

**Oral History Interview of Michael
R. and Honey Wilson Casey**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
May 25, 2008
Unknown location**

Part of the:
General Southwest Collection Interviews

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

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

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Michael R. Casey & Honey Wilson on May 25, 2018. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

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

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Casey, Michael R. & Wilson, Honey Oral History Interview, May 25, 2018. Interview by Daniel Sanchez, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

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

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

Technical Processing Information:

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

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

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

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 96 kHz/ 24 bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews:

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Daniel Sanchez

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Iris Rangel

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Michael Casey and Honey Wilson Casey as they discuss Newman Casey and his ventures in the restaurant business. In this interview, they describe all the restaurant's they had, Old Abilene Town, and delve into Honey's history.

Length of Interview: 01:25:18

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Introduction and his Uncle Newman's restaurants	05	00:00:00
Newspaper articles and other restaurants	13	00:10:35
Stuart Hamilton; Old Abilene Town	22	0:19:46
Entertainment provided at the restaurants; Old Abilene Town Main Street	30	00:30:03
The museum burning down	36	00:39:11
Honey's life and background	47	00:53:37
How her life changed after she moved to Abilene	50	01:04:20
Michaels' time lecturing film classes at UT	59	01:17:02

Keywords

Restaurants, Old Abilene Town, Business

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

Yes, I always check, because one time we were—well I did—I had—when I first started doing this, I had interviewed—well, I already started that, so I'll go ahead and just be quiet and let y'all talk.

Michael Casey (MC):

Okay, this is Mike Casey, we're sitting with my aunt Honey Casey Wilson. She's the one that raised me every summer and anytime I got in trouble I came here. She straightened me out and kicked me out of the house. So, without her I'd be in jail or prison or dead. [Laughs] Well, she's a great lady.

Honey Wilson (HW):

Oh. I'm old, for sure.

MC:

She's been like my mother to me. But, anyway, we're starting to look at the restaurant business that she and my uncle were in. First thing is a picture of Uncle Newman and he was in the army at Fort—.

HW:

Um. [Laughs] I don't know.

MC:

Blissbragno [?] [00:01:02]. I can't think of the name now—getting old. Anyway, he was a cook in the army and he got out and he borrowed three-hundred dollars from Aunt Desi and opened his first restaurant. And this is a scrapbook of the history of the restaurant. Do you want to say anything about it? That's Uncle Newman in the army and this says, "Casey's Triple A Drive-In. Four locations", it's got a four digit phone number, so you can tell that's a little old.

HW:

The reason that it has a four digit number is because its 19—do I have a date on that, Mike?

MC:

No.

HW:

Should be dated.

MC:

Not on this page.

HW:

I was bad about not putting dates on them.

MC:

That's probably what—'41 or '44? Well this is '40—?

DS:

Well, this says '37 on—on here.

HW:

Okay, that's an article about something. That was in '37?

MC:

"Bandits Rob Drive-In Café in Stolen Car," yeah. There see, like my dad's it says, "Big Boy Burgers", see? Then later, Bob's Big Boy sued him for using the name and they had it copyrighted, so he quit using it, but we had the name long before Bob's Big Boy was in business. [Laughs] [Coughs]

HW:

So, we—it didn't cost him anything, and—because it—he did have a right to use it because he used it long before Big Boy, but he chose not to after that. That's just permits for something.

MC:

Yeah, well these are racing checks for pounds of sugar.

HW:

Oh. Oh, remember during the war.

MC:

Yeah, "Casey's White Way Drive-In." 2023 South 1st.

HW:

South 1st.

MC:

Yeah, so this is racing checks so you can get sugar to use at the restaurant. That's the circle one I'd tell you about. He built that, of course, and used to show silent movies from the roof for the people that drove in with the cars, you know, and the carhops. This one is—this the one back up on the hill, isn't it?

HW:

No, I think that was down on Butternut.

MC:

This one?

HW:

Uh-huh.

HW:

Oh yeah, is that not a—a trolley car? Sort of.

MC:

Yeah, it's a trolley car, yeah.

HW:

It was on First and Butternut. That's where I first started working for him. Actually, it's not, I'm sorry. [Laughs]

DS:

[Laughs] No, I think it'll catch on better that way.

HW:

But I—I did work for him—I—I was going to Draughon's Business College across the street from this place. So, I went over there every day and worked for an hour for my lunch. [Laughs]

DS:

Wow.

