



Speaker 1: [00:04](#) This is the *Thank You, 72* podcast brought to you by the Wisconsin Alumni Association. This podcast salutes outstanding Badgers from Wisconsin's 72 counties. Here's your host, Tod Pritchard.

Tod Pritchard: [00:15](#) Thank you, Iowa County for Chuck Halverson. Chuck is one of the oldest-living University of Wisconsin Football letter-winners. He played tight end, making the varsity team in 1949, and he has remained a fan for six decades. But this is not just a story about a football player. It's the story of a man who overcame poverty and tremendous odds to follow his dream and become a Badger. Chuck then served his country in World War II, and went on to start a successful business. Chuck recently turned 95 years old. His daughter, Renee, has lovingly captured Chuck's life story and legacy in a new book, *Running Country Roads and Life Lessons Learned*. Chuck Halverson and Renee Halverson Wright join us on the podcast. First of all, Chuck, congratulations and happy 95th birthday!

Chuck Halverson: [01:10](#) I thank you very much for helping me to celebrate it.

Tod Pritchard: [01:11](#) We are here to celebrate this, and we're so glad you could make it to the podcast today. I'd like to talk about your life, Chuck. You were born on Saturday, September 20th, 1924. You were the 12th of 17 children: 11 boys and six girls. First of all, tell us about your life growing up, and maybe you could start with your mom and dad, Clara and Henry. Tell us about them.

Chuck Halverson: [01:35](#) Well, my dad was a very hard worker, and he used to travel around. He had the farm, of course, but he also worked in the Singer Lumber Mine that was in Dodgeville, Wisconsin. And we lived in Jonesdale, which was 11 miles away. My dad, he would walk the railroad tracks to work in the mine, and he'd walk back home at night. It's 11 miles.

- Tod Pritchard: [02:08](#) Walking 11 miles to work seems just unbelievable. That's crazy. He had to though, right? He had to get to the mine and that's how he made his living, right?
- Chuck Halverson: [02:18](#) It's how he made his living, and that's how he fed 17 kids in the family.
- Tod Pritchard: [02:23](#) And so your mom, tell us about her.
- Chuck Halverson: [02:26](#) My mom was a hard worker also, and everybody envied my mother. She was so kind and nice to everybody.
- Tod Pritchard: [02:37](#) You and your family did not have it easy growing up. You moved from farm to farm. Some of the places you lived didn't even have electricity and running water, and you worked the land. You grew enough food to survive through the depression. Tell us about your memories of that time and what it was like growing up.
- Chuck Halverson: [02:53](#) I can remember all of us boys worked. We hunted for fox and we trapped it for meat and sold the hides. Anything to make money. And we'd go around the neighbors along the Pecatonica River and ask the farmers that lived along the river if it was okay if we trapped there along the way. I'd walk behind one-horse cultivators, culling when we'd put the crops in; we'd be plowing to put the crops in, like corn and oats and all that stuff. And I was walking behind a one-horse cultivator six, seven hours a day at least to plow and get ready for it. And then when the crops grew up, we had a big crew — thrashing crews that would come in.
- Chuck Halverson: [03:48](#) All the neighbors, they'd come in and they'd help us harvest our crops, and we traded to help back and forth that way. We had some really great people that lived in that neighborhood that we would all work together. Working didn't bother me. I was proud to do that. And then when I was little, I wanted to be the best at anything I could do. I didn't want anybody to be better than I was or to do anything better than I could do it. And I was constantly competing, even with my brothers who were four and five years older, to prove to them I could do as much as they could do.
- Tod Pritchard: [04:24](#) And is that why you decided to move away from home so young? You were 14 when you moved away from home, right?
- Chuck Halverson: [04:30](#) Yeah. Well, see, the reason is the house — we lived in a three-bedroom house — and the youngest of us ... I was one of the younger ones. We had to sleep cross ways in the bed, three or

four of us, cross ways in the bed. No inside facilities. We'd go out to the outdoor toilets. And the toilet paper we had received some Montgomery Ward catalogs and Sears Roebuck catalogs. That was actually the toilet paper. I mean people wouldn't believe the kind of life that we led — any way to survive, you know? And I said to my mom one day, I said, Mom, I can't, I, I'm so ashamed of this house, and I can't live here any longer, and I want to go away and make some money. And get you out of here, too.

