

Dick May Oral History Interview

Interview Conducted by
Christina Wright
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Title: Dick May oral history interview, 2008 January 15

Description: Dick May recounts his thirty-year career as a race car driver, competing in NASCAR and locally in New York State. Mr. May discusses growing up on a farm, his military service in the late 1940s, and how early incidences of speeding contributed to his later driving career. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, he became best known as a relief driver, aiding in qualifying and racing other drivers' cars. Mr. May reflects on the role of independents in NASCAR and the many team owners with whom he raced. He also recalls memories of his competitors, moving from New York to Charlotte, North Carolina with his wife, and side advertising jobs he held during his driving career.

Biography: Dick May was a 77-year-old man at the time of the interview, which took place at J. Murrey Atkins Library at UNC Charlotte in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was born in the borough of Queens, New York City, New York in 1930. He was employed as a race car driver and truck driver.

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Transcript Notes: CW : Christina Wright
DM : Dick May

Dick May Oral History Interview Transcript

CW: Mr. May is a former NASCAR Winston Cup driver. His career in racing began on the dirt tracks of his native New York state where he built a fine reputation in driving modified cars in the Adirondack Stock Car Association Series. He decided to try his hand at the Grand National towards the end of the 1960s and continued with that series until he retired from racing in 1986. In the Grand Nationals he was known as reliable and talented driver who could qualify any car and who was often available and willing to drive relief for other drivers. This cost him a certain amount of recognition, but I'm pleased to say that in 2007, Mr. May was honored by being inducted into the Dirt Hall of Fame in Weedsport, New York. I wanted to start with your family background and I wonder if you could tell me when you were born?

DM: I was born in 1930, Dec--November 7, 1930 to a college professor at St. Lawrence University. And we stayed at St. Lawrence University until I was approximately four years old. And then my dad changed jobs from St. Lawrence to Cornell.

CW: Um-hum. What was your father's name?

DM: Frederick May.

CW: And your mother's name?

DM: Margaret May.

CW: Right. And you were their first child.

DM: No I have a--

CW: You were their second.

DM: --sister.

CW: Okay.

DM: I have sister, and--

CW: She's older than you?

DM: Sister's two years older. And this, this is why I think after my sister was born they decided that they needed a brother or another sister--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --so they could not have any more children or didn't have any more children, they adopted one--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --and I'm the adopted son of a college professor.

CW: Right. What is your earliest memory would you say? Do you remember anything about that first place that you lived?

DM: Yeah. (laughs) We, we were we had a house up in Canton, New York. And Canton is the snowbelt of the nation.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And for some reason it keeps out in my mind that my mother after lunch would put me out on the porch in my crib, in a blanket, all wrapped up. But for some reason I don't think I liked that. I remember being out on the porch, but it wasn't, it wasn't a bad experience but that's a first thing of Canton that I remember.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And then they drove us, then we went in our Model A Ford, which my dad at that time never had a car until we got up to Canton because in New York City where he was born and brought up, you don't need a car.

CW: Right.

DM: So (pause) it just they took that we took the Model A and started out for Ithaca, New York, sort of like the *Beverly Hillbillies*.

CW: Um-hum, and you were four years old?

DM: I was four years old.

CW: But you remember that.

DM: I remember going--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --but I don't remember the trip.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And I remember the car, but--

CW: Did you take an interest in cars from being quite small?

DM: Yes. Like on the farm in 1939 my dad, we had a team of horses, my dad decided that we need a farm tractor. So the local dealer of the House of Charmer's people come up and gave a demonstration of one of their tractors. And we bought that in 1939, we did all our plowing, farming, whatever we could use a tractor for.

CW: Um-hum. And you enjoyed the tractor--

DM: I enjoyed, but my dad would not let me operate it. And I, and I really felt and they thought afterwards that I could probably operate better than he did.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But he wouldn't let me.

CW: And that was, so you were only nine years old?

DM: Nine years, nine, ten years hardly big enough to climb up on the seat--

CW: Right.

DM: But back, during the war, farm boys did everything.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Sometime the oldest () would be only thirteen or fourteen years old.

CW: Um-hum. When did your father decide to have the farm as well as being a professor?

DM: When we moved to Ithaca we moved we bought a house and a farm. And then when the war come along, college begin to close down, he's too old for the service himself, and we went into chicken farming.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And we had, at that time a fairly large chicken farm which we had 10,000 meat birds and about 4,000 laying birds, that's laying for eggs, which is big back then but it isn't now.

CW: Um-hum. But still yeah for back then that was to supply a lot people, and that was an important job during the war.

DM: And, I hated that, the chickens are messy and it just, we had three cows, I much rather work around the cows and the horses then the chickens.

CW: Um-hum. You knew pretty early on that farming wasn't for you, though right?

DM: I, it was better than school. (laughs)

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Well, that's, it's just farming it's a lot of work. And when some of the other boys were out going to the movies, I was out working in the barns. And during the war, times were rough because you didn't get all that gas you needed. My dad was very patriotic about not using gas unless it's really necessary.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And so, start to, when I got to work I could crank the tractor myself, it was a hand crank, no starter--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --but you had to watch what you're doing if it kicks, which people that understand farm tractors, knows what you're talking about when they kick. You know not like a horse but like a machine.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I could start it, but my dad would have a hard time starting it. So my mother would send me out to help my dad get the tractor started and then as soon as they get it started, he would jump on it and go and do the work with it. Which I thought I should be doing that.

CW: Uh-huh.

DM: So one day, I got it started and I got up out of the tractor, and he said, "Where do you think you're going." I said, "Going to go up and plow the garden." "No, you aren't, he says, "I'm doing that." So what I did, I reached up underneath the cab and turned the gas off. So it's going to stop in about one minute, by that time I'm back in the house. So my dad comes in the house, told my mother, "Send your son out and get that damn." Now when he used damn, that, he didn't swear, he was upset, so he got, I got it going again. And I said, "Let me drive it." He said, "I drive it." So I did it again I say, "What you're doing you're flooding in it when you drive, you drive it across the road." Well I got that far--

CW: (laughs)

DM: So it was shortly after that that a neighbor come up by and wanted his garden plowed. Because it was wartime and everybody had a victory garden.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And my neighbors asked if I would be able to go down and plow his garden, I thought I wonder how I'd do that. I think Dad will have to go to town Monday afternoon, I think I can go down there plow the garden, and be back home before he would know it. So I went down plowed the garden. About four or five days later the person come up that I did his garden, he said, "Will you send your son back down to disk, disk it up, the garden." He said, "Yes, but he didn't plow it." Well yes he did, no he doesn't, he isn't allowed to use the tractor. Well my dad went down and looked at the garden and he said to me afterward, "That that was a very nice job." He says, "I think I'll have to consider you to take care of the tractor."

CW: Well that was good that he understood that.

DM: Yeah.

CW: Yeah.

DM: Well in that, that first, the second year I was driving the tractor I made enough money. I was charging five dollars an hour, I made enough money to buy a used 1936 Ford Coupe, which right now would be very valuable.

CW: Yes.

DM: You use to borrow in 1942, the Coupe would've been practically pretty close to a ten-year-old car, but it was nice.

CW: Um-hum. Now how old were you at that point?

DM: In 1946 I was sixteen.

CW: Right. So you bought a car how old when you were sixteen?

DM: Yes, yeah.

CW: Wow.

DM: And that was another thing, I was never allowed to drive my dad's car. He said, "You wreck everything else you aren't going to get in that, car wreck."

CW: Now what had you wrecked?

DM: Oh, stuff on the farm. Just do damage that could be avoided. As you work in the dairy farm a lot the stanchions could get broken. It's just stuff that I would sort of, kids would tear up.

CW: Um-hum. So you had your own car until, did you drive it fast?

DM: Yes, yeah. I got, I think I got nine tickets in one year. It wasn't, it wasn't a record but an awful good average. (laughs)

CW: (laughs) Did you have to pay those?

DM: Yeah.

CW: Uh-huh.

DM: But it's one of those you pay on the spot.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And they didn't, they didn't when they did start marking your license and after three tickets I would tear the license up, go down the courthouse get a new one, never put that marks on them--

CW: Oh. (laughs)

DM: --I had a lot of, the police were good to me. Really, they tried to help me. So a lot of the time I could talk my way out of a ticket. But they, they help me, the tickets did help--

CW: Uh-huh.

DM: --I had--

CW: They helped you to slow down?

DM: Well one of the nice officers stopped me. He says, "I don't do this very often, I'm going to let you go but the last time I did it I let two kids go, they went down the road about fifteen minutes from here, and run into a pole and killed themselves." He says, "I blame myself for that, I should not a turned them loose. If I had to give them a ticket they would be alive." So he told me that, he said, "I am going to let you go, but the reason that you're getting the ticket" And when they finally came and took my license they took it for two years but I kept on driving. I lived right next door to the local sheriff of Jefferson County, and I used to pal around with his son. And he would come home at noon time or at nights and say, "Will you take the police car back down to the office, and I come down and pick you up." I get into the police car, drive it down there.

CW: (laughs)

DM: So I asked him, "When it came time to get it back what you got to do to get it back?" And he explained you need to do this, that and everything. He said, "By the way who lost the license?" I said, "I didn't have one in two years." He said, "You got to be fooling. He said I would've never known it." But I got rid of the car with the shiny hubcaps, the foxtail, the noisy radio and begin driving like a normal person. It taught me how to drive.

CW: Um-hum, right. Do you think looking back on your young self, that you were already a driver you know you were already a racing driver, I mean were the seeds already there at that point in your life?

DM: It comes natural to me.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Yeah. But the car--

CW: Did you have to get taught, I mean were you taught--

DM: No.

CW: --how, you just got into it and drove.

DM: That '36 Ford also would've gone to the local track in 1950, and been a racecar.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: If it was in rough shape you would use it for a race car. If it was in pretty good shape we'd use it for the family car.

CW: Um-hum. Right, right. Now I know that you didn't much care for school. You preferred to be doing things--

DM: Yeah, if I had--

CW: --involve.

DM: --if I had to do it again, I would quit school at sixteen, get my folks to sign the release to let me in the service.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Because I, I was a good soldier.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: It was simple for me.

CW: Right.

DM: And all the running and the push-ups, and polishing, it just comes natural to me.

CW: Um-hum. Tell me about how you joined up.

DM: I wrecked my car on a school day, about sometime in December of '48. I went to Elmira, New York, skipped school, why I went to Elmira I don't know, but on the way back I wrecked my car. I went around a corner pretty fast and slammed into a car. And when it got all done the car was on the wrong side of the road, I'm on the right side, and it looked like this older man had runned in to me. And he's apologizing, (laughs) it was me. But I'd said to myself, I want go into the service because things, I couldn't get the car fixed right away, and no sense in going to school without a car. And back then of the whole Ithaca High School there was only three of us that had cars. People didn't drive cars to school--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --you took the bus. (pause)

CW: You must've been pretty popular for that then, for having a car?

DM: I, yeah I had a couple of girlfriends. We had a good time.

CW: Um-hum, right.

DM: But I, I really hated school, just I don't even like to go past a school now--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Everybody tells me why I wish I was back in school. I don't even care to come here. (laughs)

CW: Um-hum. (laughs) It's a little bit different--

DM: Look at these kids, they're studying.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I couldn't study to sit still that long.

CW: Right, you needed a different form of education.

DM: Yeah.

CW: Which the Air Force was able to give you, you joined the Air Force, right?

