

**Oral History Interview of
Bill Davies**

**Interviewed by: Curtis Peoples
June 7, 2016
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*American Veteran Interviews***

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Bill Davies on June 6, 2016. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Davies, Bill Oral History Interview, June 7, 2016. Interview by Curtis Peoples, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses over 6,300 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

The transcribers and editors of this document strove to create an accurate and faithful transcription of this oral history interview. However, this document may still contain mistakes. Spellings of proper nouns and places were researched thoroughly, but readers may still find inaccuracies, inaudible passages, homophones, and possible malapropisms. Any words followed by "[?]" notates our staff's best faith efforts. We encourage researchers to compare the transcript to the original recording if there are any questions. Please contact the SWC/SCL Reference department for access information. Any corrections or further clarifications may be sent to the A/V Unit Manager.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Video, extracted audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews: Bill and Evelyn Davies were interviewed on September 6, 2016.

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Curtis Peoples

Audio Editor: David Rauch

Transcription: Madison Schreiber

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Bill Davies as he discusses his life. Bill explains his time spent working for IBM, and his involvement with radar during World War II. He also clarifies how he met his wife Evelyn and their travels together.

Length of Interview: 01:44:34

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Birth and early life	05	00:00:00
Being drafted for World War II	07	00:09:15
Working on early warning radar	10	00:22:43
Being stationed in Hawaii	12	00:33:39
Getting raised to the rank of Captain	14	00:42:36
What he did when he got back after the war	16	00:47:27
Creating his own business	19	00:54:54
How he met Evelyn	21	01:05:19
His mother and Father	24	01:11:47
His travels with Evelyn	29	01:18:55
Playing instruments and writing music	34	01:36:45

Keywords

World War II, IBM, Memoirs

Curtis Peoples (CP):

I'm Curtis Peoples and I'm working with the Lubbock Arts Alliance here at the Davies home here in Lubbock, Texas. We're interviewing Bill today about his life. I'm sure we've got all kinds of interesting things to talk about. Today is Saturday, I mean not Saturday but June 7, 2016 and it is Tuesday. Once again thank y'all again for inviting us into your home. I guess with this oral history I would like to just back all the way up and start at the beginning, and find out where you were born, and when you were born, and a little bit about your early life.

Bill Davies (BD):

Well Curtis I was born in Kansas City, Missouri. My parents both were from other cities but for some reason they met in Kansas City where they were married in 1915 and I was born in July of 1916. My father was working for the railroads, in fact there was a Pullman company as a conductor, and an auditor at that time. Did some traveling around the Midwest and the Southwest for many years. My mother was born in I think Little Rock, Arkansas. The family moved here to Kansas City. She had two brothers and another three sisters. It was a musical family and their purpose of moving to Kansas City was an Uncle Jack that I had that was a pianist. It was the closest place of any size that had some quality education. That was their reason for being in Kansas City.

CP:

So your mother was a musician too?

BD:

I'm sorry.

CP:

Was your mother also a musician?

BD:

My mother was very light on the piano you might say. She did win as a single person—she sold sheet music at a local store there, and if people wanted to hear the latest tunes that were available she'd play them on the piano there. But that was as far as her professional [phone rings 00:02:50] part allowed her to proceed in music. After I was born I had a sister, a younger sister another year and a half younger than I. We grew up there, went to the local schools, elementary school, high school, and I went on at the time, this was back now in 1934 to an engineering school, it was a private school. That name sometimes I forget but I'll think of it in a minute.

CP:

Was this in Kansas City?

BD:

I'm getting to old to remember every detail of things.

CP:

Well there's so much to remember it's hard to remember it all.

BD:

Yes, however, I graduated from there in mechanical engineering, a bachelor's degree. Following that in a short period of time, I went to work for a company known as International Business Machines, today we call it IBM. But for many years they used the full name.

CP:

What was your role at IBM?

BD:

At IBM for some six months, I guess, I was a trainee in the sales department, but I did a little bit of everything. I was taught the mechanics of their equipment, and sometimes did some minor service work, I never was qualified to be a mechanic with them. I was being trained for what they call a combination man. Sometime a little later I was given a territory in the Ozark area of Missouri and also western Kansas in the southern part of it. There I was responsible to see that their equipment worked as it should, and also a quota to make in sales.

CP:

What kind of equipment were you-- or training to—

BD:

I had a little bit of everything, although it was electrical EAM equipment that was electrical accounting machines. In addition to that though IBM had a division that sold typewriters. They had another division—division I should say, that manufactured some specialty equipment for keeping time records. It so happens that about that time was when our federal government passed many laws on forty-hour a weeks, and there were—time clocks is one of the items in that group that people could keep records on. I would occasionally get a service call there but if there was anything of a critical nature, we had qualified mechanics at Kansas City that would be advised to come down and make repairs when necessary.

CP:

So this is right in the middle of the depression going on then?

BD:

Exactly it was.

CP:

So you were very fortunate to have a job. I guess a lot of people—

BD:

I was very fortunate, in fact, I had temporarily after getting out of college, and specializing in the mechanical engineering field, I was looking for work and in contact with some personal at the college. They referred me to a railroad company, well it was Pullman company. I did mechanical work such as—actually 90 percent of it was just hard labor, cleaning equipment for air conditioning systems, which was new to the railroads at that time. I don't recall a year but as winter approached, I was not needed for the kind of work I was doing. I went back to the school and they told me that International Business Machines had approached them about interviewing some people for their work, and an interview followed. I was brought back again to their offices when a personal manager from Chicago came down and gave me some tests which somehow I managed to pass. I heard later that I had been approved, and I went to work for International Business Machines. This was in late 1939. As time moved along we saw political problems with some of the countries in the world. If you recall—perhaps you were not even born at that time but—

CP:

I was not born at that time.

BD:

President Roosevelt was interested in helping England and actually, we were an enemy of Germany at the time. A draft was instituted and a little later on in 1940, the draft was held and I was called in the spring of '41 to be enlisted in the army.

CP:

Did you go in as a private? Or what did you go in as?

