

Oral History Interview of Vernon and Juanita Hicks

Interviewed by: Monte Monroe

July 27, 2016

Belton, Texas

Part of the:

Soil Conservation Services

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Vernon and Juanita Hicks and their history with soil conservation work. In this interview the Hicks' discuss their backgrounds, growing up, college days, careers, and lives before they met, then describe how they met later in life and got married. They also discuss working with the Soil Conservation Services and Vernon being the National Biologist.

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Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Vernon's background, and growing up	05	00:00:42
Working on pipeline	13	00:10:45
Going to college after the war, and working for SCS	20	00:17:37
Working at Fort Stockton	25	00:24:40
Serving as the National Biologist in Washington D.C.	35	00:37:52
His perspective of being a soil conservationist	48	00:53:21
Working with ranchers and farmers	52	01:02:23
Juanita's family and background	61	01:15:48
Growing up during the depression and dust bowl	71	01:34:32
Her experience going to college	77	01:46:21
Her engagement to Clarence Cook Jr.	82	01:56:05
Her and her husband's lives after college	88	02:08:47
Her husband's position at Exxon in Houston	91	02:19:02
Working as a teacher when Houston integrated schools	96	02:28:53
Retirement	101	02:38:23
Clarence's passing	104	02:43:48
When Juanita met Vernon	110	02:54:53
How Juanita and Vernon got together	113	03:03:31
What life was like growing up compared to now	119	03:19:38
Why the way she was raised is important	124	03:34:58

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Monte Monroe (MM:)

This is Monte Monroe from the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University, and we are in Temple, Texas today and this is July the 27th, 2016. Or we are in Belton, to be more precise. At the home of Vernon and Juanita Hicks. Vernon served with the Soil Conservation Service as the Texas state biologist and we're going to talk about his life and his career with the service and we're also going to talk to Juanita about her life, as well. So, Vernon, why don't you tell us when and where you born?

Vernon Hicks (VH:)

Well, I was born at Haskell, Texas on October 21st, '28, I guess. Twenty-eight, yeah.

MM:

Okay and who were your parents?

VH:

Walter Hicks and Ala Hicks.

MM:

And your mother's maiden name, do you recall?

VH:

Sanford.

MM:

So now, who were your father's parents? Do you remember your grandparents?

VH:

Yeah, I think, yeah. I should. [Laughter] They called him Jimmy, but James Hicks, over at Haskell.

MM:

And your grandmother?

VH:

She was a Sanford.

Juanita Hicks (JH:)

No, your grandmother.

VH:
Huh?

JH:
Your grandmother.

VH:
My grandmother? Well, I think –

JH:
Your grandmother, Hicks. What was your grandmother, Hicks' name?

VH:
Oh, on the Hicks side. Well he was Jimmy, and her name was – [whispers] what was it? I don't remember.

MM:
It's fine. It'll come to you. We can always come back to it. Now, tell me about growing up. Where did you go to school? And where did you go to high school?

VH:
Well, I started in a little community outside of Three Rivers called Simmons, and let's see, I may have gone only one year there, one or two, and then they were consolidated into Three Rivers. I went through high school there.

MM:
Okay, at Three Rivers. All righty. When you were growing up, what did your parents do? What did your dad do?

VH:
Well, he was a farmer.

MM:
He was a farmer. Okay, so you grew up during the so-called Great Depression, and you then of course went service at the end of World War II. What was it like growing up during the Depression years on a farm in that part of Texas?

VH:
Well, I was young enough then that I really didn't know we had a Depression, but yeah, I can remember pretty lean times back then.

MM:

Like Dorothy was saying this morning, she didn't remember growing up poor because they had cows, and chickens,, and milk and fresh fruit, and stuff like that. Was that your experience, as well, growing up on the farm?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

You never felt like you were hungry?

VH:

No.

MM:

Okay, and that you were always provided for?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Did you have any siblings?

VH:

Yeah, I had an older brother and two younger, I guess.

JH:

Five boys. Three younger.

VH:

Three younger.

MM:

Okay, and your older brother, was he in World War II service, as well?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Which theater was he in?

VH:

I guess he was European Theater.

MM:

Okay, was he in the Army or Air Corps?

VH:

Army.

MM:

Did he see combat? Do you recall?

VH:

No, I don't think so.

MM:

And his name was?

VH:

Dean. Walter Dean.

MM:

Walter Dean Hicks, okay. Now, growing up, what did you do as a boy? Was there anything in your childhood that would ultimately lead to you becoming interested in biology?

VH:

Well it's bound to be, but I don't remember what it was.

MM:

Did you go hunting or fishing?

VH:

Oh, yeah, I did both of those and I guess that's why it was.

MM:

Okay, all right. And then once you got through high school and you graduated, what came next?

VH:

Went into service.

MM:

Did you volunteer? Were you drafted?

VH:

Yeah, volunteered.

MM:

And this was towards the end of the war, right?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

What was the attitude of people in the high-co of Three Rivers area at that time about the war and kids that were in high school? What was it like being in high school with that huge conflict going on?

VH:

Of course, we didn't pay too much attention to it. We didn't know the scope of it or anything. I don't know.

MM:

Do you remember listening to the radio and hearing about it?

VH:

Oh, yeah. We'd hear it on the radio. Of course, we didn't have a TV.

MM:

Did you ever go to the movie theater and see some of the news reels and things like that?

VH:

Yeah, occasionally.

MM:

So you knew what was going on?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:
Did your older brother write home to your mother at the time? Do you remember?

VH:
Well yeah, I'm sure he did, but I don't remember.

MM:
Okay, so when did you – when you were inducted, where did you go to basic training?

VH:
In San Antonio.

MM:
In San Antonio, okay. And then, what did you do once you went through basic?

VH:
Well I got shipped overseas to Okinawa, and worked in the post office there.

MM:
Okay, worked in the post office there as a clerk? Or a clerk typist?

VH:
Clerk.

MM:
The Battle of the Island had already been taken, right?

VH:
Right.

MM:
What was it like? Did you get out into the countryside at all?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:

Did you see any of the places where the battles took place there at Okinawa?

VH:

No, I don't remember any of that.

MM:

Okay, okay. Do you remember – what was the attitude of the Japanese people since you were on one of their home islands?

VH:

Well they were friendly. I don't know. It's kind of like being over here.

JH:

They went through a typhoon.

MM:

Oh, really? What was that like? Going through a typhoon?

VH:

Well it was pretty windy. [Laughter]

MM:

That's a good answer, that's a good answer.

VH:

I remember, of course we lived in quonset huts, and that blew them to one end off, but that's – we made it.

MM:

You made it, yeah. Do you remember anything unique during the service there? Were you secretary for like a bomber group or something like that?

VH:

No, no. I worked in the post office.

MM:

In the post office, okay.

JH:

That was my husband.

MM:

Yeah, that's right. I remember. Now, when did you muster out? Was it like in '46 or '47?

VH:

No, it was in '49.

MM:

'49? Okay, so you were actually in Occupied Japan, weren't you? You were serving in Occupied Japan?

VH:

No, on Okinawa.

MM:

Yeah, right, okay.

VH:

Which is –

MM:

Part of their island structure. Did you – at that time, you had just a high school degree – did you think all along that you would go to college when you got out of the service?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

And what did you want to do? What made you decide that you wanted to become a biologist?

VH:

Well of course, I was a big hunter, and always interested in wild life. That's the main reason.

MM:

All right and then you came back and you're living there, and did you come back and live with your parents?

VH:

No, I don't remember what I did when I came back.

JH:

Didn't you go to junior college?

VH:

I think, yeah. I think I went straight into college.

MM:

There at Tarleton Junior College?

VH:

No, U Valley.

MM:

U Valley, okay. All right and then you stayed there for what, a year or two years in U Valley at the junior college?

VH:

I think one year.

MM:

One year? Okay and then you transferred to A&M?

VH:

Well no, I went to work. I worked a year or so, then I went to A&M.

MM:

Okay, and did you work on pipeline?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay, tell me about that a little bit. What was that job like?

VH:

Well of course, then at junior college there at U Valley, and I had a friend working on a pipeline

up and Ohio, and I was going to get married so I needed some money. So I went up there and worked with the company he was working with.

MM:

Now, was this a high school friend or was this an old Air Corps friend?

VH:

I don't know.

JH:

High school.

VH:

High school. Who was it?

JH:

Well, I don't remember, but you told me.

VH:

Yeah, I used to know.

JH:

Can I interject?

MM:

Yes, you may.

JH:

He told me that his idea of working, I mean of volunteering, was so he could take advantage of the education that he knew he would be eligible for. That was his driving inspiration for everything he did was to be able to go to college. He knew his parents could not afford to send him.

MM:

Send him to college.

JH:

Yes.

MM:

That all makes sense. So you went up and worked on that pipeline. Was this an oil pipeline?

VH:

Um-hm.

MM:

What was that like working up in Ohio on this pipeline?

JH:

Tell about the thumb.

VH:

Huh?

JH:

Tell about your thumb.

VH:

Oh well, yeah. I broke my thumb. But well, I was just a common laborer, and we had a mixture of stuff we had to heat in a big old pot to coat the pipe with, and I was, of course, so low on the totem pole, so I got to carry all the stuff to warm up to pour on there to start with. After a while, I got to where whoever was running that coating machine – I don't know what happened to him – but anyhow, they put me on that machine and I stayed on that machine until I quit to come back and go to college.

MM:

And so you worked there for about a year, right?

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

And all along were you thinking about, you really want to get that money to go to college?

JH:

Oh yeah.

MM:

Okay and did you have a sweetheart at that time? You were saying you were thinking about getting married.

VH:

Well yeah. Let's see, when I got out of service, I went to junior college at U Valley and that's where I met the girl I married.

MM:

Who was that?

VH:

Anne Garnett.

MM:

Okay, Anne Garnett. Was she from U Valley?

VH:

Yeah, I think so.

MM:

Okay and did you ultimately have children with Anne Garnett?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay. How many children did you have?

VH:

I had three.

MM:

Okay and who are they? What are their names?

VH:

Debbie, well Deborah. And Dorothy. And Sarah.

MM:

I have one of those last ones, myself.

VH:
Oh?

MM:
I have a Sarah myself.

VH:
Is that right?

MM:
Yes, sir. I do. Now, so when you came back from working on the pipeline, when did you marry Anne? Was it before you went to school at A&M or while you were in A&M?

VH:
No, it was before. I guess that was in '49, wasn't it?

JH:
I don't know the year.

VH:
Huh?

JH:
I don't know the year for sure.

MM:
It's all right. Years aren't necessary, really.

JH:
Where did you marry Anne?

VH:
Where?

JH:
Yeah, where was it? Was it in Ohio?

VH:
It was either Ohio or Michigan.

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MM:

Okay, so she came up there for y'all to get married, and then lived with you, I guess, while you were finishing working?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

All right and then y'all moved back to Texas, and did you immediately go to school at A&M?

VH:

No. I went to – well – my first schooling was at U Valley Junior College.

MM:

Yes, sir.

VH:

And then I went from there to A&M.

MM:

And so you knew that you wanted to major in biology when you went to A&M? You have made up your mind about that?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Did you think that you would go into the Soil Conservation Service at that time or were you just interested in some kind of a wildlife job when you got out?

VH:

Well, I thought I'd go to work for the state. Parks and Wildlife.

MM:

Okay, Parks and Wildlife.

VH:

But they didn't have any openings.

MM:

I see, I see.

VH:

And then the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service. I had my application in with them and interviewed, and they would call me, but they never did. So then – and I had interviewed with the Soil Conservation Service.

MM:

That was just one of the entities that you interviewed with?

VH:

Right.

MM:

And then how did you get the job? How did they tell you, you had the job?

VH:

Well I think they called me if I remember right.

MM:

Okay and where did you start out with the Soil Conservation Service? And tell us about that.

VH:

In Raymondville.

MM:

Raymondville, Texas. What was your first job in Raymondville?

VH:

Well it was a [laughs] kind of a catch all.

JH:

A trainee.

VH:

Yeah, a training position that was a little bit of everything they had.

MM:

And this was in a district office?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:
Now, let's go back to college just a little bit. What was your experience like going to college there at A&M in the post-war period?

VH:
Well I wasn't in the Corps or anything, but I don't know. I lived in a dorm.

JH:
Veterans apartments.

MM:
[Phone rings 00:18:02] Was everybody real serious about their studies at the time? All the veterans, returning veterans, on the G.I. Bill?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:
It wasn't like it is today where people party all the time? Y'all were —

VH:
That's right. In all honestly, I was married and lived an apartment then and of course, the unmarried ones, I don't know.

MM:
They may have partied, but you didn't know it. I got you. Now, were any of your children born while you were in college?

VH:
No.

MM:
Okay, they came later.

VH:
Later.

MM:

All right. At Raymondville, in this catch-all training position, what kind of work did you do on a daily basis? Just kind of give me an idea of what you did every day.

VH:

Well at that time, land leveling. Cultivated land. That was the big thing, and I spent most of my time on that estimate, getting field notes for leveling, land leveling. That was the main – wasn't supposed to be, but that was the main thing we did. Let's see. From there I went to Plainview after about a year in that Raymondville.

MM:

What was your position there in Plainview?

VH:

Well I was just what you call a soil conservationist. Again, a catch all the name for doing anything that came along.

MM:

Do you remember approximately how long you were at Plainview?

VH:

I think about a year and a half.

MM:

What did you do there in Plainview?

VH:

Well we did some land leveling. We – crop rotations – we'd work with the owner on that.

MM:

Was there anything distinctive about working there in Plainview as distinguished from say, the soils and the farming conditions in Raymondville?

VH:

Yeah, it's a quite a bit of difference. Well at Raymondville, most of that was irrigated. At Plainview, about half of that was irrigated. It was well water.

MM:

Do you remember what was the distribution mechanism there in Plainview? Was it pivots? Was it a canvas irrigation systems or pipes?

VH:

No, it was a sprinkler.

MM:

Center pivot type sprinkler system?

VH:

Yeah.

JH:

Throwing that water in the air.

VH:

Huh?

JH:

Throwing that water in the air.

MM:

The precious water in the air.

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

Did you – I'm going to ask you some names – you may not remember these people, but they're good friends of ours up at Plainview because we're close to them. Did you ever remember hearing of a man named Sam Curry? Mr. Curry? He owned a lot of land up in that area, and he took care of a lot of the absentee landlord's property, the Slaughter family and people like that.

VH:

No.

MM:

Or a J.B. Roberts?

VH:

No, I don't really remember the names of any of them.

JH:

He remembers Jimmy Dean.

MM:

Jimmy Dean? Well Jimmy Dean went to school with J.B. Roberts.

JH:

Can you tell him the time that Jimmy Dean came to visit at Plano and he stepped out of the limousine and asked, where is my dressing room?

VH:

Yeah, that was a field trip, had a bunch of farmers, you know, out on the field looking. I forget what I was demonstrating, but anyhow, he came up in a limousine and wanted to know where his dressing room was out there in the middle of a cotton field. [Laughter]

MM:

So he was a character back then even, right?

VH:

Yeah, well no, he was serious.

JH:

And Vernon lived next door to his brother.

MM:

Okay. I've heard all of his Jimmy Dean stories, but you always get a different taste of one here and there. So you were there for about a year and a half in Plainview; was cotton being farmed at that time?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

That was the primary crop?

VH:

Right.

MM:

And this would have been in the early to mid-1950's, correct?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:
And then where did you go from there? Or well let's do this, there in Plainview, you did land leveling and some crop rotation demonstrations and things of this nature. Tell me about working with local, you know, county – I just went blank.

JH:
County agent.

MM:
County agents. How was it to work with these folks? Did you have support or not?

VH:
Yeah. I know a lot of places that didn't, but we got along great.

MM:
What about local politicians, county commissioners, and people like that? Did y'all work pretty closely with these kind of folks?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:
Okay and did you have support from the farming and ranching community in these places?

VH:
Oh yeah.

MM:
For instance, I mean, did they seek y'all out or did you have to go and give demonstrations and then convince them to avail themselves of your expertise?

VH:
Both, yeah.

MM:
So after Plainview, where did you go?

VH:
Fort Stockton.

MM:
You were all over. Now, tell me about what you did there at Fort Stockton.

VH:
Well they had quite a bit of irrigated land there.

MM:
Okay and you're still working as a soil conservationist at that time?

VH:
Um-hm.

MM:
Okay and –

VH:
And was in charge of the office there at Fort Stockton.

MM:
Oh, you were?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:
Do you remember what the position title was?

VH:
No, I don't.

MM:
Okay, but you were the conservationist there in Fort Stockton?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:

Did you have a – I take it – a fairly small staff, right?

VH:

Yeah, I think it's a staff of four, I believe.

MM:

Okay, and what was the primary crop down there in Fort Stockton at the time?

VH:

Cotton.

MM:

Cotton, okay. You remember anybody there by the name of James or Jim Merriweather.

VH:

No.

