

**BILL TINKER**  
**Longtime Customer - Check's Café – Louisville, KY**

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Date: January 17, 2008  
Location: Check's Café  
Interviewer: Amy Evans  
Length: 58 minutes  
Project: Louisville Barroom Culture

**[Begin Bill Tinker Interview]**

00:00:02

**Amy Evans:** This is Amy Evans on Thursday, January 17, 2008, for the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm in Louisville, Kentucky, in the Germantown neighborhood at Check's Café with a regular here, Mr. Tinker. And, Mr. Tinker, would you say your whole name and your birth date please, sir?

00:00:17

**Bill Tinker:** Well, let's see. It's William W. Tinker, Junior, born two, fifteen of thirty-seven [February 15, 1937]. I will be seventy-one years old a month from now. I've been a full-time resident, since 1941, of the Schnitzelburg area [a neighborhood considered part of the greater Germantown area], and I started coming in this great place of Check's in about 1957 when I was still in college and illegal but I still came in. **[Laughs]**

00:00:47

**AE:** You went to the University of Louisville?

00:00:50

**BT:** I went to the Bellarmine University, which was a—at that time, was a secular college. I was very young, and the college at that time really excelled in the accounting profession. And our classes were very limited, but in our class of 1959, our graduating class, nine of our—nine of the twelve in that class passed the CPA [Certified Public Accountant exam] the first time they sat. So I mean this was—at that time, it was really a school of excellence, and now it's still a school of excellence and each year you'll find out in several of these *Money—Money Magazine* or *Inc—*

*Inc Magazine* that Bellarmine is one of the top twenty-five—let's say private universities in the South. And we're striving to be the Notre Dame of the South before it's over with. But and they—they've created several universities or studies and masters in business, nursing, and engineering and several others and—and the next one we're trying to promote out there would be the School of Pharmacy which the state of Kentucky needs.

00:02:07

**AE:** Well tell me about your first time or two here in Check's and what it was like back in the day.

00:02:13

**BT:** Oh, back in the days—that was about 19—1957 and after a few times you get in and the owner [Joe Murrow Sr.], well, sort of took a liking to me, I guess you might say. And being a poor kid, struggling, trying to work his way through college, come in and have a few beers and the first thing he would say is, “How you doing in college?” “Doing great.” Happy for one of the kids in the neighborhood, he'd say, “You need some money? You sort of short?” I said, “Yeah, I need ten dollars.” He said, “Okay, here's ten dollars, pay it back to me.” Well the next Friday I'd come in, and he'd say, “You got that ten dollars you owe me?” I said, “Here. Here's your ten dollars.” Later on in the evening he asked me, he said, “You short?” “Yeah, I'm short.” “Well how much you need?” I said, “Ten dollars.” “So here's the ten dollars. Pay me back.” This went on for several years, and I got him up to \$20.00 when I was a senior, which sort of made me happy but it was just—it was place that I don't know what you would say—basically, you had all types of people that came in there. Your Friday nights were big nights because it was fish. The place smelled like a fish market. And the place was crowded and a bunch of really—people in

the neighborhood that—that enjoyed the—really the company and so forth of the neighborhood at that time. These were my first big expressions or impressions of this tavern when I first came in. And I liked it so much, I've been coming back ever since.

00:03:57

**AE:** Uh-huh. And so was Mr. Murrow the owner when you started coming here?

00:04:00

**BT:** Yes, Joe Murrow [Sr.] was the—the owner. I've got a little history here I'd like to give you if that would be pertinent. You can leave the mic on, or you can leave the mic off from that standpoint. *[Laughs]*

00:04:13

**AE:** I'll leave it on, if that's okay.

00:04:16

**BT:** Well that's fine with me. I'm basically—I'm leaving it all—I'm going to leave all this with you also and you can take it with you and digest. But this building—and you'll notice you have your steps here—this building was built in two parts. It was built in 1911; the front end was built by John Knable and his wife, Mary A. Knable, and the front was a grocery store in 1911. The back part we're sitting here discussing the situation is that—this was the living quarters, which you'll notice here, and there was a little door from the tavern. The people lived in the back end, and we're sitting in the living room and the small room over here was a bedroom. And you had steps which would take you upstairs into what they called a camel-back house here in Schnitzelburg, which you had bedrooms upstairs and then on the door to your—my left, your

right—was the kitchen. And your bath—your bath and your bathroom was back there. So this was what it was for years. In 1928—in 1928 the—the building was leased to a Quaker Maid, which was the forerunner—fore-runner to the A&P Stores. Well they kept those until about 1932, and it was right after Prohibition or at the time after Prohibition and—let me look at my notes here [*Laughs*] so I'll tell you—see what I can find I've got here on this particular—. In 1928 the property was housed to Quaker Maid.

