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**Narrator**

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**KMRS**  
**Interviewer**

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- LT: 00:00 —Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota, a KMRS news feature today. Today, we're talking with Alvin J. Olson of Morris. Well, Alvin, you told me that you're a Norwegian, so I presume that maybe your folks came over from Norway. So you're a first generation American then.
- AO: 00:21 Yeah.
- LT: 00:24 Tell us about what your dad did, what was he involved with?
- AO: 00:27 He worked for the City of Morris on the waterworks, took care of the water, the pumps out to the pump house.
- LT: 00:35 Some of those pumps are they in the same place as they were?
- AO: 00:38 No, they got new ones up there now, bigger ones now. Now, the old one, they had five wells in the circle and they pumped out all five of them at one time. Now, now they got a 24-inch that they pump out. I've worked on them, too.
- LT: 00:54 Well, things have really changed a lot over the years in the City of Morris, like, let's take Main Street as an example. What things have you noticed that have changed about that?
- AO: 01:06 Oh, a lot of—the ditches had to be dug by hand, too, they didn't have a machine to dig them with like now. There's one place up there below the high school, it's 14-foot deep,

and then the sewer. And then guys was down in there working.

- LT: 01:23 Everybody's complaining now about potholes, and I'm not saying that Morris has more than any place else, it's just been a bad year for potholes. What were they like back a long time ago?
- AO: 01:34 It was just gravel was the only thing they could put in them then. Everything was all enough with gravel roads. Now, I see they're tarred and then they're paving.
- LT: 01:46 What schools did you go to in Morris?
- AO: 01:48 I went to the old Lincoln School.
- LT: 01:52 Where was that located?
- AO: 01:54 Where the old Stevens County Hospital is.
- LT: 01:57 And then you went onto what school after that?
- AO: 02:01 And then I went to the Longfellow School. From there, went—when we moved on the west side, then of course I had to go there to school.
- LT: 02:10 One teacher that you had really sticks out in your memory, what was her name and what was she noted for?
- AO: 02:16 Allie Warren. Oh, she was—if you didn't get any—if you did something wrong, she said, hold out your hand like that there, and then if you did, if you pulled it back, you didn't want to do it the second time.
- LT: 02:30 What did she do to your hand though?
- AO: 02:31 She hit it with a ruler.
- LT: 02:34 So I don't think they probably would do that anymore in school, do they?
- AO: 02:39 No, they wouldn't do it now. They wouldn't—well, of course, some of them kids, they get pretty rough, too, I guess now, too.
- LT: 02:48 One time, you got hurt when you were a kid, something about some barrels. Tell us about that if you would.

AO: 02:53 Well, I jumped off in the bag swing and broke my collarbone. It was dark and I couldn't see the bag when I jumped on.

LT: 03:02 You got laid up for a while then?

AO: 03:04 Yeah, I laid up in there. Of course, I was only about 12, 13 years old then I guess when that happened.

LT: 03:10 Well, you went through the fifth grade and you started working right away. What was your first job?

AO: 03:19 Well, I guess I worked—I think I worked for the city for a while.

LT: 03:25 Started doing some mechanical work.

AO: 03:26 Mechanical work, and then I drove a tractor when we graded the roads and stuff. At that time, they had a blade that drove in front.

LT: 03:40 You pushed instead of pull.

AO: 03:41 Pushed upon, and the blade was right underneath you. You could see, you looked right down at it.

LT: 03:47 You worked at the Ford garage, and that was that big brick building on main street. Where was that and what did you do there?

AO: 03:54 Oh, I repaired cars there . Worked on cars and Ford tractor.

LT: 04:02 Okay. You worked on lots of different kinds of cars. What are some of them that you worked on?

AO: 04:07 Well, a Marmon old Charlie Torry had and a Franklin that a Hansen, he had the dry goods store here, he had a Franklin, air-cooled. And some more of them, I can't think of the names of them.

LT: 04:22 Lots of Fords, model Ts and As, and what else?

AO: 04:25 Models Ts, model As.

LT: 04:30 Well, then you started working for a blacksmith and of course you were doing a lot of the same kind of work that you're doing as a mechanic, I suppose.

AO: 04:37 Yeah. I worked for old Henry Watzke there for a while, until I started my own shop up.

LT: 04:45 Which area was that shop located in?

AO: 04:49 Away in that old horse barn over by the International dealer.

LT: 04:55 Okay. For people that weren't around then, what buildings or businesses are on there now?

AO: 05:01 Well, there was Anderson Hatchery across the street, and Lloyd Smith's plumbing, and Culligan's Soft Water is over there. Of course, there's Eul Hardware, too, but he had that building there, that was there before.