MM:

Okay, always checking various people I know in these little communities. You just never know when somebody, it turned out they were your best friend. And how long, Vernon, were you there in Fort Stockton?

JH:

That's where Sarah was born.

VH:

Yeah, I guess, I want to say two years, but I'm not sure that's right.

MM:

Well it seems like everybody kind of served two-year stances here and there, all over. Did you enjoy working at these three places to begin with?

VH:

Oh, yeah.

MM:

What was your – even though you weren't doing biology, did you have a sense of purpose and if so, what was that sense of purpose?

VH:

Well in Plainview, it was land leveling for irrigation, you know. And at Fort Stockton, it had both irrigated and non-irrigated.

MM:

Okay and Raymondville, the same thing pretty much?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

And you didn't mind doing soil conservation work even though you were trained as a biologist?

VH:

Right.

MM:

You felt like you had a good job and a good career in front of you.

VH:

Yeah and I knew it was just a matter of time before the biology vacancy came up. That's why I didn't do it.

MM:

So you were looking for that kind of a job all along?

VH:

Oh yeah.

MM:

Whenever those positions would come open?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

What was it like working for the service at that time? A lot of people said it was kind of like working – like a family atmosphere.

VH:

Well yeah, it was more or less that. I had an engineer there supervising my work.

MM:

Now, did you feel like you were part of something larger? I mean, did you have a lot of direction at that time from – did your offices have direction from the federal government or was it all mainly local and the various conservationists would tell you what to do every day?

VH:

Well, it was mainly local, and what I mean by local, they worked for the federal government too, but they would then have an area that they covered, and our area office out there was – where was it? Well, I don't know.

MM:

It'll come to you, it'll come to you. Now, after you left Fort Stockton, where did you go?

VH:

Into Temple.

MM:

Into Temple, okay. And each time that you moved, did you apply for those positions or were you asked to apply for those positions?

VH:

Well of course, somehow I knew when they came open, and they knew I was a biologist, and they would let me know. [They] wanted to know if I was interested in taking the job.

MM:

When you came to Temple, what was your position?

VH:

Biologist.

MM:

As just an area biologist or as the state biologist.

JH:

State.

VH:

I think it was state.

MM:

So you literally went from being the soil conservationist there in Fort Stockton to becoming the state biologist. That was a pretty good step up, wasn't it?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Were there other people applying for that job at the time?

VH:

Oh yeah.

MM:

I mean, you must have impressed somebody to get that position.

VH:

I guess I did. [Laughter]

MM:

Now, so about what time period was that, Vernon? Do you remember? Would that have been in the sixties? Early sixties? Mid-sixties?

VH:

Yeah, I don't remember exactly what year it was.

JH:

I think it was '61 or '62.

VH:

Yeah, as early as '60.

MM:

Where were your other kids born along the way? Just for sport. Deborah and Dorothy.

VH:

Well let's see, I think they were born in Raymondville.

JH:
Yeah

MM:
Okay, okay. So those two were born in Raymondville, and Sarah was born in Fort Stockton, right?

VH:
Right.

MM:
So you come to Temple, which is the state headquarters, and who did you go to work for? Who was the state conservationist at that time?

JH:
Red Smith. Is that right?

VH:
Yeah, Red Smith.

MM:
And what was he like? Do you recall?

JH:
[Laughter]

VH:
Well he was a –

JH:
Character.

VH:
He was a strict disciplinarian. I'll put it that way.

MM:
Had he been in the service a long time?

VH:
Oh yeah, yeah.

MM:

So he had been in probably when you were a boy growing up?

VH:

I'm sure he was.

MM:

Okay and when you say strict disciplinarian, give me an example there.

VH:

Well he had rules he followed that he expected everybody else to follow.

MM:

Okay. Did you feel like you had any latitude to do what you wanted as biologists?

VH:

Yeah, pretty well.

MM:

Aside from being a stickler, was he good enough to get along with?

VH:

Oh yeah.

MM:

And how long did you work with him?

VH:

Oh, he retired I guess two or three years after I came in.

MM:

And then who came along after him?

VH:

Darn, I don't remember. Can't recall.

JH:

Was Red Smith ever in charge of the office?

VH:

Oh yeah, it was after him.

JH:

It was after him. Another Red.

MM:

Another Red?

JH:

I'm not sure he was the man in charge, but I've heard stories about him. And when you brought the [Inaudible 0:33:02] you remind me, and I'll tell you a story about their wives.

MM:

Those are the stories we want to get on recording. [Laughter]

JH:

The reunion down at San Marcos after Vernon and I married, Dorothy Marks was my good friend, and of course, she was widowed. Grenada Smith was Red Smith's widow, and Minnie Morris was Red Morris' widow, and I went one year with just Vernon and people were very cordial and very nice to me, and the next year we – they called it – we had a van and they all began to say that Vernon had a widow's van. But those women had not been to that convention in several years and of course they were delighted, and people were delighted to see them and all. When they had passed away, they still would sort of tease her a little about his widow's van. Great ladies.

MM:

That's great, so it sounds like y'all had a good time all the time.

JH:

Oh, we did.

VH:

Oh, yeah.

MM:

Now, so did you serve out the rest of your career right here in Temple?

JH:

No.

MM:

As state biologist?

VH:

No, I went to the northeast where they had regions, you know?

MM:

Yes, sir.

VH:

And I was regional biologist for the – I don't know how many states there, but about eight I guess.

JH:

He was headquartered in Pennsylvania. Was it Darby? Or you lived in Darby?

VH:

Upper Darby, yes.

JH:

How many years did you serve as a regional biologist?

VH:

Oh, I don't know. Until I retired.

JH:

No, you finally moved to Washington in the national office.

MM:

Okay, so you served as regional biologist over approximately eight states up in the northeast there around Pennsylvania, I take it. What was working, doing that, like? Were you travelling all the time?

VH:

Quite a bit, but only half the time.

MM:

What would have been your daily regimen, your daily duties as a regional biologist?

VH:

Well, of course I worked with the state office in those states, and whenever they had surveying or looking at the deer management or what have you. Deer and quail management.

MM:

Were those the two big ones right there?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay. I take it – that was quite a promotion. Did you seek that promotion or did somebody ask you to become the regional biologist? Do you recall?

VH:

Well, I was out at Fort Stockton, and of course, I knew the biologist we had, and when he retired, I knew that –

MM:

So you applied for the job?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay. Now, then about how many years did you stay in that position?

VH:

Probably two or three years. I don't remember exactly.

MM:

All right and then what about – then how did you get a position in Washington, and what was that position? Because again, I assume that was quite a promotion.

VH:

Yeah, I went from here to Pennsylvania.

MM:

Yes, sir.

VH:

And then when our biologist in Washington retired, I replaced him.

MM:

So you were the national biologist?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay. Over the whole country?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

That's impressive. So what – as the national biologist, did you have to travel all over the country at that time?

VH:

Well at least to our regional offices, and then I would work with a regional biologist in whatever he had that I needed to look at.

MM:

Yes, sir. All right and this is during the period of the 1960's, I assume, when there are significant changes happening in the birth of the conservation, and the environmental movement, and legislation about wilderness and wildlife and things like that.

VH:

Yeah, it was in the seventies.

JH:

In the seventies.

MM:

In the seventies? Okay. Did that have any impact on your office?

VH:

Well, I don't know.

MM:

Or were y'all aware of those or were you already doing these kinds of things?

VH:

We were already doing it, yeah. I don't remember. It seemed like we hired one or two other biologists then.

MM:

Okay. What would you say your – aside from working with regional offices as national biologist – and was that the title, national biologist?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

As national biologist, did you get to set policy relating to wildlife?

VH:

Well, yes and no. I would, but of course, having to clear it with my supervisor in all that.

MM:

And who was your supervisor at that time? I mean, what position was your supervisor? The head of Federal Soil Conservation Service?

VH:

No, it was the one under him, and I forget what his title was.

MM:

Like an assistant director?

VH:

Yeah, I guess that would be it.

MM:

I mean, a lot of these things I can just look up. But what was it like working in Washington D.C.? Did you feel like you were as involved as you had been in the past? Did you enjoy working at the federal, the regional, or the local level the best? What was most pleasing to you? Or challenging?

VH:

I guess my time there in Washington was the best.

MM:

Okay and why would you say that?

VH:

Well, I got a chance to go to the various states, and see what they were doing and advise them.

MM:

And how did they take it? Somebody from Washington come into their areas or their locals, and telling them what to do.

VH:

Well, you had to be careful with it. [Laughter]

MM:

Explain that. Tell me a little bit about that.

VH:

Well, they didn't want an outsider coming in.

MM:

So you had to learn diplomacy?

VH:

You had to be diplomatic about it.

MM:

Did you feel like you were successful doing it?

VH:

Yeah, rather than come in and, "You got to this," and all that, but yeah, I had a good working relationship with the state.

MM:

Which part of the country seemed to have the strongest conservation organization in terms of the areas at that time, relating to wildlife?

VH:

Oh, I think the Midwest, probably.

MM:

Midwest. Why do you think that was? Just because it was predominately farm country?

VH:

Yeah and where the wildlife hadn't attacked, they were more interested in maintaining it, and improving it.

MM:

For hunting purposes and things like that?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay, so they were cognizant of conservation and the importance of that.

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

What about the South?

VH:

Well, yeah. That was an ongoing program with them too.

MM:

Okay and what about – if you had to put a finger on it, what was the most – the area that needed the most work or was most resistant?

VH:

Probably the Midwest, because it had so much farmland.

MM:

Did you already have relationships with many of these area biologists?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay, so you already knew these men when you were working with them.

VH:

Yeah. Right.

MM:

So they respected you, I assume, and were much more amenable to taking direction from somebody they knew.

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Did you have that sense of community or family that many of the people said that they had working for the conservation service? Did you feel that at the national level the way you had at the local level?

VH:

Pretty well, yeah.

MM:

Okay, so it permeated from the top down.

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

How many years did you stay national biologist?

VH:

Well, I don't know. I don't remember when I went in there.

JH:

I know you retired at eighty-four.

MM:

Okay, so were you state biologist right up to when you retired? I mean, national biologist right up until you retired?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:
Okay, so probably went in in the 1970's, early 1970's?

VH:
Yeah, I think so.

MM:
And then you retired in 1984?

JH:
Um-hm.

VH:
That would make me have been in there, what? How many years?

MM:
Probably ten, maybe a little bit more than that.

VH:
No, I don't think it's any more than that.

JH:
I'm trying to remember how old Sarah was when you – she was in junior high when you lived here, wasn't she? Or going into high school?

VH:
I don't know.

MM:
Where in this period – did you detect any changes in the attitude of the service at the national level when you were – up until you retired?

VH:
No, I don't think too much. In working with them, they became more aware of the wildlife program, the need for it, and what have you. They were willing to do more.

MM:

Okay. Did you ever have to testify before congress or anything like that in your position at that time?

VH:

No.

MM:

A lot of people have said that some time period – and we've been trying to kind of nail it down – there in the eighties, about the time that your generation starts to retire, that there is a shift, and that there's a different breed of people coming into the service. I won't say they were less committed, but that they were different. They weren't as eager to work with the people on the land and all of that. Did you detect any of that at the time as you moved towards retirement?

VH:

No, not really.

MM:

Okay. I hear it more from people at the local and state level, so the people that we've talked about. It seemed like there was a different generation of people that were coming in. Now, when you decided to retire from this highest post, for a biologist in the country, why did you determine to come back here to Temple, Texas?

VH:

Well, it's kind of home.

JH:

He bought – do you want me to tell you?

MM:

Sure.

JH:

He lost Anne to cancer.

MM:

When was this?

JH:

I'm not really sure because I didn't know them then.

MM:

While in –

JH:

No, while they were here.

MM:

Okay, this was after the return here.

JH:

Yes – no, no. In the sixties, she died of cancer, and then he remarried, and then after they retired and came back here, she died of ALS. She was a friend of mine.

MM:

And who was the second wife?

JH:

Dorothy – it's complicated – whom the middle daughter is named for. He married sisters.

MM:

I see. Okay, very good.

JH:

And so he and Dorothy had bought this piece of property.

MM:

Okay and this is Dorothy Garnett, the younger sister of Anne?

JH:

No.

MM:

Older sister of Anne?

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay, all right. And Dorothy was the mother of Dorothy?

JH:

No, she's the aunt.

MM:

I see, she's the aunt.

JH:

Anne was the mother of his three children and she passed away, then he married Anne's sister, Dorothy. They had no children, of course.

MM:

And this was while he's in Pennsylvania, and at the federal level, or after they came back here?

VH:

After I moved back, yeah.

JH:

Anne died in the sixties. He and Dorothy married in the seventies, early seventies, and she moved with him to the northeast and then they retired and moved back. They had purchased this site while they lived in Temple and decided to move back here and they built this home.

MM:

Okay, very good. And then she passed of ALS when?

JH:

'94.

MM:

Okay, 1994. So you came back here because this was home. Texas was home, and Temple was a pretty place to be, right? And you had purchased this land to retire on?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Had you started building this wonderful place before she died?

VH:

No.

JH:

Yes.

VH:

I had?

JH:

They completed it. You and Dorothy completed it, and moved into in 1985.

VH:

Oh, Dorothy. Dorothy, yeah.

MM:

In what year was that?

JH:

'85.

MM:

So it was right after retirement then.

JH:

Yes, they lived across the road on this beautiful ranch over here, and he has many houses, rentals, and they rented one of those and we can see it from –

MM:

You mean the one that's right across the highway over here?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Who is that, by the way?

JH:

Dixon is his last name.

MM:

Okay, Dixon.

JH:

Dixon Ranches.

MM:

When you retired, do you remember, Vernon, when they first started having these CSC [**Civil Service Comission**] reunions in New Braunfels? Do you remember how that came about?

VH:

No, I don't.

JH:

He was one of the original –

MM:

Founders?

JH:

Well, I'm not sure that he was a founder, but an advocate.

MM:

Advocate for it?

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

Now, I've heard there were a lot of CSC people that would have coffee on a routine basis?

VH:

Yeah.

JH:

He and George Marks organized that.

MM:

Okay, so you and George Marks organized it. Did you two work together in the Texas office at any time?

VH:

George? No, I don't think so.

JH:

I think George was in the district office.

MM:

District office, okay.

JH:

If – all of mine is –

MM:

Hearsay.

JH:

Hearsay, yeah.

MM:

Then, so you, along with George, were involved in the coffees, and y'all were some of the people that thought up the idea of having retirement reunions. Do you remember why y'all picked New Braunfels?

VH:

No, I don't.

JH:

Charlie Thomas could tell you that. Glenn Black, I know could. Did you ever locate Glenn?

MM:

No, we haven't yet I don't think.

JH:

I think he might be at a nursing home.

MM:

I'm going to ask Glenn Black.

JH:

And I'll tell you someone else who can tell you all about that is Jack Elrod.

MM:

Okay, Jack Elrod. Is he still living?

JH:

Yes, he's younger than these guys.

MM:

Where does he live? Does he live here in this area?

JH:

In Temple.

MM:

Okay, so we need to get ahold of him.

VH:

Yeah, he can fill you in on a lot of that.

MM:

A lot of that kind of stuff? Okay.

VH:

Yeah.

JH:

And O. Gene Barkmeyer [?][00:52:15]. Has anyone mentioned that to you?

MM:

O. Gene?

JH:

Or Gene, most people call him, but his name's O. Gene.

MM:

Gene –

JH:

Barkmeyer.

MM:

Barkmeyer. We have his name here, but we haven't interviewed him yet. He's – evidently, according to Dorothy – a knowledgeable engineer here.

JH:

Yes, and young, and sharp, and good-looking, with a lovely wife.

MM:

Okay, so he is definitely one we need to get ahold of.

JH:

But I don't know that he had any – I think he and Jack were still working when the guys organized the reunion, and there again, I know these guys and all but – I knew all of these that I'm talking about now before Vernon and I married. Now, some of them I didn't, of course. I knew several of these people.

MM:

Vernon, give me your perspective as being a soil conservationist at local district levels, and serving in a number places here in Texas, and ultimately becoming a state biologist, and then ultimately going on to become area biologist over eight states, at least eight states, and then national biologist. To the best of your recollection, what did you feel like your mission was while in service and what did you think was the most rewarding part of your career?

VH:

Well, I think the reason they had that position set up was to work with the local people, I mean, the local service people, and getting them to consider the wildlife end of it when they work with the local people and that was, of course, my main objective, to even get them to recognize that there was some potential to improve the wildlife habitat. That was, of course, my main goal was to work with, and try to educate the local people, I mean, the local service people. I had a good working relationship with, I guess all of them. Whereas before, I came on, they just kind of skip over it, but they were receptive to my work. And they, I guess, we set up some training for the main ones around over the state and got them involved more with it. I guess that 's –

MM:

So actually, you're one of the early leaders in bringing recognition of the importance of wildlife management to not only the state of Texas' Soil Conservation Service, but also at the broader regional, and then ultimately national area. You were probably the leading person that did that, right?

VH:

Right, yeah.

