'

"I told him about the nice bunch of boys down the hill, and he fetched two factory carts and pushed them in between these two units, and we was in outa the way of production. I could see this long red thread comin down, and I watched for a while, and at the end it went around this thing and droppin in this big barrel and it was makin marbles for kids to play with. And they was storin it like grain. So, I laid back down, and it was like somebody hit me with a sledge hammer. I mean ta tell you, I slept.

"In the daybreak, it was just breaking good enough for us to see the road, and we heard a noise, and it was a great big tractor trailer comin with a bulldog on the front of it. It was the guy pickin us up. He never stopped. I run along and got in it, and my

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buddy got in, and we was all in the front seat. We pulled into a rinky dink diner, and a woman waited on us."

The trucker says to me, "What da you want?"

I says, "I don't have any money."

He said, "I didn't ask you if you had any money. I asked what you want."

So, I said, "I'll have the same thing as he's havin, and my buddy said, 'Me too.'"

"We had a darned good breakfast that day. This was the last day, and we road into Charleston to a big warehouse. When we got there, it was already after one, and their shift only worked till noon on Saturday.

"The man who greeted us was on crutches and said, 'You're gonna have ta stay here till Monday.'"

The driver said, "I hate to stay here till Monday."

I said, "What-a ya got on?"

"Beer and ale."

"So, we helped him unload. He showed us how to make the ramps up on the stoop, and he got up on the truck and used the thing that was like roller skates and rolled the boxes down to us. We only dropped one. We got it all unloaded, and the man give me a dollar.

"The driver took us out to the big road that'd take us where we was goin. He give us two bucks. Along came a little car with a jump seat in the back, and it was rainin again, so my buddy got in the back, and I got in the front cause I'm a scared passenger after that accident I got in when I was a kid. And the driver was goin fast, and I was pushin on the dashboard and hittin my foot on the floor like there was a brake on my side. He was drivin like the law was chasin him, and he got a load of moonshine. He drove us until we could get on a bus with all these old women who stood on a corner. They called it Johnny Cake Mountain. We road the bus until we got to the big road, and I said to the driver, 'How much is it to take a bus to the village of War?'

"To this day, I can't remember how much it was. But he let us out, and we stood on the big road and the darkness fell again and down the road came a big bus. It looked like a Greyhound, but it wasn't. He rode us inta War, and I knew how to get through the village cause it was small like Holley. We went up the side of the door of her house—it was a four-room shack, but they had a bathroom in the house.

"My stepfather hollered from the bedroom, 'Who's out there?' He was a genuine southerner."

I said, "It's me, **Archie**."

"But he don't know **Archie** from Jesus Christ."

I said, "It's **Flowbie's husband**."

"Her name was **Edith**, but everyone called her **Flowbie**, and she didn't like that name. Her name was **Emily Flowbie Allison**, and somewhere along the line, she changed her name legal like. She had an Aunt named **Emily** that was meaner than hell, and she didn't want that name so she changed it to **Edith**."

I said, "Why the hell didn't you change the **Flowbie** part?"

"Well, I don't know," she said.

"So her Mommy had some biscuits left, and she poked the fire around a bit. They burned soft coal so it didn't take much to get it goin again. She cooked up somethin else, so we ate there. They didn't have another bed, but they had an old mattress underneath another bed, so we pulled it out and changed the bedclothes, and that's where we slept.

"She come from worser, and I didn't know that, but when you get a stepdaddy and he's a drinkin lad, he beat the snot right outa his wife, and she's the kinda woman that won't leave him.

"When I come back to Brockport, the town of Sweden was short a man and **Charlie Clark** and **Mary Jane Draper** were just married, and they didn't have a home, so they were living in my house. When I was in West Virginia, they wrote a letter and asked if they could stay there, and my wife wrote a letter back to them and told them to just take an ax and knock the padlock off the door and go right in. They didn't have to buy nothin cause everything was right there for them. When we come back on the bus, we didn't have no money even for coffee, so we lived there and ate his groceries. He was workin at the time. He told me to go up to Holley Street, and **Mr. Totter** was the superintendent of the town of Sweden. So I hired out, and he said I had to work two weeks before I could get paid. When I got paid, I got credit at Wright's Grocery Store and Sunseri's banana store and could buy whatever we needed to get through the week. Charlie finally moved down to Clark Street by the creek.

"I worked for the town of Sweden for two years, and our first boy was born in December of 48. He was born in the old wooden hospital. **Mrs. Epke** was managing it, and my wife had a normal delivery. I was standin there with nothin in my pocket.

"**Mrs. Epke** had an office upstairs, and she said, 'How're we goin to pay for this?'"

I said, "My wife works at General Electric, and I think they've got some kind of a plan over there."

"Before I could say hardly anything, she said very strict like, 'We don't recognize General Electric.'"

"Archie" Webber

Then she said, "You've had nine months to prepare yourself for this ordeal."

"So, I borrowed money off my poor old mother. She had a little money from the settlement. The law made my father give her some money. I don't know how much it was. I just remember that after the car accident, when I come outa the hospital and was sittin there with a broken arm, he come by and said, 'I can't afford to support two houses. I got a notion to go jump in the river.'"

"Ma ain't sayin nothin. So I said, 'Well, why the hell don't ya?'

"That's the second time I talked to my father. I thought he was goin to lace me. I stood up, and it wasn't but a blink of the eye and my hind end was back on the bed. Ma was red in the face like a brand new beet comin outa the jar, and she said, 'There'll be none of that goin on in here.'"