BD:

You bet. If there was anything lower I guess I was—in a contingent from the area where I lived there were perhaps twenty, twenty-five of us, took a train one day to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas where we were inducted into the army. The next day the barracks that I had slept in the night before with these perhaps twenty-five other individuals, was a changed place. All of them have left and I'm sitting there by myself on a bunk. It was several days before I was given some orders to report to Omaha, Nebraska to the federal building there. It so happened that there was a punch card counting system there, and people had reviewed my records, and said, "Well he's just what

we need to work in the IBM unit that we have in Omaha, Nebraska.” Although I knew about actual operation of the machines I didn’t know everything and they soon found out. I was there perhaps six months, and one day I was called into a colonel’s office which had nothing to do with this accounting system that IBM had provided. He asked me if I knew anything about this intercom setting on his desk. I told him, “Yes I knew something about it.” After a few minutes I think he said, “Well that’ll be all soldier. A few days later I had orders to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. Fort Monmouth, New Jersey was the headquarters for the signal core. All their activities for training and the operations were out of Fort Monmouth. I entered the school there, and after three months I was given a second lieutenants cremation and sent to a classroom, I’ll call it, a school they had on telephone equipment, and joined what they titled as a long lines telephone systems. Studied those, learned how the wiring was done, what kind of equipment was needed to make operations work over some distance. While in that school I received orders to go to—memory again—Harvard and MIT [**Massachusetts Institute of Technology**]. Some classes were detailed on what I was to be taught, I might say. The school was organized through President Roosevelt, and actually the British people got together with him and they laid out an educational program for training people in radar work. I don’t think even Roosevelt new the word radar, I sure didn’t.

CP:

Yeah. Fairly new at that time.

BD:

Yeah. It was a large group and they were divided into abilities or education and electronics. Primarily alternating current electricity field. There were many quite older people that were say PhD graduates in electrical engineering. There were people that were engineers for the major electronic companies, I’m thinking of RCA [**Radio Corporation of America**] and a few others of that type. Eventually, after some thorough testing, there was half of this group was sent to England, the other half stayed behind, and that’s where I got my order from, was to go up there and go to school, try to improve my level in electrical engineering.

CP:

So were you developing the radar or learning to use the radar?

BD:

I was learning nothing about how to use—I didn’t even know the word radar at that time, I’ll be frank. It was all electricity. The mornings were spent purely on the math and the afternoons, most times, we would be in a laboratory working with some product, basic components, never yeah in fact I didn’t see anything related to radar for the first three, four, five months. After I finished this particular electrical engineering class, I was then transferred with the rest of the group to application of these principles that we’d been studying for a long time. In fact we were

then into radar to the extent of radio receivers and other electronic devices that might apply to something, we knew not yet what they were for. There were three sections of classes that—I guess they were all three months in lengths. The last three months was at—boy I'm bad with memory—

CP:

I'm with you it's hard to remember everything.

BD:

Yeah there was a class—

CP:

So you finished Harvard, MIT learning those principles.

BD:

Yeah at MIT classes for the first two sessions, three months each were at the—well you named it and I can't—

CP:

Harvard and MIT.

BD:

At Harvard. So I guess the only reason that we spent any time there was because there was a vacant building, the lawyers recently got a new facility and this old law building was available for lectures at the university so that's where we spent our time.

CP:

So you left there and would you go to like a military base or was it another school for the application of those principles?

BD:

No military bases did I see for over a year, I do believe. For a location, that last term, it was in a warehouse on Atlantic Avenue in Boston. That was more or less top secret. The other was not open to the public but it was classified as restricted which meant that you only talked to people that were with you about what you were doing and where you were. But then the secrecy increased at the warehouse where we spent our time. Much of the time was doing, I call it research or practice. We might be given a problem such as determining the frequency of a radio, and that can be done with a few simple instruments, and sometimes calculations and so forth. We would be given these problems when we'd work the problem we'd turn in our papers like we would in any school, and they were graded. Well it was either right or wrong but mostly they

wanted to know how you went about determining your answer. You could maybe make a mistake on a decimal point or something, it could be purely an accident. But if you knew how to solve the problem I'm sure that was all they were looking for. Those classes eventually ended, and I was still in this electronic training group, in fact we went by the initials ETG [**Electronics Training Group**]. Anyone who knew initials ETG was in radar research or actually working with radar. I was given orders to Camp Murphy in Florida. The group scattered, I know there were some that were sent to such places as perhaps a manufacturing plant would have a man and he was looking for quality control, and maybe even was available for advice if they had any problems in the manufacturing procedure. There was some I know that went to aircraft manufactures, and would supervise installation and operation of air craft radar. Maybe I should get away from the general term, they all had specific requirements. I was in early warning radar.

CP:

This was at camp Murphy for the early warning—

BD:

Sorry?

CP:

Camp Murphy for early warning radar. Is that what you were doing?

BD:

Yes I'll get into that but I was going to say there was early warning radar, there was radar on planes at that time to actually receive information from other planes. There was also radar from the ground to the planes which could be early warning but also there was some for communication directly between the two, and of course you can go on to ships and fighter planes on ships and so on. I was specifically involved in early warning radar at that time. I had really never seen a complete working radar set until I was at camp Murphy, we had one there for testing purposes, and for educational purposes. Camp Murphy was designed to educate and form a group that could operate a radar set. They were enlisted men as a rule, that would set up a radar and did all the operations that were required. These groups were designed to be self-sufficient in a way. There would be approximately forty-two people in a group and there was the leader, or I guess you'd call him commander, or top person was a first lieutenant, that was his rank. He was the technical man and that's the field I was in. Then there was a second lieutenant who was administrative. He had such things as being sure that the supplies were in, and handle all the day to day activities for this group. Then there was a group that were technicians, that operated the equipment. Each shift there were I think three normal shifts, but a fourth shift made up to fill in where needed. They would have a top rated mechanic if there was some mechanical or electrical failure that would make repairs or do the work. If there was any problems, call their officer. Lieutenant office.

CP:

So you said you were first lieutenant?

BD:

Yes.

