

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

HARRY CHRIS SOUFAS

INTERVIEW 1043

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is one thousand (1000). I am interviewing Harry Soufas, s,o,u,f,a,s, at his home at 710 Plantation Drive in River Bend in New Bern. The number of the interview is 1043. The date is February 11, 1993.

DR. JOSEPH PATTERSON: Harry, it's nice to be out here in your home talking to you, and I appreciate you letting Fred and myself come.

While Fred's taking, making copies of your pictures, we can go ahead and get started. What I'd like to do first is just to ask you about yourself, your full name, and your birth date.

HARRY SOUFAS: My name is Harry Chris Soufas, c,h,r,i,s,a,s,o,u,f,a,s, and I was born May 22, 1917.

DR. PATTERSON: That was a very good year. I was born that year too.

HARRY SOUFAS: Is that right?

DR. PATTERSON: Harry, where were you born?

HARRY SOUFAS: I was born in Thessaly, over in the country of Greece, and my parents came to this country in 1920 when I was three years old, and we settled in Wilson, North Carolina.

DR. PATTERSON: How did your folks happen to pick Wilson? It's a fine place, I'm just, just curious how...

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, my father had been to America prior to our coming and he had worked in Norfolk and Wilson as a laborer or cook or whatever and when we came to this country, of course, he naturally gravitated to one of the two places, and we lived in Norfolk for awhile

and then we moved to Wilson and settled there in 1923.

DR. PATTERSON: What did your dad do in Wilson?

HARRY SOUFAS: My father ran a restaurant and he had, operated a restaurant there for about fifty years.

DR. PATTERSON: What was the name of it?

HARRY SOUFAS: New York Cafe. That was on Goldsboro Street, right across from Branch Bank Building.

DR. PATTERSON: Was that tied in at all with the New York Cafe in Rocky Mount?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, they were not connected, but they were very good friends and we knew who those people were.

Dr. Patterson: Did you know the Leloudis family.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes, I knew Mr. Leloudis and his family and grew up with some of his children.

DR. PATTERSON: That's interesting. I'll tell you why. In this program, we have been funded with a major grant by the North Carolina Humanities Council, that's a state branch of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and they require us to have what they call a humanities scholar, that's a person from the academic world who works with us to make sure we're doing things the right way. And we have gotten a very fine young man from the history department of UNC in Chapel Hill to be our scholar, and his name is James Leloudis and he's the son of Mr. Leloudis who had the New York Cafe in Rocky Mount.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yeah, I remember him very well.

DR. PATTERSON: So you lived in Wilson until, about what age.

HARRY SOUFAS: I lived in Wilson until I was about twenty years old, at which time I had, I had been to the University of North Carolina as a freshman and I was playing football on the freshmen team and I got hurt and so I had to drop out of college and came back to home and I signed a professional contract to play baseball with the Snow Hill team and the Coastal Plain League.

DR. PATTERSON: Harry, during your years in Wilson, you had played high school ball there.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes, I had played baseball on the high school team. Charles L. Coon High School and my coach, incidentally, was Ashley B. Futrell. He, I think he was the mayor of Washington, little Washington over here for a number of years and Ashley was, he's connected over there with the, he was connected with the university, East Carolina University. I think he was one of the trustees or something of that nature.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, you played football in Wilson also.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yeah, I played football at the high school team.

DR. PATTERSON: Were your growing up years at Wilson pretty happy years?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes they were. I have very fond memories of my young days in high school. A lot of my class mates and team mates have all passed on now, but I occasionally read something in the newspaper about one of them which brings back a lot of memories.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you work in the restaurant?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes I did. When I was about fifteen, sixteen years

old I used to put in a few hours in the morning or late in the afternoon when I wasn't in school.

DR. PATTERSON: That restaurant lasted until about what year?

HARRY SOUFAS: I think that my dad retired and they closed that restaurant about 1965, if I'm not mistaken.

DR. PATTERSON: Is that when your father passed away?

HARRY SOUFAS: My father passed away in 1969. He was 87 years old.

DR. PATTERSON: The restaurant wasn't taken over by someone, it was just closed.

HARRY SOUFAS: No it just closed.

DR. PATTERSON: And when you went to Chapel Hill playing football, who was your freshman coach?

HARRY SOUFAS: My coach was Bear Wolf. Do you remember?

DR. PATTERSON: I remember Coach Wolf.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes Bear Wolf was the coach at Carolina.

DR. PATTERSON: That was about what year?

HARRY SOUFAS: That was 1936.

DR. PATTERSON: I was at Chapel Hill then as a student. What sort of injury did you suffer?

HARRY SOUFAS: I had an injury to my face, and my nose, and my jaw. I got kicked and that kind of finished me as a football player.

DR. PATTERSON: So then you came back to Wilson and you were offered a contract with the Coastal Plain League.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: It's important to this story of New Bern to know as much as we can about the Coastal Plain League. It was such a big thing in the life of New Bern and all of eastern North Carolina. Can you look back and tell me something about the history and development of the Coastal Plain League?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, originally the professional team began in the year 1937 which was developed from the semi-professional league that was in vogue at that time.