00:06:08

And it operated for a number of years until it—a fellow named Check Sumpter established a tavern here in 1935. Now he ran the tavern until about 1944. At that point Ray Dillman and Joe Murrow [Sr.] purchased the operation from Check Sumpter. Now, at the time, Joe Murrow had another tavern in the neighborhood called Mary's Tavern, which was Mary—which was named after his wife. So between 1944 and about 1965 he sort of spent some time at Check's and some time at Mary's Tavern. And then at that time in 1965 he assumed—purchased the building and assumed full control for his operations. At that time, the place was fairly run down, and he proceeded to clean the place up plus establish a good clientele. And the other nice thing about it is, when he purchased the business, he still did not have ownership of the—of the building. But he still ran the thing for a number of years, and then in 1980 he purchased the—the—not only the building, the front and the back, but he assumed the control of the whole building. Now at the time, several—two of the heirs, which were old maids, lived in the back end. And he guaranteed them that back until—to the day that they died they could live in that—live in the building.

00:08:14

Well, ironically, the house next door became vacant and in a period of time he—he moved them over into the house next door to this tavern here—free of rent until they died. And

then, from that particular standpoint, he converted this back end into this dining area here, improved his kitchen, et cetera—so forth and so on. But Joe was just—he was a great—from my standpoint he was a great person, and that’s all I can really say for the man. I mean he’s a humanitarian, and I guess if I could look at my—look at my notes here [*Laughs*—something—.

00:09:04

Unfortunately Joe died in 1980—June 13th—and one of the things from the *Courier Journal* here in Louisville was [**Reading**] “A wreath of white carnations hung off the green door of Check’s Café last night. And the heart of the Louisville Schnitzelburg community the sign simply said ‘Closed in memory of Joseph Murrow. Open 6:00 a.m. Monday.’ Joe Murrow, 67, died yesterday at Suburban Hospital. For the people of Schnitzelburg, a rich and special part of life in Germantown is gone. Since 1944 Murrow has operated Check’s Café, the home of the 20-cent bowl of bean soup, the dollar dinner and on Wednesday special 55-cent chilidog. But friends and long-time patrons tell of the special allure of Check’s was not just the inexpensive meals; it was Joe himself. Last night many of his friends—friends gathered at a local tavern [Old Hickory Inn] down on the street on Lydia and swapped memories about Joe and his café. Central themes emerged—his generosity, his trust, his ability to make people welcome, his 14-hours a day, and his ability to listen. Joe was a bartender’s bartender; he had the ability to put you at ease by spinning a yarn or listening to your problems. He was a goodwill ambassador; he was a common regular guy who worked 12 or 14-hours who loved his business and spent his whole life behind the bar. Everyone agreed that Check’s is also special because of the diversity of the people—” which I was trying to talk about a little while ago in this conversation. “He was special because of the diversity of the people; he attracts Fort Knox soldiers, bricklayers, Brown & Williamson executives, lawyers, football players, elderly couples, jockeys, Mayor William

Stansbury, truckers and even Billy Carter.” These were some of the individuals that have come through here, which I thought was pretty special.

00:11:45

And then mostly what I’ve got here really as a lot of insight is several—several of my reflections back in the days when I first started coming in here. My first recollection of Check’s was back in 1953. The night bartender was a fellow named Bill **Zack**. Bill was one of many soldiers stationed at Fort Knox during the War and fell in love with one of the local girls and married and made Louisville his home. He was also the brother-in-law of a friend—of a friend of mine, a boy named Ray Rotlmann. Ray along with myself and other friends, Bob Heines and Kenny Mattingly were either sixteen or seventeen at the time and thought we were the cock of the walk. We came back to Check’s at night when business was slow and not very many patrons around. We could ask Bill to sell us a bucket of beer—about 40-cents worth of *loose*. Now *loose* is something that comes out of the tap and goes into a bucket and runs—it’s called *loose*. After several conversations and being under-age, the consequences of being caught, he would tell us to have it—have it—leave and minutes later it would be sitting on the side steps, which we would take off and off we would go. [*Laughs*]

00:13:25

**AE:** That’s funny.

00:13:25

**BT:** Huh?

00:13:26

**AE:** That’s a great story.

00:13:30

**BT:** But some of the other things is some of my comments here is—basically, I can read all these or you can take—you can take them and add them to the story or conversation or throw them out from that particular standpoint.

00:13:43

**AE:** Well I think it would be lovely if you, you know, said the recollections—shared them on—on the tape here.

00:13:48

**BT:** Okay, then I'll do that. Well my recollection, basically, 10,000 words couldn't describe this man. This is Joe Murrow, the owner. Ten thousand words couldn't describe the man and his association with many customers. My story—my experience dates back to late [nineteen] '57 [*Laughs*]*—*some of us talking about struggling students and so forth, blah-blah, I'd come back, blah-blah. Joe—Joe got several calls a month from a—the Priest in this neighborhood church over here, St. Elizabeth, who would send homeless victims looking for a free meal. Joe would always have a bowl of bean soup and a cold glass of water to feed these people. The bean soup was always Joe's featured item on the menu and told me one day, "If the price of beans ever go, up I will always keep my price at 15-cents a bowl and raise the price of everything else." And that really was my recollection—recollections of Joe.