CP:

So you were a team leader?

BD:

I was—yes uh-huh. Then of course there was the usual core number of cooks and bakers, and we had some guards around the equipment. We had a power plant and there was a power plant maintenance man to see that that power was always available. There was one medical man, somebody would get a cold or something, he was the one to pass out the aspirin or whatever. We had a supply truck with a sergeant that was head of the supplies, and he had a couple of men under him.

CP:

So this whole time at Camp Murphy you were still training but just practical purposes?

BD:

No, at Camp Murphy they were training, and they would operate a radar set there as the main reason for being at Camp Murphy. Also although I'm not familiar with all the details of what the enlisted men did, but they were apparently kept pretty busy. I never found a lot to do there. We eventually moved on, this is about a year later, to Drew Field in South Florida. That was—what's the name of the town that was on the West Coast—anyway that place still operates today, by the way, as a commercial field. But at Drew Field, people were assembled to form a unit. That's where there would be the crew ready—there was something what would it be four, six—there would be about twenty-four people that were going to be radar operators. Various ones would fill all of the places, and that I think, totaled up to be forty-two people to make a unit.

CP:

So were these units concerned with early warning of American soil or were they getting ready to be deployed I guess overseas to set up these radar installations?

BD:

There were radars installed already at this time that I'm there. It was a question of replacing these crews throughout the pacific is where I was located. At Drew Field in addition to that, there was some radar sets that were operating there. It would have to have those of course, because we're now training enlisted men in the operation and maintenance of the units. Also at Drew

Field the officers, which there were very few sent to Drew Field at that time, but they would go out with a crew that had been assembled with a working unit. They'd select a location and I say would be assigned maybe to one of these groups. I would be the one that would be required to select the location, find the land owner, get permission to set up a radar there and operate it for two weeks. From there on the crew had their own boss, I guess you would call him, or commanding officer better I guess, from there on such as operating a radar, keeping the records and all was up to the crew. My job would be to grade it, and that was a double trick because my grading could be determined by someone back [laughs, inaudible 00:31:19] whether or not I knew what I was doing if they're following, they could tell from the records and what all was going on. I would make a recommendation of, "Yes this group is fit now and ready to go to work somewhere," or in one case I turned them down. I thought the commanding officer needed to get more experience at directing other people. I did that for some time there until one day my group was one to catch the duty of going out, setting up a radar, and operating it, and being graded. That was done, we were assigned to I think it was a five hundred eighty-first early warning battalion. Let's see the battalion was made up of four or five companies, and in our company I think there were four radar stations that we operated. Of course, that meant that there were four of these small groups such as the one I was in charge of. They were scattered around on the big island of Hawaii. The battalion headquarters was on Oahu. There were other groups such as ours on other islands and they'd stand on out some distance around that part of central pacific. They all reported back to the five hundred and eighty-first headquarters.

CP:

So have you moved to Hawaii by this time? Were you stationed in Hawaii?

BD:

Oh I'm sorry if I skipped it. Yes, our battalion one day was given orders to go to Seattle and we had a ship waiting for us.

CP:

Do you remember what month and year? I guess this is before—

BD:

Yeah this would have been '44, it would've been June, the first of June.

CP:

Of 1944?

BD:

Yes. I think that's right. Let's see '43 because I skipped some on my education. See that was that—after leaving—I'm sorry—after leaving Camp Murphy, I was sent along with, I'm going to

guess forty other people, to Canada to the RCAF [**Royal Canadian Air Force**] installation at—well I've forgotten the name of this army post. It was an airfield. We spent three months studying some British radar. The British had just come out, I think it was called a five thirty-eight, a machine which recorded visually anything in a three hundred and sixty degree circle. If you can visualize it with the radar set at the center, and this beam continuously around completely for three hundred sixty degrees. That three hundred and sixty degrees circle was something that nobody could handle, so there were several crews that operated this unit. Of course, with three hundred and sixty degrees, depending on the number of operators, you could have four or six or eight sectors divided off into pie shaped pieces. In that case, one crew would be responsible for maybe a northeast quadrant or something, and they reported anything that was going on in that area and that was all. The same radar set or modifications of it is used today by the meteorologists.

CP:

For tracking weather.

BD:

You hear them talking about the radar well that's what their radar is, is a modified five thirty-eight. Only one man needs to find clouds or rain or snow on three hundred and sixty degrees in that case. He's not required to find out why there's a little wrinkle here that keeps moving and what direction he's going in. Actually that's not—I should also say that any radar group like the one I had, at one o'clock every morning we changed the code on our machine. By the way all communications was written in a code and we had a little machine that we'd put English into, turn a crank—

CP:

Get out the new code.

BD:

And it would come out with something that was not what we said especially, but then that was sent on telephone and radio to wherever it was required. There was one man that would know all about the air flights in his particular area, and he would report, after filtering out stuff that was automatic, such as maybe a plane that brought meat on this island at some certain time of day and he'd land at certain airport. He would then just ignore it on his report to higher headquarters. On the island of Oahu in a hole in the mountain there somewhere, I don't know where it was, was what they called a filter, and every one of the different units that had any interest at all in air navigation had a representative there and there was a large table. These reports would come in from units such as mine and they'd send out a little airplane or something on there to keep track of it. Maybe it would be set up just in front of a person, maybe you know, half hour or more, well it had moved over here to somewhere else. Anyway you could pick a trajectory that this

little plane is following. As these planes would appear on this large table someone would claim a plane and report on it to anyone that wanted information. Now, if there was a plane that no one would accept or had any knowledge of, there was an air force officer there that would create a scramble of planes up to check it and see what it was.

CP:

Now did that happen often, where they're planes—?

BD:

Probably too much. I don't know if it happened a lot. We had two cases, the ones that we had were pilot error. The two that we had, one was a B26 bomber and it killed six or seven people. The crew, our crew handled it fine but one man was told he was on the wrong island, there's a wheeler field up on Oahu, and we told him he was not near wheeler field and he said, "No I'm supposed to land here I know the place, I've been here before." He landed on a strip that had been dug up so that no planes could land. Honey do you need something?