DM: No Army.

CW: Oh you joined the army, but you were in the--

DM: Seventeenth Airborne.

CW: Right that was why I was thinking it was the Air Force. So where did you go to boot camp?

DM: Camp Pickett, Virginia.

CW: Um-hum. What--

DM: Right down there outside of Richmond, going south on 85. You go through a town by the name of Blackstone. And Blackstone is just off the post of Pickett.

CW: Um-hum. What was it like boot camp?

DM: Simple.

CW: Did you enjoy it?

DM: Oh yeah, yeah. Didn't bother us, we were in good physical shape. They pretty near sent me home, I only weighed a 130 pounds.

CW: How tall?

DM: Five-six, five-seven.

CW: Um-hum, that's very light, though isn't it?

DM: Yeah.

CW: Yeah. But they kept you on and fed you up?

DM: Right.

CW: Made you stronger.

DM: They said if I, we was to jump out which I did not jump but they said, You start jumping when we do you're going to be up in the air. After five minutes we're going to have to wait for you.

CW: (laughs) that's not right thought is it (laughs) physics. Now why did you get into, did you have a choice of which branch of the Army you went into?

DM: Yes. But maybe the Army recruiter was the first door we come to possibly. I don't know.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: My buddy that went in with me said, "We should've gone into the Marines." I said, "Why didn't we?" Well he doesn't know.

CW: Uh-huh.

DM: I would just follow him.

CW: Right, so you were just young and you--

DM: Yeah--

CW: --knew you wanted to join the forces, but you just happened to get into that one accidentally what did they pick you out to do, when you got there--

DM: In the service?

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I was MP [Military Police], and then I was in the fire department. In the MPs, I started off in the stockade as a stockade guard, or at the regular gate, or at the town patrol. And what more exciting thing could you want to do at eighteen years old, riding around in a shiny jeep

CW: Um-hum.

DM: That's living.

CW: Um-hum. (laughs) Did you feel that you might fly? I mean did you have, did you want to be involved, did you want to parachute and fly and--

DM: No. As you get in, next thing you want to do is get out.

CW: Oh. (laughs)

DM: You say you must've been delirious when I asked to go in--

CW: Really? You didn't feel like that to begin with?

DM: --we, everybody does--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: After your first start, how did I get myself in this mess? But I, I enlisted about that time in the forties, '48 and '49 they were drafting people. A lot of people were going because they didn't want to be where they were. And drafting should've never happened, there was enough people similar to me and my buddies that would've fulfilled it without drafting. And the draftee sort of they complained, some of them couldn't be soldiers they had to be in.

CW: Um-hum, right. Now didn't you end up driving trucks in the Army?

DM: As I got out of the Army.

CW: Oh after you, okay. Right. So, tell me about your first experience with a race car which was in the Army with your lieutenant--

DM: Well my first experience with a race car was, I was at the motor pool with one of the fire trucks, and one of the mechanics said, He was going to go to Canton, New York and race a car. And I said, "Well how do you that? And he begin to explain that he's got a '36 Ford, got roll bars in it and the about twenty or thirty other cars come out, we race around a dirt track. Well that sounds like fun. So I went up there with them two or three times. And one day he said, "Would you like to drive?" Well sounds like fun, how would I know? So I started driving and I don't know if I was in a heat race and there was eight cars, and I finished second, because five of the other ones had piled up. (laughs)

CW: Oh really? (laughs)

DM: So I always put it in like that, I don't know.

CW: (laughs) You finished second that's pretty good.

DM: Well I'm just guessing at it.

CW: How did it feel, what do you remember of that first race? Did you think this is something that I want to do more of?

DM: Well I wish, well this is getting a little bit ahead of it. If I had known more about the mechanics of a car, I could've got better rides. But when I, going to Watertown, after Canton, Watertown Speedway, I got in with an electrical company by the name of Dexter Electric.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And they built a heck of a nice car for me. But they had all the machine shop and everything to do where the other people had to do it in their own backyard, in their own garage, and their own makeshift tools.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But--

CW: What, how many tracks were there in that area at around, that stock cars--

DM: In that area, there would be just Canton and Watertown. And we could either race one or the other. And seeing that I lived in Watertown, so I raced Watertown.

CW: Um-hum. Right. And this is when you were still in the Army, that first couple of years?

DM: First couple of years.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And then--

CW: Were you able to race much when you were in the Army?

DM: I had to use an assumed name because you had to be twenty-one years old, and I wasn't.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: So I would be Clem Kadiddlehopper or something. (laughs)

CW: Not always the same person.

DM: No.

CW: Alright. And so, and so for two years you raced with this the, he was a lieutenant.

DM: No, he was a corporal--

CW: Oh a corporal.

DM: --in the motor pool.

CW: Um-hum, what was his name?

DM: It was, no actually he was a sergeant, Sergeant Patty. Had no relation, nothing to do with it.

CW: Um-hum. Was he a good driver too?

DM: Well we all this, like I had two more races than he had.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: You know. (laughs) Like after I was in there a third time I'm a pro.

CW: (laughs)

DM: I've been doing this for three weeks.

CW: Is that kind of how it felt in that period?

DM: Yeah.

CW: People picked it up very quickly--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --and just went in and raced, and, not--

DM: Sort of like when you go on a job as a truck driver. Your first couple of trips you're a little awkward, after a couple of days you get to know what you're doing.

CW: Um-hum. Right, what was your car like, that first car?

DM: First car was a '37 Ford Coupe.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Number eighty-eight.

CW: Um-hum. Did you pick the number?

DM: No.

CW: --or was that, it was his number.

DM: Already on it--

CW: Right, right.

DM: And then when I went to went Watertown, I had a friend build me a car out of a '37 car or a '35. (pause) And I, I crashed it a couple times. I was much better driving for somebody then drive, I would tear my open equipment apart.

CW: Why do you think that was?

DM: I don't know.

CW: You didn't feel responsibility necessarily--

DM: Dexter Electric knew I had a car and at that time I had already been running championship race at Syracuse, New York.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And Dexter Electric come by and ask if they could use my car at the local track because their driver has crashed theirs so many times its junk. And I said yeah, but you got to have a car ready for me for Syracuse in Labor Day time. So I started driving for Dexter Electric, and they built me a car, and I got the championship with that.

CW: Um-hum. Do you, I know that dates are a little difficult to remember sometimes, but approximately when did you hook up Dexter Electric? In--

DM: Early sixties--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Is that close enough?

CW: Um-hum. Yeah.

DM: Yeah.

CW: So you'd been already driving for about ten years.

DM: Ten years yeah.

CW: Right, it's a long time isn't it you, how many--

DM: And it's only, see up there it's a dirt track--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --and you only raced Friday nights.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Or Saturday, we didn't have a rain date. If we got rained out Saturday we couldn't go down there and race Sunday night.

CW: Um-hum, right. So how many, during the first ten years, how many tracks would you race on? There was obviously Canton--

DM: Peacefully, six. They'd be Canton--

CW: Watertown--

DM: --Tupper Lake, Sandy Creek, tracks that only race once in awhile--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But a long trip for us was go to Syracuse. Which was sixteen miles away, but now--

CW: Well later in your career that became just a very small journey didn't it. Alexander Bay, that was another one.

DM: Alexander Bay was tourist attractions up around, right by the Thousand Island Bridge. So everybody from Canada would get off on the stateside to come to the races--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And we would have a crowd of oh anywhere from 500 to 1,500.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: That would be big crowd.

CW: Right. Which were the bigger tracks?

DM: Big tracks were Syracuse, that was mile track.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: When I went to Syracuse they use to get over a hundred cars, and people told me when I started going down there said you can't even make that race, besides Canada. I says, "I'm not trying to make it, I'm going down to win it."

CW: Good for you. And what, how did you fair?

DM: Third.

CW: Oh wow.

DM: It was my own fault. I was busy watching another car, which I thought was a lap down, but it was a leader. And I held off because I didn't want to--he was doing weird things, and I didn't--it wasn't safe to be around him.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And that's where I tell everybody when a driver starts thinking, get rid of that driver. You don't need to thinking, I just could've passed him.

CW: Um-hum. So what is your philosophy of driving, in that respect then? Who makes the best drivers, what's the best approach?

DM: Well--

CW: Not to think too much presumably.

DM: Pass everything that isn't moving. (laughs)

CW: Do you think it's very instinctual?

DM: Well when I first went to Daytona, if I had got all my modified information out of my head--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --and not mix it up with the I'd a been a lot better off. I had a very good car. It use to belonged to Tiny Lund and Marvin Panch. And when I first went to Daytona everybody said that car's going to do something. But I had no knowledge at all what the car's suppose to do and I should've let Bobby Allison and Donny Allison, Patch or one of them in the car, shake it down, to see if it was set up right--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --but no I know too much about it. No one's getting in my car.

CW: Um-hum. So you didn't you need to have a certain amount of give and take then, you need to not let--

DM: (speaking at same time) If I got into a strange car to qualify, usually I would get a lap or two to see what it would do. And I could normally figure out what a car needs to be done before I had to qualify it.

CW: Um-hum, right. But the two different kinds of cars threw you off when you made that change.

DM: Threw me off.

CW: Right. What, back in the early period, what do you think motivated you to keep going to the track?

DM: Beats working.

CW: Uh-huh. (laughs) In that early period? Mean you weren't going too many times to the track.

DM: I had a regular job driving tractor trailers for a paper company. But the paper company manager was into racing--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And I could have much time on the weekends as I needed--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And--

CW: Did he come, did he come and watch you?

DM: Yeah, yeah.

CW: So it was a diversion from working, or was something else pulling you back?

DM: Well the truck driving job I had was a very good job and it paid very good money. I was making more money back there in the late fifties then some of the people are making right now.

CW: Um-hum, um-hum.

DM: But we were instructed not to crash them. If we crash a truck we're done, we're fired. And--

CW: Might not be your fault though

DM: Well--

CW: (laughs)

DM: --(pause) a Delta airline pilot can't say that ain't my fault--

CW: True.

DM: As the plane is on the fifty million people, whose fault is it?

CW: Um-hum, um-hum. Well I get, well anyway, yeah.

DM: Yeah, that time we said to them, well do you got allowance to have a one wreck you know without getting fired. Well you see that Delta airline pilot, see if he gets another chance, he doesn't get another chance.

CW: Um-hum. It's true. So you were it was a good secure job--

DM: Yeah.

CW: You could afford because you, I mean the racing was just for fun, I assume you weren't really making extra money.

DM: I didn't have to spend any money. They would build a car, I would drive for nothing--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --but I didn't have to put any money out. These drivers now are when the sign up they're signed up for \$300,000 a year guarantee.

CW: Right.

DM: I drove all my driving career I made \$278,000 in my whole career--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --according to that in one race.

CW: Um-hum, right, right. And in the early period with the modified races, the purse probably wasn't very much at all.

DM: I took the most money out of Watertown, I won six races in a row that paid \$300 a piece. But that was good.

CW: That was good yeah. Was that 1962 when you were champion of the track?

DM: One of those years, yeah.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Yeah.

CW: So what, we still haven't quite got your motivation though, what, besides maybe enjoying that kind, you know winning is there something about being in the racecar and going fast, and what is it that makes people want to do that?

DM: I've never been asked, racing beats working, you know. And it wasn't costing me a penny and I was having a ball--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --a lot of the other drivers they had to make that car run right or they just couldn't continue.

CW: Um-hum. Is there a lot of adrenaline, and excitement when you're in the car racing?