MM:

Was there a national biologist before you?

VH:

Sort of, yeah. He had more than just the wildlife end and supposedly, he looked after it, but when I was up there, that one position that had the responsibility for it.

MM:

Aside from deer and quail, were there any other types of wildlife that concerned y'all, particularly as you moved forward towards the eighties?

VH:

Well, not a whole lot. Most of the landowners, if they had songbirds or what have you, that was fine. If they didn't, that was okay too. But every once in a while, there'd be a landowner, usually a lady that was real interested in non-game.

MM:

Um-hm. Such as?

VH:

Well, what they can do to increase the food, and what have you, you know?

MM:

Okay, very good. Were you cognizant, at the national level, of changes that were going on in society at that time relating to wildlife?

VH:

Well, we tried to be at all times, but it's still – a lot of the landowners that had different kinds of wildlife, that was fine, if they didn't, that's okay too.

MM:

You also see the institution of the environmental protection agency starting in the 1970's. Did that impact any policy making that y'all did at the federal level on wildlife?

VH:

I don't think so.

MM:

Okay, so there was no inner agency friction there?

VH:

No, that I knew of, but we worked together pretty closely.

MM:

You did?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay, what were some of their concerns that may have been different than what the SCS's concerns were? Do you recall?

VH:

No, I think they were both on the broad spectrum of wildlife protection and management.

MM:

Did you, as chief biologist for the SCS, did you have an opportunity to work with people, say, in the National Park Service relating to wildlife or especially, in the National Forest Service?

VH:

Very little.

MM:

They kept a pretty closed shop, I suspect.

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Well, all of that's very interesting. Did you ever keep calendars or diaries or a journal, or anything like that? Or field notes or journals?

VH:

Oh, yeah. We had a regular little notebook deal.

MM:

What happened to those?

VH:

Well, when I filled one out, I just turned it in.

MM:

You turned it in, so it's probably in a state office or a regional office or something like or at the federal level or anything like that.

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

When you were the national biologist, did you keep any records like that? Did you keep daily journals or anything?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Did they stay with the service?

VH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay, very good. When you retired, who replaced you as the national biologist? Do you remember?

VH:

No, I don't. It might have been James Henson.

MM:

James Henson? And where was he from?

VH:

Oh, well from Texas.

MM:

I'm curious why these people, or these leaders within the service, had strong roots in Texas. Is there any reason for that that you can put your finger on?

JH:

I can.

MM:

Okay, go ahead, Juanita.

JH:

I think because the men from Texas were more aware of agriculture area, more, you know, grew up in it. And I may be wrong, but they were more rural.

MM:

As opposed to say, the Midwest.

JH:

Yes, that's ranch country, and is certainly agricultural to a sense, but not like it is in this area.

MM:

Vernon, let me ask you this question, when you were working out in places like Fort Stockton and even out in Plainview, did you work with ranchers or was it predominantly farmers?

VH:

Well, Fort Stockton is mainly ranchers and Plainview is farmers.

MM:

The ranchers in Fort Stockton, what were their concerns? What was it that they would come to the soil conservation service to inquire about or seek guidance relating to?

VH:

Of course, they were the ones that were leasing out – what could they do to improve the habitat for more wildlife, more deer, more quail/

MM:

More quail. Okay and what did y'all tell them? How were you able to help them?

VH:

Well, of course, we'd go out and look the place over and see how much covered plants they had and food plants and what have you.

MM:

And why did that matter?

VH:

Well, if you had a discrepancy, then try to increase and improve.

MM:

And what type of cover plants and food plants did you encourage them to cultivate?

VH:

Well, on the quail, of course, it would be the low-growing bushy type. In fact, the deer, the same way to a certain extent, and of course, on the quail management, the primary food for the quail is native plants.

MM:

Such as? If you remember.

VH:

Well, weeds. And of course, to increase those, it disturbs the soil and that's the first thing that comes up, weeds.

JH:

When you don't know the name of a weed, what scientific language did you use? [laughs]

VH:

I forget. [laughs]

JH:

Yerba verde. Yerba verde [?][01:04:28] or something like that.

VH:

Yerba verde [01:04:32].

MM:

Say that again.

VH:

Yerba.

MM:

Why that?

VH:

Yerba is weeds and verde is green. Green weeds.

MM:

Green weeds, okay. Yerba verde. That's good to know.

JH:

Back in his prime, he was such a fun, loving personality.

MM:

Well, he seems like that now. He gets that grin on his face, you know he's thinking something smart to say, but he's resisted so far. [Laughter] I bet you were something to work with. Now, let me ask you one final thing, going back to your Hico days, did you ever know my good friend, Cal Seacrest, the baseball player from Hico?

VH:

No.

MM:

And his people – he had a farm down there in Hico – Cal Seacrest. He would have been about your age, as a matter of fact. He just passed away here recently, but he went on to play baseball for the Yankees, and played with Mickey Mantle and all those great players. He was one of our dear friends out there. He coached at Texas Tech and we have the national college baseball hall of fame there and so he was always there. This is the first year he wasn't there with us, and always could tell good stories, but he loved talking about growing up in Hico. That was the pleasure ground for him.

VH:

Well, I never lived there, but of course, my grandfather did. Dad was raised there, and all that.

JH:

Tell him about leaving Hico.

VH:

How I was leaving?

JH:

How did you leave? Did you ride the train?

VH:

No, we moved to South Texas in a wagon.

MM:

Oh, really? Okay, so you moved from the Hico area down to South Texas there in Three Rivers by wagon. What kind of a wagon was it?

VH:

Just a regular old iron-wheeled wagon.

MM:

Okay and pulled by mules?

VH:

Yeah, mules or horses.

JH:

It was approximately two.

MM:

How long did that trip take?

VH:

I don't know.

MM:

Well, what was it like?

VH:

Seemed like forever.

MM:

Yeah, I bet you it must have, but what was it like going through open country like that? Most people don't have that experience.

VH:

No, I'd say it's different, but I can remember at night, you could hear the cars coming way down there, you know? [Imitates car noises] Faded out, but yeah, we'd camp on the side of the road at night.

MM:

Camped on the side of the road?

VH:
Yeah.

MM:
Okay. And your mom made – cooked and everything like that on the side of the road?

VH:
Yeah.

JH:
His mom told me that his grandmother took a new granite dishpan, and filled it full of sandwiches and I don't know what else, I don't know that she told me, but food, and she said, "I don't think we would have made it without that."

MM:
Did that keep it cool? That granite?

JH:
Well, no. Back then, you used things that didn't have to be cooled or who had coolness.

MM:
But was it the granite that kept it cool or preserved it better?

JH:
I don't know, well see, do you know what I'm talking about?

MM:
I'm not sure.

JH:
Well, that was what all – I almost said poor folks – all of us, the kind of cooking utensils we had. I don't know what it was, but it certainly wasn't – of course, cast iron. We had a lot of cast iron, but she had two small children. Vernon was two and his brother was three and a half when they made that trip.

MM:
Did they not have a car? Is that why they went by wagon?

JH:
Well, not many people had a car.

MM:

At that time. And the roads weren't good at that time, either. You must have gone a long roadways, I guess. I assume dirt and some of them not dirt, because there wasn't a whole lot – the country is starting to be fenced off, so it wasn't like you were going across an open ranch, so you went on the roadways. Why did they decide to move to Three Rivers from Hico?

VH:

That's a good question.

MM:

Must have been opportunity or land or something.

VH:

Well, they had some friends that moved down there and I guess that persuaded them to move there. I don't know.

JH:

Your mother's sister and her family had, a year or two before, had moved down there. Leota. They encouraged – and their parents – and they encouraged Vernon –

MM:

So Vernon's grandparents had already moved down there?

JH:

No, his mother's grandparents. I mean, his mother's parents.

MM:

Mother's parents had already moved down there.

JH:

Yes, and a sister and her husband.

MM:

So that's probably why. They were the lead people that went out there.

JH:

And then Simmons, where they first moved to, was Simmons City, and this man from the East, somewhere had bought this. I have been to Simmons City, and it is kind of wilderness still, but he was going to develop this town, and sold a lot of people the idea of moving there, and I think he gave them a lot, this sort of thing. Of course, this is just dead ends of the information that I

picked up from his mother. His mother died when she was ninety-seven and sharp as a tack up until about two years before she passed away.

MM:

What did she pass away from?

JH:

No, she didn't. She lived to be a hundred and four. At ninety-seven, she broke her hip and she was living alone at ninety-seven when she –

MM:

Where? Here?

JH:

No, in Three Rivers.

MM:

In Three Rivers?

JH:

In Three Rivers, yeah.

MM:

A hundred and four. I thought my mother-in-law, who just passed this year, living to a hundred and a half had crossed quite a milestone, but a hundred and four, that's pretty impressive.

Vernon, you've got a long way to go.

VH:

I hope so.

JH:

After the broken hip, she had to accept a nursing home. She had to move to a nursing home, and long towards the end, we went to see her, and she was waiting to be pushed out the dining room so Vernon decided to go get her and push her to her room, and she had lost most of her vision and Vernon says, "Hi, mom. Are you ready to go to your room?" and she said, "Who are you?" He said, "I'm Vernon. She said, "Vernon who?" Because she couldn't see anything. And he said, "Vernon Hicks," and she said, "Lean down here so I can see you." I mean, she was – so she accepted him finally and he pushed her to the room.

MM:

Do you know if anybody ever interviewed her?

JH:

Yes, on her hundredth birthday, a person from the city down there interviewed her.

MM:

Okay, so down there in Three Rivers, there must be, probably at the public library or something like that, an interview, or maybe somebody at the newspaper.

JH:

It was probably the newspaper, because there was an article in the newspaper about her.

MM:

There was?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Do y'all have a scrapbook with that kind of stuff in it?

VH:

No.

JH:

No, and the daughter-in-law that has all of that is in Three Rivers.

MM:

In Three Rivers, okay. All right, very good.

JH:

She was a remarkable woman. She painted no less than – did not finish high school. She could play the piano. I mean, a remarkable woman.

MM:

What year did she die, approximately?

JH:

Oh, gosh. Let's see.

VH:

Ten years ago?

JH:

Oh, it wasn't ten years ago, was it? It may have been ten years ago. She came and stayed with us. She was not feeling well at one point, and the other sons thought that she should come up here and go through Scott and White, so she came and stayed with us and she did have brothers, one or two brothers, that died of diabetes, so the doctor thought that's what it was. So he would tell me what to cook, and have her eat. Draw her blood early, and then cook these certain things, and bring her back for another blood draw. We went back and forth for a week doing all these kinds of things and Ala was – well, she was a different person. I don't know how to describe her, but anyway –

VH:

That's my mother.

JH:

Yeah, that's his mother. And the other daughter-in-laws, I got along with her just fine, and everything, and anyway, at the end of that, the last time we went to see the doctor, I was helping her in the front door and of course, that ramp was not out there, it was over that. And she looked up at me and she said, "Young lady, you're a keeper." My other daughter-in-law says, "You better write that down because you'll never hear that again." [Laughter]

MM:

I take it she was a strong-willed woman.

JH:

Oh, indeed, but she had to be.

MM:

Pioneer stock.

JH:

You bet. Her husband died, and she still had two younger boys at home.

VH:

Yeah, raised five boys.

MM:

By herself? After he passed, right?

JH:

Well yeah, but Vernon was married when he died. Her boys, she had Vernon and Dean, and then she waited five years and had one and then she waited five years and had two more.

MM:

Now, were these twins?

JH:

No.

MM:

Just had them back to back or close or something like that.

JH:

Like Dean and Vernon. There were two years between Dean and Vernon, but a really strong lady. A really fine, fine lady.

MM:

All right, well this is all interesting. Now, what I'm going to do. If it's all right with you, Vernon, I'm going to turn towards Juanita, here, and interview her for a little bit. Are you ready?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Okay, all right. And you can jump back and forth, for instance, talking about you know, Vernon's mom or anything like that if something comes to mind. Or Vernon, if something comes to your mind, jump in there and talk. Just say who it is talking, but since there's only three of us here, it's a lot easier than if there were several. Juanita, where were you born, and what were your parents' names?

JH:

I was born in Mitchell County, Texas. My father was Earl Brown and my mother was Lily Merket Brown. M-e-r-k-e-t. It's an unusual name.

MM:

Any particular township or just in Mitchell County?

JH:

Colorado City was the county city.

MM:

Tell me about – did you have any siblings?

JH:

Yes, I had a sister older than I, and a brother.

MM:

Okay and their names?

JH:

Earlene was the sister. Lee was the brother. I have a younger brother, seven years younger than I, who was named Ted.

MM:

And you lost him, right?

JH:

I've lost all of them.

MM:

Okay. Who were your grandparents and did they live there in Mitchell County?

JH:

No, my grandparents were Adam and Elizabeth Merket on my mother's side. John and Effie Brown on my father's side, and they lived in Eastland County. They had a ranch in Eastland County. My father, of course, farmed in Mitchell County.

MM:

And your mother's people, they lived in Mitchell County?

JH:

No, they lived in Scurry County, which was the adjoining county. My grandfather owned a cotton gin. He first owned in Nimrod, Eastland County, but he moved it to Scurry County. Where he was, was almost in Mitchell County, but still, it was not. It was in Scurry County.

MM:

Was there a little township there?

JH:

Well my uncle had a general goods store, and my grandfather and his sons operated the gin for many, many years before the gin became a co-op.

MM:

What was the name of that gin? Do you remember?

JH:

Yes, China Grove Gin.

MM:

Was it in the community of Chine Grove?

JH:

Oh, yes.

MM:

Okay, all right. Very good. Now, tell me about growing up there in Colorado City.

JH:

Well, I lived thirteen miles in the country from Colorado City and attended country school.

MM:

What was the school?

JH:

Valley Bu, until the seventh grade. And then the bus from Colorado City came to the community, and also a bus from Lorain was in the community, but my side of the community was serviced by the Colorado City school system so that was why I went to Colorado City to school.

MM:

Okay and tell me when you were born.

JH:

I was born in 1925.

MM:

Okay, your birth date?

JH:

December 30, 1925.

MM:

So you're a Christmas baby.

JH:

Yes, never had a birthday party until his family gave me one at age eighty-nine. Always had a birthday cake, but was dried up fruit cake left from Christmas.

MM:

You sound like my wife.

JH:

People didn't have birthday parties back during that time. They couldn't afford it.

MM:

Now, so what was it like? You grew up on a farm. Was it a farm and a ranch, or just a farm?

JH:

It was a farm. My father had several acres, probably eight hundred or a thousand acres that he grew, primarily cotton. Dryland, no irrigation. Later in life, he owned a ranch in Callahan County.

MM:

Where in Callahan County?

JH:

Near Bayard.

MM:

Okay, near Bayard. How did he transition from cotton to ranching? When did he decide he wanted to do something different there?

JH:

Well, he kept the – he didn't dispose of the cotton. He continued to do that ,and he just bought the ranch because he had the money, I suppose and decided. Of course, he grew up out of Cisco

in Eastland County on a ranch, so I mean he knew about ranching so that wasn't a new idea for him, but he and my mother went from Eastland County to Mitchell County in a wagon.

MM:

Okay, tell about that. What you – the stories you remember hearing.

JH:

He had a buggy horse that was a Morgan pony, a Morgan horse. He had a team of, I guess, probably mules because my father loved mules, that pulled the wagon that took them. They had two small children, a dog, and that pony trailing that wagon right down what is now I-20. When they got to Sweetwater, there was a Pace Packing Company there, and Mr. Pace saw that pony. He recognized that it was a Morgan horse and they were not plentiful, but my father had sworn he was not going to sell that horse, and so Mr. Pace saw that horse behind his wagon and followed them, and when they camped that night, he tried to buy that horse from my dad. My dad said, "That horse is not for sale." So he thought about it overnight and in the morning, he said to my mother, "You know, I'm almost out of cash. I should have sold that pony. You and the kids just stay here. I'm going to ride that pony back into town and I'm going to tell him I'll sell him that pony if he'll meet my price." So I suppose he did because he sold – the man did meet the price – because he sold that pony. My dad had purchased a farm for two dollars an acre, eighty acres, in the Valley Bu community, and had bought an oil field house that some oil field camp, where the company had left. Those houses were bolted together, and so he bought that house and had it put on a railroad car, and that house went to Colorado City and my grandfather and my uncles who were already out there and my daddy constructed that house on that eighty acres. And my mother has told me many times that by the time that they had the first crop, you know, ready to put in the first crop, they had no money. My grandfather was, I guess, German, he always said he was Black Dutch, but he spoke German. He gave all of his children, he had five children, and he gave each of those children five hundred dollars that year. My father even told me that he didn't know how he would have made it without Mr. Merket supplying money that year, but he said that was enough money that he could buy the equipment that he needed, and feed his family and gather the first crop.

MM:

Now, Mr. Merket, he's already living out there?

JH:

Yes, had moved his gin from Nimrod in Eastland County which was a small community and he had been out there several years and was ginner.

