

Chevron Ricketts
Oral History Interview
November 26, 2016
Interviewed by Robert MacGregor

MACGREGOR: [0:00:03.8] Good morning Chevy. Thanks for meeting with me. This is the interview of Chevron Ricketts, better known as Chevy, conducted on the behalf of the Wood Memorial Library, its oral history project by Bob McGregor at the South Windsor Public Library, 1550 Sullivan Ave., South Windsor, Connecticut, on the morning of Saturday, November 26, and thank you again, Chevy for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. What I'd like to do is start off with finding out where you were born.

RICKETTS: I was born in Stafford Springs, Connecticut. My parents [Christine Berry Ricketts and Cedric Ricketts] were already living down on Sperry Road, but my mom's doctor was from Stafford Springs, so it was kind of unusual. She had to trek all the way out there when they still actually had a hospital.

MACGREGOR: Interesting. Are there any great memories of when you finally got here to South Windsor after you were born [0:01:00.0] (laughter) that you would like to share as you were growing up?

RICKETTS: Just great. I want people to know how absolutely wonderful, and isolated, and quaint South Windsor used to be. Growing up down on Sperry Road next to the river, having full access to the fields, and the barns, and the animals, and that South Windsor used to be quintessential "Leave it to Beaver" where you knew your neighbors from the top the hill, all the way down to the East Hartford line.

MACGREGOR: That really sounds great. What did your parents do for work?

RICKETTS: Mom was a homemaker and dad was a carpenter. Most of the homes, he was telling me, that were built in Avon, Simsbury, Bloomfield, either through a company or on his own, he helped build. [0:02:00.0]

MACGREGOR: Interesting. What about people that you played with in the area?

RICKETTS: You want names of the family or...?

MACGREGOR: Sure, that's fine.

RICKETTS: Well, basically, I hung out mostly with the Whooleys, that lived right at the top of the hill, the Cases that lived right at the very beginning of Sperry Road at the time, they were an older family, Brad Case, Mr. and Mrs. Case; Brad was already an adult, married with children. We were the only kids—no, there was one other family once the Dellards' moved out, the Jones' bought the property, the house at the top of the hill, but mostly it was Tom Whooley, Bill Phillips from the other side of town on Barber Hill over where the Dzen's lived. [0:03:00.0] Being a girl—my father was a Jamaican—he was a conservative man, so I wasn't allowed to go out. The boys [Cedric L. Ricketts, Jr., Carl L. Ricketts, and Cornell L. Ricketts] always had free rein—they could get up, get on their bicycles, go across town; I basically had to stay within my parameters.

MACGREGOR: So life was a little bit different back in those days, to say the least.

RICKETTS: Yes.

MACGREGOR: What kind of activities were you involved in?

RICKETTS: Well, mom was—mom and dad were both very active at the church and at the time First Congregational Church on Old Main Street was; it had a big congregation, they had a youth group, they had lots of programs, 4-H was big, both my brothers were in Junior Achievement at the time, the Maiettes I know were big. They were living on—I can't remember what side of town, but they were [0:04:00.0] big in town with Junior Achievement. I did Girl Scouts with the Driscolls, the Toseas, and I'm trying to think of—oh, jeez, I can't think of her name. Shoot. She lived in the red house right next to the church. It's on the backside of the cemetery there. Anyways, so I did 4-H with Mrs. Clapp and I was really active between the Pilgrim Fellowship at the church, 4-H, and Girl Scouts. I had a lot of stuff to do.

MACGREGOR: (laughs) Sounds like it was a pretty active time for you.

RICKETTS: Yeah.

MACGREGOR: Did you go to South Windsor High School?

RICKETTS: Yes, I went to Union School, I think it was first grade through fourth, then think one year over at Pleasant Valley, [0:05:00.0] that was fifth grade, and then by then the high school [Ellsworth Memorial High School] was no longer a high school; they made it all sixth grade. Best year ever, because it was like the whole—it was all sixth graders, all the teachers knew each other—it was just great and then after that, I went to South Windsor High.