DM: I feel very relaxed.

CW: Really?

DM: I, people say aren't you scared, I'd look at them, why would you think I would be scared, would I be dumb enough to keep doing it and be scared? You know I.

CW: Um-hum. How many? I know you had a terrible wreck in '63, but did you have many other wrecks during that period?

DM: No, no.

CW: So that was your first really big one?

DM: That was, and that was a driver's fault. I should, I should've never been in that wreck. I was starting in the middle, rear of the pack, and they restarted it three times and I had already come up to the front, in just a couple of laps. And somehow the car got loose and they would've stopped the race, why didn't I stop, and start up again? Because I already started in the rear for the last three times, I (pause) ended up going home in the ambulance.

CW: So what happened exactly?

DM: I broke my jaw, knocked out nine teeth, and my ribs.

CW: Boy and the car was totally--

DM: I got a new one.

CW: --destroyed.

DM: It--

CW: So you said a car, another car ran out of control, or your, what happened to cause the accident?

DM: I just got loose, got sideways--

CW: Oh, okay.

DM: --and went towards the infield. And there's one pole in the ten-acre lot and I was lucky enough to hit that.

CW: Oh, so it was just--

DM: It, it, you know like you say, the action wasn't my fault, well whose fault was it?

CW: Um-hum. And nobody else was involved in that accident.

DM: No.

CW: Which track was it on?

DM: Watertown.

CW: Uh-huh, did you have a favorite track of those Adirondack Tracks?

DM: I use to like Waterloo, New York which I auto raced a few times. I use to go to Canada, I drove for different people in Canada.

CW: What makes one track better than another, dirt tracks?

DM: Dirt tracks, it's a cla--it's a clay, does not get dusty and break up.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: That's the trouble with the track up here at Lowes, the dirt track. The car's got so much horsepower that the wheels are just tearing holes in it--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And they don't know how to control it. The way you control it is take the horsepower away from the cars. A Flathead Ford only puts out 230 horses, these cars now are putting out 900. It's just a big, different.

CW: Um-hum. There wouldn't be a clay track anywhere that could take that--

DM: No.

CW: --really. Was there anything else, I mean they're just all ovals so or occasionally circles but is there anything else that makes one track better than another? Did you have superstitions--

DM: Well--

CW: --about some of them.

DM: The Winston Cup cars, the, the Nashville track which was a high paying track and you could drive around that thing flat opened, and I think I just had good luck at that one.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And Darlington is another track that is, I forgot what in the heck they call it, but you got to drive Darlington track at the whole track the minute that you get on it, just drive as hard as you can drive. And just don't ease off, and then I had very good luck at Darlington.

CW: Do you, are you superstitious? Do you believe you can be lucky sometimes?

DM: I will go around a latter.

CW: Yeah.

DM: I don't care if people eat peanuts in my car, but I'd rather have them do something else. I'd say do you want to play a game, go somebody else, let them know that, I not, it's not going to spoil anything but let's not put any more pressure on.

CW: Um-hum. I guess it's just the culture of, did you have the peanuts thing up north, or was that just Southern thing?

DM: That was Southern, carried along way back in the Indianapolis days.

CW: Really, really? Oh interesting.

DM: Yeah, yeah Which means nothing.

CW: No, no.

DM: Like I drove from Elmo Langley, he had green car--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --and green was suppose to be zero.

CW: Um-hum. Was that something else that came from the Indy cars or--

DM: I don't know where the, where the green we had a good man down in Syracuse, Irish, Jack Murphy that had a green car but he was winning.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: So.

CW: Right. And very appropriate that he had a green car being Irish. (laughs) You decided in 1960, well in 1967 you decided to do your first NASCAR race.

DM: Yeah.

CW: How did that happen? What, how did it come up?

DM: Well, I'm, at a truck stop with my truck going into New York City and I'm talking to a trucker, and he was saying that he's got to go sell his Grand National car. And I asked him, "What is a Grand National car?" He says, "It's one that you see Richard Petty, Cale Yarborough,

and David Pearson driving at Darlington and Charlotte, that you read in *Hot Rod* magazine and *Langhorne*.” And I said, “Well that’s quite an operation.” He said, “I got one, but I got to sell it or my wife’s going to leave me.” He said, “One of us got to get rid of something.”

CW: How much was it worth?

DM: I paid \$2,500 for her--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --but I, I was at Carrera, New York, which is a small resort town up in outer index. And the house that he lived at was in Poughkeepsie, New York which is on the Hudson River--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --down by West Point. So I decided that I wanted to go and look at the car. And I looked at, I went down to find his house with a tractor trailer, here I am running around northern New York in a tractor trailer. And he took me downstairs in the basement and there was this beautiful shiny car. It’s just spotless, better than the road car that I’m driving. And he started it up and had a 427 in it, that was the big Ford motor, and it just rattled the rafters. And I told him, I said, “I’ve got to have that I got, I’ll take that home.” So I had to make three different trips down there with a tractor trailer so that I could load it in and bring it back home.

CW: Three different trips?

DM: Yeah. Because a lot of time when I’m in New York or Philadelphia they will give you loads to pick up I would have no room. So three different trips before I could finally make the arrangements. And I loaded it in the back of the tractor trailer, took it to Watertown and called up my buddy and told him, “I just bought a car.” And he didn’t believe me, so.

CW: What was the history on the car?

DM: It was the Marvin Panch, Wood Brothers car. Very, very good car. He was this road course car, which course I ran it on the Super Speedway, but who cares back in those days.

CW: Um-hum. How old was it at that point?

DM: It was, ’63, and I made it into a ’64 by changing the grill on it. You could change a year by just changing some sheet metal.

CW: Oh, wow. And there was nothing wrong with it--

DM: Oh, no.

CW: I mean clearly it was in perfect--

DM: No.

CW: --working order. It hadn't been crashed or anything.

DM: No. So I took it home, we sanded it down, repainted it, and I got a lot of help on it. And I asked my buddy, "What we do?" he said, "You take it to Daytona." I said, "Where's Daytona?" We got it onto a racecar hauler just over one-ton truck which the car was actually bigger than the truck. But we were going to go to Daytona and that's why I said, "If, if I could've had my crew get stuck in Richmond and couldn't make it and send me down I would've got one of those Southern boys to take the car out, shake it down." I was running third in the first race, ran out of gas, I didn't know what a pit stop meant, had a big border around the pit, I'm winning this thing, I ain't going to stop.

CW: So there was no preparation at all? I mean you just went in having driven on these short tracks--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --and you ran, I mean what were the length of the races that you'd been driving those--

DM: Biggest--

CW: --those dirt races.

DM: --biggest track I've ever been on was a mile track, Syracuse.

CW: Um-hum. And how far, how long would the race be?

DM: Race would be thirty laps.

CW: Right. So nothing.

DM: Nothing.

CW: So the, to go from that to Daytona and do 500--

DM: Well it would be--

CW: Four hundred, what was it--

DM: --it was the ARCA race, was the first one that, that's the Auto Racing Club of America.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: That it has a race the week before the Daytona 500. And they ask me to come into that race because they was shorter cars.

CW: Right. And how many miles was it? At that 500 one? Or you don't remember it, it doesn't--

DM: Yes, I do.

CW: It was a lot. (laughs)

DM: It was, (pause) be like eighty laps, I think.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Two hundred and fifty miles.

CW: A lot further then you'd ever driven--

DM: Yeah but it goes had a 150 mile an hour go by fast.

CW: Right. How, what was your top speed in the north?

DM: I think I noticed in one of entry planks the other day, I qualified at 156. Which the pole winner would've been 170, 175. I was twenty mile an hour different from the man on pole.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But now the pole winner and the last place car are within a half a second apart.

CW: Right, it's amazing. But when you were driving on the dirt tracks what was your top speed up there?

DM: I don't know. I was out front, I was I was planning on, I could win there.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I entered all the races, and the idea that I'm going to win.

CW: Right.

DM: But when I got down south, and see what I was getting, then I had to go to plan B.

CW: What did it feel like being at Daytona for the first time?

DM: You think, boy we're really traveling, until one car passed you on the right another one on the left, well I'm not going so fast, am I?

CW: (laughs) I guess not. And, and the car, presumably, the car wasn't, maybe going--

DM: The car was--

CW: --wouldn't have gone as fast.

DM: The car was a winner--

CW: Okay.

DM: --was a winner. He just had a loser for a driver.

CW: Well not, just a--

DM: Had to learn, I had to learn.

CW: You were wet behind the ears, you needed to learn. But you did take a little crew with you, you had some people with you to help out.

DM: A lot of people volunteered. They paid their own expenses. I got the, some of the stores in Watertown to donate some money. I had a, I just fell into a gold mine. Not knowing didn't have the slightest the ideal what we were doing.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Like I, I'd like to go back to the first minute I entered the, I should've won that thing.

CW: That would've been incredible wouldn't it?

DM: Yeah.

CW: It would've been amazing.

DM: But I did not know how to work, I, all the Water Town cars I did not work on them. They would a, they say you do enough damage on the track without working on them, and tearing them apart here in the pits.

CW: Um-hum. I know that you weren't inclined to get involved with the mechanics very much--

DM: No, I, I don't think it's necessary, Buddy Baker is not mechanically inclined. And you can't say Cale Yarborough is a better driver than Buddy Baker, Cale could work on his car, but Buddy couldn't.

CW: Um-hum, um-hum. But you do acknowledge some necessity--

DM: I do.

CW: --for the driver to be in sync with the car.

DM: I know what the car would need for the springs, and the gear reach, and what the car, if it's loose or pushing and I can tell what it's, it's doing.

CW: Um-hum, right. What kind of things did you have to learn to drive on those long, super speedways?

DM: Well we were in Atlanta one day, and my wife, we're going to the track in the morning, my wife says, "We got to do good today because we're out of money, so we don't have any more money. And you got to try to finish fifteenth, sixteenth," or from fifteenth up to fifteenth is worth a little bit, guys could finish and a make a few dollars.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: So with this, she told me I would have to go to work, and that scared me for me to go to work.

CW: (laughs)

DM: So I got out of Atlanta, and I started a race and I went up past Elmo and (pause) Ben Arnold, Cecil Gordon, those also runners in the same, and I said if I'm passing all those cars then all I got to do is pass the leaders and I'm going to win this. Then I said, now wait minute these guys always are finishing fifth to fifteenth and here I am already passed those guys, I said something is wrong, I backed it off and tucked in behind one of the more experienced drivers and followed him the rest of the day, finished the race.

CW: What was your position do you remember?

DM: Maybe it was the fifteenth, twelfth around there.

CW: It was in the right bracket, that's good. So you learned something that day.

DM: Yeah.

CW: Uh-huh.

DM: I could get the most improved spot all in the cars I qualified were very poor cars. And they, we would start thirty-eighth, thirty-ninth, fortieth.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: They would pay the driver for the most improved spot, tools or extra money. And I quite often got the most improved spot. If you started fortieth and finish twentieth, most likely you're going to get the most, but if you started twentieth and you would have to win to do it.

CW: Um-hum, right, and it's always the equipment isn't it, it's you know obviously the driving skills--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --is important, but if you don't have the equipment there--

DM: Well I learned how to take, take care of them, I was driving from Dave Thomas one time and he said, "Do not exceed 6,000 RPMs on the motor." He said, "It would stay together all day but don't exceed that or it just won't last." So I got in the middle of the race, he come out in the pit stop, said, "You're doing great for running about twentieth, twenty-first, doing great, just

keep going.” So I come in and I think, we had about another thirty laps to go, I told the chief, “I’m going to hook on the back and race with them.” Oh he said, “Don’t, don’t do that. You got a good spot we need the money, take it easy.” And he was pretty near crying. But we finished, I think, about tenth or eleventh.