MM:

So that's what drew your parents out there, wasn't it? To be by your mother's folks?

JH:

Yes, well and cotton was a cash crop and a ranch, you know, wasn't always a cash crop, and my father was from a large family of boys, and it was time that some of them moved on out and did something different from being there on the family ranch.

MM:

So Mr. Merket, was he a pioneer out there in Mitchell County?

JH:

Well, I was born in '25, and so they moved out there in '23. Grandpa was already out there.

MM:

He was at least one of the early people out there in Mitchell County.

JH:

Right, but not Mitchell County, Scurry County.

MM:

Scurry County, that's right. Where did he come from before he got to Scurry County?

JH:

Do you know – he was reared in Pennsylvania. And came on a frater around to Galveston, and I said to Vernon the other day, "I don't know where my grandmother – how my grandmother –" I know they met each other in Galveston, but I'm at a loss to know exactly how he was able to acquire the funds for that gin, because he was born in America, but his father had come to America and left his wife back in Germany, and had earned enough money to send for her, for her to arrive before she gave birth to this child. Then my great grandfather was murdered before she arrived, but he had a good friend by the name of – and I don't know, well it was Merket – Neusbaum was the grandfather's name.

MM:

Neusbaum? How do you spell that?

JH:

N-e-u-s-b-a-u-m, I think. Mr. Merket had become friendly with Mr. Neusbaum and so he knew this woman was coming in and her husband was murdered and she would be all alone, so he met her ship and sort of took care of her and eventually they did get married and he adopted the child that she had which was my grandfather.

MM:

And his first name again was?

JH:

Adam.

MM:

Adam, and his birth father was Neusbaum.

JH:

And he had a brother. She had landed with a small child, and his name was Jake Neusbaum, and I never knew Uncle Jake very well, but he was older than grandpa. As a child, I don't remember, but grandpa and grandma built a little house near their house, and I used to take food, plates of food, out to Uncle Jake, who was not well, so I really didn't ever really know him.

MM:

Did he go by Neusbaum or Uncle Jake?

JH:

Yes, he went by Neusbaum.

MM:

Okay, but your father went by Merket?

JH:

My grandfather.

MM:

Your grandfather did, okay. Very good. It's very interesting. Do you know how your great grandfather was murdered?

JH:

No, they worked on the wharf and it was down there somehow.

MM:

Somehow on the wharf.

JH:

Why I didn't I record all of this, I don't know.

MM:

Well people didn't pay much attention to that back then. They do now, but they didn't then. That's interesting. Do you know what drew him from Pennsylvania to come around to Galveston to Texas?

JH:

No, I don't. Probably because times were really hard, and he probably was – my grandmother was fourteen when they married, I know that.

MM:

Okay and remind me what her name was, her maiden name?

JH:

Oh, gosh. Isn't that awful?

MM:

Her first name?

JH:

Elizabeth was her first name.

MM:

Elizabeth? Okay.

JH:

Well Elizabeth Katherine, and he called her Kate.

MM:

Elizabeth Katherine, all right. So they move out, and he ran this gin there in Scurry County on the border with Mitchell County, and then your folks move out there by wagon. I guess since I-20 kind of goes along the same route that the old T&P used to go around along the railroad. Do you remember them talking about going along the railroad line there?

JH:

No, I don't, but old U.S. 80 was the road before I-20 and the ranch that my father bought, bought it while it was U.S. 80. When I-20 came through, he sold the gravel off of that ranch that they used for paving I-20, and there was only surface water on that ranch and he sold that gravel with the understanding that they would create a big tank for his livestock. It's humongous.

MM:

I'll be darned. That's interesting. Now, and then he moves back to Scurry County to – I mean, to Eastland County there in Cisco with a ranch, right?

JH:

No, it's at Callahan County.

MM:

Callahan County, okay. Now, tell me how you knew my old friend, Bob Fee and Jim Baum.

JH:

Well, Bob Fee had the lumberyard, and my mother thought if Bob Fee said something was a good buy or something was of good quality, it was. Of course, after she'd lost my dad, he was there no longer and it was really comical, but everybody knew Bob Fee at the lumberyard.

MM:

Did you know his brother?

JH:

I probably didn't.

MM:

Okay, okay. Then Jim Baum, I guess everybody knew Jim.

JH:

Well, he was a relatively newcomer. I don't believe – I believe he was first in Loraine, and then moved to Colorado City after I left. See, I left Colorado City area when I was out of high school, and really, was never back there. I went away to college and it was during the war and I went to college on the train.

MM:

Okay, so you went by troop train, I assume?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

To Dallas.

JH:

To Fort Worth.

MM:

To Fort Worth and attended TCU, what drew you to TCU?

JH:

No, I went to Fort Worth, got on the MKT and went to Denton. I attended school in Denton.

MM:

Oh, at Denton? So you went to what is now North Texas, or what was then North Texas?

JH:

No.

MM:

Texas Women's?

JH:

Texas Women's.

MM:

Well, I'll be. Okay, so you went to Texas Women's University. I don't know why I had TCU in my mind.

JH:

Well, my deceased husband graduated from TCU.

MM:

Okay, maybe that was it. That must have been what I was hearing. Well, tell me about that experience because it was rare for somebody, a young lady, to go to college at that time.

JH:

Yes, well my parents had four children, and three of us had degrees, and my older brother – he went to college, but he chose not to finish. It was his choice, but the rest, the other three, got a degree. Of course, the tuition was so low that it didn't take much effort, and my mom was very industrious. We churned and sold fifty pounds of butter, drove to the homes and put the butter in the refrigerator. Twenty-five cents a pound, that's fifty pounds a week and with that. and the chickens that she sold, and the eggs that she sold, she was able to feed and clothe us and daddy was busy farming, making money, and buying land. Very industrious people.

MM:

I assume that your mother gained some of her industrious nature from her father, right?

JH:

Absolutely, absolutely.

MM:

Okay, Mr. Merket?

JH:

Mr. Merket. And he would say to me, even as a young child, "What work have you done this week?" Of course, I could always tell him because I'd always done work. Like in the spring, mother would order chickens from a seasonal book or Montgomery Boards. They'd come in the mail. The postman would put the box on the ground, and blow his horn so that we'd know they were there. Vernon's mother did the same thing. They'd come in boxes about that square with little divisions. You'd always lose some that suffocated, but that was my job to care for those chickens before school and after school.

MM:

Were you the oldest?

JH:

No, I was third.

MM:

You were third? Okay. All right, so tell me a little bit more about growing up during the Depression era there.

JH:

Oh, it was in really hard times, but as Vernon – we didn't know we were so poor because everybody was. It was just sort of normal. Although I do remember one time, I told mother I had a hole in the bottom of my shoe and she said, "Well, I can't afford shoes right now. Here's cardboard. Cut you an insert." And I did that. That made an impression on me because I said, I will never have to do this again. When I'm big, I'll always have shoes. I can remember that so well, that little mind. But the dust storms were terrific out there, just horrific.

MM:

Talk about those.

JH:

Well, they would roll in. You would see them coming, and mother had given us – by the way, mother never drove us to school or picked us up from school, ever. We went to school if there was snow on the ground, which we used to have big snow drifts out there. We still went to school. We never missed a day of school because of weather. My daddy was always on the board of trustees at that country school, usually the chairman, and hiring the teachers. I knew all the teachers like family. In fact, if the school grew a year and we had an additional teacher and there was no space, they boarded at our house, or again, that industrious mother of mine. But our instructions from mother, if that cloud of dirt rolls in, and usually came later in the day, we had drainage ditches. We called them bar ditches along the side of the road which were deep. The instructions, I was to get on the bottom, my brother was to make sure I was held down, and my sister, the older, was to make sure that both of us were safe. She would come meeting us, could not see a car. You could not have seen – that's why she told us to get off the road, in case a car was trying to pass. She would come down the road calling to us, and we knew that we had to wait until her voice was close to us because it was blowing in that direction, because we lived north of the school, northwest. And that's how I got to school every day.

MM:

So you walked? You didn't ride a horse or anything like that?

JH:

No, well my brothers, once in a while, would ride a horse just for fun because we only lived a mile, and some of the other boys rode a horse. We always had a horse. We had a pony. We, of course, didn't have a saddle. Rode it bareback.

MM:

Of course, of course. Now, talk about – do you remember Black Sunday? What they call Black Sunday when the dust storm was so terrible.

JH:

No, not in any particular Sunday. They were all bad to me because I was six and seven years old. It was terrible.

MM:

Well this was more – I hear this story more from the people up in the Northern Panhandle than down in your area there.

JH:

Ours was more sandy loam.

MM:

Sandy loam, right. Was there anything, if you were home when these dust storms would come, was there any particular thing that your mother would do to kind of protect y'all? Talk about that.

JH:

Yes, she would close the windows and the windows all had locks on them, of course. We'd lock the windows, and you know, close the doors, and make sure all the doors were closed. First of all, we'd sit. Coming in, she's say to me, young lady, make sure those chickens are all in the house. That was my job, and I knew not to stay too long. I guess instinct told me that. You rapped on the door and she'd let you in. We all had various things, various assignments that we had to have, but I remember she would emphasize to us, close the windows and get away from the windows in case one blew in, she would tell us.

MM:

She didn't put you in the bed and put cold rags on your mouth or anything like that?

JH:

Well, in this house that – after that house that they moved on that flatcar, the next farm that my dad bought had a great big house on it, that the land had been homesteaded in that house. So this was a much larger house, and it had one huge walk-in closet, and she would put us in that walk-in closet, and sometimes she would get in there with us or if she had stuff she hadn't done, she'd go ahead and do that.

MM:

Now, you had told me that your dad was one of the first people there in Mitchell County that really cared about soil conservation.

JH:

Well, but I think his job actually came through the ASCS [**Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service**] because it was measuring. The farmers would sign up the number of acres they had, and how many they were going to put in cotton, and how many they were going to put in maize, gooseneck maize, that sort of thing. He had a helper or two and they would go out and they would actually chain that acreage, and make sure that was right and then that farmer would come back, and they would all sign an agreement and that farmer would be paid to not overproduce one crop over the other and yes, he was in charge of – it may have just been my side of the county. That I don't know because I was young, but yes, they came to our house and did that. He did that at our study table and I can remember, I wish those men would go home. I have homework to do. It was a Latin lamp, of course, dad was using.

MM:

Well, what did they talk about when they were doing this?

JH:

It was business.

MM:

All right, such as? What did they say?

JH:

Well, they'd come in with what they were proposing that they plant, and if my memory serves me right, my father's responsibility was to check and see that they were actually to have that allowable. After they came with, this is what I have, Earl, and then he and his helper, the next day, they would go out and measure their land, and then they'd come back and they'd sign a sort of an agreement that was true and correct.

MM:

Was he actually employed by the government to do that or did he work with some government conservationist like Vernon to do something like that?

JH:

I think when it started, probably it was a soil conservation – I mean, the county agent in the very beginning [phone rings 01:41:30]. I probably, at the time, didn't know there was a ASCS. The county agent meant everything to us. My brothers, or my older brother, was a member of the FFA and in 19 – what was the Texas Centennial?

MM:

'36.

JH:

'36. He had the grand champion – this is 4-H division – the grand champion, Aberdeen-Angus and the reserved grand champion, Aberdeen-Angus.

MM:

Really? The state champion? That's impressive.

JH:

Yes, at the Texas Centennial.

MM:

That's impressive.

JH:

His prize money, I don't remember how much it was, but my father allowed him to buy a bicycle, and the rest of it, he had to put in savings. He had to loan me that bicycle once in awhile, which I really remember too.

MM:

Which brother? What's your brother's name?

JH:

It was my older brother.

MM:

Your older brother. And his name?

JH:

Lee Brown, who eventually operated the ranch that my father owned, but Jim Baskins was the county agent. I mean, it was under his direction, because this was not FFA, it was 4-H, and Jim Baskins – and he would say, “Earl we’re going to win that,” and my daddy would say, “Well as hard as that boy has worked, I hope so, but go ahead and tell him, she washes that calf every day.” My brother would con me into doing that, but yes he did that.

MM:

I did all that too, but I didn't win a state championship.

JH:

Well, this was Aberdeen-Angus, it wasn't –

MM:

I had Black-Brangus, is what I had. I used to wash him.

JH:

Brangus was not even around.

MM:

Right, exactly. That's very impressive there. Okay, so –

JH:

I think, probably, my dad's first participation was under the county agent and I might be wrong about that, but of course, ASCS, I never heard of that word until my father passed away. At his passing, of course, the estate was partially divided. I had a lot of personal dealings with ASCS then.

MM:

Well, and let's talk about those dealings since we're talking about soil conservation. What did you do with that after you came in possession of your part of the estate?

JH:

Well, it was leased. My brother was still the overseer, but it was leased and he continued to operate that as the overseer until my mother passed away, and he was so shrewd. My mother, I've already told you her background, she was – he made her feel like she was in charge at operating all that stuff.

MM:

This is your father? Or your brother?

JH:

My brother, after my father passed away. I had a sister-in-law that wanted it divided now. My brother and I were the executives of the estate, and she kept after my brother and he said, "I wish you would do something to get her off my back." I finally told her, I said, "I'm going to tell you this one time, and this is the only time I'm going to tell you this. Until mother dies, forget it." I said, she feels like she is operating that. Well, I know she's not. Well, I knew that too, but he made her feel that important which was wonderful.

MM:

So she had that sense that she was still the matriarch of the family. When did she pass?

JH:

Absolutely. After Vernon and I married. She died in '96.

MM:

'96, so how old was she?

JH:

She was ninety-five.

MM:

Ninety-five. That's quite a run in itself for living during those times, no doubt about it. So you graduated from high school in what year?

JH:

'43.

MM:

'43, and you went off to North Texas there?

JH:

No.

MM:

I mean, to Denton to go to Texas Women's University. Why did you pick that college?

JH:

I had an aunt that lived there, in Denton, whose husband operated a garage. I could've gone to McMurray, which was a Methodist school in Abilene. My father's family, nothing but Methodists. The tuition was a little higher at McMurray than it was at TSCW, and I was always frugal, and I chose to go to the state school, and it was a larger school. Other than that, I did look at the tuition carefully, and my sister had gone to McMurray, but she finished at TSCW also, and I adored that aunt that lived there too. That was another influence.

MM:

So you got on a troop train, where? In Colorado City?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

What was your route?

JH:

I went from there to Fort Worth, changed trains to the MKT to go to Denton and there was no transportation when you got there, except the city bus which we called the Goose. I went to the dorm. Well, my father and mother had driven me up there when I registered, but that was all the gasoline they had, and of course, farmers had more access to gasoline than most people.

MM:

Because it was rationed at that time.

JH:

Yes, most of them had their own gas pump and that sort of thing, but my parents were one not to abuse the rules, and so I did that and I only went home at Christmas time, back on the train. It wasn't because of the – it was because of the conditions under which we were living. They would sell you a train ticket, but they would not guarantee you a seat. Back at that age, I didn't look too bad. Get on that troop train and I'm telling you, I have seen them take the back of the seat and just rip that back off, come sit right here by me and stuff like that. It was a great adventure, it really was.

MM:

Well, my mother talked about riding on those troop trains when she went from college out to Marfa to teach. What was it like travelling with all those young men, all in service at that time?

JH:

They were having a good time, because they knew they were shipping out, and we were all aware of that too. It was a hard time, and once in a while, there would be a young man on there that was really having a hard time, and everybody, even the troops themselves, were kind to that person, and the girls particularly were. They would sort of take turns talking to them. Of course, you didn't sleep. There was no possibility of a nap. I was not afraid. I had no concerns with my safety or anything like that. It was –

MM:

And why would you say that?

JH:

I think it was the times in which we lived.

MM:

Describe those.

JH:

The men respected the women. Particularly, the women who acted like a lady. If you acted like a lady, you were treated like a lady. I think the women have forgotten that this day and time, but that's my reaction. Men just respected women more, I think, then.

MM:

Even young men going off to service?

JH:
Yes.

MM:
Just want to get that on tape.

JH:
Well, I think back then in particular, if you acted like a lady, you were treated like a lady. If you didn't act like a lady that was the way you were treated.

MM:
Do you remember any particular teachers? And, Vernon, this was something I was going to ask you about there at A&M. Do either one of y'all remember any teachers that had an influence on you in your careers?

JH:
My first grade teacher had as much influence on me as –

MM:
And who was that?

JH:
Mrs. Powers.

MM:
Mrs. Powers. Do you remember her first name?

JH:
No.

MM:
Okay, Mrs. Powers. What was it about her that you think influenced you?

JH:
I really don't know. Just the fact that she was a woman and was employed. Women were employed. They worked at home harder, but she was like drawing a paycheck, and I don't think that really registered with me, but the fact that she was always dressed up and I guess, refined and educated because she was. It was the impression that I had.

MM:

Vernon, can you remember anybody? Any teacher that particularly had an influence on you? Maybe in college there at A&M or otherwise?

VH:

No, if any, it would have been my old high school football coach.

MM:

Who was that?