Evelyn Davies (ED):

No sir, thank you. Just seeing if you're moving along.

BD:

But anyway there was another case of one man who thought he was at a different airport and he came in and crashed in the sea right close to shore, killed him.

CP:

So never any kind of any—

BD:

To my knowledge I don't, I honestly don't know about what happened a lot of the time. I had a wonderful crew, they were exceptional. They had been operating stations before, that crew had come from Alaska, that too, I think, was where they had a radar set that they operated.

CP:

So are you still a first lieutenant at this time, or have you moved up in rank as you've gone along through your career?

BD:

You don't change rank. A first lieutenant, if you had the job I had, no you don't move up in rank. That's it. Fortunately I moved up in rank, didn't even know it, but I found out later that on dismissal that group all got a raise of one grade. But I didn't know that until a long time after. I

was back in the states. Actually, I was in New York at the time on an island, my dad calls me and said, "I got envelope here and it's got a raise in it to a captain."

CP:

Oh that's great. So you were out of the service at the time or were you still in the service when you got the raise to captain?

BD:

I was out of the—

CP:

You were out of the service.

BD:

I was still in the service, but I was in the reserves.

CP:

Okay. So I guess with the end of the war you came back to the United States from Hawaii? Or did you go anywhere else besides Hawaii?

BD:

I might point up that people in radar everywhere had to serve an extra five units. What is a unit? That is an arbitrary figure that they set up for all the people in ETG because they'd spent so much time in education and research at the one place, that the government felt, I guess, that they needed to get some value back. So a unit was I think six months, so that meant two and a half years I would spend longer before I could get out.

CP:

So you were in for—since 1940—

BD:

Nineteen forty-one until, let's see, the actual overseas until I keep thinking of April. It's in my records over there—

CP:

Now are your records here or are they at the Silent Wings Museum?

BD:

At Silent Wings Museum.

CP:

Okay so we'd be able to research all those particular dates, things like that.

BD:

No, it was just before Christmas, and actually my time was up before that under this system. However, I was given orders to go to Fort Leonard and 81st headquarters as a G2, they gave me the job as G2 until they could find transportation for me. I was there I'm guessing two months, it may have been longer. Then one day I got orders that there was a battle ship Colorado, I had a berth on it to come back to the states. That was an experience.

CP:

Oh the battle ship?

BD:

Uh-huh.

CP:

What was it like?

BD:

Well—which I didn't like I had the normal ships executive officer was right next to the captain, and that was up the top of the spire in the front of the boat, had to climb a lot of ladders. I'd look down and the hall of the ships over here somewhere, or it's over here somewhere, and it was that way the whole trip.

CP:

Did you have a job on the ship to do or was it just—

BD:

No a passenger.

CP:

Just a passenger. So when you got back to the United States—what did you do when you got back to the States?

BD:

I reported to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas that's where—

CP:

Kind of where y'all started.

BD:

Uh-huh. I arrived there and they checked me out, and I was gone in two or three hours. I caught a train down to Kansas City and that was to visit my folks. I had married my first wife in January of '43, I was in Florida at the time. It was close to Christmas, and I invited her down to visit. She was living on Long Island with her parents. She came down and we were married. We were married until she passed away in 1980 in June.

CP:

So when you got out of the service did you go back to IBM? Or what did you start doing?

BD:

Yes I did. After a short time, I took a little time off and my wife and I went to Mexico for several weeks. When I returned I went back to IBM. Nothing was different, everyone was what, five, six years older, and there was no opening for me there but they always promised me a job when I went back. So they said, Well until we can get things worked out—it was just a mess everywhere. Nobody in IBM knew what they were doing. I was given Main Street. Are you familiar with Kansas City by chance?

CP:

A little. I've been there a couple of times.

BD:

Well at the time, Main Street was a street down town and it ran on out south, I don't know where it ended, pretty close to Lubbock I guess. Anyway I was given Main Street, any place on it as territory. That's ridiculous, there was mechanic shops, barber shops, grocery stores. So anyway I'd walk the streets there and call, somedays I made a lot of calls, but they're fruitless, but I'd go in a visit with everyone.

CP:

So you're trying to sell machines I guess? Accounting machines?

BD:

Yeah. They had no product at that time, they were so swamped with orders that were really important Federal business or something. So there was nothing to sell. Anyway they sent me back to school, there was some new product in the line. They had come out with some new alphabetical equipment. I went back to Binghamton, New York and went to their school.

CP:

What did this equipment do?

BD:

I'm sorry?

CP:

What did this alphabetical equipment do? What was—

BD:

Well instead of just all numbers, you could spell out words. Not that they didn't do that before, but their new multiplier had an alphabetic ability, which it never had before. I forget now, boy it's been so long since I've been around it. They had an administrative person at that school—when I finished the course, the man gave me a little note with Lafayette, Indiana on it. Any way, my then wife and I got together, she went back to see her parents while I was at this school in New York. We headed back to Kansas City where clothing and what little we had in material things was in an apartment.

CP:

So what was it—?

BD:

I told her, "Let's go by Lafayette, Indiana and give it a once over, see what we're getting into." It's not a dismal place, there's a good school there. Later on I found out the only reason they were sticking a man there, was the only place that would be really a prospect but was not a prospect was a college, a university. After I returned to Kansas City I told my boss there about it, I said, "Mr. Vincent they have no business putting anyone in Lafayette." He agreed.

CP:

Did you go anyway?

BD:

He agreed and we canceled that. I finally wound up with Tulsa as a location. I spent a year there.

CP:

Still, I guess, hitting the streets selling machines?

BD:

Yes. I did fair, nothing great. I was there one year and got orders for transfer to Houston. I was there about a year. What happened? "We had to many men here Davies, where would you like to go?" I brought that news home, and it doesn't sell very well. I understood Mrs. Davies said "We're not moving."

CP:

That was in Houston?

BD:

That suites me. So I went into business with myself.

CP:

What business was that?