CW: You took his advice?

DM: Oh yeah.

CW: Yeah.

DM: Because that’s the, I’m the only one that’s jumping cars. Everybody else had to come in they were buying rides, I would qualify cars, another guy would come in and buy a ride and take the car and drive it himself.

CW: Right, right. Now you first, and it wasn’t, I guess it wasn’t a NASCAR race because you said it was an ARCA race, but it was in Daytona, that was in 1967.

DM: Sixty-seven, right.

CW: And then what happened in the next couple of years before you actually moved--

DM: When I went back, up until ’69 I went back to the dirt tracks--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --and raced just the Grand National car at, I, I took it down to Trenton, New Jersey and just made a fool of myself.

CW: Oh really?

DM: And just--

CW: Why?

DM: Well I had no business with a car that size, with the Sportsman cars, you know.

CW: Um-hum. So you, it was legitimate to race it in--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --in that race? But you thought it was the wrong--

DM: It was--

CW: --that kind of car.

DM: --it was the, it's like taking a mule to a horse race.

CW: Oh. (laughs) Now what, what did, it's sort of interesting because it sounds as though people didn't know much about NASCAR up in the north--

DM: No.

CW: --of the New York state, so really no, because it wasn't on the TV of course.

DM: I had a lot of papers, news prints, May's going to Florida, May's doing this, May's doing I had to, I got a lot of ink.

CW: Yeah, right. Nobody had ever done this before--

DM: No.

CW: Where there any other people that you encouraged to take that step?

DM: No, they, a lot of people, I had drivers calling me if they were going to Atlanta, say What car you driving at Atlanta? I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well would you let me know what ones you aren't driving so I could get a ride?"

CW: Did people, do you think people in New York idolized NASCAR? I mean did they think it was an amazing, wonderful thing, or did they, did they--

DM: (both speaking at the same time) Well, it was sort of like football, they didn't make a big, Appalachian State won at Michigan this year, you familiar with what I am talking about?

CW: A little bit, not a lot.

DM: Well that's no big deal--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --but to the college that was a, and to the people up in the New York--

CW: (coughs)

DM: --me going to Daytona it was a big deal. But I wasn't, I was a (). If you looked for me in the lineup don't start in the front, start in the rear, go up about five cars, you find me back there some place.

CW: Um-hum. When did you decide it was time to move down and actually get serious about the Grand National?

DM: I asked to go to Daytona. We had a new manager in the trucking company, I asked to go to Daytona in '69, and they said that I couldn't go down. And I said well I have my vacation time coming to me, well that's only if you're you aren't needed. I said well I'm not needed well I'm just going to. So I told the manager that I was going to turn in my resignation.

CW: By this stage you were married and did you have children?

DM: No, well--

CW: (coughs)

DM: --I didn't, I didn't, I had three different romances or marriages. My first wife I got three children by them, and they are (pause) (laughs) fifty, one passed away, the other one will be fifty-five, but I still get along with my wife.

CW: Um-hum. And that was when you were up there--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --they didn't come down with you--

DM: No.

CW: --at all.

DM: I would, I do not, count myself as the ideal father. I didn't have too much in the bringing up of the children.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Like I say I got one granddaughter that graduated from Cornell, got another one that graduated from Purdue, and my sister from Wellesley. What happened to me?

CW: You went into racing. So when you made the decision that you were going to move south, did you, were you married there at that point?

DM: I had a girlfriend--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --and we worked together. And--

CW: She was interested in coming with you?

DM: Yeah.

CW: Um-hum. What, did she come to the track sometimes--

DM: Well, I met her at Watertown it was after the race we were doing something, and I (pause) got introduced to her, and she said, you aren't Dick May. Says, but she didn't know me from Adam, she knew the name, the name would, so she'd come back up the following week and I won the race, she said you are Dick May. And from then on, I would go down, I would, every weekend and she went, she went to Daytona, and she helped me out financially, she worked for GE. We use some of her money for the cars.

CW: So she had a genuine interest--

DM: Oh, yeah.

CW: --in the sport too. Did you have children together or--?

DM: (speaking at same time) No.

CW: Right.

DM: Just by my first wife.

CW: Um-hum. Now, so when did you move, when did you actually move down south? Was that in, about 196--

DM: Seventy.

CW: --Nine, '70.

DM: Yeah.

CW: Um-hum. Did you move here to Charlotte?

DM: I, I would come from Daytona and I went to Charlotte, Elmo Langley was going to go, go to Riverside, California, I didn't want to go to Riverside then. He says come up to by my garage, he had a wooden stall garage, nothing like what we got now.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: He says I bought a new house, and he said you can stay in it until I get back. And I, we've been there ever since.

CW: Wow, so that where, that was, that's where you are now?

DM: No.

CW: Oh right.

DM: And that was an apartment.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: We got an apartment over on Rumble Road.

CW: In Concord?

DM: No, in Charlotte.

CW: Oh in Charlotte, right, Charlotte itself. Now how did you hooked up with him, you drove for him quite a bit didn't you?

DM: Well, Elmo made me, he was letting Tom Gale for him--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Tom Gale was another racer. Tommy had a, a fleet of tractor trailers, and Tommy liked to race, so he got Elmo Langley to furnish him a car. Tommy would give Elmo round numbers of two or \$3,000 a race, to try and drive his car.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And as Tommy got tired or sick or anything, they would put me into it. I was, better physical, they were smokers and drinkers.

CW: Um-hum. Did Elmo drive himself as well?

DM: Yeah, Elmo was a very good driver and he was, actually after he got done driving he was noted more as a Pace Car driver.

CW: Oh really, uh-huh.

DM: He loved driving that Pace Car.

CW: Uh-huh, and he lived all his life in Charlotte?

DM: Yeah.

CW: Right. Was, how much older than you was he? Was he already had some age on him at that point?

DM: Elmo's probably two years older.

CW: Oh not, not much then.

DM: No.

CW: Similar kind of in age, right.

DM: He went in the, he went in the Navy in 1945. But he said he was fourteen years, he discharge is all mixed up. I don't--

CW: (laughs)There were a lot those circumstances--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --around that time I know, I don't know how it happened but. Now I have a little list here (laughs) of just some of the dri--owners that you drove cars for, and these are just the ones that are listed officially. So I know there were a whole bunch of others, but it is a very long list some of them crop up over and over again, like Elmo and you would you know recognize, you probably haven't got your glasses on. But you know Ron Ronacher, and I guess that was the first car that was listed as being in a race a legitimate NASCAR--

DM: Ron Ronacher was actually Joyce, my wife, she owned the car.

CW: Oh. Where did she get the name? Just made it up?

DM: No that was her maiden name.

CW: Oh really?

DM: Ronacher.

CW: Oh and she decided to call herself Ron?

DM: I don't know how we got Ronacher, I think they, I think when we first went to Daytona they asked for the owner--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And we didn't know what we'd put Joyce's name down or, so we put down Ronacher brother, that's her brother.

CW: Oh, okay. Right, right. So actually that was a car you owned, that was your car.

DM: Yeah.

CW: Was it still the same car at that point, the old Marvin Panch car?

DM: Oh yeah.

CW: Uh-huh.

DM: Yeah.

CW: And you just kept it going--

DM: Kept it going.

CW: --through these years.

DM: I ran it, I ran it three times, I never put it in the Grand National. And Permatex race--

CW: Uh-huh. It was that you raced it in the Permatex race--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --race. And then anyway there's just a lot of people here Doc--

DM: Doc Faustina--

CW: Faustina.

DM: He was a dentist out of Las Vegas, and he bought a Richard Petty car and he could never qualify it. So I would qualify it and he would get into it for the race.

CW: Oh really.

DM: Very good. The car would run by itself.

CW: Right.

DM: I don't know why he could not have.

CW: (laughs) And Ralph Davis?

DM: Bob Davis. Bob Davis he was another one that had a Petty car and he couldn't qualify it so they put me into it.

CW: Uh-huh. Interesting. D.K. Ulrich--

DM: Ulrich.

CW: --and--

DM: And he, he had people driving for him such as Ernie Ervin and Tim Richmond, so. And they would put me into it if they didn't have a driver. They would come up with money.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Those guys were always looking for drivers that had money, to buy the ride.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: So they couldn't get a driver that will give them money for the ride. Then they put me into it.

CW: Right.

DM: I didn't, I didn't have to pay nothing, but I didn't get much either.

CW: Uh-huh. So the winnings, was that divided?

DM: Well the, the winning I had to sign a release for every car I drove that I received money for driving Number 10, 20, 30, 40, or 50 because the driver was required to pick up the money for the car.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And a lot of the cars, like I drove for Tony Bruton he was in Indianapolis how could he pick up the money?

CW: Um-hum. J.C. Cruise.

DM: Harper, Harper--

CW: (coughs)

DM: --Cruise. It was the Ford garage out of Tampa, Florida.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And I don't know how I, somebody, the driver had in there, couldn't get the job done, so they put me into it--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --for a while.

CW: Buster Davis.

DM: Bob Davis. That's the same way, he had a Petty car and Buster was the driver. Buster was his son, but he couldn't, couldn't drive it.

CW: Um-hum, right. All these, good job you were there. Walter Ballard, who obviously was a driver too.

DM: Walter Ballard was a rookie in 1972 or '3. And I drove quite a few part-time, he would get tired or something.

CW: Um-hum. So you take a turn kind of--

DM: Yeah.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: The drivers sometime would get the key and they were not in physical shape, either from smoking or drinking or eating or--

CW: Um-hum. And these were long rides too I mean they. Earl Brooks, who we know of course, I know, but was that one-off kind of ride?

DM: Who's that now?

CW: Earl Brooks. Is one of the, comes up as someone who owned a car that you drove.

DM: Which was it?

CW: Earl Brooks. Earl Brooks.

DM: (pause)

CW: You don't remember driving for him?

DM: No.

CW: No? And Bill Hollar.

DM: Yeah Bill Hollar. He was a guy out of Burlington, North Carolina. I would drive, he would bring a car down they couldn't make it, they'd put me in the car.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: That's the one that they, they caught me, qualify it, and I parked it way down the end of pit row, and walked back up.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: So they didn't know who was in the car.

CW: But they called you out because you qualified--

DM: No. Cecil Gordon got very upset about it. Cecil Gordon was one of the regular drivers. And he come up to me, he said, "Were you the one in that Number 29?" "No I'm hanging banners, I work for SG." "Oh," he said, "something is very fishy, the car been going around the track and thirty-six, thirty-seven seconds all week long, all the sudden it comes by thirty-six seconds then down to a thirty-five. What in the heck happened there?" I said the car must've got away from the guy.

CW: (laughs)

DM: He said are you sure? You weren't in the car? He was sorry. Because it took a spot away from him.

CW: Um-hum. Right. Henley Gray--

DM: Henley--

CW: --who drove for quite a bit.

DM: Henley I drove for quite a bit. Henley got hurt at Michigan, got in the hospital all broken bones. And I drove the rest of the season for him. He was a good man to drive for. He was one of

those that we had sponsor Belden Asphalt, paving, and he says we need to try run good at Michigan, he said we can put on a show for them. So about halfway through the race, or a quarter way through, I come in and says I need some more tires, said we don't have any. I come back, I said well Henley I just can't do anymore, what do you want me to do. Said why don't you slow down?