MACGREGOR: What has changed since you grew up on Main Street in that area? Anything major that's changed with Main Street or that part of town?

RICKETTS: I don't think neighbors know each other like we did then. I remember Halloween. Halloween on Main Street was great. My parents used to let us, when we got a

certain age, say, I don't know, 12. We could go. We used to walk from [0:06:00.0] East Windsor hill, all the way down to Chapel [Road] and we would stop at practically every house on the way and then hook up with some of the kids on the way and we'd be like a crowd and certain houses they would have you come in and serve you doughnuts and hot chocolate because they knew you lived at the other end to warm you up and you had to make the trek all the way back down.

I remember Timmy and Kippy Shepard who were pretty funny, because one year they bribed us with doughnuts to take certain people's pumpkins to put on other people's lawns. We'd jump and they'd rake up the leaves and on the way we'd jump in the leaves. It was just great. That kind of closeness that you knew every one of your neighbors and if something did happen [0:07:00.0] to you, good or bad, your mom pretty much knew by the time you got home because Mrs. so-and-so was going to call her by time you got home and that's the—there was always that rule; don't you ever lie to me because she always knew. (laughs)

MACGREGOR: Always somebody to keep an eye on you.

RICKETTS: Somebody always to keep an eye on you.

MACGREGOR: What about holidays? Like Thanksgiving, and Christmas in the area. Was that—

RICKETTS: Yeah, because I remember—well Mom was a—Mom was one of ten and she always did a big thing for holidays and I guess also in her tradition of her family, Sunday was like open door policy. My mother, even if we went somewhere, she always cooked a big meal because people were always welcome to come to the house on a Sunday and she would feed them and being down at the river, we'd either eat outside—so holidays were always a big thing. I remember [0:08:00.0] a couple of Christmases when we were kids, the Fire Department from South Windsor would come down with their truck and Santa would be there and drop off a couple of toys or, like our road was difficult to get up and down because we were on a hill, or at the bottom of the hill.

Mr. Prior, who lived down the other, was the town truck driver for the plow in snow. He would come in, do our whole driveway. That's what South Windsor had. People just took the extra step without asking and just being friendly. I remember, you know, mom being part— we said Welcome Wagons. Either Mrs. Whooley or Mrs. Addington would know who was in town and you did it as a group and I don't think they do that anymore.

MACGREGOR: I haven't seen them myself. [0:09:00.0] I know when we came to town, that was it.

RICKETTS: That was it.

MACGREGOR: Yeah, that didn't happen at all. What are the proudest memories you have of your life so far?

RICKETTS: Concerning South Windsor growing up?

MACGREGOR: South Windsor or yourself.

RICKETTS: Well, really about South Windsor because that's what shaped me, you know? I think my parents had picked the perfect place to live and I still, I think, exude wanting to meet people, thinking the best of them and trying to always be friendly and kind and I really think that's what helped shape me was the environment I was in growing up here in South Windsor.
[0:10:00.0]

MACGREGOR: You have notes, so if you have some other things that you wanted to go ahead and put in there—

RICKETTS: Well, no. This was yours because you were going to either ask me about what are other proudest moments—No. I'm trying to keep it related to South Windsor.

MACGREGOR: Sure. That's fine, or it can go beyond that as well, if you want.

RICKETTS: Yeah, yeah.

MACGREGOR: So that's not a problem. That's not a problem. Okay, so I just had (crosstalk) for a second here for us. On that so I'll go back to (crosstalk)

RICKETTS: I had wanted to mention that.

MACGREGOR: Well, that— yeah, I was going to hold that until the end.

[Removed discussion of what questions to ask]

MACGREGOR: (inaudible due to whispering) Continuing on this. Do you have any regrets, Chevy with your life or anything that's going on?