HW:

[Laughs] Yeah, and then I'd go back to school, see. So, I was the store—.

MC:

You could get a—a chicken burger for a quarter, a hamburger for twenty cents, cheeseburger's a quarter, a root beer's a nickel, root beer float's a dime.

HW:

Prices have changed.

MC:

Prices have gone up a little bit. Yeah, it was a little more than that at that restaurant we went to last night. [Laughs]

DS:

Just a little.

MC:

Yeah. [Laughs]

HW:

Where'd y'all go? Copper Creek?

MC:

Copper Creek, yeah.

DS:

But—my thoughts are, it didn't cost me anything. It was actually cheaper than that.

HW:

Oh. [Laughs]

MC:

Yeah, that's true.

HW:

It is a little pricey alright.

MC:

This is, "Casey Not Connected with Liquor Law Violation"—nine charges for that.

HW:

I think there was a bootlegger working on our parking lot and they had to clear us of that.

MC:

I was telling you about the car hops that came out, you know, and they'd come back to the soda jerk and say, you know, "Give me an HB drug to the garden, give me a Waco stretch one, draw one, and give me two for the city" and a Waco is made in—Dr. Pepper because it's made in Waco, stretch one was a Coke, draw one's a cup of coffee.

HW:

A taco.

MC:

Two for the city was—meant the police were outside and they want two free cups of coffee. Because they always gave free coffee to the police because you might need them. [Laughs]

HW:

Boy, you remember more than I do on that. Pina wanted me to write that down one time. All the slangs we used to use.

MC:

Yeah. Like what was a black cow? Was that a chocolate milk?

HW:

Yeah and then—.

MC:

What was a forty-four?

HW:

I don't know.

MC:

A chocolate soda?

HW:

No, now, chocolate milk with ice cream was an eight-hundred.

MC:

An eight-hundred.

HW:

I don't know why, but that was—.

MC:

So anyway, all the car hops had the same code and you went to another restaurant and they all knew the same language and it's a lost language right now.

HW:

Yeah, they don't do it anymore.

MC:

Nope. This is—is this number one, here? This is on South 1st.

HW:

I think it is—nope, that's not—not with the pointed—

MC:

No, that's not number one, I don't think.

HW:

Let's see. What does it say?

MC:

"First with the finest" said, South 1st, 2047 and 2023 South 1st. This must have been the other one. Isn't that the—The Red Barn there?

HW:

You know, I can't—I got where I don't see very well. No, that's still a Triple A.

MC:

Is it?

HW:

Uh-huh.

MC:

My God. How many restaurants did he have total? Thirteen?

HW:

Thirteen. But not at the same time. You know, I—and I tell my kids all the time, my husband should have been in the real estate business because he liked to buy and sell. He would—he would buy—now some restaurants he would not sell—can't. That was our main stay. But, some—he would buy a small restaurant and build it up good and he'd sell it. [Laughs] He didn't—well, it just would be too many, you know, to handle and he always kept it pretty personal.

MC:

Well, the most at one time, was what—six or eight?

HW:

About six would be his limit to hold.

MC:

I was telling him that—

HW:

We had six in Abilene running at the same time, I think.

MC:

Yeah and he'd go by and check each restaurant, you know, to see if they're doing good and while he was there, if some customer came up to cash register, he'd take their money and give them change, and he'd slip a twenty in the register and at night when they'd call "here" and tell him, "Mr. Casey we made 860 dollars, but we—we don't know what's wrong, we've got 880" and if they just said they had 860 he knew somebody stole a twenty. So he'd fire them.

[Laughter]

HW:

Oh, boy. That's planting evidence, I guess.

MC:

Yeah. The restaurants were a good business, but boy you had to just—

HW:

Had to stay on top of it. You still do.

MC:

Had to marry it nearly.

DS:

How many hours would y'all work?

HW:

Oh. I don't have any idea.

DS:

You'd never leave, huh?

MC:
Yeah.

HW:
Almost.

MC:
We'd go to church on Sunday and then we'd go out to eat at the The Barn Door or The Little Red Barn or later on in Old Abilene Town and we'd be there in our Sunday best and the first thing you'd have to do is— the women's toilet was stopped up, so you'd take off your tie and coat and go and stop the toilet and then the dishwasher didn't show up, and you know, I'd go back and wash dishes and if a cook didn't show up, Casey'd start cooking and she'd start waiting tables and Penny, my cousin, would start waiting tables and—.