CW: So you did. (laughs) And the tires held?

DM: Yeah.

CW: (laughs)

DM: It's no way to be racing but I'm the only one with a ride--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: So why tell me how to do it? I'm being successful

CW: Um-hum, that's true. J.D. McDuffie?

DM: J.D. McDuff, I would relieve for, he's the one that got killed at Watkins Glen.

CW: Oh really. Ed Negra, I don't know how you say it--

DM: Ed Negre.

CW: Negre, right.

DM: Yeah. I drove quite a bit for him, and I qualified, thirteen fastest one in one of his cars. It was Ed Negre and Harry Hide car.

CW: Dave Marcis?

DM: Dave Marcis.

CW: Oh Marcis okay.

DM: I don't--

CW: Don't remember?

DM: I don't remember. I didn't maybe, maybe I drove for a heat raver or a qualifier something--

CW: Something. Hiram Handy.

DM: Jeff Handy.

CW: Oh, okay. That, this is just the names that--

DM: That was the other Donnie Allison car. This man bought it and he couldn't drive it, so they put me into it.

CW: Junie Donlavey.

DM: Junie had a driver that was going to Michigan to an IROC [International Race of Champions] race and they needed a guy back here to qualify a car. So I qualified their car.

CW: Don Robertson.

DM: Roberts?

CW: Robertson, or was it Roberts. I maybe that it was down wrong.

DM: What was his name, it wasn't Don. Roberts, was it, just Roberts? I don't know if, I forgot. I know what one for, (pause) I don't know.

CW: Um-hum. G.C. Spencer.

DM: G.C. Spencer was from Johnson City. And that was a track, they needed a driver for him, he was getting tired and they come over to pick me up, I'm on the backstretch at Darlington.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And that's where, but his pits were on the front stretch. So when it came time for me to pit, I didn't know where the pits were. So I go down the front stretch looking for him, they'd be out on pit row trying to find me, but I'm behind them. It was sort of like an Abbott and Costello film you know--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --trying to get me in.

CW: Alfred McClure.

DM: That's a Ford dealership out of Troy, Pennsylvania.

CW: Did we say Harold Miller, was that one you just talked about, Harold Miller might've skipped him.

DM: Harold Miller.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I know who you're talking, I don't remember what that

CW: And Bill Champion.

DM: Bill Champion was the one that Ricky Rudd started driving for. Bill brought the car one day says I not going to use you today, said I got some kid in the car that's got money. I said that beats me and Ricky Rudd started driving, that's when he started his racing.

CW: Rod Osterlund.

DM: Ron Osterlund, was the man that Dale Earnhardt was driving for.

CW: Really. Bobby Warwick.

DM: Bobby Warwick was another one from Chicago and I would when he might've got tired or something.

CW: Um-hum. Billy Hagan.

DM: Billy Hagen was, he had (pause) what some driver that was going after the rookie of the year, and they needed a man to drive the car because they could only drive so many races in order to get the championship, the rookie can't. And I drove for Billy Hagen.

CW: Nelson Oswald.

DM: Nelson, he was just a, needed a driver.

CW: Um-hum. Don Satterfield.

DM: They were from Spartanburg. And they come to me one day said, "Would you just take the car out, we know you already been in the race. Just take it out because the driver can't get going." Says I think that, the guy said that, "I think it will run." So I took it out, ran a couple of laps, come in on pit row, they're jumping up and down.

CW: (laughs)

DM: Said Boy can you get that thing around. I said. "I can't drive it, I already got a ride." He says pull one of your tricks. So I drove it, jumped out of the car, it was a good, it was a good car.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I wish I had stayed in the car but at that time I had to catch a plane to get back to Charlotte. And I--

CW: (laughs) Before the race ended?

DM: Yeah.

CW: Oh boy. Let's see, Ron Spawn? Spawn don't know how you say that.

DM: John Kennedy.

CW: Um-hum. That's a good name isn't it?

DM: Yeah.

CW: (laughs)

DM: He was a just another just regular driver, needed help.

CW: Right. And Billy Harvey.

DM: Billy Harvey was the one that went in the penitentiary for selling dope. (laughs)

CW: Oh really. Is that why you were driving his car?

DM: No, but he had a lot of money had a heck of a good car. And then this one day they needed a driver quick, like, it's one of those deals that I jump in make two laps, then jump out, they didn't know I was in it.

CW: Frank Warren.

DM: Frank Warren is a regular Winston Cup driver that drove for about ten years, as one of the regulars. And he had a pretty good independence car. It's a car that you could figure on fifth to fifteenth with it but you got to take it easy, you might run out of tires or something, got to just watch what you're doing.

CW: Um-hum. Right. Norm, well Norman Negre, is that the same person?

DM: Yeah.

CW: Ed Negre earlier. Buddy Harrington.

DM: Buddy Harrington had a couple cars. And he had his son driving one of them and he couldn't do anything so they would put me into it, and I would qualify the car then his son would run it in the race for a few laps.

CW: And Junior Miller, Harold Miller we had earlier.

DM: Junior Miller.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I, I don't know why I was in, some reason I don't know--

CW: You were in the car. So it, it's very interesting because all these people, that most these people are independents.

DM: --yeah.

CW: And, and so they--

DM: So like Billy Hagen and, (pause) Billy Hagen, I, he had Skip Manning driving for him, with Skip Manning got rookie of the year.

CW: Um-hum. Would, these, this is the you know, the bread and butter, it's kind of, it's the thing that keeps the race going right?

DM: Yeah.

CW: It's the people who are putting the cars in.

DM: These, these drivers you don't see any David Pearson, Carey Marlboro, Jeff Gordon, you wouldn't see. These are the ones that, they have us on the track so they got something to pass. If it wasn't for us what would Richard Petty be passing.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: If it wasn't for the little guys.

CW: Right.

DM: And the racing began to improve, Richard began to miss racing and get in wrecks. But we would see Richard coming, you'd go up high, then cut down, and go underneath but we would back off knowing because we don't want to wreck the champion.

CW: (laughs) That's interesting isn't it? So there was a feeling in this group then, that nobody was going to win really, it was a long shot.

DM: Yeah.

CW: So you had a whole different concept of the race.

DM: Well like I, Chris Economaki come to me one time and he says, "What are your chances of winning this race today?" I says, "There's what, forty or forty-one cars in the race?" He looks on his slip, "Forty-one cars." "Well I tell you, if there happen to be a forty-one-car pile-up and I'm in the pits and two laps ahead I might win it."

CW: (laughs) And what, what would you say, what was the feeling in this group about the difference, why was there that difference, was it entirely to do with how much money you could spend on your car?

DM: A lot of people say they would not drive just to qualify a car, they would go out and spend twenty or \$30,000 but they'd want a car that would win and each, maybe you don't belong in a car if you don't plan on winning with it. But what would racing be if you didn't have--

Pause in Recording

CW: So we're just talking about the people that you drove for, and there were a few more people on the list that we hadn't talked about. Ronnie Thomas, was one.

DM: Well that was Dave Thomas's son.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: They would come down with two cars sometime, sometime Frank Warren would bring three cars sometime. They want to just get a driver for, to start the car, get starting money, you only drive the car fifteen, twenty laps and park it.

CW: You wouldn't even try going any further in it.

DM: No.

CW: Because what? The car would wear out.

DM: They had, they had more, they didn't have enough cars. So everybody made the race without qualifying.

CW: Oh. And H.B. Bailey.

DM: H.B. Bailey was a Texan from Houston, and he had a large salvage yard. And his wife and my wife were good friends.

CW: Cecil Gordon, of course.

DM: Yeah.

CW: You talked about, so you just drove his car sometimes, Wayne ()?

DM: Wayne with, from Hanover Printing out of Richmond, Virginia. And he wouldn't need a driver, he would only go to half a dozen races a year. But when he did go he would call me. He still calls me, wants me to come down and help him. I said my knowledge of racing now would be no help at all.

CW: Is he still involved then, he still has a car?

DM: He has a car, yeah.

CW: And he, and he entered it in the Nextel Cup?

DM: He tries to.

CW: Oh--

DM: But he didn't make it.

CW: Yeah very hard now for the independents. And Dick Bear.

DM: Dick Bear was from New Hampshire, he's the owner, brother, the brother of the owner of New Hampshire's Speedway. Dick Bear was the one that Daryl--

CW: Walter?

DM: What's the other Walter? Mike Walter, he asked me, "What are you doing, I can't even remember the number of the car, what are you doing in that car?" I said, "They called me up said they needed a driver. He said, "What do I have to do to get that ride?" I said, "Go tell them." Next week he had that ride, and Mike said one of the best rides he ever had. And Dick Bear said he was the one of the best sponsor, might come up with lots of money.

CW: Um-hum. Now, financially how did it work for these people? Did they, did a lot of them lose money on this? Yeah.

DM: Like Cecil Gordon working on other guys' cars, and Bailey would only try to fill the car four or five times a year. It just they all come and go.

CW: Um-hum. What do you think their motivation was for being in the race?

DM: Just being in the Daytona 500 or be a Winston Cup car.

CW: Um-hum. Just the love of it really. And then obviously some of these people were owners and some of them also drove--

DM: Right.

CW: --kind of like--

DM: You had a lot of, like Buddy Arlington was an owner and a driver, Cecil Gordon owner and driver, H.B Bailey was an owner and a driver, Walter Ballard, Elmo Langley. Most all, all of the pride and ninety percent of the list were owner drivers.

CW: Um-hum. Did you, you considered yourself mainly as a driver though--

DM: Just a driver.

CW: --yeah. You did own your own car a little bit.

DM: Yeah, but I was dangerous with the car.

CW: (laughs) Interesting that you did drive differently in other people's cars.

DM: I think it's just the way it worked out.

CW: Um-hum. When you moved down in 1970 and came to live in Charlotte, what did you think the future would be? What did you imagine?

DM: I live, my whole life I have lived from day to day.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Which I could say I, I could've probably been a good fireman, I've past civil service exam for fire department, up Potsdam, New York which is up by Canton. But they wanted me to work weekends, well weekends was when you raced and I didn't want to give up my racing so I never took the job. But if I had gone in there I had other guys that I know that were in the fire department and retired making three or \$4,000 a month in social security. And I don't--

CW: Could you've given up driving though? Could you have given up racing do think? Would it have been possible?

DM: No. No that's why I went to work for Pontiac, STP, Goody's, Winston, all those companies I did a service for. I just, I was not employed but they were pay me x amount of dollars to hang so many banners or put the decals on their car. I always had something to do.

CW: Um-hum. When did that start? That extra work?

DM: When?

CW: 1970, did you start right in with that?

DM: Yeah. And I also had my one race car hauler, that I could haul two cars, one on top of it, one on the trailer.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I gone to the west coast, three or four times by myself.

CW: Um-hum, totally? Right wow.

DM: (clears throat)

CW: Did your, that first season, like 1970 on paper you don't seem to have raced very much. But you were racing a lot when you weren't included in line up.

DM: A lot of these cars (coughs) I never started them. I don't get the recognition for starting a car unless I started it. So they got me starting 280, 290 cars, if I started that many I'd finish 500.

CW: Right (laughs)

DM: Because a lot of them I just.