DR. PATTERSON: Did that include the Battery D team in New Bern at the time?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, no. That was prior to the Coastal Plain Semi-Pro.

DR. PATTERSON: So the Battery D was strictly amateur.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: And the semi-pro league came along.

HARRY SOUFAS: Then the semi-pro league came with New Bern, Kinston, and Greenville, and a few of these other towns in the eastern Carolina. And one of our more famous players in the semi-pro league at that time was a fellow named Charlie "King Kong" Keller.

DR. PATTERSON: I remember him.

HARRY SOUFAS: He played with the Kinston Eagles. Well, they weren't called the Eagles at that time, but he played for the Kinston team. And then, in the year of 1937, the semi-professional league turned, went into professional baseball.

DR. PATTERSON: Can we stop there and just backtrack a moment

and let me ask you about other players in the semi-pro league whom you remember. People of, perhaps, prominence or just outstanding for whatever reason.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I was probably about seventeen or eighteen years old at the that time, so I'm not too familiar with, I don't remember too many names. Charlie Keller was primarily the mainstay and there was Dwight Wall, and my memory has a way of getting away from me now.

DR. PATTERSON: New Bern had a team in that semi-pro league, did it not?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes it did.

DR. PATTERSON: And this semi-pro league had gone on for a number of years?

HARRY SOUFAS: I don't know exactly how many years, but it was in vogue for a number of years.

DR. PATTERSON: Yeah. Lefty Kenell did talk about this to some extent and it's on his, in his interview. And in 1937 it became professional ball and was called the Coastal Plain League.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: Can you take it from there and talk about it.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, there was, in 1937, the inauguration of professional baseball in eastern North Carolina including New Bern, Kinston, Greenville, Goldsboro, Roanoke Rapids, Snow Hill. The smallest professional team in professional baseball at that time of which I was a member in that year, and in 1937, '38, and '39 - old

Pea Head Walker was the manager - was the Snow Hill team which I played for.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you start out on the Wilson team?

HARRY SOUFAS: No. I started with the Snow Hill team.

DR. PATTERSON: They signed you in '37.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right and I signed up with them.

DR. PATTERSON: That was a very famous team.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, we won, we won everything that year. We won the championship, what we called the play-offs series, and we beat all the teams. We went undefeated that year.

DR. PATTERSON: Your first year?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yeah, in the play-offs. We won eight straight games.

DR. PATTERSON: You mentioned Pea Head Walker. Who were some other members of that team?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, we had Joe Bistroff who was a catcher. We had Aaron Robinson who eventually went and played with the New York Yankees, and we had Monk Joyner who was an outstanding player who played with the Athletics for awhile. We had old Big Jim Tatum who was at one time coach at the University of North Carolina football team. Big Jim used to play the outfield, and we had a fellow named Cecil Longest from down here at Morehead City. I think he originated from down there. He was our, he was our ace of the pitching staff there that year, and a few others that I can't recall right off hand.

DR. PATTERSON: You played first base on that team.

HARRY SOUFAS: I played first base. Yes I did.

DR. PATTERSON: Was your regular season that year, a good season?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes it was. I batted over 300 that year and the following year I hit thirty one home runs which was one behind Joe Bistroff's thirty two. He lead the league that year. And they used to put and it got to be, it got to be a point that, I'd hit a home run and Joe would come up right behind me and he'd hit one. And we did that a number of times during the season. They called us the home run twins. So that was kind of a unique label they had to put on us.

DR. PATTERSON: I suppose the Snow Hill people were pretty thrilled about all this and they supported your team pretty well.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes that's true. You know Snow Hill is right in the middle of the tobacco area and we had a lot of farmers, and Snow Hill only had about two thousand people. Well, no, at that time they only had about, about a thousand people that lived in Snow Hill proper and we would have at least two thousand people at the ball games every afternoon. And so the farmers would quit plowing and putting in tobacco and they would come to the ball game in the afternoon. They just had a great time.

DR. PATTERSON: How much did it cost to go to a ball game then?

HARRY SOUFAS: I believe it was twenty five cents. You could get a seat in the grandstand.

DR. PATTERSON: Was the playing field at Snow Hill a pretty good field.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes we had what we call a skin diamond. We didn't

have any grass in the infield but the ball park was reasonably good and had no problem there.

DR. PATTERSON: You played, of course, in all these other towns. You'd visit them and they'd visit you.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right. We would have a home and home series. We would play in Snow Hill one day and go to New Bern the next day, and back and forth. None of the towns were so far apart that you couldn't go within, maybe an hour between, driving.

DR. PATTERSON: What was your mode of transportation? Did you have a bus or...

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, we would go by bus sometimes and sometimes we'd go by automobile.

DR. PATTERSON: Your own cars?

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: Of course, you played New Bern during those days. Can you tell me something about the New Bern team when you entered the Coastal Plain League?

HARRY SOUFAS: I remember the New Bern team had a manager named Dock Smith, and he was quite popular in the New Bern town and New Bern had some good baseball players back in those days. In fact, they had several of them that went to the major leagues. Alf Anderson was one I remember.

DR. PATTERSON: Vanderson?

HARRY SOUFAS: Anderson

DR. PATTERSON: Anderson.