00:15:01

Another fellow that used to come in was a guy named Ed Seitz; Eddie was another regular customer who was a dining—who was a Dining Facilities Manager at the local Audubon Country Club and his—his position was responsible for the food purchases and the amounts of

foods that were prepared. Thursday nights at the Club on the menu read barbecued ribs, beans and etcetera; the ribs were cooked with a glaze of sweet brown sugar. Ed, being in charge of the quantity of ribs to be cooked, almost always over-estimated the amount that were to be prepared. This overage of brown sugar coated ribs found a fond place to me—to the consumers of—to be consumed. Ed would bring several large service bins to Check's Café, which naturally would be consumed by Joe's customers.

00:16:07

Another one of my fond memories—and these were back in the years not from the time in your conversation with Bill [Reynolds, a bartender at Check's] because his were probably from later—later years, Darling Bertha Ash, she was another lovely patron of the tavern who had a penchant for Falls City Beer. On many of night—many of college nights students from U of L [University of Louisville] or Bellarmine University would challenge Bertha to chug-a-lug contests. Bertha—Bertha would wetten her hand and shake a small amount of salt on that hand, and then she was ready to go. To this day, I don't remember a soul who could beat her. She was so good she was a member of the St. Aloysius Payne Street Chug-a-Lug Team. As Bertha grew older and moved into senior citizens homes downtown, her visits to Check's lessened but seemed always to make Check's on the meeting nights of the All Wool and Yard Wide Democratic Club, which is also down the street. She would always come in with several—several shopping bags of cookies, crackers, chips and et cetera they'd pass out to customers for their pleasure. Bertha would always entertain—entertain us on those nights with her singing rendition of a *Good Man that's Hard to Find*, *God Bless America*, and *My Old Kentucky Home*. She was also fond of the kazoo, a musical instrument, and played songs of her choice to the amusement of the tavern patrons. God love her. Unfortunately, she's deceased. In later life, when she got to a point when she couldn't really get—get around, we—she was in a nursing home, and I spent a many of night

taking her back to her nursing home. She was a large lady, and I had a Volkswagen so sometimes it was tough getting her in the car. But she was one of my fondest.

00:18:15

Of all the—of all the—this was—this was probably my greatest bartender—was a fellow named Eddie Spayd. Ed had just died recently at age ninety-six. We had a big party for him, and one of the pictures hanging on the wall out there, which I took the pictures and framed myself for him, was—was his ninetieth—his ninetieth birthday—his ninety years-old—his retirement party from here. He was—he lived in the neighborhood for years and worked for a company that moved their operations to Athens, Georgia, and he went with them until retirement and came back. But Eddie, of all the bartenders here that worked at Check's—probably one of the most unusual and favorite was Eddie Spayd. He was employed at [Puritan] Cordage Mills in Louisville, and when the company moved to Georgia, Eddie and his family followed. Upon his retirement, he returned to Louisville and shortly after the return, he started to work part-time at Check's as a favor to Joe. Eddie worked at Check's for years until he retired; his retirement party was a grand day for Eddie. It seemed that half the city of Louisville came to his party. George Baker, the President of Hamilton Printing Company; Coach Chris Pagodis, an assistant coach at the University of Louisville Football Team—Eddie—some of the people that attended that particular city. Eddie worked the day shift with bartender Al Oswald. Al Oswald was a retiree from Ashland Oil Company and also held several political jobs before coming to Check's.

00:20:02

Now Al had several unusual traits, which used to aggravate Eddie to hell and back. Al was—quoted—hard of hearing and would never answer the phone to take a carryout order. This made Eddie furious and he once said, “He can't hear the damn phone but can hear when someone drops a quarter on the floor.” Another one of his—his squirks with—his squawks [meaning

quirks] was his refusal to pour mixed drinks. On one occasion, a customer requested three Bloody Marys. Al turned to Eddie and said, “Don’t you know how to make a Bloody Mary?” Eddie said, “Let me show you how.” Al watched as Eddie made the drinks and gave them to the customers. Several days later the same customers ordered Bloody Marys and, again, Al told Eddie that he didn’t know how to make—make them. Again Eddie prepared the drinks and told Al, “It’s made—should be—it may be best for you to learn how to make this drink; he tips me \$3.00 every time.” From that day on, Al was an expert at preparing a Bloody Mary at Check’s.

00:21:27

On Wednesdays for a number of years the daily special was chilidogs. Once the rush was over on Wednesday, Al would take the remaining hot dogs and hide them in a beer box. If you were a late customer and needed to eat, there were no more hot dogs. *[Laughs]* Al would take all—Al would take all the leftovers—take them home for supper. Every year at Derby time, he would also take off a week because he worked as a bartender for the Ashland Oil Company.