CW: Um-hum. And so like in 1970, I think they you know, statistically they have you driving only eight races, or I don't--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --or even fewer. I have the statistics here. Oh, actually quite a few sixteen of the forty-eight races in 1970--

DM: Yeah but--

CW: --but you probably raced all forty-eight? Do you think?

DM: I was there. Yeah, but see back in 1970 we were running fifty-six events a year.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Which you don't that. Now the most you race now is thirty-four.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But we use to race sometimes on the weekend, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

CW: Um-hum. Did you, you moved down, did you jump straight into that kind of schedule, because up north you hadn't been racing that much.

DM: No--

CW: So--

DM: --but when I come down here my wife, could see that it was no sense of her going to the track, hanging around doing nothing, so she went into the motel business. She was a manager of the Ramada Inn, Quality Inn, Howard Johnson, Holiday Inn, she had a lot of motel management jobs. And she gave them up till one day she come home with all her books again, she said she I got fired again. That's because the hotel, which was a Holiday Inn, turned into a Ramada overnight and all the new staff come in. And she says I'm going to, then she went with the airlines.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And, had a good job there.

CW: Um-hum. And that kind of fit in with your career?

DM: Yeah. And she would, she would go to, like, she would fly to the races for a Sunday race.

CW: Um-hum. I see.

DM: But we, like I said I couldn't of done all this without her. She, actually, the backbone to my success in racing.

CW: Um-hum. Right, right. Because really it was precarious wasn't it, you were very favorable--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --I mean people wanted you in their car, but you didn't have security.

DM: I was gone, I would get home sometimes Tuesdays and have to start out again Wednesday morning to get to a track. And I use to go with two shepherd dogs. Everybody knows me from my dogs. German Shepherds, and I used to hand out STP and keep cool, the rear treatment, the oil treatment, and shirts, hats, jackets, t-shirts. So when you're giving stuff away you can be nothing but the good guy. Anybody who gives stuff away had to be a heck of a good guy.

CW: And you had your dogs at the track?

DM: Yeah.

CW: So they just roam around or--

DM: No.

CW: --I'm sure they were well trained.

DM: They stayed in the van.

CW: Um-hum. But people knew you through--

DM: People would know, I come back one day and the doors were wide open and there was the black Sheppard standing there in the door. I said what's a matter, I can't get in there that dog won't let me. I says that's what he's doing.

CW: They were good protection for you.

DM: Yeah, they were very well behaved. But it's the same way of what you did in fifties and sixties, seventies you can't do in the 2000s.

CW: Yeah, totally different. Over the sixteen years that you were driving in the Grand National, you must've driven in incredibly large numbers of different cars. I mean you know in terms of the make of the cars and everything you must've driven them all, did you drive them all?

DM: I drove them all.

CW: Did you have a preference?

DM: Not really it depends on the manufacturer. If it was a Holman-Moody car it be pretty darn good car.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: If it was a Petty car, it be a pretty good car. It would, you got a car that somebody that try to build themselves then it might not be too good.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But a good Petty car or a good Holman-Moody you could've qualified on. They would good by themselves.

CW: Um-hum. So you didn't in terms of the manufacturer you didn't mind Ford, or Pontiac, or whatever.

DM: Chris Economaki says, "How do you like driving the Buick?" I says I don't, no one never drove one. He said, "You're in one now." I said, "Oh they're nice I like them." I didn't realize as you're sitting in the car, is this a Pontiac or a () I can't tell.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: You could tell if it was a Dodge by the sound of the starter and the switches the way they were arranged.

CW: Interesting. Was there a favorite? Did you have a favorite in all this time?

DM: Well I could've got into the, the Hall of Fame at Darlington. Bec--I picked the wrong car, I had the choice of the Chrysler or a Ford. And I took the Ford, Ed Negre took the Chrysler and he got in the Hall of Fame and I didn't. It was, I could've done the same thing.

CW: Um-hum. Was that the time when the Fords were just all, something was going wrong with all the Fords, that that--

DM: No. It's just half the cars were, well could share the cars with Fords, and not too many Chevrolets, not too many Dodge, mostly Fords.

CW: Um-hum, that you drove.

DM: Yeah.

CW: Mostly Fords, right. You saw the technology of the cars change a good deal in that period of time.

DM: Oh yeah.

CW: I imagine, what was the most striking changes that you saw?

DM: Well when they come out with the power steering, that took the, it was, it was just really tiresome when regular steering and the power breaks. Sometimes at Daytona you had to slow up I thought I'd be just as well off putting my hand out the window as the brake pedal, didn't seem to do much different.

CW: What other changes did you see that were striking?

DM: Well as you're sitting, as you're looking at a car you can't tell is it a Toyota, a Chevy, a Ford, a Dodge, or you don't know. Back then the public knew exactly what you were driving.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And they would, people would opt to fix their own cars up so it would look like a racecar.

CW: Um-hum. But they did look like stock cars.

DM: Yeah.

CW: They looked closer, whereas now they--

DM: Holman-Moody really built a nice-looking car, roll bars are very neatly painted, padded. And it was a luxury car to compare to the Modifieds. The Modifieds, the cars the one I had was a cream, but most of them weren't like that.

CW: Um-hum, right. Did you see, did comfort change for you? Well the power steering obviously helped, but were there any other things about comfort that changed?

DM: Well they're doing a lot now with the shocks. We use to have approximately four different shocks that we would use, but now they got about forty different settings--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --and I could not explain what setting, I would not know. That's why when people call me and ask me for advice, I would be harmful.

CW: Um-hum, just not, yeah. It is a different world now isn't it, then in those days?

DM: Like the doctors, Dr. Adams can use to take your appendix out, now they got a separate doctor just for appendix.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Dr. Adams don't do it anymore.

CW: No, that's true. You saw a lot of changes with safety in that period too I would, I would say, did you feel safer?

DM: The cars were, I, I never felt that I was going to be in the car that would fold up like an accordion, but I had never flipped one of the Winston Cup cars. I--

CW: You never ever did?

DM: No. I did in the modified.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Why I got hurt so bad, but I got up onto the wall at Darlington that sort of scared me a little bit, because I looked down and there was a crowd, and boy I said is this thing going to the into the stands or the electric chair. But, and the following week they did put cable up.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: They called it the Dick May safety cable.

CW: Oh really, they did? Because you--

DM: It should've, it should've been up there to start with.

CW: Um-hum. But you didn't, so you didn't really think about safety that much. So as the--

DM: No.

CW: --safety changes occurred you just sort of accepted them and didn't, didn't really feel--

DM: In no way, if you start to spin out and the car gets pointed to two o'clock or ten o'clock jump on the breaks and no way keep going the same direction but sideways. Don't take your foot off the break until this hand can touch the ground, which means don't take it off.

CW: Um-hum. Right. Right.

DM: A lot of these wrecks you see happening, the guys are, you see the wheels going around, why didn't lock it? Well the motor blows, they come down the back-stretch smoking, kick the darn thing out of, out of gear, so it doesn't smoke. But, (pause) they hadn't had that much experience.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And then when you do get that much experience, you're no good anyway.

CW: (laughs) What was that like on the track? That the different levels of experience, were you always aware of that when you're driving, of you know who's in which car, and what they're likely to do?

DM: No, like I say I got into G.C. Spencer car. I didn't know how to shut it off--

CW: (laughs)

DM: It was running when I got in there, when it began to slow off, I wanted to shut it off because I think it was going to blow. I didn't know how to shut it off.

CW: (laughs) What did you do?

DM: I went back in, I said you want to stop the thing you better get somebody who knows how, I don't.

CW: But how did you do the switch? (laughs)

DM: The, the other driver, there was another switch on it--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: That I wasn't accustomed too.

CW: Right, right. Now when did they start having communication into the cars?

DM: I never had it.

CW: You didn't ever have it, that whole period.

DM: They, another story is Henley Gray wanted me, I was driving for him at Bristol, and they, Bristol was very hazardous track for wrecks, a lot of problems. Henley said, "I want you to have a radio." I said, "Henley I have to have somebody else's helmet, I don't care to use a different helmet." And he says. "It's going to be alright." "No," he says, "Take the radio just in case there's a wreck we might be able to save the car." So we got going that big wreck down on turn four, Henley said, "Wreck, wreck," he says, "Tricky did you hear me?" "Yes Henley, where are you?" "In the wreck."

CW: (laughs) Too late. (laughs) But do you think it makes a big difference?

DM: (pause) Well, if you know how to use it, like these people on that interstate down in Florida, seventy car wreck down at Florida a week ago. Was that what it was? If somebody has been listening, they wouldn't been in that.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: How can you run into a wreck that's already happened minutes ahead of you.

CW: Um-hum. That does seem extraordinary, I know it's happened over and over, hasn't it so? How did, when you got involved with NASCAR how did you find NASCAR as an association, as an organization?

DM: I was a member of the crew, and we had Bill Gazaway and Junior Burner and those guys, they were sort of like fathers to us. And us guys would always make a race, if they had a car that wasn't, look like was going to have a hard time going through inspection. Gazaway would come over and get me, he said get into that Number 5 car and see if you think it's safe enough. And he was, let me go out and test it. I had a, he come and see me once, he said, "One of your buddies, Canadians from up in Canada, brought a car down, had a heck of time. Take that car out and see what you can do." and they were all talking French, which I could understand a little bit, but not but he was out there pounding on the brake light, I asked him, "What are you doing?" He says, "The breaks don't work so we're going to block it off." Well you do that on the dirt modified car, you can't on a Winston Cup, it be like a () operation. So I went back and told him, I says "Don't pass that car, that's a hazard."

CW: So you were like a mole almost, you were like you know finding out what was happening.

DM: Yeah.

CW: They must've, you must've been very valuable to them in that way. Did they treat you well? Did you feel that--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --you were?

DM: Yeah. Course it was my wife in the motel, and they're like, she use to be able to get a lot of, good connections on the airline or the motel, a lot of rooms.

CW: Um-hum. And that would be very helpful with all the traveling that everybody was doing. (coughs)

DM: I didn't get paid, I got paid weekly, every week, but it just, it beats working. I was, why do I need money if they buy your meal, furnish your gas, and get everything you need. Why do you need money? And then they think you don't really.

CW: Do you think, how many people like you were there at that time.

DM: They said there was--

CW: The relief drivers.

DM: --only one Dick May they said.

CW: I would think so. Were there any, no other people who were really doing what you were doing, in terms of the driving, in terms of being around--

DM: No.

CW: --as a relief driver?

DM: Because they had to get back to their regular jobs, that's why I would have drivers call up want to know if I was the Number 3, 10, 15. What car you are, so they could call them up see if that car needs a driver.

CW: Um-hum. So you really were unique.

DM: Well I, I had my choice of cars, quite often.

CW: Um-hum. Now in 1975, you made history with NASCAR when you changed cars five times--

DM: (laughs)

CW: --in a race. Could you talk about--

DM: That was Dover, Delaware. And what happened the race was a Sunday race, it got rained out. So the crowd would be smaller because they had to race it Monday afternoon. They sent down to the Air Force, airport, that's where the, what you call that Air Force Base?

CW: Oh in Delaware.

DM: Can't even think of it. Well whatever, Dover, Delaware Air Force, they called up and told all the soldiers that they could come up and get in for nothing. So we ended up with a fairly, fairly good crowd, but some of the drivers had to go home because they couldn't stay because they had jobs. And I don't know, they said I started that 57 car, and I ended up in the 29 car, what the other three cars I don't know but, they were the last car broke us accelerator rod pedal broke and I couldn't finish. The, none of them I didn't destroy, I didn't crash, they just motor blow--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --spindles broke, something, and they only reason they were using me there was no more extra drivers, next thing they were going to do go out the interstate and get truck drivers (laughs)

CW: (laughs) Really? They were really going to do that?