VH:

I don't remember.

MM:

You don't remember, but your old high school football coach in Three Rivers.

VH:

Yes.

JH:

He not only played football in high school, he played football in junior college.

MM:

Oh, really? So you played at Tarleton? What position?

VH:

No, at U Valley.

MM:

At U Valley. What position.

VH:

Guard.

MM:

Guard? Oh my goodness, you were a big guy then.

VH:

I was small.

MM:

Tough, just tough I guess.

JH:

As he has said to me, if they got injured, the coach would say, "Knock it off, brush it off, get back in there and play."

MM:

They even did that when I was playing football. Walk it off, walk it off.

VH:

Shake it off.

MM:

Yeah, shake it off. There you go, all the time. That and basketball and every sport there was at the time that seems to be there favorite phrase was shake it off. Now, what was it like going to Texas State College for Women at that time?

JH:

There were no guys, of course, there. On the weekend, the air force had a big base at Sherman, and the place was flooded with males on the weekend. But the college rules were you could not date except Saturday night and Sunday afternoon. The dorms were locked. That was not just because of the war. I mean, that was the rules of the college. It was – I don't know – and the rules, of course, you could not be married, and go to that school. I had a roommate that was secretly married and we all knew it, but the big guys didn't. She became pregnant and of course, they sent her home immediately. No cars. No one could have a car. I mean, they took care of their young ladies.

MM:

Now, let's go back to that roommate that was secretly married and that y'all were covering for, and who ultimately became pregnant, was she married to a service person at that time?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Okay, was that person overseas?

JH:

Yes, it was a boy from her hometown and they had married before he was, I guess, drafted

because he was in the army. She came to school, she was married, she had a twin, and I was friends with the twins. She did not realize she was pregnant when she came. She knew she was married, but then when sure enough, she became pregnant, well of course, the jig was up.

MM:

They made her go home. Do you ever know what happened to her? Did her husband survive?

JH:

Yes, he did. I don't know where they are now.

MM:

Well, I'm wondering if she ever finished college somewhere else after the war.

JH:

Her parents lived at Taft, Texas, which is a big cotton growing area back during that time. Really, lots of money in that cotton. She was – they had a lot of – in my judgement back then, they had a lot of money. They had things that a lot of us didn't have there at school, but I mean, were lovely girls. I did not know them until I met them there at school. Her sister, Gene, she graduated when I did. The other girl, I don't remember.

MM:

What did you major in in college?

JH:

I majored in secretarial science, because I thought that would be quick. By the way, I was engaged. Would be quick employment when the war was over.

MM:

Tell me about your engagement. When did that happen and to who? He was in service, wasn't he?

JH:

Yes, six weeks. He was Clarence Cook Jr. from Colorado City, and when we graduated from high school, he remained in high school for an extra year, because of conduct, and so we graduated from high school at the same time. His mother insisted that he spend that other year in high school. Back then, everybody was getting married before the guys left. We knew better than that, so he left six weeks after he finished high school. They were about to draft him. He did not want to be in the army, he wanted to be in the air force so he volunteered and six weeks after he was inducted, they sent him overseas.

MM:

Oh, really? Do you know where he did his basic?

JH:

Yes, at Mojave, California, and I forgot what that airbase was called.

MM:

Well, now it's called Muroc, and then became Edwards Air Force Base. My father was stationed there before he went over. So you're engaged during this time, did you get a chance to see him anymore before he went overseas?

JH:

He came from Fort Sill through Colorado City going to California, so he did his basic at Fort Sill.

MM:

Okay, at Fort Sill. There you go, all right. That's what I was asking.

JH:

I lived out in the country with no telephone. He had worked at the theater in high school, making popcorn or taking tickets or whatever. The lady who was really in charge of those youngsters that worked at the – he sent her a telegram telling her, please try to contact me. He was going to come through. I had no phone thirteen miles out in the country. His mother and daddy, let's see, where were they? They were out of town. Anyway, but I did not get the message, so he passed through town and I did not see him. But of course, V-J letters came with holes cut in them and all of that jazz.

MM:

Explain that a little bit for the people who are unfamiliar with it, somebody listening to this a hundred years from now.

JH:

It was a letter, a form, that the government –

MM:

A victory letter.

JH:

Yes, a victory letter, and the government furnished those for the fellows, and they were not supposed to tell where they were, where they'd been, or any particulars about their jobs with the

army or the air force or whatever. The censors read them all. If there was any forbidden information, they'd just cut it out. You'd get that V-J letter, or they could write regular letters too, which he did some, because he had access to a typewriter and so forth, but they didn't come to often because the Battle of the Bulge, you see. After he got there, the unit he was with, they flew them – well, when the Battle of the Bulge started, after a certain period of time, it went pretty good for a little while, and they attempted to fly them or get them ready to fly to Belgium. Of course, things went bad and so they didn't do that. They landed immediately as soon as they said they had a secured landing. He was there in Belgium, and in France and moving back and forth between bases and all that kind of stuff. When the war was over, the guys that had been in service for a long, long, long time, they didn't fly them home, of course. They came on ships. They were the first to come home. These younger men who – and he was among the younger men – they had to just really wait their turn.

MM:

They had to have a certain number of points, didn't they?

JH:

Yes, age and service and the job that you had. All of that figured into the points that they got. While he was waiting, he was in a German prisoner war camp. I mean, that was the – you know, they had cleaned it up. The German maids that had been taking care of the troops for money, remained there, and these guys didn't have to do anything. They were looking for a job. He landed in, I guess he landed in New York. And came by train to San Antonio and was mustered out in San Antonio.

MM:

Was this in about 1946, '47?

JH:

1946, early '46.

MM:

Now, how did he get – what did he do at Muroc?

JH:

Well, hear him tell it, the story he told us, he pushed a wheelbarrow. They were waiting to decide what they were going to do with these young men. They were through with their basics. They were giving them tests every day to find their skills. In the meantime, they were working on that air base runway and all.

MM:

Now, he was there '44 and '45, probably? Or '45, maybe?

JH:

Maybe.

MM:

'44, I guess, because before the Battle of the Bulge, it had to be '44.

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

He was there probably the same time my dad was there, but he didn't do any work on B-29's there?

JH:

No, this kid is out of high school.

MM:

He wound up being a secretary or a clerk typist or a clerk for a fighter group in Belgium, right? Or back and forth between France and Belgium?

JH:

Yes, the ace of his group was, his name was Meyers.

MM:

Meyers, okay. He was the commander, or the ace?

JH:

He was the ace, but commanded that wing of that group.

MM:

Okay, commanded that wing. And you can't remember whether it was P-40's or P-51's?

JH:

No, I can't tell you that.

MM:

So he's off. You're getting letters. You're going to college. You're majoring in –

JH:

Secretarial science, minoring in early childhood education.

MM:

Right, exactly. I remember that. Now, so tell me about that and how that wound up benefiting you later in life.

JH:

After I married, I had graduated from college, and two weeks after I graduated from college, we married in Colorado City.

MM:

And he was back from service at that time?

JH:

He was back, yes, and waiting to be accepted at a school. He knew what he was going to do. I should say, his mother knew what he was going to do still. But anyway, I went ahead and got my degree and two weeks after I got my degree, we married. He had been accepted at TCU. We couldn't find a place to live. There were ex-service men and wives all over the place. He had made so many trips down to the Fort Worth Star Telegram on Saturday because that's when the rentals were listed. This woman became familiar with his face and she said, tell me your story. He told her what he was doing, and she said, next week, I'll have something for you. It was a one room efficiency, sharing the shower with the landlord, and the shower was cardboard. But he was already in TCU. I had graduated. He went to TCU a semester before I graduated. We took it, or he took it, and called me and told me he had found us a place. I couldn't believe it when I walked into the place, but it was okay. I can remember the little land lady saying, "Now, I hope you're just not moving in here until you find something better." Of course, we swore we were not, but we knew we were. Then we moved over on 8th Street.

MM:

Where was this efficiency apartment?

JH:

It was on Lipscomb Street in Fort Worth which is now a terrible, terrible part of town. But then, a friend told him about another friend that was moving out on 8th Avenue – I guess it was called Avenue – upstairs in a big old house, so we moved there and I was working. Well, I went to work for that architect engineer in Fort Worth Bank Building.

MM:

Right. Who was that?

JH:

Charles T. Freelove, who built hospitals and courthouses, and I was a private secretary. I had only to transcribe and I didn't even sharpen pencils and so forth, but he wanted me to work long, long hours, which back then, it was not unusual, but I was newly married, and that was not the environment that I really wished to have. I decided I would look around and see what I could find, and I went to an employment – now, that first job I got on my own. But then I went to an employment agency and told them what I was looking for, and the first thing they said, "How good is your short hand?" I said, "Well it's pretty good.", "How good is your typing?", "Well, it's pretty good." She said, "I have an interview for you. Are you still working?" And I said, "yes, and I must give leave. I won't leave anyone without giving leave." This was college training. The man stayed on a Saturday, came back to his office on Saturday to interview me. I went to work for the district manager of Safeway stores that was managing the Fort Worth District. Mondays, he came in and I took dictation all day long. He left for the road, was gone all week, and I'd have a stack of letters on his desk for him to sign when he came in. I hardly saw the man, but I ran the office and everything.

MM:

What was his region? What was the district?

JH:

It was Fort Worth district. It went from Fort Worth to the Oklahoma border, and I don't know how far out west.

MM:

Did it go to Wichita Falls?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Charlie and all those little places?

JH:

Yes and the Safeway stores did not have a telephone in them because they didn't want the customers calling the store. There was a payphone and they'd call the office, not answering, they'd want to know the phone number, and I'd say, "I'm sorry, we don't have a phone available in that location." Oh, they would call me everything in the world, because, "I see that phone hanging on the wall." I'd say, "That is only a payphone.", "I'm going to check you out. I'm going to turn you in," and all kinds of stuff, but anyway, I knew what I was doing, and all. I stayed with that job until my husband got his degree at TCU.

MM:

Okay, so you kind of helped support getting him through. He was on the G.I. Bill and I assume, Vernon, you were on the G.I. Bill going through college as well, right?

VH:

Yes.

MM:

So after that, tell me what happened.

JH:

When my husband got ready to graduate, the department head at TCU thought he was pretty sharp, and he had a good friend in Exxon that was the controller of Exxon. He told my husband, he said, "I'm going to set you up an appointment in Houston with Exxon, but don't tell any of the other students that I've done this, because there's no hiring going on." We made that trip. I told Mr. Freelove, my boss, what I was going to do, and he allowed me to leave the office a day or two. I can't remember. He made that interview and sure enough, Exxon hired him. He was the only accountant hired by the Exxon Corporation. Of course, it was Humble Oil and Refining Company in the year of 1949.

MM:

The only accountant? In the whole corporation? Humble?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Wow, that's impressive.

JH:

We lived out in – at the end of the semester which was I guess, January or February –

MM:

What year?

JH:

'49. I resigned and we moved to McKinney which is paradise, and he worked out in the field with a gang – a gang truck. They were testing him, I'm sure, but he also learned all about pipe. I don't know what all he learned, but back then, if you went to work for Humble Oil and Refining Company and you were a geologist, an engineer, whatever you were, you started on the gang

truck learning the business from the ground. They shot and killed lots of rattlesnakes, and all that kind of good stuff. Finally, one day, he came in and says to me, "How would you like to live in California?" I said, "You're kidding me. I'm in paradise already." He said, "No, I'm serious. We have thirty days." We moved to Bakersfield.

MM:

Which was close to Muroc.

JH:

Yes, yes. We moved. I had already gotten a job with the oil field supply place there in McKinney, but I resigned. I was going to the bank and setting up his loans and everything. He would just come down and sign everything. That was the best job I ever had, but he understood. We left, locked the house, and left and drove to Bakersfield. We had thirty days, company expense, to find a house. One afternoon, oh I don't know, it was probably about four o'clock, three thirty or four, I was sitting in that motel room and it had plate glass – I mean, we called it a picture window back then, looking out, watching for him to arrive from work and all of a sudden, the whole world began to move and he didn't arrive and he didn't arrive, and I knew that it was an earthquake. I was in a recliner, a rocker, not a recliner, a rocker, and when I happened to hit the wave, and every time I tried to get out of that chair it would throw me back, and of course, I was frightened and everything. He eventually made it home then, and told me that the downtown clock was knocked down. It had been there for hundreds of years. The stores were all caved in and everything. We had, just the day before, signed agreement to buy a house. That house was cracked. Everything out there's stucco or plaster of some kind inside and out. Cracked it all the way around. Inside, all the way around. Outside, and everybody said, don't worry about it. Everybody else's house is cracked. Houses that had chimneys, the chimneys were all down. Bakersfield then was small. We stayed there until '52, and they transferred him to –

MM:

He was working as an accountant at that time or was he doing something else?

JH:

No, before we left McKinney, they had already pulled him in the office. He was running drillers, invoices, and all kinds of things. Talking to me about the liquor that was in the warehouse if I felt like we needed it, because the contractors, they kept it well stocked. I mean, it was an adventure out there. It really was. When they moved him there, he worked out of Bakersfield. There was no office space. The area was growing. It was beginning to grow. So, they had to drive outside of town and they officed in an old filling station. Then – [to Vernon] you need help? I think he's going to the – [to Vernon] you going to the bathroom?

VH:

Yeah. Somehow, I always work that around.

MM:

Do you need assisting? [Pause in recording] Okay. We had a little pause and now we're back to talking again. You were talking about – you were out in Bakersfield, y'all survived an earthquake, and your husband at that time – and his name?

JH:

Clarence Cook.

MM:

Clarence Cook was – their office, because there were no – they were expanding in Bakersfield at that time, growing – he's in an old gas station outside of town. That was their office. Go ahead.

JH:

We didn't stay there very long because – and of course, he was what they called a clerk, district clerk at that time. He came in from work one day and he said, "How would you like to live in Los Angeles?" and I said, "Well I'm not interested to move to Los Angeles." But let me back up just a minute, while we were living there in Bakersfield, we were surrounded by people from the East Coast. Our neighbors were from the East Coast, and I would get in our vehicle and drive from Bakersfield to Los Angeles to shop, and they thought it was a big, long journey, but having grown up in West Texas, that wasn't so far. They thought my husband was crazy for allowing me to do that, and he would say, "But she's her own woman. She can do what she wants to do." But anyway, the day he walked in he said, "How would you like to live in Los Angeles?" and I said, "I'm not crazy about it, but if that's where the paycheck is going to be, I'm ready." I was not employed, although I had made application, and I was getting ready to go to work for the University of California there in Bakersfield, the branch in Bakersfield. Partly because of my agriculture background, and the fact that I had a degree, and I had been employed, and had a good resume. On the Saturday, I woke up and I was deathly ill, so I call, and the doctors worked on Saturday, and I told him I thought I had the flu, and I had an examination and he said, "What were your plans?" I said, "Well, I was getting ready to start a new job on Monday." He said, "I don't believe you'd do that. How long have you been married?" We told him, and we had not had a child, and we had wanted a child, and he said, "Don't start that job," so I resigned and did not accept the job with the University of California, but we moved to San Fernando Valley.

MM:

Okay, I take it that this is when you were pregnant with your son?

JH:
Yes.

MM:
Okay, there you go. I got you. So you're pregnant, and you move so he can take a new job?

JH:
Yes.

MM:
All the most stressful things in life.

JH:
Yes, but didn't faze me at all at that young age. I was hale and hearty and ready for everything. And so we lived in San Fernando, and he worked at Castaic Junction, it was called. That's where the office was. There was a man in the main Los Angeles office, the big office in Los Angeles, that kept including my husband in lots of things, even football games, and all kinds of things that other people in that office weren't included in, and I didn't quite understand. Well, neither one of us quite understood it, and it didn't seem to bother anybody, but because we were new out there, they thought that was, and I did too, thought it was just sort of a courtesy, but he was evaluating my husband. In 1957, they called him into the office, the main office in Houston in the old building. He saw the new building go up.

MM:
Oh, so he did see the new Humble building go up?

JH:
Oh, yes.

MM:
They made little wax statues of that building, I remember at the time. I had one, at one time, as a kid.

JH:
Tallest building west of the Mississippi.

MM:
That's correct.

JH:

He was very successful. They treated us well.

MM:

Okay, well talk about it a little bit. What was his position? How did it change when he went to Houston?

JH:

He became – instead of a clerk – he became a managing accountant in a couple of years. Mr. Smith was his boss, who was in charge of the natural gas accounting division, and eventually, Mr. Smith retired and that became my husband's job.

MM:

And he did that until he retired?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Okay, so that was a – he was in a good position there during that time?

JH:

Yes, had a corner office with windows on two sides. He was a fun, loving guy. His employees loved him. Every Christmas, we had an office party. He hired the very first black person – I don't know about the other departments – but in the accounting department, and her name was Lou. [address Vernon] Honey, do you want to move to chair in there?

VH:

Yeah. [Pause in Recording]

MM:

All right, so he had a corner office with windows on both corners, and y'all had office parties, and he hired the first African-American woman there at Humble.