00:21:55

Now another good friend of mine was a fellow named Stan—Stan Russell. Stan was a long-time part-time employee, worked several nights a week for over eighteen years at Check’s. Stan was a graduate of Saint X [St. Xavier High School] and was either a customer and bartended on Friday nights when Saint X played at Manual Stadium—. His wife also spent a number of years as a waitress at Check’s. His mother-in-law also worked for a number of years at Check’s. Stanley was also a very avid U of K [University of Kentucky] sports fan and had season tickets to U of K. The Saturday morning ritua—Stan was to meet Bob Burkel, Joe Hoffman and any other U of K fan at Check’s, ice up their cooler of beer, pack their snacks and head for Lexington. All the happiness and anticipation of a big football victory was this Saturday—was imminent. This was the Saturday the big victory was going to come our way

[Laughs] and that was the day that would put U of K football on the map. [Laughs] The local— [Laughs]; it didn't make it. We lost.

00:23:11

The local radio and television industry were well represented as customers at Check's including Bob Dominie, a sports-caster at WAVE TV, Bob Schulman [of] WHAS TV, and the *Courier Journal*. Well Bob Schulman of WHAS TV was also the ombudsman and a local critic of the newspaper. He died recently at ninety-one [years old]. He—he lived in Florida for a number of years and moved back. I met Bob in here—Bob Schulman back in 1991 and gave him a picture of Check's Café, and he wrote me a real nice letter that I still have that I'm going to include in this—my book, if I ever get finished, with the information on Check's and have that—one of the items that will appear in—in that book.

00:24:02

But he was that way; Bill Bailey was a local—oh, he was a hot shot at that time. He was the greatest disc jockey in the world here in Louisville, Kentucky. He was the top of the thing. And Bill Bailey he was a frequent visitor in the early [nineteen] '90s along with Bucks Braum; presently Ron Raines of WAMZ, the weather crew, is a steady customer. Al McGuire was one of the many notables—national sports celebrities who would come to Check's and enjoy—enjoy their chili when he was in town. Al discovered Check's back in—in his coaching days at Marquette University. The radio station WHAS did a preview on Al McGuire here in this tavern one of the days that Marquette came into play the University of Louisville and that—that at his death they also ran that replay on their—on their news station. When Billy Carter visited Louisville, when he tried to do Billy Beer to be brewed by Falls City Brewing Company, he was invited to one of the prestigious restaurants for lunch or even one of the treaty—trendy new places—he went to Check's Café in Germantown.

00:25:21

Joe said he received a call from Falls City President Jim Tate about 9:00 a.m. in the morning, was asked to hold a table for Billy [Carter] and his entourage. He got there about 12:00 and had some hot dogs, signed a lot of autographs, bought a chance on a car from the St. X Fall Festival, and played some pinball with Bill Tinker. Bill Tinker played for \$5.00 a game and won a quick \$20.00 from him because I was good. **[Laughs]** Joe was asked how much did Billy drink and he said, “Four to five cans of City, but that’s not all that much; I can drink that much in a couple hours—or plenty more though.” From the time that Billy arrived to Falls City Brewing Company at 7:00 a.m. to complete taste—taste tests for Billy Beer, he—Carter put away God knows how many, according to the Brewery spokesman. He was drinking all day but never showed it, and the legend lives on. After kissing virtually every female employee of Falls City Beer, Doe Anderson, an advertising agent did a—did a late after bit with the Wayne—WAVE’s Claude Wayne, which is a talk show. He smiled a lot and said, “Wayne, I think he was about half-stoned, but it was so quick, he stopped me cold a couple times.” **[Laughs]** Those are my recollections of Check’s Café.

00:26:53

**AE:** Well they’re some good ones, for sure. I can’t wait until you get your book done.

00:26:57

**BT:** **[Laughs]** I hope—I hope to God I do.

00:27:01

**AE:** What else do you have sitting here, this picture of—of Germantown here?

00:27:04

**BT:** Well, what I was wanting to give you on my—before you leave is basically is some of the things that—a little memento. I mean last night I gave you the t-shirt of our—they call it Schnitzelburg Walk. I want to give you this little copy of Check's Café. I didn't have time to frame it; I did cut the mat for it. This fellow here did this picture here in 1979 [the picture is signed Sonny T.]. It was a good friend of mine. He did a lot of the pictures on that t-shirt. So I'm going to give you that. And this is the Catholic Church down the street. You may have passed that. And then this is the heart of Schnitzelburg and you'll see at one time—this says Flowers. This was a drugstore, a law office; here's the bakery across the street but here's Check's Café right here on the corner and the church and that was—they called it Gould Hall there. And then there's a little background as to the—the artist and his take on this area, which he lived here all his life, and I know his whole family. And then here's one little article I don't think you have this article. Here's a little article about the King of Taverns, Check's Café; it gives you your date and so forth and so on like that [*Courier-Journal newspaper article by Jeffrey Lee Puckett, no date*]. And last but not least—here is an original copy of the Schnitzelburg Walk [in photos] and here are the taverns that were involved in it. These are color-type and then these I took and—.