Tod Pritchard: [05:24](#) It must've been incredibly difficult for you in saying that to your mom. And, and how do, you know, what were you feeling at that time?

Chuck Halverson: [05:32](#) Dad wanted me to stay home on the farm, and mom said, Dad — I break up when I talk about that somewhat — he wants to get, he wants to go to a school and he wants to get ahead in life, and we got to let him do it. And so when she says something, dad would listen to her, and so that's how I walked in the school and got in class. I'm sorry for the breakdown here. It upsets me when I talk about my mom.

Tod Pritchard: [06:01](#) I can only imagine what that conversation must have been like — to say to your parents, I need to do this to better myself and go on with life.

Chuck Halverson: [06:10](#) As I was moving out of that home, I said I can't stand living here and I can't let people in the house, and I can't stand you living here either. I want to go home and ... I had in my mind that I was going to be in sports and either play — I played a lot of sports, so I could either go play football or play baseball and make a living out it, and then I could get some money to her, get them of that home. But through high school, I kind of changed my mind. I got into ag school, and they've got some great teachers. I remember Kurt Prieto said when we, for our first one of his classes, he says, I want you to remember this, "So much good in the best of us. And so much bad in the worst of us, that little behooves any of us to do anything wrong to the rest of us." And he said, I want you to remember that. I did, it stuck it in my mind.

Tod Pritchard: [07:12](#) So tell me about coming to the University of Wisconsin—Madison. You decided to get a degree in agriculture, but you also were able to play football here. Tell us about it. You tried out for the football team, right?

Chuck Halverson: [07:23](#) Well when I tried out, I was in Dodgeville. I lived in Dodgeville at that time. But the Mineral Point Fair, I always went to. But then

they had a weight thing where they rang the bell. So nobody could ring it, and I'm a big shot. That's a big shot deal here. I walked up, and I rang the bell and pulled both clavicles out. I went to the doctor in Mineral Point, and he put me in slings and said I had to wait for at least two or three weeks. Then I had to walk back to Dodgeville, back to go to the University of Wisconsin. I got to thinking, I can't go there like this. I said, they won't let me back on the team if I tell them I've got broken clavicles. So I took them out, and I went out and I practiced with two broken collarbones.

- Tod Pritchard: [08:28](#) You're trying to try out for the team and the, and the coach must have, did he catch on to what was going on?
- Chuck Halverson: [08:33](#) They came to me. They said, Chuck, you know what, you're just ... they took an x-ray and found out they weren't even healed. They said, you got a lot of ability, and you're just ruining it. You got to ... you, you could really get ahead in life in sports, and, he says, you're just ruining your chances. He says, you got to lay off, let this heal. Well I did lay off for a while, and they started to heal pretty good, but it was too late for me to go out for football, at that time. But they had cross-country, and I had won the mile at cross-country meets, you know, and one guy come up to me and said, Chuck, he said, we got a meet this week, but if you run in this, this isn't going to bother your shoulders. You run in this, and maybe you'll make the track team." I ran so hard out there, there were blisters all on the bottom of my feet, and that was the end of my track career. And then the war came on.
- Tod Pritchard: [09:45](#) And that's when you decided to enlist in the navy, right? Was 1944, right? Is that correct?
- Chuck Halverson: [09:52](#) Right.
- Tod Pritchard: [09:52](#) And so you served on the USS *West Virginia*, which was a battleship, right?
- Chuck Halverson: [09:58](#) When I went to get out on there, they asked if anybody had physics and chemistry and I raised my hand, which sometimes I wish I had not. And then they transferred me from fireman first class to hospital corpsman. And so I would, there was a guy by the name of Wilford Captor. He was from Richland Center, Wisconsin. He was the lab technician there on the ship, and he had so many people, he couldn't take care of them all, and then they wanted to me to help him. So I was there for two weeks, and he got cat fever, and they shipped him back to Richland Center. Here I am sitting there, only two weeks practice to give