HARRY SOUFAS: He was a short stop here to New Bern and he went up into the major league, and we had, I remember they used to have a player named Peanut Doak. Chick Doak's son. Chick Doak was a, I think he was a coach out at the university of N.C. State.

DR. PATTERSON: Yes, I think that's right.

HARRY SOUFAS: There quite a few fellows that made a name for themselves.

DR. PATTERSON: When we get you back to New Bern managing the team, maybe you can speak to more, more New Bern players. Was it fun to play in New Bern? You played at Kafer Park I suppose.

HARRY SOUFAS: Oh yes. Kafer Park was a...

DR. PATTERSON: What was it like in the thirties?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, back in those days, people didn't have television and they didn't have many sources of entertainment and baseball was, seemed like to be, like a religion with the fans, and they would come from all over. And I remember fans would come from Morehead City and down from Pamlico County and come and fill the ballpark up. And if you didn't get there by six o'clock, you didn't get a seat.

DR. PATTERSON: This is true in all of the towns.

HARRY SOUFAS: That's right. They all filled the ball parks right to capacity.

DR. PATTERSON: Including the Kafer Park.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right, and I remember many a game where the fans overflowed the stands and they were standing ten deep down the sidelines

of third base and first base coaching lines. In fact, they got, they would be so close to you, that they could whisper and the ball players could hear them talking.

DR. PATTERSON: About how many people would the New Bern Park hold in those days?

HARRY SOUFAS: I would imagine they could handle anywhere from twenty five hundred to thirty five hundred people.

DR. PATTERSON: And it was crowded almost every time you played there.

HARRY SOUFAS: Every night it was. People would start their supper early so they could get to the ballpark, get a seat.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you have a favorite town to play in. Which town did you like best, outside of Snow Hill?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I enjoyed playing here in New Bern and I enjoyed playing in Kinston. They were all fine towns. I think maybe the Kinston fans were pretty rabid and they would razz you probably more than some other fans, but that's part of baseball.

DR. PATTERSON: Who were the owners of these clubs? Were they owned locally?

HARRY SOUFAS: The New Bern club was owned and operated by the fire department here in New Bern for a number of years, and then I think it was taken over by a man named Mark Skinner. He purchased the club and he operated it for a number of years in the latter stages before it went, went out of business. And when I played and managed in Rocky Mount, we had, Frank Walker was the owner of the ball club

in Rocky Mount. I don't recall any of the other

DR. PATTERSON: Was a Bert Taylor ever involved in the New Bern club.?

HARRY SOUFAS: Oh yeah. Bert Taylor. Yes that's true. Bert Taylor was involved with the New Bern club back in those days.

DR. PATTERSON: Harry, how much money did you all make?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, we didn't make a whole lot in comparison to what people make now, but I think that in the 1930's if you made \$75 to \$100 a month, that was usually considered a good salary in the professional stage. Now as the times went along, years went by, of course, salaries began to increase. Now when I came to New Bern in 1947, I think they were paying ball players anywhere from \$300 to \$400 a month, so.

DR. PATTERSON: Now during the time you all were playing, were you involved in other jobs also or was this full time.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, in the professional part of it, it was a full time job, but now when they played semi-pro ball.

DR. PATTERSON: Yeah, that was, of course, different.

HARRY SOUFAS: That was different.

DR. PATTERSON: But you were a full time ball player then.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: Now were these clubs farms for the major, certain major league clubs?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes they were, some of them, you know.

DR. PATTERSON: Was Snow Hill a farm club?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yeah. They were considered an affiliate. In other words, they're affiliated with, say, the New York Yankees or the Boston Red Sox, or the Cleveland Indians.

DR. PATTERSON: What sort of affiliation did New Bern have?

HARRY SOUFAS: Now, in the year, years that I played with New Bern, we were not affiliated with any major league teams. Prior to that, I'm not sure who they were affiliated with.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, how long did you play with Snow Hill?

HARRY SOUFAS: I was with Snow Hill for three years, from '37, '38, and '39.

DR. PATTERSON: Now just to get the thing straight about your private affairs, when did you get married?

HARRY SOUFAS: I got married July 1, 1940 in Norfolk, Virginia where I was playing professional baseball with the Norfolk Tars of the Piedmont League.

DR. PATTERSON: Ok, so you left Snow Hill when?

HARRY SOUFAS: 1939 after the season. I was sold to the New York Yankee farm club of the Piedmont League at that time.

DR. PATTERSON: In Norfolk?

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: How long did you play there?

HARRY SOUFAS: I played there for two years. 1940, '41 and then in '42 I went into the service.

DR. PATTERSON: That was a step up from the Coastal Plain League to get to this Norfolk situation.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: So you were pretty highly thought of.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I was a pretty fair ball player I would say.

I was

DR. PATTERSON: Yeah. Well, I certainly remember that. Yeah.

Ok, so you were in the service then in '42 and you had gotten married two years before that, and who was your wife?

HARRY SOUFAS: My wife was Elizabeth Hargrave Edwards of Snow Hill. I met her and, while I was playing at Snow Hill, and was, it developed into marriage and raised a family. We've been together all these years.

DR. PATTERSON: Let's interrupt the baseball talk for a minute and talk about your career in the service. Did you join the Army?