00:28:49

**AE:** Can you explain the Schnitzelburg Walk for the—the record?

00:28:53

**BT:** Well Schnitzelburg Walk basically was set up it was a—sort of a pre-Derby-type thing, just something that, you know, everybody is having a party or something like that around Derby time. And these tavern operators, at that time they were more—more united in the one than they

are at the present day. They decided to have a walk and the only thing you did is if you were a— if you were a regular customer at Check’s Café or a regular customer of Ole Hickory Inn or Flabby’s or something like that, you met there and they blew the whistle. And all the group took off and they walked to visit the next tavern and spend maybe twenty minutes or a half an hour in the next tavern and drink a few beers and shoot the bull, and they’d blow the bullhorn again and you’d go to the next tavern. And this repeated in almost a circle until everybody made the ten taverns. If—or twelve taverns at the time, if they were capable to make all of them. And the other thing about it, they advertised the thing as the Schnitzelburg Walk, and they had a common logo, which they used for years, and on the back they had each tavern that was represented in this particular walk. Now each tavern at that time had their own colored t-shirts. One of them would have blue; one of them would have green, red, et cetera so forth and so on like that. It was just a night of fun. And the thing was is that it—it was, hopefully, to bring in outside people outside the neighborhood to see, you know, just what we’ve got. Because we’ve got some good publicity, you know, about the taverns and the food, so this was the start of this thing. And it ran pretty good until a lot of the old owners [*Laughs*], partially the old owners sold the businesses or something like that, and you got some young pups in there with different ideas and—and then you had some of them that wanted to gouge the customer—the outside customer—and raise the prices of everything, you know. And a lot of the ones, they balked, so it’s sort of a split right now. But that basically—that’s what the Walk was and—.

00:31:23

**AE:** So you don’t do that anymore, the Schnitzelburg Walk?

00:31:27

**BT:** We still do that. We still do that because every *[Laughs]*—we still do that because every year I send a flyer—I send a flyer out to each one of the taverns and I also have one of the breweries who will make me some flyers, and I go personally to each one of the taverns and invite them to a meeting. Now young John *[Morrow]* just took over this operation *[at Check's Café]* probably about a year ago. I told him, I said—the first meeting we had was at another tavern, and I took him with me to introduce him to these people. *[Laughs]* So the next time we had a meeting, I set it up here and—because I thought I was trying to help the kid out, you know, get a little bit of business in here at the time because it was very slow, and we've had the last two there. And all I do is set the—the meeting up and tell them this is the meeting, now you all go kill each other. I don't care. But see if you can come out with something, you know, that everybody can live with and—.

00:32:38

**AE:** Tell me quickly about the *[All Wool and Yard Wide]* Democratic Club up the street.

00:32:45

**BT:** Ugh, Germantown, God love you. Gee, you're—you're Catholic German or you're Catholic Irish and, unfortunately, Catholics are Democrats in this particular precinct and this thing has been in existence, I mean I think since about the 1930s. And they have a meeting once a month; dues are \$8.00 a year, and if you're a Democrat, you best join the Democratic Club and meet all the politicians, and they'll tell you what they're going to do for you but get them elected and you won't see them again, but—.

00:33:21

**AE:** So how do they come up with the names for these clubs?

00:33:24

**BT:** With what?

00:33:24

**AE:** The names?

00:33:26

**BT:** What Germantown—?

00:33:27

**AE:** Names for the clubs like the All Wool—?

00:33:28

**BT:** Oh, well, you know, that's a good question. I really couldn't tell you, to be perfectly honest with you. *[Laughs]* But the only thing I can surmise that back in the days there was a large cotton mill that wove the—would weave the—the materials so I can only surmise that—that particular situation all wool—it was a woolen mill in a yard—all wool. That's what they made a yard-wide. The machines probably just made it thirty-six inches. That's—that's the only logical thing that I could really, you know, come up and tell you is that's why it was named that way so—.

00:34:18

**AE:** Well and now tell me about being Schnitzelburg's Number One Citizen.

00:34:22

**BT:** Well [*Laughs*] you're trying to—when you say something like that, you're trying to build my ego. Excuse me. Being a member or being a resident of this particular area, one of the requirements—the basic requirements to become a member of Schnitzelburg, you either have to have lived in Schnitzelburg or in my particular situation is that I lived in Schnitzelburg, and I also have a small business down the street. I do some tax business down the street. Now I've been here since 1941. In my process, we try to—we try to pick an individual—and I wasn't on the selection committee, believe me; the selection committee on this Number One Citizen is that, number one, is you've got to do some charitable work, assist people. It's more of a situation—you belong to your memberships in these particular things and participate in these operations. Plus, there are a lot of them—a lot of our members that—a lot of our Number One Citizens had—did good deeds back when they were younger. Like the mayor. The mayor—and one of really the pre—prerequisites is that you lived in the neighborhood. We had the Mayor that was elected. We had several preachers that were the preachers in the churches in the neighborhood that got these, but they'd done outstanding work, you know—the standpoint. But mine goes back really as outstanding accomplishments in our—in the Catholic grade schools we have a football league, and every year you got the Super Bowl, you got eight, eleven different bowls of the college teams. Well they instituted in this particular grade school systems, they had what they called the Toy Bowl. Well the first thing I did, I played in the first Toy Bowl with this church, St. Elizabeth over here. Got beat—both of them but I played in those. I was an Eagle Scout at St. Elizabeth, and after I became an Eagle Scout, I continued to work with the Boy Scouts. At that time I was about twenty-four years old. And later on as I was—I was raising my children, I was real active in the—I was a football coach, baseball coach, basketball coach, President of the