JH:

Right, well in the natural gas division, I do not know about the others. The first year that she was invited to come to our house for the party, she would not come because she thought, she said to my husband, "No, I think everyone will have a better time if I don't come."

MM:

What time period is this? Do you remember what year it would have been?

JH:

No, because we did it for so many years.

MM:

Was it in the early sixties? Late fifties?

JH:

It was late fifties, I believe. No, maybe the sixties because he was in that department forever after he got there, but when Mr. Smith retired, he became the chief of that division, and when Exxon first had computers, they had a room, not at the building, at another location that had the big computer and of course, Clarence was not trained to operate a computer. But the guys who – he would give them – his office would give them the information they needed, but three o'clock in the morning, if it wasn't working, they would call him and say, "We've got a problem." He would get up and dress, and at that time when that first happened, we only had one car and our son was pretty small. I'd haul him out of bed because he didn't know how long he'd be gone. Sometimes, it was the rest of the night, and all day long. And the computer was in an air-conditioned building. Gigantic thing. Believe it or not, when our son was in college, on summer he worked at the computer center with Exxon too.

MM:

Now, where did y'all live in Houston at that time?

JH:

Well, we first lived in Windsor Village, and then after I guess five years, then we moved to Maplewood South, which was near Meyerland. We lived there until we moved to Temple.

MM:

Now, somewhere in all of this, you went back to teaching. Tell that story there about how your husband didn't initially want you to go to school, but you did because of your son, and then where you taught and where he went to school.

JH:

When our son entered school, it was a brand new school, and the books were there, but the books weren't cataloged in the library. A mother who was really interested in her child's welfare, I was there every day helping get those books cataloged, and on the shelf, and it was a brand new school, and I was making new friends.

MM:

What was the name of the school?

JH:

Windsor Village Elementary. The principal, of course, spent a lot of time with that group of women in the library getting to know them because she was new to the area too and you know, in general conversation one would say, what school did you go to? So anyway, she learned that I had a degree, and as she listened again, she discovered I had a teaching certificate. When I graduated from college, I had a one through twelve certification, and then later on, I got my kindergarten certification by the simple fact that I'd been teaching kindergarten so today, I'm kindergarten through twelve certified. Anyway, the principal, one day when I was getting ready to go home, called me into the office and she says, "I'm adding a book clerk to my office staff next year. Would you be interested in that job?" I said, "Well I don't know. I don't know whether I would or not." She said, "Well you're here every day as it is." I said, "Yeah, but only while Lance is in school." And I said, "I'll have to talk to my husband, because I had not even thought about going to work." We talked and my husband said, "Well I don't want Lance going to a nursery school. If she will arrange it somehow that he can go to school with you, it is okay with me, but I really don't want him in nursery school." Of course, we thought he was the brightest one that had ever been. I told her what my husband had said, and she said, "That can be arranged." He can sit in here in the office with you before school, and come to you after school and go home with you. That would be no problem. By that time, she already knew my child.

MM:

How old was he at that time?

JH:

He was in second grade by that time. At the end of that year, she said, "I've got to add another kindergarten teacher. Would you be interested?" I said, "Oh, I don't know. That would mean a little bit longer day." By that time, she knew my husband. She called him by his first name, because we were interested in the school and so forth. She said, "Discuss it." He said, "It's up to you. You can do what you want to do as long as Lance has good care." Needless to say, he was very proud of his son. I did, I started teaching kindergarten, and I did not interview. The man from the personnel office came to the school, and interviewed me at the school. That's how much the principal wanted me to have that position.

MM:

What was the principal's name?

JH:

Bernice Newton. I'll never forget her.

MM:

Bernice Newton.

JH:

Yes, and she had fallen in love with my son, and with my husband. It was such a joy to work for her.

MM:

Was she older or of an earlier generation?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

More your mothers age or not quite that old?

JH:

Not quite that old.

MM:

There weren't a whole lot of women in the work force at that level at that time.

JH:

True, mostly teachers. A lot of teachers. Anyway, I taught kindergarten for, I don't know, five years, I guess. Every year, they would try to get me to move to first grade and so finally, I consented. I had the very first black child that came to our school.

MM:

What year was that? Do you remember?

JH:

No, let's see. Well Houston was the first school district in Texas to integrate, so it was early on in integration. I never will forget that little Randal's name, but anyway, I don't remember the year, because I guess I started teaching in '65. That could possibly have been about, I guess, maybe '68? The year alludes me. I can't put a year to it, but that was kind of a rough time.

MM:

And so he was the first student to integrate the school?

JH:
Yes.

MM:
And his name was Randal?

JH:
His name was Randal, and then the next year by that time, other black families had moved into the area.

MM:
Let me ask you this since this is unique, were there any social problems in the class because of Randal and this integration either with parents or students?

JH:
No, well the students, of course, sort of viewed him as different, but they were not cruel to him. Of course, they knew that I wouldn't allow that. One of the mothers said to me – and by the way, the classes were forty-two children in the morning, and a different forty-two in the afternoon, no aids. That word hadn't been created yet.

MM:
No air-conditioning either.

JH:
No.

MM:
Fans.

JH:
One.

MM:
I remember the big –

JH:
Pedestal fan. One of the mothers said to me, "How do you control this huge group?" I said, "You see these two black eyes? They know if I zero in on them, they're in trouble." She said, "What do you mean trouble?" I said, "I don't, but they know trouble. They know that that's what's going to happen." I told them the rules when we started, and told them that I would keep my

rules, and I would keep their rules, but they had to keep my rules too. Of course, there was always one or two that would challenge the rules, but it didn't take long. Would you like me to tell you something funny that happened one time?

MM:

Sure.

JH:

I had taught in kindergarten. I had taught the superintendent's granddaughter first.

MM:

And who was that superintendent?

JH:

Oh, gosh. I can see him, but I can't dredge up the name.

MM:

It's all right. Go ahead.

JH:

Anyway, and the next year, I had another one of his. I had the assistant superintendent's son in the next year. The Borrison family, there were five children in that family and I had those children, one every year. John Borrison was friends with the assistant superintendent's – Don? Daddy's name was Don, and the little boy's name was Don, but there last name eludes me, but anyway, Don was fine with coming to school the first day, but John was the baby of the Borrison family, and he didn't really want to be there, and tears started running, and Don looked at him and he says, "John, stop it. You're going to make me cry." This was the assistant superintendent's son, and a blonde, beautiful child. John straightened up. In a little bit, I went by and I asked John, I said, "How is Sarah?", "She's mean to me." That was the older sister. Then I quickly thought of another sibling's name. He got over it then, but a little bit later on, we started talking about money, and I had paper money, and taught them what a penny looked like, what a nickel looked like, and I know kids this day and time wouldn't think that it was ever a problem with recognizing such, but back then, they weren't as familiar with money.

MM:

Oh, I remember.

JH:

I said to them, okay. I had gotten around to having real money. Pennies and nickels. I said, "Okay, what do I have here?" I had an overhead projector which helped and it was a nickel and I

had pennies over here and I said, "How many pennies do I have over here?" They counted them. Together, we counted five. Which one will buy the most candy? Or whatever I was using that day as an example. They came up with they are the same. I said, "Okay, Don, would you rather have a nickel or these five pennies?" He sat there a minute and he said, "Well, I'd take the five pennies." I said, "Why would you take the pennies, Don? Tell us why you would do that?" He said, "Well, I have the habit of losing stuff and if I lost one of those, I would still have some money, but if I lost that nickel, I wouldn't have any money." Now, you tell me that's not sharp thinking.

MM:

That's pretty good. That was kindergarten thinking, wasn't it?

JH:

I would give anything to know where those children are today.

MM:

Now, let me – and if you remember these names as we're going along, just throw them in there. Let's go back to the black child. When there was play period, did the other kids play with Randal?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Okay, so he was not mistreated in any way?

JH:

No, in fact, he was sort of a novelty to them, and they would bring and offer him things in kindergarten. They had more freedom then they did when they went to first grade, of course. He was afraid to really accept anything. I would tell him, "It's okay, they want you to have it. It's okay." It doesn't belong to him. It belongs to all of us. It belongs to the class or the school or whatever. It was obvious, he preferred not to be there, but I tried to make him as comfortable as possible.

MM:

Did he finally come around by the end of the year, or was he always uncomfortable until there were other black students in the school?

JH:

I think he was uncomfortable all year to a certain degree. I don't remember that he ever did anything hateful to anyone or disrespectful. I don't remember that they ever did – they did not make fun of him. They did not call him names. They were sort of fascinated with him, those whom were not familiar with black people. I don't remember, but little people like that don't show the difference like the older children that finally came, I can say that – I don't really know, but I can imagine.

MM:

Yeah, that it was difficult for them.

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay, so you're teaching and you move into the first grade, and how long did you teach there in the first grade?

JH:

I taught in the first grade until 1950, when my son finished TCU.

MM:

Not 1950. He wouldn't have been –

JH:

No, I'm wrong. Absolutely not. 1970 – he finished college in 19 – you'd think I would remember this.

MM:

When was he born?

JH:

He was born in '53.

MM:

In '53. Probably would have finished college in '75, or '76, something like that?

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

Where did he go to college?

JH:

TCU.

MM:

TCU, as well.

JH:

He majored in mineralogy – well, geology, his first degree. He got his Master's in mineralogy and went on, well he worked first for Shell, and then Union Pacific Railroad, and Union Pacific sold that leg of the railroad, and the state of Wyoming, they were looking for a state geologist, and they hired him.

MM:

So he became the state geologist in Wyoming?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Where else did he go after that?

JH:

After that, do you know the company XTO?

MM:

Yes, I've heard of it.

JH:

Well, it is now a fully owned subsidiary of Exxon, and they came to Wyoming and hired my son. With the Master's in mineralogy, Wyoming is a big coal producer, copper, and that's why they hired him. He loved it out there. When he told me he was moving back to Fort Worth, and taking a job with XTO, I said, "You were so happy in Wyoming. I never thought you would leave Wyoming." Of course, I was jumping up and down for joy that he was coming back to Texas, but he said, "Mom."

MM:

[Laughter] So it was about the money?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Yeah, of course. Now, was he married by that time?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Any kids?

JH:

No. The woman he's married to has two children so he has two –

MM:

Steps. Now, so you worked right up until he graduated from college, so how many years was that that you were working? You were from the sixties through almost the eighties, there. And then, what is Clarence doing all this time?

JH:

He's still working with Exxon.

MM:

Okay, on the same position?

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

And y'all were in Houston?

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

All right, and then when did y'all finally retire?

JH:

In 1982.

MM:

1982.

JH:

Fifty-seven years old.

MM:

Okay, fifty-seven. How many years did he have in at that time? It had to be over thirty, wasn't it?

JH:

Yeah, they were buying out. It was a period in the oil industry like we're having now. They had a formula by which you could go, and he met all of that criteria so he goes in and tells his boss, the controller, that he's going to retire, and the controller says, "You can't do that." He said, "You watch me. I'm gone." A year before, he had said to me, "I can't live in the city. I left home and lived in London, and then in Los Angeles, and then in Houston. I'm just going to stay right here in the city. Do whatever you want to this house." I had had a contractor paint outside, and inside, and new carpet, and all that, and one day he comes in from work and he says, "I made a mistake when I said that to you. We've got to get the hell out of this place. They'll kill us in our old age." He had almost had a wreck on the freeway. His widowed mother lived here. They had moved from Colorado City here because of his dad's health. His dad had passed away.

MM:

Okay, so they came for the medical facilities here.

JH:

Yes, so Mama Cook was still here, and we'd been here many, many times, and new people – we had met people here, and liked the area, and it put me closer to my family out in West Texas.

MM:

I'm curious why they didn't go up to Lubbock at that time instead of out over here.

JH:

At that time, Lubbock was not the medical center it is today. His father had a World War I injury, and he was going all the way to Dallas to a neurologist. He was gassed. They could receive that kind of medical care here, and that's why they came.

MM:

That's why they came. There's always a reason. That's what I'm trying to get at. Okay, so he decides that he's going to retire here to Temple.

JH:

And I had often talked about that, and he'd say, "No, I don't want to leave the city. I'm a city guy." That was okay with me too.

MM:

By then, the traffic was –

JH:

Was horrendous.

MM:

I remember dad said that when he moved down to Houston after the war to work at Deer Park there for Shell, that the city was only about three hundred and fifty thousand people, but by then, in the eighties, it's in the millions.

JH:

Yes, and so we immediately came up here and bought a lot, and then we put our house on the market. Before that, a few years earlier than that, at Salado, when they built this golf course, and this place, let's see, what do they call that down there? Anyway, we bought a lot, paid nineteen hundred dollars for it. So when we decided we were moving up here, we thought about building down there, but decided – and we were looking for retirement, old age – that was too far from grocery stores, and doctors, and the church that we wanted to attend, and all of that, so we decided to put it on the market. We bought the lot we built on eventually, put a for sale sign on that lot down at Salado, put a price on it. We didn't think it would sell for a year or two or three. So before we had a telephone call, the minute we walked in my in-law's house, the man was from Houston. He was paying us cash. Don't you let that house go. He put green bags in our hand. Same thing, our house in Houston, when we got that lot bought, we put it on the market, and the realtor – of course, it had just been spruced up, and the realtor said, "You better have a place to go, because this place will sell," and my husband said, "Well I wanted the price, so it'll take them a year or two." She said, "Well it may, but you better think about getting ready." It sold within a month.

MM:

Oh my goodness.

JH:

It was bought by Pike Dealer as a wedding gift for his daughter and new son-in-law. [Laughter]

MM:

What was the address there?

JH:

It was on Picasso Place.

MM:

Picasso Place, okay.

JH:

We moved, and they wanted possession by October. I believe, October the fifteenth – no, October the first. Well on September the first, I had a melanoma removed.

MM:

Oh my goodness.

JH:

It was successful. They were able to – it was early detected and they were able – it was on the back of my leg. Anyway, we went ahead and moved, and built – and the house was already under construction. The contractor got right on it.

MM:

Here in Temple?

JH:

Yes. We were ready to move in and my husband became ill.

MM:

Right as you were moving in?

JH:

Well, he had surgery right before we moved in, and when we moved in, I, with the help of my son and daughter-in-law – they were living in Fort Worth at that time, I moved us into the house. He had had gallbladder surgery which, back then –

MM:

Was a little bit more complicated.

JH:

Yeah, but anyway, we built the house thinking we'd be there twenty years, but in '89, he passed away.

MM:

And what took –

JH:

Massive heart attack.

MM:

I remember you telling me that, now. So he didn't get to enjoy retirement for too long, did he?

JH:

No, he didn't.

MM:

Now, how did you – here you are at a new place away from everything, your son's down in Fort Worth – had you already established contact or connections with your church here, or did you have any other contacts? Did you know any other people at that time?

JH:

We knew a few people, but as we would go to West Texas to visit our parents before my in-laws moved here, we would – Highway 36 came into downtown Temple, and you'd go by the city hall and you'd see the United Methodist Church over here, and we'd say, if I lived here that's the church – because we're Methodist – and so then when we moved here, the second Sunday we were here, we moved our letters. They wrote the – back then, I guess they still wrote letters because – and the pastor in Houston told him we'd been – my husband was the treasurer of the church and we were the communion stewards and all that.

MM:

What church was that in Houston?

JH:

Saint Paul's. No, not Saint Paul's. Saint Paul's was downtown. Golly.

MM:

It'll come to you.

JH:

Yeah, anyway, it was there on the edge of Maplewood South. God, I can't believe I can't remember. Anyway, we had two pastors, and then the president of the United Methodist Women at our door the next week, and we just stepped right in where we had exited the church in Houston.

MM:

And that was at the First Methodist here in Temple?

JH:

In Temple. They were most welcoming, and soon after we got here, we heard other people, new people saying, oh these people are so unfriendly. My husband would say to them, "You've got to be a friend to have a friend. You've got to come and be ready to join in and do your part and so forth." He was an usher immediately, and we became the communion stewards. Nobody would do it before.

MM:

So you did have contacts and you did have some friends that you were developing at that time.

JH:

Well next door to my in-laws was the recreation manager of the city of Temple, and he took Clarence to Lion's Club and I joined the Garden Club, which I was already a member of the Garden Club in Houston. We just picked up our life. It was another chapter.

MM:

Did Temple have a big Lion's Club at that time?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Lubbock has the biggest one in the nation now, but I don't know how big it was back then. I knew that Temple had a big one.

JH:

Yes, well they have a luncheon and a breakfast and so forth. When my husband passed away, he was the – I want to say chairperson, I don't know what the title was, of the Warm Springs children thing down here, and a lot of money was given in his memory to that organization or through the Lion's Club. Anyway, he passed away suddenly which was a blow.

MM:

Yeah, so how did you deal with that, Juanita?