HARRY SOUFAS: I was a draftee in 1942 and

DR. PATTERSON: Into the Army

HARRY SOUFAS: The Army, and I served overseas for twenty seven months.

DR. PATTERSON: Where did you go?

HARRY SOUFAS: I served in Africa and Italy and the European part.

DR. PATTERSON: Were you in the infantry?

HARRY SOUFAS: I was in the military police, prisoner of war detail. We handled prisoners of war at that time. I was not actually in front line combat, but I was right behind the lines where we had to handle the prisoners of war as they were captured up at the front lines. They would send them back to us and we would process them and

send them on to prison camps.

DR. PATTERSON: You spent all of your career, the European Theater area then

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: And you were discharged

HARRY SOUFAS: In 1945.

DR. PATTERSON: Then what happened.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well when I came back from service, I went back home to my hometown of Wilson to visit my mother and father, and my wife and I had a little boy at that time. He was born about ten days before I went overseas. So when I got back, he was almost three years old. And while I was visiting my home there, I got a telephone call from Mr. Frank Walker in Rocky Mount and wanted to talk to me about playing ball for Rocky Mount. And during the mean time, I had found, I had found out from the minor league office that I had become a free agent due to the league busting up during the war. All the players were declared free agents and when I came back out of service I could sign a contract with anybody I wanted to, but at, prior to talking to the minor league office, I didn't know that until I got back out of service. So I eventually signed a contract to be a player-manger for the Rocky Mount team that year.

DR. PATTERSON: Rocky Mount was a member of the Coastal Plain League.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, that's right. They. ..

DR. PATTERSON: The league was still running.

HARRY SOUFAS: They reorganized the Coastal Plain League in 1946.

DR. PATTERSON: You were a player-manager playing first base.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: How long did you stay in Rocky Mount?

HARRY SOUFAS: I stayed there one year as player-manager and that year we won the pennant, and we won the play-offs, and we won all the honors, you might say, and at the end of the season I thought it was about time for me to start getting serious about life, and start looking for a permanent employment and so I came to New Bern and...

DR. PATTERSON: Let me ask you why you picked New Bern.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I had a friend that I grew up with in Wilson, went to school with. His name was Peter Chagaris and Peter, every time I'd come to New Bern to play against the Bears when I was managing the team in Rocky Mount, Peter would ask me to come down here and go in business with him because he was in business for himself.

DR. PATTERSON: What was he doing then?

HARRY SOUFAS: He had a little sandwich shop on Middle Street and he..

DR. PATTERSON: Excuse me. Do you remember the name of that sandwich shop?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, I really don't. Mid-Way. That's what it was. It was the Mid-Way, the Mid-Way Sandwich Shop. But, he eventually talked me into coming down to New Bern and investing in his business and together we would make a good living for our families back then. So I decided to give up baseball. I was about thirty years old at

that time. I didn't feel like I had much of a future in professional baseball. The older you get, you know, that time has a way of doing things to you, so I decided the best thing for me to do is start earning a living like everybody else was and go to work. And so I did. I went in business with Pete.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you work in the sandwich shop yourself?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes I did. We worked night and day almost.

DR. PATTERSON: Was this located in the same place where Pete had his restaurant later on?

HARRY SOUFAS: Right. Same, same area.

DR. PATTERSON: That was also called the Mid-Way.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right. Mid-Way Restaurant.

DR. PATTERSON: That's where Baxter's Sporting Goods...

HARRY SOUFAS: Is now.

DR. PATTERSON: Right. Ok.

HARRY SOUFAS: And so we worked that business for about seven or eight years and things finally got a little bit, business got bad, and one thing or another. So I decided I would get out and I sold my interest back to Pete, and then I went into the insurance business as an agent for the Nationwide Insurance Companies and I worked with Nationwide for twenty seven years. And, made a good living and raised my family.

DR. PATTERSON: But along there, Harry, baseball got hold of you again.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, that's true. After I came to New Bern in

1947, the local management of the local team, New Bern team, they decided that they were going to try to sign me up to play with the New Bern team and I had come to New Bern to go in business for myself and rather than play baseball. But they seemed to be very persistent and talking to me and trying to get me to change my mind and to play with the local New Bern team. Eventually, I succumbed and decided I would sign a contract with them to play ball in 1947 as a player.

So the following year, I had a good year that year. I played very well, and batted well, and the team did pretty good. So then the following year, the people that operated the club, which was the fire department, and it was George, Mr. George Scott. He was one of the leaders, and John Morton, and Jack Lee, and they all decided that they had to have me as a manager that year for 1948. So in 1948, I was a player-manager for the New Bern team and then the following year, I decided I was going to quit. So I did quit, playing professional baseball for about thirty days and at the beginning of 1949 season, after the season had been started, the management of the Kinston team decided that they had to have a ball player for, to help them out of the cellar and so they came down here and tried to talk me into playing with the Kinston team. Eventually I succumbed to them and went and played the final year of '49 with the Kinston team and I would travel back and forth from New Bern to Kinston to play. And after the '49 season, I came back to New Bern and I played one more year with the New Bern team. I signed back the following year, in 1950, and that was the last year I played ball. I was thirty three years old then.