LT: 05:20 Well, having your own shop, what types of things did you do? Did you fix things or did you make things or what?

AO: 05:28 I did a little of everything. Welding of all kinds, sharpening plow lays.

LT: 05:37 What kind of welding, just about every type?

AO: 05:43 Arc and acetylene welding.

LT: 05:45 One of the things that, of course they don't use anymore are these steel wheels or steel-covered wooden wheels, I guess. How are those things made?

AO: 05:54 Wooden wheels? Well, they had a hub in the middle in there. They come that way, a new one, and you'd order them out. Of course some of them had steel wheels on, too. And then we cut the spokes off and put rubber—put the regular car wheels on them so they could put a tire on there, 15-inch tire, or 16, whatever size rim you're going to get.

LT: 06:20 In other words, as progress came, you were able to adapt to everything.

AO: 06:25 Frank Manny, I fixed quite a bunch for him. He was farming out there right on the edge of town out here.

LT: 06:34 The way it is today, it seems like, well, farmers have always been pretty inventive, they can do a lot of things that I'm sure they probably do a lot of their own work now, but how does it work? Is there still a demand for the blacksmithing and welding?

- AO: 06:51 Oh, yeah. Because when you have a—when you get new machine, it's welded anyway. Of course, it can crack—a lot of stuff that cracks through the welding, there's so much strain in there. And the iron isn't heavy enough to take that, it'll bend in there and of course then it'll crack the welding loose and let go where it'll break off.
- LT: 07:13 Whereas in the older days, a lot of farmers didn't have their own welding equipment.
- AO: 07:18 Had a hole bolted together. Drill a couple holes and put a piece of iron on and bolt them together, that's the only way they could fix it.
- LT: 07:26 Some big pieces of machinery, did they have to bring all that in so you could fix it, too? That must have taken some time and slowed things up.
- AO: 07:34 Oh, yeah. Some of them loaded up and brought it in, and then we had a loading area and we get unloaded off in the trailer or whatever they brought it in on.
- LT: 07:44 Well, you had your own business for a number of years and the business is still going. You sold to whom?
- AO: 07:53 Yeah. I sold the building and all the equipment off then. Of course, they're still using a lot of equipment yet.
- LT: 08:06 You sold the business to the Gillespie brothers.
- AO: 08:10 Sold to the Gillespie brothers. And they do tank repairing and all that there. And they put new bottoms in those tanks or either—or they clean them out, too, because they get the long time, the tank will rust.
- LT: 08:27 Well, today, it's getting towards spring and I think just about everybody has got their motorcycles out. You had perhaps one of the—I don't know exactly when motorcycles first came out, but you had a pretty early one.
- AO: 08:41 It was about 1910 or 1912 when they come out.
- LT: 08:46 They were a lot different back then.
- AO: 08:48 I know we bought one from Hemming one time and they had motorcycle racing. And my dad, he bought one for \$45.

LT: 08:58 You got quite a deal on buying one of your own one time. Was it in a basket?

AO: 09:03 Yeah. That one I bought from Mike Nugent for three bucks. And I got it running, too.

LT: 09:10 They were—the bikes were lot heavier then, right, and the engines weren't quite as powerful.

AO: 09:15 Yeah. They were a lot heavier, and then they had—well, the motors that they make now are light now and more powerful, too.

LT: 09:24 Okay. For today, to start a motorcycle, you turn the key and, boom, you're off. How did you used to start them?

AO: 09:32 Had to run on the side of them and push them, and jump on. And it started, and you jump on.

LT: 09:38 Yeah. What happened if you missed?

AO: 09:40 Well, you just went down the road and went in the ditch somewhere.

LT: 09:44 Well, you've been in the welding business for a long time, and in fact, you've got some grandkids that have shown a little bit of interest, so you're still a teacher, I see.

AO: 09:57 Yeah. They want to be that, too, I guess. I got about two or three of them that are going—yeah, they're going to follow my footsteps, I guess.

LT: 10:05 That makes grandpa feel pretty good, I bet.

AO: 10:07 Yeah. If you go to school, you go to one of those tech school and you can learn all that, it don't cost much either. Because I know there were a couple guys working for me that went to the tech school down at Willmar.

LT: 10:23 So your advice to kids is to get as much schooling as they can get.

AO: 10:28 Because there always will be welding. I worked on a lot of buildings around town there, too.

LT: 10:36 Well, Alvin you sound like you've had a pretty interesting career this is my first interview since I came back, and

there's one question I always end up with, and that's when I ask your age.

AO: 10:50 Seventy-two.

LT: 10:51 Thank you very much. We've been talking with Alvin J. Olson of Morris on Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota, a KMRS news feature.