Booster's Club, Athletic Director and so forth like that with these children, while my children were in grade school. And then they proceeded to go onto high school, and I would work the picnics and the—the benefits and so forth like that. I worked all the basketball games and all the football games at Trinity High School, when I had two boys there. During the summer times, they belonged to a swim team, and I spent half my time there timing when they had the races against the other schools—just volunteered time like that, you know—donated to that thing. I helped form the grade school—when my children were in grade school they were—I helped form the Catholic grade school Tennis League. I was instrumental in it; my ex-wife was instrumental in it and several others, which now has become sort of a pretty good—a good thing. They have competition, et cetera and so forth like that in these indoor tennis courts, but that was some time I spent with that. I did some volunteer work back here at the church when I was younger; I always worked at the church picnic. Well, as I got older, I came back in this neighborhood and a lot of the elderly, if they needed a ride or something like that, I would, you know, I would ride them here or ride them there, so forth. A lot of them—I spent a lot of time advising on Social Security and sometimes income taxes and so forth like that. And then I joined the Schnitzelburg Area Community Council and immediately I was elected treasurer. We weren't registered with the Internal Revenue Department, nor the State of Kentucky nor anything, and it spent me about two years just going through the steps to get us back legalized in the State of Kentucky and Internal Revenue Department. I finally got us classified as a non-profit organization, got us back in good standing with the state and so forth like that. So I assume that these particular traits or virtues or whatever you may say is that I'm—maybe this was something that helped—helped get myself elected. I didn't like the—I didn't like the procedure—the procedures on the way they elected because there were two individuals that were doing the

electing, so I had them change the situation where this year we got about six people on the selection committee. **[Laughs]** I got the final vote. So this year we—we gave the Schnitzelburg Number One Citizen award to an eighty-five year old lady that lives right down the street here on Burnett Street in this block, a great lady, but she's done a lot of volunteer work. So these are the things that we're looking for in these individuals, and the other thing, basically, you got to be—one of the things that—basically, you got to be in your late 60s or 70s to get this particular award because somebody twenty-eight years old that moves in the neighborhood and two years later they become a citizen—Number One Citizen—there are a lot of other people that have done a lot more work in this neighborhood than them. But that's basically the reason I got it.

00:41:01

**AE:** So—

00:41:01

**BT:** I get—I get my nice jacket, insulated, and they also give you a Louisville Slugger bat; it's something you know—it's something nice, I guess. I don't know. **[Laughs]**

00:41:17

**AE:** Well you're enjoying that jacket. I've seen you wearing it every time I've seen you.

00:41:18

**BT:** That's to let you know who the guy is. **[Laughs]** But that's it. No—.

00:41:29

**AE:** Well tell me about your friendship with your bartender here [at Check's], Billy [Reynolds].

00:41:33

**BT:** The sports nut. **[Laughs]** Well basically, as I've aged naturally I'm—unfortunately I'm divorced after twenty-five years and, really, my children have all moved out. Several of them—all of them are not in the city of Louisville. One of them is a captain in the Navy; he's a doctor and he's—right now he's in San Diego. My other two sons, one's a lawyer in Lexington, Kentucky, and the other one is really a pharmaceutical representative in Lexington, Kentucky, so basically pretty much—pretty much by myself. I do have a girlfriend. But we were talking about various trips, and he [Billy Reynolds] had mentioned a trip about three or four years ago about—about a three-day or a four-day trip at—to Chicago, so I said, “Yeah,” you know, “I can go.” Retired, semi-retired, whatever you want to call it. So we went to Chicago and had a good time. I said, “I'll go,” I said, “but somebody has got to push my wheelchair because I can't walk very far.” So he pushed my wheelchair. The next thing I know he said, “Hey, I need somebody to go to a football game, the University of Kentucky.” I said, “Okay,” I said, “all right, I'll go. You've got to push me.” So this is—later in this particular situation it—usually, we go to Lexington, and I drive my car because his, I don't know that it would make it. But we've been Lexington a number of times, and we just got rid of the wheelchair last night and gave it away to somebody else who needs a—needs a wheelchair and I got me a new one. But we've put mileage on it to Chicago, University of Kentucky football games; we've been to Nashville, Tennessee, to several ball games there; went to Atlanta—went to Atlanta last year to watch the basketball—the SEC tournaments and we went to Georgia—600—not Georgia, but Arkansas, 600 miles from here, to watch Kentucky play Arkansas. And this was sort of a thing—this sort of gotten together but I've known him for all these years because I think I was probably one of the first people sitting at the bar that—when he came in. And I told a couple racist jokes in here one night **[Laughs]**, the first