DM: No, no.

CW: That would be pretty funny. You've met a lot of different people in your--

DM: I don't--

CW: --many years of driving. Who stands out for you would you say, which people?

DM: Well, I had, I had Bettenhausen, Tony Bettenhausen, Gary Bettenhausen, they are well Indianapolis, they stayed at my garage for a year.

CW: Now your garage being, what was your garage?

DM: Up at the speedway.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I had a stall in the Goodyear building which has been torn down. Know where the Goodyear building use to be?

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I use to have a, right next to Harry Hide.

CW: And what did you do there?

DM: I had cars in there, D.K. had a car there. I had my STP equipment in there.

CW: Um-hum. Was it, was it part of, it was owned by NASCAR, or not NASCAR but it was owned by--

DM: STP they paid the--

CW: Oh yeah.

DM: --they paid the rent on it.

CW: Right.

DM: So, I don't have to worry about rent. STP took care of the rent. All I had to do is just hand out product and it was a, I use to hang up to 200 banners a day, around fences--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Walmart, stores like that. Which now they don't allow you to do that.

CW: Right. Is that what you did for the other companies too, Goody's and--

DM: Goody's.

CW: --Winston.

DM: Yeah. I work for Heinz Ketchup sometimes, because I had truckings, and I had trucks that could transport the stuff.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Then I use to take care of all the old tires that come off the (). I'd take them down to Fast Track down in Charlotte, and sell the case. I just get ten dollars apiece so you take 300 tires down there, just a lot of work.

CW: Yeah.

DM: My wife use to help me, and we'd get up on that truck, tie them down, pull the linen liners, but we made good money.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But like I say, I have nothing financially to show for it. But I got a lot of stories, they don't pay off much but--

CW: (laughs) But you can look back and feel fulfilled in what you did.

DM: Right.

CW: And then I guess you didn't have a choice, did you really? You had to race, right?

DM: I could've gone back to trucking.

CW: But I mean could you've done it really? I it seems as though you wanted to race.

DM: Oh I wanted--

CW: That it was a passion.

DM: --I wanted, everybody, they, like some of the drivers they would give anything to have the reputation.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: You know if a car, car was going to slow up under the track and they could see that, they're looking for a relief driver, they would go looking around for me.

CW: Um-hum. Hope you weren't in another car, right?

DM: I'm use to have to get out of some cars to get into another car.

CW: Oh really? That would annoy somebody wouldn't it?

DM: That's the way the independents, Cecil Gordon or Frank Warren might've had two cars in the race, we'll take one out, we'll put you in the other car.

CW: That's very, that's interesting. So the people who you met, you know drivers, promoters, all the different people involved in the sport, who do you remember you know as being very close to you or having an impact on you, or who did you admire?

DM: Well there's only one Richard Petty and one A.J. Foyt's, there's a lot of Dick Mays, Cecil Gordon, Frank Warren, and all them, whole list, but in drivers, when you talk about drivers, your just drivers.

CW: Oh really? Richard Petty and--

DM: A.J. Foyt.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Of course now Earnhardt would be involved in it and Jeff Gordon.

CW: You think?

DM: Yeah.

CW: Um-hum. Did you, did you personally admire their driving?

DM: I kept out of their way.

CW: (laughs)

DM: Because they, they I could've really messed them up by not watching what you do. They put you into a borrowed car they don't want some squirrel out there getting into other people's way. And that's what happened, quite often when you put a relief driver in, he is overcome by the speed and the power of a car and his mind slips, and get into the way. Richard Petty would come up and get pretty near in your trunk and you might not of seen him coming but he waits until he knows you see him then goes on by. But Bobby Allison and Cale Yarborough they were like if you're on the homestretch, they would like you to be on the back, they had no patience.

CW: What would they do?

DM: Shake their fists at you.

CW: Now did you feel that if you'd had the right, you'd would've been up there with them?

DM: Yeah, if I, when I first went Daytona, if I left my crew and had more knowledge of the car handling because on the dirt track they knew exactly what to do to the car. I would, they would just look for me when it's time to race, that's all.

CW: Um-hum, but why was that first race so crucial?

DM: They would've got the car setup much better than I had. Some of those cars would go around the track at 160 miles an hour, with you driving them, and not even set up. And I learned how to get them set up so they would handle right.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: I've, we would take the rear spoiler off of the Dodges and that would give them no down force, but the car would be very loose, but I could drive the car on the track, by myself, for qualifying. And then I told them I said, whatever you put in this car get that spoiler back, this thing is a mess without it.

CW: Um-hum, right. Do you think that first race, that Daytona race, if you'd of had the car set up right, and you would've come let's say first, would it have made a difference because people would've noticed you from the beginning?

DM: They thought I was going to win anyway. Because I had a very good Holman-Moody car.

CW: There must've been a lot of other good drivers out there.

DM: Well there was Elmo Langley, Hoss Ellington, Donnie Allison, Bobby Allison, they were all in the same race. And like when you look at a race nowadays you, certain cars, well he isn't going to do anything, this one isn't good you know you got a group of ten cars that possibly they going to win.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And I was in that group of ten cars that possibly could win, if I knew what I was doing, but I didn't know what I was doing.

CW: Um-hum. And then if you'd of had that attention do you think somebody would've sponsored you?

DM: No because the factories were getting out of it and they needed people with financial backing.

CW: Um-hum. So as a driver at this point, what was the best bet? To become one of the top drivers you have to own your own car, or--

DM: Get a good ride.

CW: But who was going to be giving, since the--

DM: Well like, I went driving for McClure Ford. And we started a 100-mile race, that's the Thursday before the big race--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --and I've got myself up to tenth which means I'm qualified, I'm going to make the big show. So I pull out to pass the number ten car, and slide back to eleventh, well that didn't work. So I go out, quite a bit later, pull out to pass the number ten car, slide back to twelfth, and I kept doing that and missed the race, not thinking if I had just stayed behind that one car that I was doing good with.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But, there, that's when you need a thinking driver. Could I, like I'd be racing in a race and I'm trying to pass Number 24 doing a lot of work trying to get by them, the pit crew would sign in with an arrow pointing to the back. That means that 24 is about four laps down, don't monkey with them. You can pass if you want to but you're wasting your time.

CW: Right, right. And that's the kind of information you can get--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --from the headphones, now that would save a lot.

DM: I could almost make normally the hundred-mile race because I had the knowledge of what to do.

CW: Um-hum, right, right. Who is the one driver that you, well I don't know if you can narrow it down to one, but maybe you can, that you admired the most, over the years?

DM: Well like I said Richard Petty, I, A.J. Foyt is not that popular among the other drivers, he sort of an independent but I got to know A.J. quite well. And STP would let me take a decal and put it on because some of the decals I was handing out the drivers didn't want because they didn't pay enough money.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But STP wanted a, STP patch on Foyt's car, Foyt wouldn't let anybody put it, except for me.

CW: Oh, um-hum.

DM: But he would pull it off before the race.

CW: Oh.

DM: And I had a couple of cars like that, that would manufacturer want their decal on, but I would be the only one--

CW: --be allowed to put it on.

DM: Yeah. I worked with the drivers.

CW: Um-hum. Did you have your own style in the car, that was very recognizable as yours, did you do things that other people didn't do?

DM: Well like I said, we would just take off easy and taper off. (laughs) So that isn't the way to start a race.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But, we needed to finish.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And sometimes during a pit stop that's made on the eleventh lap, everybody comes in, Henley would hold me up, say you stay here let me talk to you for a while, let those guys get out of the way, we don't care if we get ten laps down, we want to finish tenth, eleventh, or twelfth.

CW: Um-hum, right, right. In 1978 you, let's see you started twenty-eight races and you ended fifteenth I think in points, which was your best finish, that's pretty good isn't it?

DM: And they said I was never in the same car more than five times. I did it jumping cars.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And then NASCAR took it away from me. I had to send an entry in on the car, if I was going to drive it. And I use to send in three or four entries and then they would penalize me for sending an entry and not have a car there. So my little gimmicks got, but I learned that's their rules, this their game, not mine, I'm just invited to their party, so if I want to say I want to do what they say.

CW: Um-hum, did, that didn't bother you too much once you saw it that way?

DM: No, I got rides the other guys didn't.

CW: So yeah, you were benefiting every day I guess. Did that year, did 1978 feel like a really good year to you? Or since the record only shows part of what you were doing, maybe you didn't--

DM: Well I sort of liked it with Henley Gray when I drove from him, I don't know how many races. It was a presentable car, we wouldn't have to worry about not qualifying.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: We can always qualify, and this where a bunch of guys used to worry to about qualifying there.

CW: Right.

DM: That's why they quit, we qualifying other cars.

CW: Um-hum. Now one point you warned off qualifying more than one car at a time, which of course is illegal in NASCAR of course.

DM: I qualified three cars once, never started a race.

CW: Um-hum. Did, now did, was it Bill France himself, or was it his--

DM: Bill Gazaway.

CW: Bill Gazaway?

DM: Yeah.

CW: Who told you, you shouldn't be doing that?

DM: Well, he says, look at it his way, if the man is not capable of qualifying the car, why is he, why should he be safe on the track?

CW: Um-hum.

DM: If it takes another man to get it he wouldn't be safe on the track.

CW: There is something in that isn't there?

DM: I wreck one time in a fender bender, I had three or four people come down, what happened, what happened to the car? I said I crashed, well you never crash, well I did that time.

CW: (laughs)

DM: It was unusual for me to crash.

CW: Um-hum. What was your worst crash in this kind of racing?

DM: In Darlington when I got up on the fence. It hurt my ribs.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Scared me too. I was afraid that somebody would get hurt. I didn't want to hurt anybody.

CW: That must be something of a worry and--

DM: Well, that was the only time. And then when you went for the hundred-mile race, that's the race before the 500--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: The two, the twin 150s they call them--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --I use to be in the second 150 and they would park them way down on the backstretch. And I walked down with my wife one time, she walked down with me. I said think this don't seem right today, I don't, but I was a little leery and I said after I did that I said I never going to have another thought like that. You shouldn't think that there might, but those hundred-mile races we had a lot of deaths, unfortunate accidents, fender benders that still meets newsreel every day.

CW: Um-hum. To, even still, yeah. Now were you in races where people died?

DM: Yeah. That one that Charlie (pause) now I can't even think of his name, guy down at Daytona, Dutch Prince died at Daytona, Joe Boar died at Daytona. One of the modified drivers died at Daytona and (pause) if I got the list of the deaths I probably been to ten of them.

CW: Really.

DM: But they, they did things wrong.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Wasn't, that car what was his name, he was a radio announcer. I qualified his car for Dick Bear and when I had the car the car got loose on me and I slid all the way down the track. And drove in the pits just like I knew what I was doing, it was luck, my eyes were closed all the way.

(laughs) I didn't have no idea to what had happened. So they put this other driver in that front of the race, and he went out and killed himself. The car got loose--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --when it got loose with me I locked it up. And if, if you do things right you usually can slide around that track just like that's the way, but sideways.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: Don't release the, when you see cars sliding and the wheels are turning that driver is not with it. But Dale Earnhardt told me was a new type of steering that they got with an eight to one steering, or a ten to one we use it to the best we had, for steering were twenty-four to one. And you can't turn a wheel fast enough for one of those.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: (pause) Were there, like I said I don't know what they would do if they ever ran a front wheel drive, I don't know.