I said that's enough. So I...

DR. PATTERSON: So that was the end of it.

HARRY SOUFAS: That was the end of my baseball.

DR. PATTERSON: When you were in New Bern during the time you were playing and as a manager, you were working with Pete.

HARRY SOUFAS: I tried. I was working and playing professional baseball too. So I had two jobs.

DR. PATTERSON: Who was the manager the year you came?

HARRY SOUFAS: Abe White.

DR. PATTERSON: And then you took over the next year.

HARRY SOUFAS: The next year I took over in 1948 as manager of the New Bern Bears and...

DR. PATTERSON: Harry, who were some players on the team with you?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, we had a fellow by the name of Worlise Knowles.

DR. PATTERSON: Did they call him Lefty, too?

HARRY SOUFAS: Right. Worley's,

DR. PATTERSON: W,o,r,l,

HARRY SOUFAS: W,o,r,l,i,s,e, Worlise.

DR. PATTERSON: Two s's I think. Worlise, but they called him nick name Worley. Yeah, anyhow, he was...

HARRY SOUFAS: He was an outstanding player with the New Bern team.

DR. PATTERSON: Pitcher?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, he was an outfielder.

DR. PATTERSON: Outfielder. Who else can you recall?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well we had a fellow by the name of Billy Bevill.

DR. PATTERSON: B,e,v,

HARRY SOUFAS: B,e,v,i, double l. Bevill. Billy was a fast short stop. He could steal bases and, right from out, from under your nose and I also had a fellow named Zippy Zunno, played the outfield. He was

DR. PATTERSON: Z,u,n,o...

HARRY SOUFAS: Z,u,n,n,o. Zippy Zunno. Matter of fact, I had gone to Florida on a scouting trip in 1947, the spring, and I went to one of the major league training centers there that was trying out young ball players to see if they really had any prospects. And so I had a chance to sign Zippy Zunno and I signed him up to a contract with New Bern, and I brought him to New Bern that year, and Zippy played a couple of years at New Bern and then they sold his contract to some other team and then I lost track of him after that.

DR. PATTERSON: Any other players come to mind?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, we had a fellow named Moose Shetler played first base. He was a big home run hitter. And there was old Jack Daniels. Bull Hammonds was a pitcher.

DR. PATTERSON: How do you spell Pruill?

HARRY SOUFAS: Bull, b,u, double l. He was a kind of a heavy set fellow and he looked like a bull, and he would get mad at the umpires and I reckon that's the reason they called him Bull.

DR. PATTERSON: Who played second base?

HARRY SOUFAS: We had a fellow named Sulliman. George Sulliman. He was part Indian. He never smiled. He had one expression and George was a reasonably good ball player, but I remember him distinctly because of his Indian background.

DR. PATTERSON: Third base?

HARRY SOUFAS: Let's see. Third base. We had a fellow names Lowery. I forget his first name now, but

DR. PATTERSON: L,o,w,e,r,y?

HARRY SOUFAS: Right. Lowery.

DR. PATTERSON: Outfield?

HARRY SOUFAS: We had, going back a long way now. I'm trying to remember.

DR. PATTERSON: You're doing fine.

HARRY SOUFAS: Outfield. We had a fellow named Glenn Mullinax and a fellow named Black, played the outfield. That's a...

DR. PATTERSON: There were other pitchers beside Worlise Knowles.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yep, we had a few. I can't recall their names right off hand.

DR. PATTERSON: Worlise was the star?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yeah, he was a star player. He was a big hard hitting outfielder.

DR. PATTERSON: I keep thinking of Worlise as a pitcher and I'm wrong about that. He was...

HARRY SOUFAS: No, he was not a pitcher.

DR. PATTERSON: Yeah. Ok. Did New Bern have good seasons when you were with them?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, we never did win the pennant when I was here, but we had an average season.

DR. PATTERSON: Where did all these ball players live in town?

HARRY SOUFAS: They lived in private homes and, about the only place they could live. I mean, they...

DR. PATTERSON: They just rented rooms or...

HARRY SOUFAS: That's right. They rented rooms.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember the grounds keeper, June Oakley?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes I do, now that you mentioned his name. Yeah, June Oakley.

DR. PATTERSON: He took care of Kafer Park?

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: Let me ask you about some baseball players who's names I've jotted down to see if they were playing with you then. Red Derda.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes, Red was a pitcher on the '47 team that I managed.

DR. PATTERSON: And he's here in New Bern now and runs with his wife, Derda's.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right. They have a bakery out here in, right.

DR. PATTERSON: Derda's Bakery. He was a...

HARRY SOUFAS: He was a pitcher.

DR. PATTERSON: A pitcher.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: Did Lefty Kenell ever play Coastal Plain League ball?

HARRY SOUFAS: Not professionally. I don't believe he played professionally. He played when he was semi-pro.

DR. PATTERSON: Yeah, I know he did that. How 'bout Archie Reel?

HARRY SOUFAS: Archie was in the semi-pro era.

DR. PATTERSON: And all the Ferebee's.

HARRY SOUFAS: And all the Ferebee's were in the semi-pro era and prior.

DR. PATTERSON: Including Bill, the great pitcher.