BD:

Communications work. Which is what I'd been doing in the army, and I had so much education then in electronic communications. I started out—I'd sell anything that I could an order for actually, but intercom systems. It was right at the time when high fidelity was getting popular. So I tried some of that.

CP:

So this would've been in the early fifties?

BD:

Yes that's correct. I was making a living but I wanted to be more creative, so I went after bigger kinds of work. I got into companies that used procedures of some kinds, such as a chemical plant that makes something and has a system in doing it, not just drilling holes in a piece of metal, but a creative system where people had to watch what was going on in a certain process continually. It was a pretty good business but there was one problem with it, that was a small man with a small business. When I got an order they were sizable, but I had to quit trying to find business to go build what I sold. I did well but I could see I was stuck. I finally got a man that was very good, that knew the electronics business, was a young man, really a hard worker that just graduated from the University of Houston. He went to work for me part time, when he got out of school, I hired him full time.

CP:

What was the name of your business at this time?

BD:

At that time it was Mechanical—let's see, Electro Mechanical something—anyway that was going along until one day—not really a true competitor, although he did have a separate store that sold high-fi equipment. I can't come up with his name. He said, "Let's form a corporation. As an obligation I will furnish materials of any kind that you need that you can't get a good price on, I'll sell it to you for ten percent over cost." So all together there were five other people, there was he and his finance man, and a repairman on televisions, and the boss of that television

company, and maybe myself then that made it—anyway we formed a cooperation, and that was a big headache. It was my problem to get the business and get it delivered, and I had more problems with it. Oh and then Brown was the name of the key man, he died, so the company was named, at that time, Brown-Davies Electronic Corporation. I kept the name, I bought the other three or four, yeah the four out, and I bought them. I then owned the business, I did very well.

CP:

This is all still in Houston?

BD:

Yes. We did business all over the world because we had products they couldn't find anywhere else's service. I had one man who, poor guy, was in some country all the time, and he finally quit and towards the last he said, "I won't have a wife if I don't stay home sometime."

CP:

So what were some of these—you said communication products and stuff, what were some of the things you developed that were needed for these systems?

BD:

We had a system that could use under the most unfriendly environmental situations, heat, cold, vibration, explosive atmospheres. We could solve a problem where there had always been a problem and no one else could handle it. Noise, I talked through noise.

ED:

Communications sequence.

BD:

Yeah. That system worked very well, and the company grew. I was never what you call a business man but by education I learned the hard way, and I found out I really loved being a business man. I quit for the most part the technical aspects of the business. I had a registered engineer, we had an engineering department with draftsman, and all I need, I had one technical man, if I had a situation that no one else in the company could handle all I had to do was send him out there. We just did a world of business in a lot of places that no one has ever tried to touch. One of them is—I never got in trouble over that was in Cleveland, Ohio, the newspapers, Cleveland—no, that was a power plant, Cleveland Electric Illuminating was the name of the company. We told them what we could do and agreed to do it, but he wanted it yesterday and he just had so many problems with it that I thought he was going to throw us out or sue me, one of the two. But we eventually made him happy.

CP:

How long did you stay in Houston?

BD:

I stayed in this business until 1980. Mrs. Davies died, two of the ladies that did the assembly work for me, sued me. These things all happened at once. I said, "It's just not worth it being single," at the time, "Why should I continue to fight this?" So I sold the business. I had a company back east that wanted it, not reluctantly, I told them they could have it.

CP:

Did you sort of go into retirement or just transition to something else?

BD:

I made a mistake I told them I would—they wanted me for one year for transition, and I said a big corporation has a different way of doing things than this individual. So I fought it for a year and then was most happy to quit. I operated a Houston office for them.

CP:

So what did you do after you left the company?

BD:

In the meantime a young lady sitting behind you over there and I got together and visited one another. I dated Evelyn for a little over a year, in 1992, in April I married her. She had a ranch near Snyder, TX, the Diamond M Ranch was Evelyn's property. So I got to be a rancher for ten years, enjoyed it thoroughly.

CP:

So did you two meet in Houston or how did you meet?

BD:

Yes, Evelyn, and her husband, and Dorothy, and I had a few visits, and I think Evelyn and Dorothy were members of the same bridge group—dear?

ED:

We were acquainted.

BD:

So we knew each other. He was a find man, and he had a wonderful business too. He was an electrical contractor.

ED:

Who? Who?

CP:

She was asking who was that that you were just speaking about. Who was that that had the business, the electrical company?

BD:

Oh Evelyn's husband.

CP:

Then you became a rancher, and I guess that's what brought you up to West Texas?

BD:

Yes. Evelyn brought me here.

CP:

Evelyn brought you to West Texas.

BD:

Uh-huh. I sold my house and belongings, and was a free man from Houston.

CP:

Were y'all living in Snyder and then moved to Lubbock?

BD:

Well no we lived on the ranch which is thirteen miles outside of Snyder.

CP:

How long have y'all been living in Lubbock?

BD:

We left the ranch in '93. We had looked around when she sold the ranch over parts of Texas, but never saw anything any better than here in Lubbock so we moved to Lubbock. We had been here shopping on occasion.

CP:

When I first got here you started showing me some of your art work so I thought maybe we'd talk about your art collecting a little bit and your passion for southwestern art and how all that got started.

BD:

It started, and it grew. I would go back to my childhood—as I'd mentioned my father was with the Pullmen Company. He traveled mostly on Santa Fe and worked with Santa Fe trains. For quite a period he operated a train from Kansas City to Albuquerque, New Mexico. The family, occasionally, would go into that area especially in the summer time on vacation. I went with him on a couple of trips by myself. Also going back a little further, when he and my mother were married some of his friends in Albuquerque donated the Indian art to him as wedding gifts. He had blankets, he had some pots of different kinds. He was never a collector but our house was quite full of that sort of thing. I fell in love with it, I really enjoyed it.

CP:

Do you still have some of those pieces that he collected?

BD:

Sir?

CP:

Do you still have some of those pieces that he brought back?