JH:

Very diligently. The pastor, I had made friends with the pastor as a result of being the go person with the communion. He came and visited with me every single day and encouraged me. My son stayed with me, I guess five or six days. Saturday, he and I talked and I said, "Lance, you've got a job. You've got to go." He wanted me to go home with him and I said, "No, I'm not going to do that." The pastor came on Saturday, and Lance went to the door and he said, "Lance, you're still here?" and Lance says, "Yes, I am, Dr. Reilly, but mom's okay." So Dr. Reilly came in, and we had a conversation and he said, "Lance, when are you going to go home?" and Lance says, "After you leave," and he said, "You've already made that decision?" and he turned to me and I said, "Well, it's time his life goes on." It was difficult because it was so sudden. George and Dorothy Marks – there was a golden wedding anniversary of a doctor friend that we had made that really became my friend – had their golden wedding anniversary and they invited me.

MM:

Okay, so you had, by this time, met George and Dorothy Marks?

JH:

Yes, in Sunday school.

MM:

In Sunday school?

JH:

Yes, and she – I don't know why, but Dorothy and I just immediately –

MM:

Hit it off. I can see where you two did.

JH:

Yes, and they took me to that golden wedding anniversary party, and I said, "I can't do things like this right now. I appreciate it." They called me and made the arrangements to pick me up. I was not planning to go, but it takes a lot of tenacity, and the pastor had told me, "You may get mad at God. You may get mad at Clarence and that's okay." Well, I didn't get mad at either one of them. I don't think Clarence chose to leave, me and God certainly didn't take him, and I know it's better not to ask God why because you're not going to get an answer to why. You have to find the answer. The Holy Spirit will help you do that. But anyway, when Dorothy lost George, then. I was leaving her house, because there was a young man there. I thought it was her son, but

it was a nephew, the morning George died, but I just stuck my head in and said, "Dorothy, if you need me, call me." Of course, she came running to me and I started backing up and Dorothy wanted me to come in and I said, "No, you have guests. I'm not coming in." I passed that pastor. He was coming in as I was going out. He took me by the arm. He said, "Don't you get very far from this woman." And I didn't.

MM:

How much time had passed between when Clarence had passed and when George passed?

JH:

Nine months to the day. Sunday, the same day of the month, nine months. On a Sunday both times. Dorothy did not drive so I started taking her to the doctor, and I had been walking in the mall with my husband – see, we were walkers. The doctor of emergency lived across the street and he said to me, "Autopsy?" I said, "Is there any need for it?" He said, "There's no need, but if you ask me to, I can order one." I said, "To me, it would be a mutilation of the body and I don't see that anything would be gained," and he just said to me, "Wise decision." He was barefoot. He had run to the hospital barefoot when he heard the call. I was in good hands, and people cared about me, and I know God cared about me.

MM:

And then you were able to help Dorothy in her time of need. Did you get to know George very well?

JH:

I knew George, yes. Let me tell you –

MM:

What was George like? Dorothy, I couldn't get her to get her to talk a whole lot about him. She talked some about him, said he had a great sense of humor.

JH:

He did. He was handsome. Very outgoing. We were at a little meeting at their house –

MM:

Was he retired as state conservationist at that time? Okay.

JH:

When Clarence died, yes. He was not when we first moved here, but he only worked a little while.

MM:

Before he retired.

JH:

Yeah, he had been here before. We were at that meeting. It was a Sunday school meeting, and my husband was not one to say, "Bring me a cup of coffee." He'd get up and get a cup of coffee and I always say, "Do you want a cup of coffee?" We were there, and George said, "Dorothy, bring us a cup of coffee." And I can remember so well, my husband turned and said, "George, if you want a cup of coffee, get up off your duff and go get it." George says, "Oh, she'll bring it." Clarence says, "Well, I wouldn't bring it to you." We had this little discussion, and Dorothy brought the coffee and sat down, and I don't know, we talked for a while and I made a comment. I will never, ever, ever forget it. I don't know what it was about exactly, except my answer to George was, "You two keep on" – something they were doing, I don't know – "and Dorothy and I are going to be left and we're going to be spending your money." You can imagine how that echoed back to me.

MM:

Oh, sure.

JH:

But yes, since Dorothy didn't drive – Caroline was in school at that time. She had gotten her degree.

MM:

So she's down at A&M?

JH:

No, let's see. By that time, she had moved home. She had gotten her degree at A&M. She went to Mary-Hardin Baylor and got her Master's, and then she went over here to CTC [**Central Texas College**] and got her supervisory and so forth. She had a life to live.

MM:

CTC?

JH:

Yeah, Central Texas College, but it is A&M now. I was free, and I loved Dorothy, so I would take her to doctor's appointments, and we walked. I continued to walk. Another friend had lost her husband nine months before mine, and she joined us and we became walkers, and we shopped and enjoyed being alive, and became really, really close.

MM:

I was getting – I want you – just take it right on in to when you meet Vernon.

JH:

Well after – Dorothy was still alive, and she had –

MM:

She was this morning when I was over there.

JH:

No, this is Dorothy Hicks. His second wife.

MM:

That's right.

JH:

And we were in Bible study with this female associate that we had – the two Dorothy's, me, and this third friend and other friends. It was a large group and they're still my friends.

MM:

Okay, so Vernon and Dorothy were in Bible study with y'all? I mean, at the church with y'all?

JH:

Well, Vernon was in another Bible study. This was a women's Bible study. He was in with the –

MM:

Okay, but y'all were at the same First Methodist Church?

JH:

Yes. That's where I met him and Dorothy. I forgot now what I was getting ready to tell you.

MM:

Well, you were talking about, y'all enjoyed being alive, is what you said.

JH:

Yeah, and we travelled.

MM:

Where did y'all travel?

JH:

We went down to the coast. I can't tell you – and at that time still, we were pretty good looking women, and these older guys that were lonely would see us, and we weren't interested, of course, but we had a good time. We went down to Rock Port and to Corpus and I had friends that lived in Corpus. We went to Port Aransas. With a group then, a travel group, we went to Branson, and with the – used to be the county agent's helper – I forget what the woman was called, but anyway, that group travelled and we joined in. In a professional group, we travelled with them, but then, this female associate that had been the Bible teacher in our class, came to me and said, "Dr. Candler has taken a census of the membership of the church, and he has found that fifty-three percent of the population of the church is fifty or older." And this is back when AARP [**American Association of Retired Persons**] was – and we all said, "Oh?" She said, "Well, he's wanting to have a meeting to see how many in that age bracket would be interested in a group." So we had that meeting, and everybody was – mostly women, but some men were there. Dorothy and Vernon and I were still married. After that meeting, Glenda, the pastor, came to me and she said, "Would you head that group?" And I said, "Sure, just what I was waiting for." So I did, and she and I chose Dorothy to be the first chairmen of that group because she knew Dorothy didn't drive and she knew we were good friends and Dorothy was outgoing and everybody liked her, and so we got busy and Dorothy and I cooked for that group a few times. It would be sixty, seventy, seventy-five people. I decided I had enough of that cooking, so I got busy, and I found a caterer. The charge that Dr. Candler gave me was, "I want the widowed women." – back in the eighties, money was not what it is today – "I want them to feel that they are not prohibited moneywise from doing things with you." I got busy and I talked to this woman. First, I hired the high school culinary class. That went for a few months, but the people in the city learned this was going on in the school district, and they didn't want them servicing any particular group so she said, "I'm sorry, it was a good experience for the kids, but I can't do it. They won't let me." That's when Dorothy and I cooked. I said, "I can do better than this." I get on the phone and call the various churches and when I called the Baptist Church, they thought I was trying to hire their kitchen person. I kept telling them, "No, I thought she might have a friend that wanted a job. No, I don't want your person." Finally, the woman says, "I believe the Presbyterian Church uses a woman for their men's breakfast occasionally. Call them" She wanted to get rid of me. So I did that, I called and the woman says, "Absolutely, I'll give you her number. I think it is just what you're looking for," and that was the beginning of this woman's business. She is our – big fast friends. She hugs Vernon and me because of course, Vernon and I, we weren't even – we were friends, but that was all. She says we started her business. She retired recently from the country club.

MM:

And her name?

JH:

Susan Faucet, but her health isn't good anymore. That's a long time that she was our friend. Even when she was doing that, Thursday was her day off, and that was the day we met and she would cook for us and bring it to the church. We lost her and I think the groups got fooled. They don't have that bulldog instinct that I had to find somebody. But anyway, then after that group had been going for a while, and another reason for doing that was so the women didn't have to go out at night alone. The associate pastor came to me and Dorothy and she said, "Dr. Candler thinks we should start a travel group and he thinks he would like for us to try to find a man that would do it." Dorothy had been gone six months or so. We knew Vernon.

MM:

Dorothy Hicks, just so we get it on tape.

JH:

Yes, and during her illness, I had organized a group of six women from our Sunday school class and we would spell him one day a week. We take always two at a time. We knew what his frame of mind was. We were close to Vernon. All that Sunday school class, they were wonderful people. Dorothy said, "I think Vernon Hicks would do that," and Glenda said, "I don't think he will." She had been visiting with him also. Dr. Candler, he says they came every week while Dorothy was here. He cared for Dorothy to the bitter end by himself. He had home health care. Anyway, she asked him and he jumped at it, so he became part of that group.

MM:

Travel group?

JH:

Yes, he headed that. We just turned that over to him and we'd have a bus full every time. Something he didn't tell you and I should have told you. I should have remembered it. After he retired, he did contract work for a mine in East Texas as wildlife biologist.

MM:

Where?

JH:

At Marshall.

MM:

Okay, yeah.

JH:

In fact, he took this travel group to tour that mine and I want you to know they graded those roads and sprinkled those roads down. You have never seen such a welcoming. The people on that bus, they could not believe that he had done such a good job. They appreciated him so much [phone rings 03:02:52] that they did that. *[pause in recording]*

MM:

So you went to the mine, y'all travelled to the mine, and because Vernon was working contract work, they had fixed it all up so everybody could really get up there and see the mine.

JH:

Right, and he continued that a long time until the manager changed, and they changed everything up, and he decided that he had worked long enough. That was after we married that he stopped doing that.

MM:

Okay, so he did it that long?

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

All right, so you're moving towards when y'all get together here. You're on this AARP—or actually the travel group.

JH:

Yes, the travel group. Well, yes and we – many trips, overnight and otherwise—

MM:

All of them in Texas, I assume. Right?

JH:

Yes. Overnight to Galveston and on the way home from Galveston, we'd do NASA or the Science Museum. A full trip, and he did all the planning, and it was a cinch for us because he took care of all that.

MM:

I take it he was a good organizer.

JH:

Yeah, and had the personality that everybody loved him. So one night after we'd been on a trip, he kept hanging around. See, Dorothy and I would make the coffee at the church. We'd put it on a timer and everything, and then we'd clean all that up when – well, he kept hanging around. Finally, he left and then the next week he came and rang my doorbell, and wanted to know if I had a cup of coffee. I did. The next week, or the next month I guess it was, they had a night group of older adults that was a game night at the church. He asked me if I would like to go to that. I said, "Oh, well that's a covered dish, and I don't have time to do a thing like that." He said, "Oh, I'll take good care of that." He had bought ice cream already. When we get there, this woman who was president of that group – we kind of slipped in, you know? We didn't want to flaunt the fact that we were there together – and the president of that group, she says, "And Vernon and Juanita are here together, and they brought ice cream." Of course, every eye in the room – and of course, the jig was up then when that happened. After, I guess it was a year and three months I guess it was after Dorothy died, that he in I married in the chapel at church.

MM:

What year was that?

JH:

'96.

MM:

Okay, '96. So, is that when you started going to the reunions?

JH:

Yes.

MM:

Okay, so talk about that a little bit. Your first experiences there.

JH:

Well I was very nervous, of course, because I knew that I knew a few of those people, but I didn't know the routine or anything and I knew they were all, as you said, like family which they truly were. The Schulenberg's [?] [03:06:26], they were members of our church, and they knew the history of *[phone rings 03:06:30, pause in recording]* – yes, and Dorothy was not with me, but I knew several of the – but the Schulenberg's [?] [03:06:42], what I was going to tell you, they were members of our church, and they knew what my situation was. They never left my side. Vernon would – people would holler at him and he'd go over to greet them, and I said to him, "Now, you're a free agent. These are your friends and don't worry about me." Whitey—

what was Whitey's name—from Arkansas? Excuse me, just a minute. He doesn't handle the phone very well. He and his wife were extremely—

MM:

Cordial and warm and welcoming.

JH:

Yes, and we were invited to go to dinner with them, and I was in Garden Club with Betty Lewis. Jimmy Lewis was at the office. I didn't know Jimmy at that time. I knew his wife, but she was very nice. Well, they all were nice. I don't mean that, but they were very attentive, made sure I was not left by myself. Then the next year, I asked Vernon about inviting Dorothy and he said, "Well absolutely." She still had pretty good vision then too, but still, she needed help. Some people – if she had trouble recognizing somebody, I would tell her. And a lot of people still don't know her vision is as poor as it is, but if someone is approaching—

MM:

We're talking about Dorothy Marks, just for the record here. This is George Marks's wife, that Dorothy.

JH:

Yes, but anyway, we took her the second year and of course, everybody was so delighted to see Dorothy. Most of them she had seen, but a lot of them she had not seen since George had passed away, and so it was really nice, and we joined other people for dinner, and we'd go to dinner at Green's at—

MM:

Green's, at the restaurant there in Green.

JH:

Yeah, and then the next year was when Vernon and well—I guess I thought of the idea of inviting those widows of the other people that had been kind to him over the years and so we loaded up the van and Grenada Smith, she came with muffins and so forth and so on. So I made a thermos of coffee, and we stopped along the way and had a coffee break. Wildflowers were beginning to bloom and that little lady—of course Vernon knew all of the wildflowers, there was no problem – but she could name them and would name them before he could. She was with it – was so delighted to be able to go. Minnie Morris was delightful too, although she wasn't as into wildflowers as Grenada was, but they roomed together, those two. I can't remember. I guess Dorothy was rooming by herself at that time. A little bit later on, Doris Johnson joined Dorothy and Doris Johnson, who also worked at the office, would room together. Along the way, at church with this senior group, I met Mary and Dick Windberg, who was an engineer within

service. They became good friends, but it's a great, great group of people. They've been very kind and welcoming to me.

MM:

But you and Vernon haven't been back to the reunion for how many years?

JH:

We only missed the last two years.

MM:

And that's the two years we were there, that we started to show up.

JH:

Well he broke his hip, see?

MM:

That's right, that's right. Now, is there anything that Vernon may have left out that you'd like to talk about relating to his career or things you heard about relating to Vernon that you've heard other service members talk about?

JH:

Well no, I think he—

MM:

Pretty much covered it?

JH:

Pretty well covered it. I'm sorry that he couldn't recall those names. At one time, he could've told you every staff member, and the years that he was at different places and all. I know that the younger daughter Sarah was born at Fort Stockton because the other girls tease her about that being her home. But I know when he first went to work down in Raymondville, Wilson Moon was the person who trained him, and there was a, I thought, a funny story. I was sorry that Vernon didn't relate it, but in the class – and he was training several of them at the same time and number one, you're going to wear a hat like the farmers wear, and this one young man refused – well the first time they went out, they took him shopping. Let him go buy a hat. He decided he was not going to wear that hat and he was sent home. He did not get a job, and I don't know that the whole class, that all of them got a job and see, I knew Wilson then. After Wilson retired as a state geologist in – I believe – I can't remember. Dorothy could have told you where he came from. Anyway, he joined our Sunday school class. I met him and Vernon, of course, knew him forever. We kept urging him – his wife died and he wanted to become a hermit, but we

wouldn't let him. He became a member of our Sunday school class. Of course, Dorothy Graham, who was widowed for a number of years, had known him forever, and they eventually married. She was a member of our Sunday school class.

MM:

It's funny, these connections between your Sunday school class here in Temple at the First Methodist Church, and these interrelationships with retired service personnel. Y'all have managed to make good lives in your retired lives.

JH:

Yes, meaningful lives.

MM:

Meaningful lives in your retired years. That's quite important. Those kinds of connections just are hardly made anymore.

JH:

Yes, well they're too busy on their cellphone.

MM:

Don't get me started on that one. The person that's going to be transcribing this will probably be just one of those kind of people.

JH:

Right. [Laughter] But Wilson himself told me that this was the best student that ever came through his class. Wilson had been a major in the air force, I guess it was, but what a fine man he was.

MM:

And he was state geologist, you say?

JH:

No, when he retired, he was state conservationist.

MM:

Conservationist. He was the state conservationist.

JH:

Yeah, I don't know where all he had been, but when he retired, it was like Kansas or someplace

like that, and he had kept his house here in Temple. That's why there's so many here in Temple. They've served here. It's a delightful place to live.

MM:

Yeah, it's an easy place to live. It's kind of like Lubbock, as a matter of fact. The fact that Vernon made it all the way to become the national wildlife person was quite impressive. I mean, did they treat him any differently at the reunions or anything like that?

JH:

No.

MM:

Just how they all treat each other, because all served all over the place, didn't they?

JH:

Yeah, just one of the group.