night on; I told the guy that I was telling the joke about—I went over and slapped him on the back and I said, “You know, I don’t want to hurt your feelings or anything but—.” He said he liked to have fell off the bar—fell off the back and said, “Who is this old man?” But in that situation you get to sit there and you talk and you—you get into sports and some of this back-stuff years ago that a lot of people don’t know about. I don’t have a—I got a pretty good memory of the old things; of course, sometimes I don’t know whether I’m chewing gum or walking but **[Laughs]**—with the current things—but back, the old trivia and so forth like that, a lot of that I remember. And that’s—that’s how I met him; I met him at here and forged a pretty good relationship since then. So we make a lot of trips from that standpoint.

00:44:52

**AE:** Great. Well and you’re a beer drinker. What—how have you had to change your—your beer that you drink over the years?

00:44:59

**BT:** Well, started out drinking Sterling Beer; Sterling Beer was one of the local distributors here in Louisville, and we drank Sterling Beer because when I was in my twenties up to the day I was forty—well, about graduated from college—about twenty-two years old and I played softball until I was about forty years old, and Sterling Beer was one of the sponsors. They’d—they’d pay our franchise fees, they’d buy our softballs, and they’d give us a real nice t-shirt with Sterling Beer on it. And I drank Sterling Beer all those years, and it was always draft beer. And then Sterling, the original brewer sold out to another group in Evansville, Indiana, where it was brewed, and they had a problem with cleaning of their barrels and stuff—the beer just tasted so bad it was just—you couldn’t drink it. So at that point I went to Budweiser, and I’ve been

drinking that probably the last twenty-five or thirty years, and it's always Budweiser, and it's not out of a bottle. It's out of the draft. And I've—I've just done that. **[Laughs]** And I don't really change—maybe—oh, maybe when I'm on a trip or something like that I may try, you know, a dark ale or something like that, or when I go to Las Vegas I try several of the mini-breweries out there and drink the brews that they have there, but it's been Budweiser all those years.

00:46:40

Now I've tried Jacks a couple times in LA and New Orleans but other than that, that's basically about what I drink.

00:46:55

**AE:** So tell me how a small neighborhood like Germantown can keep eleven taverns going all these years.

00:47:04

**BT:** Bunch of Germantown drunks. **[Laughs]** No, basically is it—you just sort of built a cult from that particular standpoint at that time, you know. This place here, basically, a lot of his [Joe Murrow Sr.'s]—a lot of his people probably came from Mary's Tavern when he first started. He had a good fried chicken, he had a good—he had a good bowl of bean soup, he had a good bowl of chili, he had a good chilidog, a good hamburger; he had good food at a very cheap and reasonable price. Well he wasn't really—he was interested in quality and not quantity. His theory was give it to them and give it to them at a good price. We survived, and he made his money on volume, you know. If it's good, they'll come back and see you. The other thing is they had all—everything was on an honor system, and I mean you just came in and ordered what you wanted, and he wrote it on a piece of paper and sent it to the kitchen and they came out yelling your—

yelling your meal. Never worried about getting paid, but 95-percent of the people that dealt would pay on that particular system. That's what made this one successful. The other one—that was—let's take old Flabby's; Flabby's was the situation there where the guy that had the place was a retired bricklayer and his son was a bricklayer, so he had a lot of bricklayers so forth and so on like that. He had an outstanding—he had an outstanding roast beef—roast beef sandwich, roast beef, mashed potatoes and gravy. He had a lot of hunters. People would bring in fresh kill, fish, so forth like that, and he'd cook it up and give it to the customers free. Always had Limburger cheese, yuck. But he just had several really featured items, plus they had a real good fried chicken up there. It was just several featured items that kept these people there, plus you sort of had a—a base. Across the street, these were a lot of young pups, a lot of the younger guys. Flabby's never had a liquor license, but the guy across the street from him had a liquor license, plus a packaged carryout, so that built that trade, basically. The guys would come in and say, "Well I'll go across the street, but I can't get me a shot of—shot of whiskey," so that built his trade there. Now down the street it was a little bit different; at Ole Hickory's—I mean at Hillsman it was called at the time, they had a different—a different type clientele. And then you went to Germantown—Germantown was probably built around the same time—no, it was built about 1891 and this thing was the same—the same family continuously owned that thing for, God knows when. But I remember when I was a kid, eighteen or nineteen years old, you could always get yourself a good bowl of chili there—a good bowl of chili and an RC Cola for about 40 or 50-cents.