- shots. I had mix all the medicines for the crew and give shots, and I learned it all out of the book.
- Tod Pritchard: [10:49](#) You're taking care of everybody.
- Chuck Halverson: [10:51](#) I was taking care of everybody on the ship.
- Tod Pritchard: [10:53](#) We're just a year away from the 75th anniversary of the victory over Japan day, and I understand the *West Virginia* was docked next to the USS *Missouri* when the armistice was signed, right?
- Chuck Halverson: [11:09](#) We were waiting to attack the mainland, and we must've been there close to two months. Each day we're stopped. We're going to attack the mainland. Five days before the atomic bomb was set off, the battleship *Missouri* came out and pulled in right beside us, and it was riding right side by side, and I could reach out and touch anybody on the ship, the other ship if I wanted to. But anyways, that's where the peace treaty was signed, and the battleship *Missouri* come out and anchor beside us. Then the General MacArthur came on there, and he was the big shot then, and a bunch of big shots from Japan. They signed the peace treaty that ended the war.
- Speaker 4: [11:53](#) [Music]
- Speaker 5: [11:53](#) The battleship *Missouri* 53,000-ton flagship of Admiral Halsey's third fleet becomes the scene of an unforgettable ceremony marking the complete and foremost surrender of Japan. In the Bay of Tokyo itself, the United States destroyer *Buchanan* comes alongside, bringing representatives of the Allied powers to witness the final capitulation. General of the army, Douglas MacArthur, supreme Allied commander for the occupation of Japan boards the *Missouri*.
- Speaker 4: [12:35](#) [Music]
- Speaker 5: [12:36](#) Including the brief history-making ceremony, General MacArthur expresses a wish.
- General MacArthur: [12:42](#) Let us pray that peace be now restored to the world and that God will preserve it, always. These proceedings are closed.
- Speaker 4: [13:00](#) [Music]
- Speaker 5: [13:01](#) Swarms of the United States aircraft fly in formation overhead as the ceremony ends. The final United Nations victory has been won. The war is over. Peace is here.

Speaker 4: [13:12](#) [Music]

Tod Pritchard: [13:19](#) The Japanese officially surrendered to the Allies on September 2nd, 1945, so you were there right when all that was happening. You were literally next to the *Missouri* as they signed the peace treaty.

Chuck Halverson: [13:34](#) I was.

Tod Pritchard: [13:34](#) So when you came back to Wisconsin after the war, and thank you for your service. Thank you for being a part of the greatest generation. You came back to Wisconsin and you, your senior year, you made varsity football squad, right?

Chuck Halverson: [13:50](#) Yeah. It was my senior year when I ... in the spring it was, Ivy Williamson, and the thing about Harris Schroeder, he had an offense was very hard to run. It's all right for pros and stuff, but his offense was run so hard, it was difficult for us to tell who we were going to block and who we weren't supposed to the block. And often the plays didn't work.

Speaker 7: [14:25](#) Ohio State's Buckeyes knocked out of the undefeated class last week by Minnesota traveled to Madison, Wisconsin, in an effort to renew their bid for the Big Ten title. This is a crucial game for both teams so far as the 1949 Big Ten championship is concerned. A capacity crowd of 45,000 spectators, jams Camp Randall Stadium. Now in the fourth quarter, here's Wisconsin trying, but Prosecco's going on for all pass. It's intercepted by Widows of Ohio State, and here's a good run back by Widows through the Wisconsin 24 yard line.

Chuck Halverson: [14:56](#) We had a bad season, a bad season, and they all started yelling, "Goodbye, Harry. Goodbye, Harry" in the stands. And we were so hurt by that. You know.

Tod Pritchard: [15:07](#) So you graduated in 1950, and you actually had an offer to play for the Packers. They were, the Green Bay Packers were scouting you, right?

Chuck Halverson: [15:17](#) I got an offer for try out because you had to try out. They wanted me to try out, but the thing about it was that I then had that job with Oscar Mayer, and I could see I could make a lot more money and do what I wanted to do with my folks and everything by making money buying cattle. I could see there was a lot more possibilities. A best lineman would make a thousand to two thousand dollars a year playing for the Packers, and so I declined that.

Tod Pritchard: [15:54](#) No regrets on that.