RICKETTS: I'm still striving to **[0:12:00.0]** find my place. I haven't stopped. I guess I only have regrets if I suddenly have to stop and think about it. I never stop and think about it because I'm still moving.

MACGREGOR: Good. That's great. That really is great. We touched a little bit on what your future holds for you.

RICKETTS: Oh, yeah. Well, I still want adventures in my life and I'm free enough in which to do that. I like to think I'm kind of winding down in the years and I want to be able to explore and still find something that excites me every day.

MACGREGOR: That's great. When we think about major things that have happened in our life; we just came by the Kennedy assassination anniversary— can I ask you where you were when that occurred, do you recall?

RICKETTS: I remember. [0:13:00.0] I don't know why, every so often I would visit with— stay over my mom's friend's house in Hartford and I was there and it sticks in my mind because the two things my mother's friend had on her wall— because she had a daughter, so we played together— was a picture of Jesus and JFK and then we were watching television and it came on. So that has always stuck in my head. I can't remember how old I was, but you know, I'm looking at the picture and it was like, "What?" These are two people she revered in her life and you know—

MACGREGOR: It was quite an event.

RICKETTS: It was an event.

MACGREGOR: Quite an event to say the least. Anything else that you would like to share with us?

RICKETTS: Well—

MACGREGOR: About South Windsor? About yourself? About your family?

RICKETTS: I just want to like 0:14:00.0 —to say—to reiterate how nice people were. You know, I remember Jack Burgdorf; he used to come down and mow our lawn and he would take the time to play with us, drink me lemonade—when he'd come down, I'd make lemonade for him and Mrs. Raymond [Catherine Hildred Sperry Raymond], who also owned the house also up on the hill used to come down with her mom [Edna Jennings Sperry]. I don't want people to forget how—she was just like this—to me—I thought a little eccentric, but she just opened my world to being friendly. I remember she had a pet skunk. I mean, who has a pet skunk? She went everywhere with her mother and she loved this town.

[0:15:00.0] And how important the post office was. It wasn't just a post office; it was a meeting place and it still is. I try to—anytime I walk in there, I want people to feel at home. When they come in the door, I want to say hi to them and put a smile on their face and you did. You got a little bit of news of what was going on down the street, and every postmaster that was up there has always been nice. I remember the White house, Addingtons', Whooley's all just great people and they watched out for us. If the bus came in the morning in the winter, they'd open up the post office so we could sit inside until the bus came and where the sheep are now, 0:16:00.0 we used to play during the springtime or the summer when we were waiting for the bus we would play tag between the two wells—there were two stones. It was a gathering place for us kids to hang out and that's about it.

MACGREGOR: That's great. I understand—I don't know if you remember or not—I understand the post office actually moved at one point down the street to one of the postmaster's houses at some stage. Do you recall at all?

RICKETTS: No, I don't remember that.

MACGREGOR: Okay. I was curious about that because I remember somebody telling me one time that that had happened for some reason. Not sure why. The other things that I just wanted to touch base on was the subject of being discriminated against and how tolerant South Windsor was or anywhere you've been as to how tolerant they have been. [0:17:00.0]

RICKETTS: Again, I was pretty sheltered from that, a bit. I remember somewhere either in third or fourth grade of being accosted by a kid at school and when I got in a fight, I got timed out and I remember I was really upset going home and telling my mom about it because it was like, "Why did I get upset when she was the one who said something to me?" and we were fighting and we both got punished. There were a few slings, I guess, throughout school, people saying things. Not always being invited to people's homes, but it never really bothered me because my parents weren't like that. They weren't raised that way and I had a good base of people around me and I remember, I guess either at my second class reunion of [0:18:00.0] high school, I had at least two or three kids come up to me and apologize for the language they used to me when I was a kid and that meant a lot and that just also shows you that people can change. They grow and again, that's what South Windsor has taught me. If you treat somebody right or correctly, either they'll let you live the way you want to live, and be nice and say yes or go on their way, but you don't let it eat at you. There's been so many positives.