HARRY SOUFAS: Bill.

DR. PATTERSON: He played semi-pro.

HARRY SOUFAS: Bill Ferebee, yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: He played semi-pro ball too.

HARRY SOUFAS: Now, Bill, he went, he pitched for the Athletics I believe.

DR. PATTERSON: Yes. Yeah. He went on up. And Charlie Keller went up from semi-pro to the Yankees.

HARRY SOUFAS: He went up to the Yankees farm club in Newark, New Jersey and then the following year he went to the Yankees.

DR. PATTERSON: Jim Tatum. You mentioned Jim. He was playing

HARRY SOUFAS: He was playing at Snow Hill

DR. PATTERSON: At Snow Hill with you. Did Jim go very far up the baseball ladder?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, Jim didn't, he never, he never played any higher than Snow Hill.

DR. PATTERSON: He was a great athlete though.

HARRY SOUFAS: Great football player.

DR. PATTERSON: Great football player and a great coach.

HARRY SOUFAS: Great coach too.

DR. PATTERSON: Fred Shipp.

HARRY SOUFAS: Now Fred didn't play in the professional Coastal Plain. He played in the semi-pro with Lefty Kennell's group.

DR. PATTERSON: That's what I thought. I just wanted to get their names in there to make sure about that. Did the town of New Bern support you all pretty well when you were here?

HARRY SOUFAS: Oh, very well, very well. They filled the ball park up every night just about.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you see some old fans who sat in the same place every game?

HARRY SOUFAS: Right. I remember there was one fan. He used to have one of these sirens. You'd turn a crank and it would make a loud siren like an ambulance siren, and he would sit in the bleachers over there by first base and he would just about deafen me when he, something good would come, he would let loose with that siren. What was his name? Red, something. Red Harrison, that's it.

DR. PATTERSON: Did any of the games get out of control in New Bern?

HARRY SOUFAS: Occasionally, they, the fans would get pretty riled

up with the umpiring and I remember one year after one ball game particularly, the umpires had called a few bad plays against the Bears and the fans were about to come out on the field and get the umpire and after the game was over, the umpires, they didn't even stop to undress and put on their street clothes. They got in their cars and took off out of town with a bunch of New Bern fans following behind them. They were going to catch them and beat them up. Which I don't think that ever came ...

DR. PATTERSON: You know, I remember, I remember that, I think. I remember one game when this happened to the umpires, I thought that they got into the locker rooms as quickly as they could and closed the doors, but maybe they got in their cars and left the park.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I think that was probably the same instance, and they left town in a hurry.

DR. PATTERSON: Where did the players... I don't remember any other incidences about games getting out of control, but I do remember how much fun it was to sit on the third base line and drink Coca Colas and crack peanuts and put the peanuts in the Coca Colas and swallow the Coca Cola and the peanuts, and everybody was hollering.

HARRY SOUFAS: That was a popular past time.

DR. PATTERSON: Was Joe McDaniel announcing those games then?

HARRY SOUFAS: Joe McDaniel was a league statistician. He kept track of all the games won and lost, and the batting averages, and the fielding averages, and things of that nature. I think he was a reporter for the Sun Journal at that time. I'm not sure, but Joe

McDaniel was, I think he was a very important part of the Coastal Plains scene, because being the statistician, he had his fingers on just about everything that was going on in the league. And, in fact, Joe McDaniels, he published a book about the Coastal Plain League, yeah, which just a few of those volumes are around now. I don't have one, but I do know somebody that does. Have you ever seen one of those books?

DR. PATTERSON: No, I haven't.

HARRY SOUFAS: It would be very interesting if you could get a hold of one of those books to go through that.

DR. PATTERSON: Yes, yeah, that's right. You were, perhaps, the only New Bern ball player who had a job in addition to the ball playing.

HARRY SOUFAS: In that time period when I was managing and playing for New Bern, that was true.

DR. PATTERSON: What was the life of a ball player in New Bern then? You said they lived in private homes. How would they spend their days and their time when they weren't on the ball field?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, they would probably hang around the pool room or they would be chasing girls or dating girls, and, just like any teenagers today, you know. They would ride around in automobiles and kill part of the day.

DR. PATTERSON: They'd practice, of course, frequently.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, they didn't practice in the sense, because you played baseball every afternoon or every night so you didn't have any opportunity.

DR. PATTERSON: Every, every day.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yeah, we played seven days a week.

DR. PATTERSON: Were they mostly night games?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes they were at that, in that particular time. When I first started back in thirty.. 1937, we played day games and then I think in 1938 or '39, they went to the night games. Some of the teams, not all of them.

DR. PATTERSON: Kafer Park was equipped for night games.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right, in fact, I think Kafer Park was the first park in the Coastal Plain era, in eastern North Carolina, that had night baseball. They were the initial team to install lights, and then as the years, in later years, they all were.

DR. PATTERSON: Once it became possible to play at night time, were Sunday games played at night time too or did they, were they afternoon games?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, Sundays usually played in the afternoons.

DR. PATTERSON: But the rest of them were night games.

HARRY SOUFAS: The rest of the night, the rest of the week was night games.

DR. PATTERSON: What was the biggest day for baseball, biggest day of the week?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I would think Saturday and Sunday probably had the biggest crowds.