Chuck Halverson: [15:55](#) No, none at all.

Speaker 1: [15:58](#) This episode of *Thank You, 72* is brought to you by the Wisconsin Alumni Association. When you become a member of the Wisconsin Alumni Association at uwualumni.com/membership you'll be where Badgers belong. This special community is all about strengthening your connection to the UW, celebrating beloved traditions, and supporting alumni efforts. And with a variety of exclusive benefits, membership is a great way to give your Badger spirit a boost. Visit uwualumni.com/membership today to learn more and to join the Wisconsin Alumni Association as a proud member. Now back to the *Thank You, 72* podcast with Tod Pritchard from the Wisconsin Alumni Association.

Tod Pritchard: [16:38](#) I'd like to bring in Chuck's daughter, Renee Halverson, right into the conversation. And Renee, first of all, great job on writing the book about your dad's life. And I'd like to talk to you more about the book. It's called *Running Country Roads, Life Lessons Learned*. First of all, how did you come up with that title for the book?

Renee: [16:58](#) Because my father had to run country roads to go to school, and that was his only way to get to school was by running. So I found the more that I talked with my father, and I've heard many, many stories of my father's, but when we really dug deep, I realized what he went through, and I just was amazed at how many places he had to live to get to go to school, and it was always about him having to run. Basically, he said, "I was running for my life," and that's kind of why I came up with the title.

Tod Pritchard: [17:33](#) Well you have so many great stories in the book. Is there a favorite one or two that you'd like to share?

Renee: [17:38](#) They didn't have shoes. My father was, they were always barefoot, and my dad didn't want to wear shoes because they were always hand-me-down, and they didn't fit him right. I think his white boots story is one of my favorites because he was so embarrassed to wear them that he put them away, and they didn't fit him.

Tod Pritchard: [17:59](#) These were white boots that were hand-me-downs, right?

Renee: [18:02](#) Yes. Actually there was an aunt that had, I guess it was a boarding house in Chicago, and occasionally people would leave

things behind. And so she would send clothes for them. They get these boxes, and they'd be excited because it was new clothes for them, but they didn't always fit. And the white boots, my dad just didn't want to wear them until it got so cold, and he'd have to bring the cows in, in the winter time and his feet would get really cold. And you know, sharing a story that is his sister Alice said, "I can't believe your dad admitted he stood in actual cow pies." And that's what finally got him to wear those, the white boots. And he got teased about that too. And he said like 94 years later, "I still remember getting teased by being called Mr. White Boots." So those are the kinds of stories that I realize what he went through as a kid just to survive and having to live as a young boy in a hotel by himself and all these things. Just to get to go to school.

- Tod Pritchard: [19:06](#) It puts into perspective what people in that time had to do. In the Depression, it was all about surviving that time. And especially with a large family you have to make do with what you've got and so, but it's very hurtful, obviously. How many decades ago did you wear the white boots? It was, it must've been 70, 80 years ago, but it still resonates.
- Chuck Halverson: [19:30](#) About 85 years.
- Renee: [19:33](#) Well and his mother too, they had a really long table, and they talked about, his sister talked about how the house was always cold, so they would put plastic on the windows, and they would even wallpaper the walls with newspapers and make their own paste because they couldn't afford wallpaper. But they were very creative family. I mean, and during breakfast they, she would talk about your sister Alice would say, it was always warm at breakfast because they had a stove, and their mother would cook pancakes and oatmeal, and they'd sit on this really long table. They had very few chairs. So it would be, most of them would be sitting on benches. But she spoke about her mother would never eat. She stood until all the kids had their food and her husband and they'd say, come on Mama, come sit down. And she wouldn't, she would never eat until they had food, and they weren't allowed to reach across the table ever for food.
- Renee: [20:28](#) So it, those are the kinds of things that I learned from my aunt Alice. You know, about making little Christmas decorations for their tree. Everything was off the land and like what they'd find — a little cigarette. You remember in the boxes of cigarettes, you said the silver paper?
- Chuck Halverson: [20:45](#) Right, the foil.