MACGREGOR: That's great.

RICKETTS: Yeah.

MACGREGOR: That's really great. Anything that you'd like to share with us about your life in South Windsor? We've touched a little bit on the people that you played with when you were growing up and the area that you lived in, and let me just ask you; what do you think of [0:19:00.0] how South Windsor has changed?

RICKETTS: I think it's grown very fast, but then again, that's like, 45 years. What do you expect after 45 years where you have condos in town and people don't know their neighbors anymore and we used to know all the cops in town and with everything that's happened in the news lately? People need to know their law enforcement, their fire departments, their ambulance, caregivers in town and so that one; they're more aware if something does happen, to be kind, and courteous to them, and that they'll know who you are, and treat you accordingly if something goes wrong and not saying, "Jeez, I have no idea." They might stop and pause or I, [0:20:00.0] or anybody might stop and pause and say, "I know that man. He lives here in town. He has a family."

MACGREGOR: Good. Yeah, I agree with you on that. Finally, just any final comments that you would like to make?

RICKETTS: Well, I hope other people will come in and give another perspective of what it was like to grow up in this town and how lovely it is and that it won't be forgotten, that it was a

farm town. There were a lot of fields. There's still quite a bit of farming going on here and we need to support them by going to farmer's markets, support our religious-based organizations here in town no matter what denomination because they all contribute to either Food Share, or making sure people have clothing, that organizations are [0:21:00.0] around so kids can have other things to do, so that their time is occupied with something positive and it's a good way to know who you're your neighbors are.

MACGREGOR: Good. You touched on farming and I really didn't bring that up when we were talking about Main Street. What was Main Street like from a farming perspective?

RICKETTS: Well, they had—the Shepards I remember did sod, Rikley's did potatoes, I don't know who did the—I think—Oh, they also did tobacco. Shepards did tobacco, they—what do you call that—leasing the land? So all that land down there got leased and I remember Mrs. Raymond used to do hay and alfalfa for the cows. I remember riding on the back of the tractor and they used to let us sit there while they [0:22:00.0] got the bales. That's when you had to actually—they had the machine that made the bales, but once they got wrapped, you had to actually lift them up, throw them on to the back of the tractor. They grew rye, also for animals down there.

So it's changed over time and I know they had corn and the wildlife that was down there. People tend to forget about that. When we were kids, just about all the guys from town would come down to our house to go fishing because there was the mouth of the river, the Scantic that went into the Connecticut River and they'd walk through the back of our property. So it was kind of a little gathering place. You felt safe down there, you know? A lot of people used to come down just to sit down by the water and, yeah.

MACGREGOR: So is it kind of safe to say or at least to say that maybe that part of Main Street was kind of like its own [0:23:00.0] little community?

RICKETTS: Yeah, but then again, South Windsor is so much smaller than that. When you think about it, the Town Hall used to be on Main Street where, still that wasn't the major side of town, but it was the hustle and bustle at one point.

MACGREGOR: Now where was the Town Hall located on Main Street?

RICKETTS: Right next to where the Dillon's—there used to be a big, like an old Masonic hall there and eventually I think—did it burn down or tear down?—and then everything moved over to the other side of town, yeah. Over down next to where the other post office is.

MACGREGOR: Oh, okay. The other end of Main Street.

RICKETTS: Yeah, the other end of Main Street.

MACGREGOR: Interesting.

RICKETTS: Yeah.

MACGREGOR: Interesting. So it has changed.

RICKETTS: It has changed. Yeah, the center of town is now actually in the center of town.
(laughs)

MACGREGOR: That's great. All right, well if there's nothing else [0:24:00.0] you want to share, I want to say thank you for taking the time.

RICKETTS: Thank you.

MACGREGOR: I appreciate it and look forward to having you review everything that we've done.

RICKETTS: Okay. Thank you, Bob.

MACGREGOR: Thank you.

[0:24:11.2 End of audio; End of Interview]

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