BD:

They're at the museum, yes. There's seven pieces at the museum that were the families. I think there's one rug over there—we grew up with Navajo rugs all over the house but wore them out through kids. Anyway, later on, I would collect a piece occasionally, and then after a time Evelyn got to have it. All of this type of art work that I'm pointing to here, and some other items that are really beautiful and rare, Evelyn collected. I stuck basically with pots.

CP:

Are those all Hopi pieces I guess? Like the Hopi Kachina dolls and things I guess? Is that what those are?

ED:

Yes those are Hopi. They're all the tribes there, all the _____ [?] [01:10:23] had people who carved. There's two different items.

CP:

Is there other kinds of art that you like to collect besides the southwestern Native American arts, Indian arts?

ED:

No, no.

BD:

I enjoy American art but I don't collect it anymore.

CP:

Do you have any upcoming plans here in the near future for anymore art collecting or anything that you're looking forward to doing, or just kind of taking it easy I guess?

BD:

I do that most of the time. Evelyn allows me to do it, and it's a treat.

ED:

I need that audio tape.

CP:

That's funny. So you have a birthday coming up in July, just in about a month. What's the date of your birthday?

BD:

July 15.

CP:

July 15?

BD:

Yes, 3:15 AM to be precise.

CP:

I was going to ask earlier, I don't know if we got it on tape, but I was going to ask, what was your mother's name?

BD:

Blanche.

CP:

Blanche.

BD:

B-l-a-n-c-h-e.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

CP:

What was your father's name?

BD:

My father's name was Edward. One name, he had no middle name. Her family, their last name is Crouch. They were originally from Virginia, my grandfather on that side was given a job by the army—well I don't know about army, it was one of those other units. What would you call them? Anyway, he was lead surveyor on Oklahoma at the time of surveying it for the Indians. That's how that family got moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas when they finished that job they just stayed in that part of the country. Their neighbor was Robert E. Lee when they lived in Virginia. All of the family of my mother's age, all her brothers and sisters have a middle name of Lee. Blanche Lee, there was a Jack Lee.

CP:

Does your middle name? Do you have the middle name Lee also?

BD:

I have a middle name of Crouch.

CP:

Okay so your mother's maiden. My middle name is Lee, I was just going to ask.

BD:

Oh is that right?

CP:

It is. My dad's name and grandfather had Lee as a middle name. My niece's middle name is Lee, Brittney Lee.

BD:

Is that right?

CP:

Yeah a lot of Lees going around. Very popular.

BD:

And your first name is Curtis?

CP:

Yes sir.

BD:

My father was born in London, England. His father was a military man. I understand it that that was the history of the family as far back as anyone could trace, they were in the military.

CP:

So all English decent?

BD:

He lost his wife when she just turned nineteen. My dad was four years old when she died—have I got this right? I'm off a year I think. Anyway, after she passed away my grandfather bought land in South Texas through some promotion I guess, in those days but the London people. He and my dad moved to this country. Darn if after moving in here, his father died. So he was raised an orphan.

CP:

In South Texas?

BD:

South Texas, South of San Antonio I should say, I guess that's south Texas.

CP:

I guess he got moved up to the Kansas City area, and that's where he met your mother from Fayetteville?

BD:

Actually I think, as I understand it, he went to work for the Pullman Company in San Antonio. He had applied for a job, well actually his education was low level, boy, really down there, but he went to a business college, learned to type and write, or whatever you learned. He applied for this job with the railroad and they were glad to have him because he spoke very good Mexican Spanish. He had a job conducting on a train between San Antonio and Mexico City.

CP:

Oh really? I guess that makes sense for the Santa Fe Trail too because he was bilingual.

BD:

He had grown up on a ranch and was running a ranch when he took that job.

CP:

Seems like there's a little ranching all up in through your family's history there a little bit.

BD:

Yeah. I guess

CP:

Well is there anything else you'd like to add? I can't think of anything else to speak about right now. I know that we had talked about having David come over and you had some items that you wanted to go through with him later on. You said you had some papers or—

BD:

Yeah. He has all my records now.

CP:

David Marshall? You said David Marshall.

BD:

Oh I'm sorry, I was thinking of another—

CP:

Of Silent Wings?

BD:

Yeah excuse me.

CP:

Now what all do they have at the Silent Wings Museum? Is it just military stuff or what all do they have out there?

BD:

Oh gee, it's military.

CP:

It's all military?

ED:

Well it's your papers and a few buttons. You didn't have a uniform or shoes or a gun for Silent Wings. It's mostly papers.

CP:

Mostly papers? Okay.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

BD:

I saved all of the orders from the time I entered the army until I—

CP:

A lot of people didn't.

BD:

Is that right?

CP:

Yeah it's good that you did because a lot of the times, you know—

BD:

I've talked with some coffee buddies and others that, "Oh you keep those old things?", "Yeah I had to have something to do so I kept."

ED:

Could I mention that after Bill and I married we traveled extensively? I don't know whether this would be of interest to you, but Bill was quite a traveler, he was always ready to go.

CP:

So where all did you travel to?

ED:

We started in Alaska and then Western part of Canada. There's a special name for that area. Then we explored the Pacific. We've been to South Korea, Japan twice, all through China, spent two or three weeks in China, Hong Kong, Indonesian Islands and Australia. We went to Europe, we went twice. On one trip we started in London and went across Europe on through Austria, and across the Black Sea, went into Turkey. Another year we went to Lapland where not many people go, for Christmas and New Year's. We had a marvelous trip to Australia. We went through South America and through the Falkland Islands, and then to Australia—I mean Antarctica, excuse me, Antarctica, at a time when very few people had been to Antarctica. We went on a ship that had been taken to Scandinavia and had the hull hardened. We were fortunate in that the ship made most of its scheduled stops. At that time, passengers were told that the ship would want to make five stops in Antarctica, but would not promise any of it. We might leave without any stops at all if the weather changes. But our ship made all the stops. We were ashore in the Falkland Islands, walked, explored, saw the mine fields left by the British. We'd just had a lot of travel.

CP:

Sounds like it. Looks like we've filled up an entire—

ED:

And Bill—entire tape?

CP:

Yeah. That's good.