00:50:40

**AE:** This is the Germantown Café?

00:50:42

**BT:** Yeah, uh-hmm. And then down the street at—at the time here it was Red Bud Liquors and basically it's nothing—people would come off work, they'd cash your paycheck for you, buy yourself your whiskey and so forth like that. And the other one that was just a Club 21 down here; it was basically these people—a lot of people worked for Stan—for Ashland, now Standard—American Standard. They made bathtubs and everything like that, and they would ride the bus from 7th and Hill down to Club 21, and they'd get off of the bus there, and they'd stop in Club 21 to get something to drink before the other bus came by and picked them up. See, so at that point, I mean that built that trade. But everybody—everybody sort of had a little—little special knack or a knack in the thing that you know—which was sort of interesting or imposing, and then you had little neighborhood cults, you know. You're liable to have maybe six or seven blocks, you know, and the only place they'd go to was—would be this one particular place because their friends were there, you know. The thing is, you got a friend—you got two or three friends and then your other friends will come. And you see that almost anyplace you go. You built up a regular clientele, but I mean you can't gouge the customers or anything like that or get snooty. And a personality like Bill [Reynolds]—with a person like Bill, that helps also because I mean he can kid them, assault them nasty, and they don't know it. But that's why—that's why these have been so successful in this neighborhood.

00:52:40

**AE:** Yeah. Well what can you tell me about the history of the rolled oyster in the neighborhood?

00:52:43

**BT:** Oh God, the rolled oyster. **[Laughs]** I forget what the old lady's name—God love her. Well to start with when it—first, when the rolled oyster was first made [at Check's], the owner, his wife, Mary—Mary Murrow, she did the rolled oyster. I never did like a rolled oyster because there was too much cornmeal, and they only put one little oyster in there. But Mary Murrow, she made them up to an extent until she got to the point where—where she got too old. But ironically, she's ninety-eight and still living **[Laughs]** and at that—they assigned this rolled oyster to a—to another old lady that, after Mary left, she gave them the little secret, you know, what they do with it; it was nothing—cornmeal—cornmeal and I—I don't know whether they use buttermilk or not, roll it up there—you got to build a hole—and she got so good at it that she was doing oysters for several of the other taverns here in the neighborhood. And then after that, right now, we had another girl named Carol Willet, and she did it while she worked here; and even after she left, she did it for a while. But now, under the new management, food costs, blah, et ceteras, they're doing—they're doing them on their own. I never—I never did like a rolled oyster here or anyplace else **[Laughs]** to be perfectly honest with you. I always liked what they call a pan-fry and—which is nothing more than just taking an oyster and breading it a little bit in that cornmeal there and throw it in the deep fryer for a couple minutes and pulling them back out. But that's all I know about the oysters around here. I know the chili has always been the same secret—secret recipe—with the herbs and spices in the little bag and everything like that. I think that's a little bit deviated from there. You can't really mess up a hamburger. **[Laughs]** Fried chicken, they got a good fried chicken, if it's fried on and your oil—you oil is clean. If the oil gets old, it's not going—it's not going to come out right.

00:55:14

**AE:** So do you have a favorite thing that you like to eat here?

00:55:17

**BT:** No. *[Laughs]* Probably—probably the fish. The fish. I'll eat the chicken every once in a while but, you know, after—after fifty-some odd years in here, you've eaten everything and it gets—it sort of gets old. And, as you get older, you shouldn't use some of that greasy stuff, you know. *[Laughs]* But he's got several other things; they make a real good club sandwich in here, nice good ham sandwich, they have a good plate of cheese, which is really great for an old man's cholesterol, but I still try it. Those are probably my most favorites, yeah.

00:55:56

**AE:** Well I have no idea what time it is, and we have this note here that Billy is meeting you somewhere between 6:00 and 7:00.

00:56:00

**BT:** Yeah.

00:56:01

**AE:** What time is it?

00:56:05

**BT:** It's only—I got no problem with that; I know where he's going to be. He's going to be at Shenanigan's, yeah. Yeah, we got time, if you've got anything else.

00:56:15

**AE:** Well what else do you want to talk about or say about Check's?

00:56:18

**BT:** I think I've—you've about burned me out, actually.

00:56:22

**AE:** Well I sure appreciate you sitting down with me and especially bringing in all these great things to talk about.

00:56:26

**BT:** Well these are things that are, like I say, is basically—these are some of my memories et cetera and so forth like that, and some of it, like I say, you can go through what I've got here and probably get rid of the inconsistencies—inconsistencies and so forth like that and maybe there will be a small contribution in this here particular situation, and if you can use these particular items, fine. If not, put it in your historical galleries or whatever.

00:57:03

**AE:** Well we definitely can use all of it, and I appreciate you being so generous to bring all of that with you. Thank you.

00:57:09

**BT:** Basically, these are things, which I've accumulated and I've put together. Usually, if anybody in Schnitzelburg, you know, gets some type of award, I usually will cut it out of the paper and—and then I will attempt to frame it or so—so forth like that because, ironically, the Schnitzelburg award here has been awarded to two of the bartenders here in this place here.

**[Laughs]** Yeah, yeah, so it's just, you know something different, but I'll give that to you.

00:57:40

**AE:** All right. Well thank you, sir, very much.

00:57:43

**BT:** You're welcome.

**[End Bill Tinker Interview]**