"So down the hall he went."

I said, "Ma, you think he'll jump in the river?"

She said, "No, No."

"She didn't call him any bad names; didn't say he was worthless; never said nothin bad about him. I had no buildup in my mind that I could hate him.

"I was about sixteen at that time when the summer come. I don't have no idea what kind of support the law come up with cause he's already got two girls in the world. I only met his other wife once, and once at the funeral parlor.

"I have to work. I've got responsibilities. I've got a wife and she's got a ten-year old child. So I straightened out a bit. I worked there a year and got a week's vacation—legal and then I worked at the stone quarry on Sweden Walker Road in 1951. It was just jackass work. You didn't have to have no education. After 1951, I went out on the highway and worked for the union. The union men come out and talked to us—the Teamsters—and everybody signed up. I happened to be operating a big piece of machinery at the time.

"When my mother almost died, the priest give her last rites. I think it was at Highland Hospital. I went to see her, and she was underneath a tent. I reached down and held her hand, and she knew who I was. But she didn't die then. She lived a long time after that.

"So, then I was operating big machinery and worked nine years on Route 390. The stone quarry had three sections of 390. One from Industry to the Thruway; one from the Thruway to the canal; the other was to the parkway.

"I retired from the union when I became 62. Then I worked for a man who had a small business doing driveways. Me and my oldest son worked together on putting in driveways and bringing in the gravel.

"I have four children. One was my wife's child when I married her. He died of cancer in 81 when he was about 42 years old. In the winter time, we went to Florida where my wife's baby sister lived. So, we rented an old rickety unit down the road from her sister. My wife retired from General Electric after 36 years.

"My son, **Arthur**, was born in 48. He just turned sixty-five on the 8th of December. Then, we had **Patricia Kathleen**. She was killed in sixty-eight on a motorcycle accident in Albion near the drive-in theater. Then my other daughter, **Eileen**, born in sixty-two. In 62, we went to West Virginia to work. I sold my $400 shack for $3,500, to a man with two children.

"I worked at the greenhouses, at farms doin just labor work, at two or three sawmills at an old steam rig that made the power for the saw to go around—anything to make money.

"I moved to Clarendon to a great big farmhouse, and my step-father-in-law was living with me and working at General Electric. My brother-in-law come up from the coal mines in West Virginia. He was hanging around sittin on my couch and lookin for work.

"The stone quarry moved all the crushing plants from Canandaigua and Brockport to West Virginia, so me and my brother helped tear it down here and move it down there on the railroad and helped to set up the equipment.

"We got there and rented a house for $24 a month. As the months went by, there was an old man walkin down the railroad. He had a wife and children, and he wanted to know if I'd rent the upstairs. I said if it was all right with the landlady, it was all right with me. So, we split the rent. We were there a year and a half. It was in the city of Taft, goin south on route 77. Then, we come back here in the dead of wintertime, just before Christmas. My father-in-law and brother-in-law were still livin here. We sold the house in Clarendon over the telephone, and we bought the $4,000 shack I'm livin in now on Clark Street.

"I didn't even know if it had floors in it. I'd never been in it. So we moved in there, and the children slept somewhere that night, and me and my wife slept in a room that had caught afire and burned the ceiling out. We didn't even have plaster in the ceilin. We were freezin to death. We had to heat with gas on the cooker stove."

My wife said. "There's no way I'm goin to sleep in that room."

"So, I went upstairs with the ax. It had a walk-in closet underneath the roof, and it had a slanted ceiling. So I knocked the boards out with the ax. I didn't know much about fine

"Archie" Webber

carpentry. That's where we lived from '64. I fixed it up a bit as the days went on.

"None of my children, other than **Art**, graduated from high school. He graduated the day that **Kathleen** was layin in the coffin down on State Street. We was sittin in the bleachers like two dummies. There was not a smile on our faces.

"**Terry Eileen** left school and got married to a man by the name of **Potter** who was going to Vietnam. We saw him off at the airplane. So, then she went back to school, and whatever the teacher's name was I don't know, but she called her **Potter** instead of **Mrs. Potter**. And the manner in which she said it kinda got my daughter's goat, and she spoke up and said, 'It's Mrs. Potter.' The teacher thought she was being kinda brazen and sent her to the principal. The principal said, 'I don't think you need to be in school,' so that was the end of it. Then she went over to the college and got a GED. Later, she and her husband separated. They couldn't get along. Now, we don't know where she is unless we find out from a girlfriend. She kept the boy, and married again, and that husband died of cancer.

"Somehow or other, I got down the road of life all right. My wife had a stroke and died at eighty-five-years old in 2003.

"Now that I'm retired, I just hang out. I never done nothin all my life but try to get by. I never had a hobby or nothin. I never went bowlin or nothin. **Arthur**, **Terry**, and **Michael** are my children still alive. My wife's son's son run into a tree and killed himself. He's in the graveyard. Her son died of cancer, so he's in the graveyard. **Kathleen** is in the graveyard. My mother got cremated, and she's in a wee hole next to Kathleen. When my wife died, I was supposed to go through all that paperwork, but I didn't know nothin about that, so I just dug a hole and stuck her in behind the stone.

Acknowledgements:

Interviewer: Sue Savard
Interview date: Starting Tuesday, October 1, 2013
Location: Local restaurant
Fig.1: by Sue Savard
Layout: Norm Frisch