BD:

How much tape?

CP:

That was probably— let me see—

BD:

Is it tape?

CP:

Well it's actually digital, about an hour and a half. They have these little cards now you just pop them in there, they're like little digital cards, and then they record surround sound, and hi-definition.

BD:

Boy.

CP:

I know. I used to have to carry around these big old cameras about like this, big old tripods, and now it's just—

ED:

My whole point in getting into this at all is to say, that part of his life, I think, has been important to him, and he was a good traveler.

CP:

I've wanted to travel some more too. I mean, there's nothing like going out and seeing the world, and learning about new people, and experiences and different cultures. I think that's important to do.

ED:

We've spent a lot of time in Australia.

BD:

Well certain aspects of it yes, but things are not as I'd like to see them and that's what—

ED:

Oh, and then we went on a ship that sailed out New Orleans that was a cargo container ship. Very new, all its activities were set by computer, its courses, and when the ship would go into a port the computer would tell the operators on land which crates came off there, and then pick up crates to take elsewhere.

CP:

So why did y'all decide to go on a cargo ship?

ED:

Computer decided where they would be located in this big ship. The ship had what was called a hotel so the ship could talk about thirty passengers.

CP:

I've never heard of that. Cargo ship hotel.

ED:

I had not either. But we had our own maids, our own rooms, and they were large for a ship, a sitting area in there. The hotel even had workers who make their own bread every day, fresh. Made their own ice cream.

CP:

Those ships are really big aren't they?

ED:

We had free seating at the tables, not assigned, you could sit wherever you wanted to. Breakfast would be served between certain hours, lunch and so forth. Then in the evenings there was a dance floor, and a little band that played music. Part of the penalty of that trip was that it was arranged by the Smithsonian in Washington, and the Smithsonian put on board with the passengers an astrologer, and a historian specialist in south American history, and another person to tended to the logistics, going to ashore, getting back and so forth, changing money. The historian did a lecture every morning and every afternoon, and we were expected to attend.

CP:

Were they interesting lectures?

ED:

Yeah. Things I never even heard of or thought of, so it was interesting to me to learn so much. At the end of the cruise just before we all—the day before we were to disembark we were told that, “Here’s your exam, take it to the cabin.” It was about a three page exam, a”Answer all these questions. The papers will be collected tomorrow morning and you’ll be graded.”

CP:

All those lectures.

ED:

So we were trying to pack and reassemble, and had these three page exams to complete, and they were tough.

CP:

Now, you said that was part of the cruise that you said, to go on this ship that was part of the requirements was to—?

ED:

Well we went down the east coast of South America. We sailed out of New Orleans, sailed into Houston, and then down to South America, and made stops all the way on the trip, because the cargo was being unloaded and loaded at each of these ports, and we were free to go ashore while these operations were going on. One other point and then I’ll shut up about this. At that time there were pirates. We were told to always keep that cabin door locked, if you were in the cabin, you locked the door, except when we were underway. If we were in port sleep lightly, because it was the custom of these pirates to come aboard at night after dark, and they would be in all black clothing. They had ropes that they would throw up and hook to the sides of the ship and shimmy up these ropes to get aboard.

CP:

Did you ever experience any pirates?

ED:

No we did not but I have to—if the ship was not underway, stood off from the port all night. He’d stay out in the ocean and not be anchored anywhere near shore. He would stand off far enough so it would be very difficult for these people and their small craft to get to the ship. But you always watch, you always pay attention. If somebody raps on your door in the middle of the night and says, “There’s an emergency you better come,” don’t open that door. Whatever. So

anyway it was—there were times where we did wait on shore a bit for the captain to come in from the ocean into the port to get us.

BD:

I don't think either Evelyn or I looked hard for pirates.

CP:

No I wouldn't think so. But like they said sleep lightly, keep one eye open.

BD:

That was a wonderful ship—

ED:

Oh it was beautiful. It was only two years old when we were on it. Everything was very current.

BD:

Curtis, there was three captains on that ship. One of them they called the hotel manager, his job was to take care of the passengers. There was another, a Navy man, that kept the appropriate balance of cargo on board the ship. I guess, he had to know the destination, and then the weight, and the dimensions. He had a bank of computers, didn't he honey?

ED:

The ship had a whole room full of computers.

BD:

Yeah. There were those two that were the bosses of those two areas. Then there was a captain that operated the ship.

CP:

Well a ship that large I can see where you would need three. That cargo balance would be—

ED:

Critical.

CP:

Very critical.

BD:

Oh yes.

CP:

Yeah. Tough job.

ED:

For fuel and consumption as well as balance.

BD:

When we came into the Houston harbor, we had a select place, barbers cut they called it. It was built especially for this type of operation. When that ship docked, you'd look out a window and there was trucks lined up, I don't know how long a line, as far as I could see, there was this line of trucks, and they were waiting for the cargo. Then there was two gantry trains that rolled up there, and they started unloading the ship. Each one of these big containers had a destination, and other information like load this last or something, this is number fourth-two "F" or something, and they started unloading that ship, which they did, and rearranged that cargo. Perhaps left some and picked some up, and it was ready to go the next morning.

CP:

That's amazing.

BD:

It got in about four o'clock that afternoon into the port.

CP:

Yeah logistics is becoming one of the fastest growing fields in America, ports and shipping. There's a lot of jobs in logistics now.

ED:

Even with our delivery services like FedEx and UPS.

CP:

I've seen, just traveling back and forth to Dallas, I see a lot more truck traffic these days, and those kind of containers that they offload. You see the trains stacked three, four high of those containers. That's a lot of movement of goods happening these days.

ED:

Absolutely there really is.

CP:

Well I'm going to start packing up a little bit. But thank you for letting me come over and interview you this afternoon.

ED:

Well you're a very patient listener.

CP:

I studied history, you know I got my degrees in history, a bachelors, and a masters, and PhD, so hearing stories and learning about history, I just love it.

ED:

What was your dissertation?