- Renee: [20:46](#) Yes the foil, and they would make stars and things like that. So it just kind of makes you think like what their, his life was like. And many who lived during the Depression.
- Tod Pritchard: [20:55](#) And made it all the way through that time and came to the University of Wisconsin. And now Chuck is one of the oldest letter-winners that we have with us. Right?
- Renee: [21:06](#) Yes. And we just celebrated his 95th birthday, September 20th at Camp Randall Stadium at Lot 17, and this book was my dad's 95th birthday gift. So, this was a big birthday for him.
- Tod Pritchard: [21:23](#) Well it was certainly a gift of love from you to him, and t, it really captures his life and it's, it's so well done. It's, it's great to follow Chuck's life through all this time and still a major Badger supporter. In fact, you did a lot in the, back in the seventies, eighties to really help the team out and do fundraisers and you know, get them a lot of help, which they needed at, at that time.
- Chuck Halverson: [21:51](#) We raised thousands of dollars for them. Also gave it to churches and places like that, high schools.
- Tod Pritchard: [21:59](#) So Renee, you were a professional cheerleader with the Chicago Bears, right?
- Renee: [22:03](#) That's right.
- Tod Pritchard: [22:04](#) So your dad bought season tickets to the Bears' game because of that, despite the fact that you're a lifelong Packer fan. So that's true, father-daughter dedication. Right. That must have meant a lot to you for him to be at all those games.
- Renee: [22:22](#) It really did. And I moved to Evanston to study dance. And that was my dream, and he always supported my dream of dance and cheerleading through high school was what made me feel like that was my life. Like his life was sports. That was my life, too.
- Renee: [22:41](#) And so at 19 I went to him, like he went to his parents and said, you know, he would, would have loved for me to stay in Madison of course. But he supported me with my dream. And so I eventually, after three years of studying dance with Gus Giordano Dance Studio, I found out there was these cheerleading tryouts. I saw it on the news, and it was for the Chicago Bears, not the Packers, but I thought it would be really fun and a great way to maybe open some doors for me.

- Renee: [23:14](#) So I did try out, and at the trials, there were 1,500 girls with numbers, so picking, and they only chose 28. And right after tryouts I was like, oh my gosh, this is not going to happen. And I flew to Florida, it was like spring break, to meet a lot of my friends, in Fort Lauderdale. And I thought, geeze, you know, no way. But while I was there, I had roommates, like there was like five of us living in one apartment, and they said, you got a letter here from the Chicago Bears. And I'm like, oh my God, don't, I don't even want to know. I don't want to ruin my trip, but I couldn't stand it. So I finally called them, and they read the letter that I'd had made it. And of course I called my dad right away, and of course he was going to be at every one of those games for me. Yeah. And it meant a lot. I always knew cause I would, I'd hear like on the south end zone, my dad would like tell them my name, so I'd hear all this like, "Hey, Renee," in the south end of Soldier Field. And it was my dad, you know.
- Tod Pritchard: [24:12](#) So Chuck, tell me, what do you think is a life lesson that you gained over these years that we should all know?
- Chuck Halverson: [24:21](#) Well, the biggest life lesson I've learned through my, through my teachers and through people I worked with was to be fair with everybody, no matter what you're doing and never give up whatever your desires were.
- Tod Pritchard: [24:39](#) And Renee, how about you? What's a life lesson that you learned from your dad?
- Renee: [24:43](#) He taught me really how to love and what's important and what's not and that everyone wears their pants the same way. And that just to appreciate the little things in life, like making a little star for a Christmas tree. I think that's what I'm so proud of being his daughter.
- Renee: [25:07](#) And we're both going to cry, but I've learned a lot.
- Renee: [25:12](#) He taught me how to do my first back walkover. When I was competing in track, my father had me running behind the car at Governor Dodge State Park. And he was just always there for me throughout my life. And I just learned about being kind to everybody, and I think being kind and always believing in your dream.
- Speaker 1: [25:35](#) You can find Renee's book, *Running Country Roads and Life Lessons Learned*, at Bucky's Locker Room at Camp Randall Stadium or on Amazon. Thanks for listening to the *Thank You, 72* podcast. For more interviews with amazing UW alumni, visit ThankYou72.org. That's ThankYou72.org.