CW: (laughs) What do you think about the car of tomorrow?

DM: I don't think the driver will know the difference.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: The car is loaded with gages and everything, water bottles, and air conditioning and they got more toys in there than I had in my whole career.

CW: (laughs) Do you think there's been a golden age to this sport?

DM: People say they'd prefer to see the racing the way it use to be. Because it would be guys like me, Cecil Gordon, Frank Warren, Ben Arnold, and when the Petties comes, and Pearson, and Cale, they're coming one, two, three, we're down, we're all the way, get out then we go on back with our racing. I might start racing again with Frank Warren, but as soon as the hot dogs, the big car come, we get out of their way.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: That's why Richard Petty's career, the end of Richard Petty's career, he was missing races. But he should've been guaranteed a spot without missing any.

CW: Um-hum. And in comparison, to today, you, they're much closer together, the whole field.

DM: Much, and they're really on the ball. And they, is not simple to drive a foot away from a guy and, without hitting him or--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And you can't, and like they say, the windows are fixed now so you can't you look through his window. And you're at the same time we use to be able to look for the windows, we always ran a scoreboard, we'd look up to see what spot we're in, we could read it. We had no radio, they just had a big sign that said 'pit.' They would be pit one, two, three, it would be GTO one for gas, oil, and water. So that, if we had two hands on the wheel, that means gas, and one for tires that means tires.

CW: And if you want them all?

DM: Well you didn't have a choice (both laugh). By that time that you would tell them that.

CW: (laughs) You'd already be in there. How did they accept you as a Northerner in in NASCAR? You were a pretty unusual person.

DM: Well I got to know them all, they felt I'm one of the good ole guys.

CW: Oh.

DM: I'd tell people, I'd say don't confuse me with New York City, Watertown is like the Charlotte of the north. New York City, those people they're angry people, they're mean. They, nothing's funny and well the Southerner is very easy to get along with.

CW: Um-hum. That's what you found, there was a lot of acceptance.

DM: Yeah, we were towing into Daytona the second trip and we had a hauler and we were having tire trouble with a hauler, and a trooper come along while we were fixing it. And my wife said to the trooper, said if he has another flat tire he says he's going to drive it in on the rims, well you tell him I'll escort him in.

CW: (laughs) (pause) Of course the, they're number of different who've, I mean when you started in the sport this was a very Southern sport, and it was also a very white male sport--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --things have changed a little bit but not very much.

DM: Wendell Scott they talk about, but you talk to an older driver, and they say oh well that nigger was no good, this there, but they really respect everybody liked Wendell.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And him and his daughter comes over and sees me every year.

CW: Um-hum. Civil.

DM: But they were called niggers, it's just like you wouldn't do that now.

CW: Right, right.

DM: Wendell was very well liked.

CW: (pause) Do you see things changing in the future in terms of there being more acceptance?

DM: It's money, money is going to get out of hand. It's costing them approximately a million dollars a race to sponsor a car, but why does it take four half-million dollar motor coaches for that team to own. Why can't they go to the Red Roof, you know?

CW: Um-hum. So the overheads are somewhat arbitrary in a way.

DM: They're misusing them. Drivers are getting paid to for starting money some, \$68,000 just to start the race. We didn't even get that for winning.

CW: Um-hum. Things have really changed in that regard. Do you think in terms of who's in the driving seat that then we might see more diversity in the future?

DM: We're getting more foreigners, well named drivers that comes with well-to-do spon--people that use to drive Ferrari.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: It's stuff like that.

CW: Um-hum. Have some, some drivers obviously crossed over from like Formula 1--

DM: Well now they're coming from Indianapolis, down to--

CW: Did you see much cross over when you were driving, were there many people who did--

DM: Foyt and Andretti were about the only drivers that we had from Indianapolis.

CW: Um-hum. Did you ever have an interest in trying the open wheels, yourself?

DM: No. They, you should try talk to open wheel man, and he's raced more than five years, he can tell you about two weeks in the hospital.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: And I, I don't know, maybe Cale, I don't know if he got in the hospital, but I could see him, the only time I got in the hospital wasn't serious. Falling out of the silo at the barn would've been the same thing.

CW: Um-hum, yeah. What about Formula 1 racing, have you ever been interested in that?

DM: No. I hate road courses.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: They put me in a race at Riverside, Elmo Langley had a car and he was racing at Myrtle Beach, they had to fly out of Myrtle Beach on Saturday morning and be in Riverside by Sunday morning. And he called me up and said the plane isn't going to make it, said you need to take my car out start the race. And I had no idea what I was doing, they it just, I didn't enjoy it.

CW: Um-hum.

DM: But one of my best finishes was in Henley Gray's car which I got a sixth or seventh there, I think that probably there was only six or seven cars left prior to racing.

CW: And that was on the road course?

DM: Road course, Riverside. No I don't, road course takes a different type of driver.

CW: Um-hum, yeah I could see how that would be. But there are people who've crossed over there, aren't there from Formula 1, and I guess vice a versa so, but they are the minority for sure. Did you, do you think there'll be more women driving the future, and what do you think of that?

DM: Not until they get a car, they got women but they don't have a car for them.

CW: They need a special kind of car do you think?

DM: They got to get one they can handle. And, like I drove Janet Guthrie's car, the car was beautiful, but she couldn't do what I could do with it. It wasn't, the car was not, I had to change the car for me--

CW: Um-hum.

DM: --after I got into it.

CW: Um-hum. How would a, do you think a woman would need to change a car, what would need to be different?

DM: Well like that, what's that girl from Indianapolis, what's her--

CW: I'm not going to be able to help you I'm afraid, but I know who you mean.

DM: Well she seems to be pretty knowledgeable of what's the car, you got so many little old gauges to change, the wedge, and the brake, and the fuel, all with little switches, and you only turn it like that. I'm use to a (pause)

CW: Um-hum, yeah, just in general the way people drive the cars now are a lot more sensitive to the drivers.

DM: I, but there are, there are women drivers that can do just as well.

CW: Um-hum. Do you have a, any, I mean there are a lot of people who don't think women belong on the racetrack, do you have any of those feelings?

DM: No. They deserve, they deserve to be there, and they can do pretty darn good, but the car's not set for them. It isn't the woman, it's the car that's not right.

CW: Um-hum. What do you imagine being the future of the sport? Where do you imagine it's going to go from here?

DM: Oh I don't know. It's only going to be well-to-do people, it isn't going to be any farmer's son, that was a professor at Cornell or, Jeff Gordon lived in California and their family wanted to come east so he could race. How many families can move the whole family?

CW: Um-hum.

DM: It's going to be, that's why I say I never bought a ride, there aren't many people that can tell you that.

CW: Right.

DM: Bob McCreadie, one of the best Modified drivers up north said to me tell me about this buying the ride. Tim McCready had just won the Chili Bowl pole but he had to buy the ride. He said how do you get; how did you get a hold of the car? X amount of dollars to drive and you will drive for a percentage. Bob never, never has given anybody money to drive, I never have either. I got no money for driving, but not to drive.

CW: Right, right. Things are very different than they were. (clears throat) What, lots of things must've happened to you over the years, and you must have some memories that are maybe a little bit stronger than others. What would be your most, say your most euphoric moment on the circuit, what was the most joyful moment you can remember?

DM: Well I drove for Harry Hide and Norman McCready in, that's a car that Earnhardt drove too for, and (pause) when I had to qualify and we only had a little bit of practice, and I didn't go out to warm up when everybody else and Harry said what's the trouble? I said too much traffic out there, I said there isn't much that I need to know, I liked to have a clear track when I go out so we don't make any mistake. Oh do whatever you want to, it come to qualify there was something like seventy cars to qualify and they only took the top fifteen.

CW: Wow.

DM: I was about the sixty-ninth car to qual--qualify, the stands are all gone, everybody else gone, pit crews are off, said this this score ain't going to do it, I got thirteenth.

CW: Wow, good.

DM: And they immediately come and surrounded the car, impounded it, because they figured I must've been using it, nitrous oxide, that's gas, they thought I'd using that. I asked Harry, I'd, I'd says what are they going to do, said why do you worry about it? He said can you do that again? Oh jeez, I don't know, I said do I have to? Well, but he said you just got a good lap in. (pause) And that was very surprised, got a lot of comment on it, I bumped Richard Petty out of the race for the first day.

CW: (laughs)

DM: And I had to make a joke out of it, went up and told Richard. I said I bumped you out of the first day qualifying but you can come back tomorrow and re-qualify, I know you don't know about this because you never had to do it, but.

CW: And he didn't know about it?

DM: He, he took it as a joke.

CW: (laughs) And did qualify I guess. Wow, that's great. Some, lots of funny things must've happened to you too--

DM: Yeah.

CW: --what was the funniest thing that's ever happened?

DM: Oh I don't know, it's just like when I do an interview with people it's hard to sit down for two hours or three hours and trying to reminisce thirty years.

CW: That's a long time. That's a very long time. (pause) You need that road trip to do it. You need to have six days of driving.

DM: As Henley, says just drive across country with me and we'll go through the whole series race.

CW: Um-hum, um-hum that's true. Well, I think I've probably asked most of my questions here. So do you have any summing up comments or you know what--

DM: No but when I go home I think did I tell them, did I tell them what, for that little bit that you read, come out very good what you've, you have already written down. And I can't think did I tell her that? Did I do that? I, Jeff Gordon would've sat and he would've had everything all written down, know exactly what he's going to say, pronounce each word, just as perfect can be,

and do a very good job. I think he's one of the most intelligent drivers that we got and I he would be one of the top drivers.

CW: Um-hum. But he's, there's only one Dick May. (laughs)

DM: He's in the class of the only one of Jeff Gordon, same as Richard Petty.

CW: Um-hum. Well let me ask you this then, is there anything that you wished you would've changed? Would you go back and change anything?

DM: Yeah, know, know more about the cars (pause) of the castor, cambers, and shocks, and what you need to do. Like I use nitric oxide one time, I got into a car of Ed Negre's and I was on the second car I have already qualified, course they don't know that. And Ed had to come down, push the car off the line to get it started because he didn't want me using the battery, and as he was pushing me he leaned in the window he said if you're having a hard time getting rpm up, turn the switch off. I don't think then I think that must be the switch for the fan and he want to save all the power and not run the fan. So I'm at Darlington or Talladega and I'm the, green flag and white I turn the switch on and the car went from 6,200 up to 6,400. The 200 RPMs doesn't seem like much, but on a big track like that, that could be up to ten mile and hour. And I can't make a big gap or they'll found out.

CW: (laughs)

DM: And that's when I used the nitric oxide.

CW: And you didn't get caught.

DM: No, but I knew they couldn't let every driver, you couldn't practice with nitric oxide. Sort of like in the service, if the parachutes don't open you can't go back and get another one.

CW: Um-hum. (laughs) Well is there anything else that, today?

DM: I hope it comes out the way you want it.

CW: Um-hum, yeah I think so.

DM: What will, will it be in book form or magazine?

CW: It, for right now it'll be the interview that people can listen to. So it will be in your own words.

DM: How will they get the interview, knowing about, who--

CW: I'll tell you about it when I turn it off, so thank you very much.

End of Interview.