CP:

My dissertation was on a history of west Texas music. I started a music archive at the Southwest Collection about thirteen years ago. I was working for the Vietnam archive there in the building—all my undergraduate work was in Vietnamese studies, and studying the war, and the culture, and all that, language. But growing up, I came from a musical family. I'd go to my grandmother's house and the uncles, and everybody would show up and they'd be playing their guitars, and stuff. So I was always interested in music. I went to South Plains College in Levelland and a degree and I went to work for Don Caldwell Studios when he was open back over on Ave. Q. So fast forward many years later, when the studio closed down all these master audio tapes were going to be put in some barns, and some old storage places that were leaky, and dusty. I thought, Boy that's a lot of music history that could potentially be lost. I got the dean and some other people—Don and other people together, and I said, "We need to save this stuff and let's get it to the Southwest Collection," and so we brought all those master tapes to the Southwest Collection, and about a year or so later I was hired on as music archivist, and we've been growing ever since, collecting the music.

Evelyn:

Soon you'll be needing your own building.

CP:

Yes I do. You know those tapes take up a lot of space, video, and more than just records and things like that, there's always journals from, you know, people writing song lyrics, and set lists, and posters and photographs, it's the whole thing. We've grown from that one collection which was a sizable collection, to now we probably have about a hundred and twenty-five music collections.

BD:

Oh. My uncle Jack did pretty well, he went to work after finishing school in New York to advisor, he had a professors job of teaching. I don't know, he claimed he had a hard life.

Sometimes he had three or four students for the semester, which doesn't seem like much. He also played violin early in life.

ED:

Did you know that Mr. Smith had just died?

CP:

I was very good friends with him, and actually recorded music with him, and had played with him on a couple of occasions.

ED:

You did know him.

CP:

I did and actually—

ED:

So you're hurting about losing him?

CP:

Yes. His son called me or sent me a message yesterday, and asked me to come play some music at the funeral. So I'll be doing that on Thursday.

ED:

What will you play?

CP:

I play guitar, so I have this instrumental guitar piece that I wrote because I was inspired by Doug's music, because he played this instrumental piano very spacious, grandiose, West Texas type piano music. I was like, "Well if I'm going to write a piece of instrumental music how would I do it," and I was kind of envisioning summer time kind of up in the panhandle, the big golden spread, and yellow, and the cicadas. So I wrote this song called Cicada inspired by his piano playing. We played it together a few times, but we never got to record it before he had his accident and was paralyzed.

ED:

Oh he liked it?

CP:

He liked it.

ED:

That was very complimentary to you, coming from him.

CP:

Yeah.

BD:

Curtis, Evelyn mentioned the guitar a day or two ago. Do you think there's any possibility of a person that can't see to read the music or the frets on a guitar, can play it?

CP:

If they can't see?

BD:

Yeah.

CP:

Yeah. There's been a lot of blind guitar players.

BD:

Well you can't read music very well.

CP:

You have to just use your ears.

ED:

The person would hear it.

CP:

Yeah. Hearing's the most important part of it.

BD:

I know how true that is because I did a few cords at one time on a guitar, but I never kept it up. But I was wondering how it would work, because I had my eyes glued to the frets when I was playing.

CP:

I've noticed I do that a lot, watching my fingers where they're going to be. Then a lot of times I have my eyes closed. You know just me playing.

BD:

But you're playing from memory?

CP:

Yeah so you have muscle memory, and a lot of memory, and just hearing is a lot of it.

ED:

Do you write music?

CP:

Um-hm I do.

BD:

I don't know whether I can read music anymore.

CP:

I don't really read music myself. I learned a little bit but I'm so slow at it, I just kind of play. I actually just—

BD:

I'm slow with anything in music.

CP:

It takes practice just like anything. You've got to work on it. I actually wrote—I've got two CDs, one of them—the last one that just came out back in 2015 was I inspired to do this sort of instrumental album, there's a little singing on it, but generally instrumental. It's about this woman Margaret Noble and Margaret left England, London, in 1898 and moved to India, and worked with Swami Vivekananda, a big guru guy over there. She was brought over, and started the very first girl's school in India for girls to go to school, which there was no girl's education going on, and those schools are still there today. She became known as Sister Nivedita, the enlightened one. So the Sister Nivedita school for girls are still there, and she was a very interesting woman, and when I was writing this album of these songs, I'd envisioned somebody on a steam ship traveling to India in the late nineteenth century. I just had all these envisions in my head and I'm like why would somebody be going there. When I came across her story it just inspired and everything else came together and the rest of the songs. Sort of a tribute to her, made a CD of music, and then with the Flatland Dance Theater group we—the girls choreographed each piece of music and then we preformed the music with dance.

ED:

How wonderful.

CP:

So my goal is someday is to maybe—

ED:

What an accomplishment.

CP:

I know—is to get a little group of dancers, and musicians, and hopefully someday be able to travel to India where these towns are, where these schools are, and perform and raise money, and give it to the girls' school.

BD:

That's a noble thought.

ED:

Was this lady ever photographed? Do you have a picture of her?

CP:

I do have a picture of her.

ED:

So it's not just the image you developed in your mind about a person.

CP:

She died fairly young in India, I think it was 1911. She was probably forty, forty-two. She worked with a lot of sick people during plagues, famine—that's her right there.

ED:

Oh I can see this. Isn't she lovely? She has on some India dress at this point.

CP:

Yeah she moved there, she traveled the world into America.

ED:

She broke a lot of rules or expectations for a women at that time.

CP:

Yep.

ED:

And her name is?

CP:

Margaret Noble also known as Sister Nivedita.

ED:

Nobel is perfect name. Isn't that something

CP:

I have a picture of her right there. So I've picked up some of her books and I've been reading a little bit and stuff. Really interesting story. So the music that I put together, because she was a Scots-Irish woman, the music itself is sort of a cross of Indian music, and Irish music, with my West Texas kind of—

ED:

How do you do that? [Laughter]

CP:

This is kind of put your feelings in. I've got violins, and strings and bells, and all kinds of Indian instruments on it. I wish I had a little CD with me, I'd leave it here with you.

ED: Oh, wow. Well—

[End recording]