MM:

Right, and were the kids coming at that time?

JH:

No.

MM:

I noticed the reunions that I were at, there were several of the kids that came.

JH:

No, and I'm not going to say there weren't any. Some of them brought their parents. I would imagine the kids that you saw were there with someone.

MM:

With their parents, as a matter of fact, who had been in service. That's right, absolutely.

JH:

Yeah, well see, Rocky Rockinbaugh [?][3:15:41] passed away fairly recently, and they came down from Fort Worth, he and Dale. I believe she worked for the service too. Newman – see I met people up in Fort Worth with Vernon, but they came down to the reunions and in fact, they were waiting when I got there that first time because they knew I was coming, and that's Whitey from over in Arkansas, had served here in the state for a long time, but they had been wonderful to me.

MM:

Let me ask you this question, does Vernon have any like old scrapbooks or old photos or plaques or anything like that, that he kept over the years? Are they still here or are they with his kids?

JH:

No, he has some stuff out in the office. He has an office.

MM:

I saw that.

JH:

But it's hotter than six blazes out there. I will look and see what is available. If you'll leave me your mailing address –

MM:

Sure, well what I'll do is I will leave you my mailing address, because I ran off busy yesterday morning and didn't bring business cards. I'll leave you my phone number, is what I'll leave you.

JH:

Well I got your cellphone number.

MM:

Oh, you do, and then I'll call you and I'll get you this information or I'll send it to you, send you a business card.

JH:

I know since he and I have been married, he received a letter – is that right? Yes, he received a letter from somebody in Washington. No, I found it. I found the letter and I said, "Vernon, is this any good?" And it was a letter that one of the supervisors in Washington had written him, thanking him for a project that he had completed. I think that would – of course, I'd have to clear it with him before I would send anything in to you –

MM:

Oh, sure.

JH:

But I know that's available.

MM:

Any types of archives that y'all are not going to keep or whatever. We just hate to see it wind up

in a dumpster.

JH:

The best keeping would be with people like you.

MM:

Right and because of Bailey and the work that he's been doing with us, and actually brought some records from here to the Temple office, some of the older records. We're trying to create an archive relating to soil conservation service.

JH:

You will find my father's name in that stuff you got here.

MM:

We'll see. I'm going to start looking.

JH:

It's in there because I saw it. That first or second time I was there, that guy that was in charge of it here, Jimmy Lewis?

MM:

Jimmy Lewis, that's right.

JH:

I said to him – I don't know what jimmy said – and I said, "Jimmy, could I look at that?" and he said, "That's why I've got it here." He said, "What are you looking for?" I said, "Well my father was involved in terracing." In fact, he might be the very first person in Mitchell County that had the soil conservation terrace his property. I mean, he was a big believer in the service. Although, toward the end, he said, "If they'd get off my back, I can make a lot more money. I can plant stuff all over the place." He was something else. Jimmy said, "Well, what are you looking for?" I said, "Well it's Mitchell County." He said, "Right here." He said, "What are you looking for?" I said, "My father's name." And I found it. I don't know what they called him, but it was all, I'm going to say lay people on a committee. County committee of some kind.

MM:

Yeah, because they had the county committees. They sure did. Well, just keep in mind and I'll be in touch with you and of course, Dorothy and her family are thinking about the little scrapbooks that they had for George's retirement. Any of that kind of stuff that you find, photos, stuff like that, that the family doesn't want or if you can – I'd be happy to talk to the daughters and if they realize that they're going to be part of the archive, it would be in Vernon's name, the collection,

that's what we'd call it, but it would be coordinated with the broader artificial collection called the soil conservation archives. We do these kinds of things all the time, and this interview process is part of it. Well, so let's wrap up here. I hate to – well, anybody that is listening would know what your age is because we know what your birthday is. You have a remarkably keen mind for somebody who is ninety-one years old. Is there anything else you'd like to share with posterity? You're talking to people a hundred years from now about what was life like when you were born and grew up and how you have seen it change over time.

JH:

Oh my goodness. Well, automobiles were found as only had one means of transportation, either a car or a truck. They didn't have a car and a truck hardly at all. People still walked to functions. Not like my mother and dad's generation, but my childhood. I remember that. As I said earlier, everybody was poor so we didn't really realize that there were people who had more than we did and if we realized it, I mean, we must not have dwelt on it because I don't remember even having those kinds of thoughts. Most all of us went to a rural school except those who were living in the city or a town. I do remember my first weeks of going to school in town, I learned they called the people that this girl was a portion of there, the River Rats. That didn't mean anything to me at the time, but it got so that it did. She thought she was real tough and I was always taller, and my first day at school in town, which was in the seventh grade, she was going to beat me up, and I can remember, I looked her in the eye and I said, "Just have at it if you think you can do that." She looked at me rather startled because she was used to people being afraid of her, and I was not afraid of her, and she turned and walked off. That was the last confrontation I had like that, but I do remember that. I would never forget that. The people that were around me that saw me do that, they came and said, oh, ignore her. She's one of the River Rats. I didn't know what that meant, but she tried to make a distinction between the town folks and the country folks, but she didn't get very far with it. I was always – you were talking about welcoming the blacks – the kids in town, when we came, they would act as though mostly glad that we were there. As I say, and I would spend the night when functions were going on with friends that I made in town because the distance, but we would walk to whatever function we were going to. We did not have the family car to do that. Of course, the older kids now, they dated with the family's car, but not junior high kids. Of course, I remember my mother made all of our clothes, very few store bought clothes did we have, except coats and probably one pair of shoes a year was about all that we could have. Of course, as things progressed and World War II came along, we could only have shoes if we had a stamp for shoes. By the time – well, it was still hard times when World War II came along. There wasn't a lot of money, but things were getting better. The dust had settled and we were not living in a dust bowl. Of course, that occurred after my parents moved to West Texas. I can't say that I really realized that things were – well, my parents made sure I didn't realize it. They provided what was necessary and I'm sure the desires of the children just by living in those times, they realized that it just wasn't available to have so many wants. We drove thirteen miles into church, went to church every Sunday. At one period of my life,

probably I was about six, my dad decided he would buy a Whip It automobile. I can remember well, it didn't function too well. Every Sunday morning, we'd put our school shoes on and set our Sunday – we called them our Sunday school shoes – out, but we knew we were going to have to push that car to get it to run. He kept that about a year, but that Whip It was a memory I'll never forget. I can't remember – there was a particular reason that he bought that car, but I cannot remember what it was that he said it was, but it was a dud. We always had Sunday shoes. My mother saw to that. We did not go to Colorado City to church. We went to Lorraine. Where I lived, we were thirteen miles from Colorado City and thirteen miles or there about to Lorraine. My sister, the oldest child, when she went into high school, Lorraine was the school district servicing that area and the only bus so she went to school in Lorraine, but we had belonged to that church. When my mom and dad moved out to West Texas, all of my mother's people were Baptist, but my father's family were all Methodist, and Lorraine was the closest Methodist Church and so we went in there to church. I remember on Sunday, we always had ice cream in the summertime. After church, we'd drive by the ice house and use a gunnysack and wrap that fifty pounds of ice and put it on the bumper of the car and take off, go as fast as the car would go to get home. And mom would get busy and use mostly eggs and cream and make the best ice cream that was ever made. We'd freeze it, pack it down, and have it later in the day [phone rings 03:28:11]. That went on [pause in recording] – well, and we'd have that ice cream later in Sunday afternoon, but as things progressed along, and my folks moved from that little bitty house I was telling you about – this just came to me. The end of this bigger house on that second farm they bought, my father purchased a Maytag washing machine that was a gasoline and put, put, put, it went.

MM:

That had to be a revolution.

JH:

I cannot remember why they put it on the front porch, but I do remember my mother saying to him, "Earl Brown, I'm not washing clothes on the front porch again. That washing machine goes in the smoke house." He moved it. In a few years – and then we used an iced box, of course, and a window cooler. The troth out at the wind mill was a cement troth, that we called it, because the windmill pumped the water into that, which was cool. It was a deep well, and milk was stored in that. At the window cooler, she kept lettuce wrapped in a wet cloth, and stuff like that, but I can remember so well, and I think I was about six or maybe seven, my daddy bought a refrigerator that was kerosene operated. He told the guys at a meeting that he'd bought that, and they didn't believe him. So they came home with him and I can still see the bib overalls, and see those men stretched out on that kitchen floor looking at that flame and he reached up and got one of the trays of ice and one of them says, "And by God, Earl, it makes ice. I can still hear that." He kept that refrigerator then when Butane became available, he had it converted to Butane. They used that for a number of years and they had Butane, but not electricity, and then when they got

electricity, he continued to use Butane on that refrigerator with my mother just telling him every day she was going to go buy a new one, but didn't. Finally, as they retired then, he was going to move that refrigerator in town, and she put her hands on her hips and she said, "I am not moving that refrigerator into my house." He said, "You are moving that refrigerator into your house. I'm going to have it converted to electricity." So it was moved into the new house in town, but it didn't stay there long. She got an electric refrigerator down there.

MM:

She won.

JH:

She won eventually. She bodied her time, but just think about all the years that that piece of machinery worked.

MM:

Exactly and people made things work like that back then.

JH:

Yes, she was still making biscuits every morning in a cabinet thing that pulled out. The other women couldn't believe that she had a refrigerator. In fact, it was a novelty. That was in 1949, they built that house in town. My daddy thought that he'd go to the farm and milk every day and bring the milk home and she told him, "I am not taking care of milk anymore. My milk is coming from the grocery store." And it did. They were quite a pair. When he got ready to build that house in town, he tore that big old house down out in the country because he said, "If we leave it, people will steal the boards off of it or burn it down." It had bitted [?] [03:32:25] board. Do you know what that is?

MM:

Yeah, sure.

JH:

Walls, and my mother, as we lived in it, she canvased those walls and papered them to make it look modern, but they used that to line the garage. They built a large garage in town, but when they went to town, they went to town. My mother did it right. They lived a number of years in town and my dad developed vascular degeneration. There was no diagnosis as such, but I took him to Houston. I lived in Houston and I took him from Scott and White, on the advice of the doctor, to Houston. We went to the Sabre Site Clinic. The young man told me – I talked to him on the phone – and he said, "Bring the part of their newspaper that your father wants to read the most." It was the obituary, so they keep up with his friends, and the young man said to dad, "Mr. Brown, are you still driving?" and my father said, "Yes, sir," and he said, "How do you see the

stop signs?” and said, “I’ve got them memorized.” He drove with my mother saying, “Earl, there’s a stop sign coming.” We’d go out there and we’d leave and just shudder, but that’s the way they operated. They didn’t give up easily. They always had – after they got any money – they always had two cars. Had a three car garage, but then whoever visited had a place to park their car. That ranch that he had bought—well, it had come in—oil had come in prior to his dying, but not for very long. He had a massive heart attack and died, but mom, that first year after he died, she had more money than Carter had little of bill [?] [03:34:27]. She really—it didn’t last long, but she enjoyed it the few years that it was going on. Of course, we benefited from it, but they were something else.

MM:

Well, you grew up during the Great Depression.

JH:

I did.

MM:

You travelled on troop trains when you were going to college.

JH:

I did.

MM:

You were part of the greatest generation.

JH:

I agree.

MM:

If you had to tell somebody a hundred years from now why that was important, what would you tell them?

JH:

You mean the way I grew up?

MM:

Yeah.

JH:

Well, I think it gave me the desire to be independent, to take care of what is mine, to love other

people, and take care of other people, and stay true to my God, and just be a good citizen. It was not easy. I didn't realize that it was not easy, but you know, you learn – when you don't have something and then you do have it, you appreciate having attained it. I think the greatest gift my parents gave me, of course was a college education, which was an out and out gift. My grandfather said to my father when he discovered he was going to send a second girl to college, "Earl, you've lost your mind. She'll just grow up and marry a farmer." My mother interrupted and said, "We're buying her a life insurance policy. If she loses her husband, she can make a life for herself. Go away, dad. We're going to do it." But my grandfather was opposed to it because he thought it was unnecessary.

MM:

That was the world he knew.

JH:

That was the world he knew, and my mom had seen that world enough, and this world we're in now – she either envisioned it or she saw of it that she knew those possibilities of a woman needing to support herself out there. But I grew up in a loving home, and we had hard times and they were disciplinarians, don't think they weren't. They were of the generation, they used the rod if necessary, not unnecessary. I remember one time when my younger brother, who was seven years younger than I, he had not obeyed my father and my father said to him, "Ted, what do you think I should do to you?" and Ted says, "I think you should spank me," and daddy says, "Get a board." He picks up a two by four. As a little kid, that didn't mean – and I can remember it so well, my father looked at that board and looked at my brother and threw the board on the ground, went on into the house, and he was not being smart when he gave my father that board. He didn't realize, but my father didn't want to laugh so he just went in the house. The older kids, we were off out here in the fringe just dying because we knew what had happened. Those kinds of things, I mean, I wouldn't trade the world for it.

MM:

You know, a lot of people think that right after the war, everything was good in America, but a lot of people don't realize that right after the war, men and women struggled to find jobs. They weren't there initially, but then it did get better.

JH:

My husband was on the G.I. Bill. Parents did not feed their children money once they married, so he got ninety dollars a month because he was married. I was making – I had a college degree – my salary was a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. We had moved in that second apartment that I talked about. We were down to ten cents between us. It was the day before his check would come in, and it was the day of my paycheck coming in, and he went to the Red Cross that had an office at TCU – they were on all the campuses – and asked to borrow ten

dollars. They refused. They said, "Where are your parents?" He said, "I don't ask my parents for money." They refused him that loan. My husband never gave another penny to the Red Cross. He always said to me, "Give it to the Salvation Army," and that was the way we operated, but we had ten cents. The bus cost me ten cents. I got my check and I can't remember – I think a friend brought him home because he didn't have money for the bus. It was hard, it was hard. We moved to Fort Worth when I finished school. No car. He rode the bus to school, and I rode the bus to work. My mother and father came down on the train to visit, and by that time, we'd moved to the third, little servant's quarters behind this mansion that was close to TCU's campus. My mother and father, they rode the train down and caught a cab and came out to our house and daddy decided he wanted to go to the stock yard, so he did, got caught in the rain. He gets back at the house, he said, "You kids need a car." I said, "Huh, need a car, I hear you, but yhat will have to come later." A day or two, he calls me, he says, "I have you a car." He didn't have to tell me, it was understood that we'd pay for the car. I said, "But we can't afford that car." He said, "Yes, you can, just don't worry about it. We'll talk about it later." Well, what we did, it was a loan, interest free, but we paid for the car and that's the way people got ahead. That was a hand up, not a handout. We paid him every penny of it and the sucker was a – and I said to him, "Daddy, you can't buy a car. Cars are not available." He said, "I think I can manage that." He went to the Chevrolet dealer and he said, "All the cars and trucks that I have bought from you and blah, blah, blah. I want a car." The next day, the man had him a car, probably a black market. We bought our first refrigerator after we moved into that two story house that I told you about, and we bought it down on the Trinity River, black market. You couldn't get a refrigerator. Stores didn't have them. There were a few made, but the black market got them. That was the life that we lived, but it was a while before we – but we didn't expect anybody to support us. That was up to us. Now, my mom would – after Clarence and I married – and she adored him, so she would send us five or ten dollars and told us to go to the movie, but don't tell your daddy, the note would say. That was my mother. I was her daughter.

MM:

And they were doing that to all your siblings too, weren't they? Taking care of them.

JH:

Yeah, but they didn't pay your rent. They didn't buy you or give you a car.

MM:

It was a hand up, not a handout.

JH:

That's right. Same thing as the first house we bought when we went down to McKinney with Exxon, they had what they call Poor Boy's Camp. We weren't on the scale of having a company house, but they had this property and you could put a house on it, and they would pay all of your

utilities because they had on there and that's what they did and my dad, again, furnished the money, but we paid it all back to him. It was all business. I did not resent that. I appreciated the fact that he loved us enough and that he was able to do that.

MM:

Sure. Dorothy, did your parents write you all the time? Did they send you letters? Did you send them letters?

JH:

Um-hm.

MM:

What happened to all those letters?

JH:

In the trash, I'm sure.

MM:

They're gone along the way. The mother's milk of history is gone.

JH:

Yeah.

MM:

Well, anything else you want to add?

JH:

You know my life.

MM:

Well, it's an interesting life you've had and I want it noted on this recording that while we were talking, we've had a gentle rain outside here in Belton at their wonderful place here that Juanita and Vernon have, and I have watched for a better part of about two hours, the little hummingbird's going back and forth to the feeder and you've got a plethora of hummingbirds out there.

JH:

Out this window, you might view deer, raccoons, fox, all kinds of birds. You see that wildlife biologist? When he was up and Adam, you wouldn't have found a dead tree or a dead limb

anywhere, but it's not that easy now.

MM:

Well I want to note that y'all live at this beautiful place here. [REDACTED] in Belton and it's a wonderful place that y'all have here, and with that, we will end this recording.

[End of recording]