DR. PATTERSON: What happened about baseball in New Bern after you dropped out?

HARRY SOUFAS: Baseball began to lose its interest to people

because of so many other things coming in. Television started coming in. People began to, become more affluent. They began the era of the two car families and people had more money to spend. They were going, they had more places to go and spend it, and baseball kind of fell by the wayside as far as the interest in it, and the attendance got down to a point where it was...

DR. PATTERSON: Harry, did New Bern stay in the Coastal Plain League until the league itself folded?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes, that's true.

DR. PATTERSON: So all the teams went out of business at the same time.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember about when that was?

HARRY SOUFAS: All of them except maybe, well, I think Kinston continued, but they went into another league. That was 1951, I believe.

DR. PATTERSON: How did Kinston survive when New Bern couldn't?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I believe it was partly due to the financial backing that some of the Kinston ownership provided for the Kinston team, and they were just, seemed to be more persistent in maintaining baseball in Kinston than they were in other towns.

DR. PATTERSON: Has there been baseball in New Bern since 1955? Not high school ball, but any other kind of ball?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, I don't believe there've been any professional baseball, professional teams.

DR. PATTERSON: So that was the end of organized ball for New

Bern then in 1955. When you were back here in those early years, in the forties, playing for New Bern, where did you and your wife live?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, we had an apartment on Avenue D here in New Bern, and then we lived in the Carolina Club Apartments for a year or two until 1951 when I built my home over on River Drive. So we lived there in our home on River Drive for about twenty seven, twenty eight years.

DR. PATTERSON: And you've been here...

HARRY SOUFAS: And I've lived in New, at River Bend now for about fifteen years now.

DR. PATTERSON: This is your second home in River Bend?

HARRY SOUFAS: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: You were in the Nationwide Insurance business for how many years did you say?

HARRY SOUFAS: Right. Twenty seven years.

DR. PATTERSON: Were they good years?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, yes. They treated me pretty well. I enjoyed working with the Nationwide people. It's a good company. They're fine people to work with.

DR. PATTERSON: You became manager, didn't you, of the local or district office?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, I was never a manager of the district office. I was strictly a, what do you call, a sole proprietor or a, what do you call it now, an independent contractor. In other words, I had contracted with Nationwide Insurance to provide service, their

services to the public and so I was considered an insurance agency of my own.

DR. PATTERSON: You had your own office and your own staff.

HARRY SOUFAS: Right. I strictly ran the business as I saw fit and I was paid commissions by the insurance company for the business that I sent to them.

DR. PATTERSON: Was New Bern a good town to be for an insurance person in it?

HARRY SOUFAS: I think New Bern is just about as well thought of in the public eye as being a good business town and we had right much success in doing business with the local people.

DR. PATTERSON: As you look back at that career, can you think of any particularly memorable people in the insurance business in New Bern?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I don't know that I would call them memorable in the sense that you, there were a lot of people in the insurance business, of course.

DR. PATTERSON: I'm thinking of Will Chadwick, as an example.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes. Mr. Chadwick was a fine gentleman. He had a, he operated an insurance agency here in New Bern and he was a well, highly thought of individual. I have some pleasant memories of Mr. Chadwick. He probably stands out probably more than any other one.

DR. PATTERSON: He is certainly a name that's treated with great respect by folks who knew him.

HARRY SOUFAS: That's true. That's very true.

DR. PATTERSON: When you went to Carolina, you and your folks had just weathered the depression in Wilson, hadn't you.

HARRY SOUFAS: That's right. Well, we were right in the middle of it practically.

DR. PATTERSON: Yeah. Was that a bad time for you all, the restaurant business.

HARRY SOUFAS: My father, he was in business at that time, and then we lived fairly well because he would bring meat and potatoes and bread from the store to our home so we could live and have half way decent meals back in those days. But things were pretty tough back in those days, and I remember going to school at, my mother used to fix me a sandwich and put it in a little paper bag, and it used to be embarrassing to me to have to go to school with that brown paper bag and eat my lunch when some of my friends used to go to the cafeteria with a ..., with ten cents or fifteen cents and buy their lunch, you know. They were very affluent to be able to buy a ten cent lunch back in those days, but, things were pretty tough for people back in those days.

DR. PATTERSON: But you made it all right.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yeah, we got along fine.

DR. PATTERSON: Since you've been in New Bern, you've seen some things happen to this town like hurricanes. Do you have any particular memories of the fifty...?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes. In 1955, I think there were several hurricanes that came through New Bern. In fact, there was one. Ione or Diane.

I can't remember which one, but the eye of the storm came right over New Bern and it was becalmed. In the eye of the storm, everything got right still. The sky was blue and the birds were singing. And then when the eye passed on by, the storm hit us from the other side and it was just like it was the beginning of the storm. So that was a very uncomfortable feeling during the hurricane that happened in 1955.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you have any personal damage in those storms?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, yes. We lost the roof of our house and had a lot of flooding in basements and things of that nature which was, it was pretty bad here in New Bern during that hurricane.

DR. PATTERSON: Harry, since you have been a part of the New Bern scene, you've watched changes take place. What changes have taken place in downtown New Bern that strike you and impress you?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, the downtown area hasn't changed a great deal, but except for the water front area has been developed extremely well. I think that has added a tremendous look to the scene of New Bern, the water front area down at the Trent River and the Neuse River area. The building of the Branch Bank and the First Citizens Bank, those buildings are rather impressive. Outside of that, I don't know that New Bern has...

DR. PATTERSON: Before the malls were built, was downtown New Bern different from now?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, the business area, I thought, I believe back in those days before the malls came, there were more people in business

seemed to be and apparently they were making more money back in those days percentage wise than they are probably today, but when the malls came, the businesses left the downtown area and went out to the malls, and so people downtown were having a hard time making ends meet you might say. There are a lot of stores, empty stores downtown that back in those days they were all, they were no empty stores. In the fifties and the sixties, they were pretty well, pretty well filled up. All the stores down there. Their business was pretty good back in those days.

DR. PATTERSON: Where were your offices when you were with Nationwide?

HARRY SOUFAS: When I first started, I had an office in the Elks Temple Building, and was there for awhile. Then I moved to my office out on Broad Street, and then I moved from there and I went out to George Street, and when I left George Street, I went up to Simmons Street and I had my office on Simmons Street right across from the Pak a Sak grocery store, and I was there for about fifteen years. So that's where I finally retired.

DR. PATTERSON: What year did you retire?

HARRY SOUFAS: I retired in 1981.

DR. PATTERSON: Harry, since you retired, what have you been doing?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, when I retired, I was 64 years old, 65, and I haven't done any work as a laborer, you might say. I retired to golfing and traveling and things of that nature. Just taking life

easy in general.

DR. PATTERSON: Right. You play golf a lot.

HARRY SOUFAS: I play golf about five or six days a week.

DR. PATTERSON: Mostly at River Bend.

HARRY SOUFAS: At River Bend. Yeah, we have a nice little golf course out here.

DR. PATTERSON: What kind of a golfer are you?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I'm, right now, I'm a nine handicapper.

DR. PATTERSON: Pretty good.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I shoot my age occasionally so...

DR. PATTERSON: Can you knock the ball pretty far down the road?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, as an old ball player, I do pretty well I think.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you hit it off the tee or do you throw it up in the air and swat it?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, I hit it off the tee now.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, I know you must enjoy that. Have you or your family in the years gone by, been back to Thessaly?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, we haven't. I've never been back to my old, my birth place you know. Of course, I've thought about going, but seemed like I never have gotten to the point where I wanted to take time off to do it.

DR. PATTERSON: Are there many people from that part of the world here in New Bern, from Greece, from Thessaly?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, not in the New Bern area. Of course, some

of the larger cities you find a large...

DR. PATTERSON: But you don't know of any in New Bern?

HARRY SOUFAS: Not at present time. Tommy Leris was, he was the last of the Greeks here in New Bern that I recall. He left New Bern about six, seven, eight years ago and he's living in Charlotte now.

DR. PATTERSON: He had the Williams Cafe.

HARRY SOUFAS: He operated Williams Cafe on the corner there.

DR. PATTERSON: For a long time, didn't he?

HARRY SOUFAS: About thirty years, I guess.

DR. PATTERSON: Did his folks have it before he...?

HARRY SOUFAS: No, he...

DR. PATTERSON: Tommy ran it all that time.

HARRY SOUFAS: Yeah, he purchased it or he acquired the business through some, from some other party.

DR. PATTERSON: He's kin, isn't he, to the Leloudis family?

HARRY SOUFAS: No.

DR. PATTERSON: Just good friends, I think.

HARRY SOUFAS: Good friends, yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Because I know, this Dr. Leloudis I was telling you about who's our helper came over to see, with his father, the Leloudis family more than once from Rocky Mount. Well, let me just ask this broad question. How do you think New Bern's coming along?

HARRY SOUFAS: I think New Bern is doing real well from the stand point of growth. It's a much, much larger place. Got more people in it than it ever has, and I don't get to mingle with the public too

much, because being retired and out here at River Bend, I don't get into a lot of the activities that go on, but I read the newspapers and listen to the radio and at the tv and so I feel that New Bern is doing real well as far as progressive.

DR. PATTERSON: Are you glad you came to New Bern?

HARRY SOUFAS: Yes, I am. I've really enjoyed my life here in New Bern. I've made a lot of friends. I've had a real wonderful life here.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, you are certainly looked up to by a lots of people in this town for many reasons and you are a very important figure in New Bern's story.

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, I don't know that I deserve it, but I appreciate your saying it.

DR. PATTERSON: It's the truth. Before we close this, Harry, do you have any other memories you'd like to speak to about yourself or about New Bern?

HARRY SOUFAS: Well, no, not generally I don't, not off the top of my head. I think we've covered pretty much.

DR. PATTERSON: Alright. Well, it's been, it's been fun talking to you and it's been a very fine interview for what we're trying to do. You've given us this baseball story that we really didn't have and this is so important to New Bern's past. So I do thank you for the Memories Program and I thank you for myself. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

HARRY SOUFAS: My pleasure.

DR. PATTERSON: So, I'll turn this off now.

END OF INTERVIEW