HW:
Well busting tables and cleaning up.

MC:
Then when the rush was over we got to have Sunday dinner. I remember one time at Old Abilene Town, we—we had a—a cook and we let him go and it was me and a waitress and a bus full of senior citizens pulled up.

HW:
Oh, yeah.

MC:
I think I called you to come help because I was trying to cook and she was trying to wait on fifty people. So, that would always happen, you know, the minute you let the people go, a big bus would pull up you didn't know about. It was always fun.

HW:
They—they didn't have cell phones in those days, where they could call ahead say, "We're going to have about fifty people in—in about fifteen minutes, can you handle us?" [Laughs] They do that nowadays. But in those days, you didn't have that privilege, so, you just took them as they came.

DS:
Yeah, I—I think I heard an interview with Coach Keeling, who was a football coach and he had an intergraded squad, so he would call ahead wanting to find out if they would be treated okay

and they were accepted there, and then he'd say, "Okay we need to make the reservation" and "No, you're going to have to try another number."

HW:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, in the old days they—some wouldn't—some wouldn't want that.

MC:

This is for the 145 dollars in 1944, "Casey Now Opens Swank New Restaurant". That's probably number one there.

HW:

So 1944 is when you went into business here.

MC:

There's somebody on a mule there. Or no, a horse, that's one of his race horses here. He had race horses that he raised and used to go to Ruidoso and Raton, New Mexico and what was the place in Arkansas? Hot Springs, right?

HW:

Um, yeah. Hot springs.

MC:

Yeah.

HW:

What did you used to do it—a lot of promo where at—like this is reserved for the Abilene First Baby of the Year, you know. We'd have the parents out for a freebie and when—at their convenience, you know, and we did that same thing for—for other things like people get awards for something, we'd invite them to come have dinner.

MC:

"After seven years, Casey estimates customers at a million a year"—that's in '52. That's Uncle Newman there and that's Dwayne Curry the manager and that's—let's see, isn't that number one there?

HW:

Yes, it is.

MC:

Yeah, that's a nice shot of it. That was on South 1st and its funny, if you go to the Grace Museum, Mack Emplane had restaurants too and he was—

HW:

He was a—

MC:

Old Abilene.

HW:

Yeah, he was a lifelong—

MC:

So, he's in the museum, but we're not.

HW:

He was a lifelong Abelian and a graduate of Hardin-Simmons.

MC:

Yeah, so he's at the museum and we're not. I didn't like that one.

HW:

Casey had a sixth grade education, [laughs] so that made the difference in the news, you know.

MC:

Yeah, when he went out to California to hop cars or work a drugstore, he carried a dictionary in his back pocket. Every time he heard a word and didn't know it, he'd look it up. So with a fifth grade education he—

HW:

Educated himself pretty well.

MC:

Educated himself and was pretty good at it.

HW:

Paid attention to what he was doing out there that's why he wasn't afraid.

MC:

Yeah, I guess he was worth probably a million at the end, wasn't he?

HW:

What'd you say, Michael?

MC:

Wasn't he worth about a million at the end at least?

HW:

Oh, yeah, I guess.

MC:

Probably, yeah.

HW:

We didn't count the dollars. [Laughs] We had plenty to pay our bills.

MC:

Yeah. What else was I going to say?

HW:

I probably threw you off track.

DS:

Oh, y'all had a cartoon.

HW:

[Laughs] Yeah.

MC:

Yeah. Somebody drew a cartoon drawing. "Ten years jailed after gang fight". Yeah, the chief of police here back then, what was his name? Bruce? No.

HW:

Brooke? No, I started to say Warren, but that's not right either.

MC:

Anyway, the chief of police had come down to the restaurant and Casey'd have a new Cadillac. He'd got one every other year or every year. Every other year he gave you one, right? The old one?

HW:

Yeah. [Laughs]

MC:

Yeah and he'd get in the chief of police's car and the chief would try out the new Cadillac and they'd race down South 1st street. [Laughs] That was in the old days. I remember when she used to take the kids to school over here, later on you'd see a policeman at the restaurant and he'd say, "Mr. Casey, you know, someday were going to not turn around and go the other way when we see you coming," [laughter] and she would start to speed a little bit. Then one day we're—

HW:

Well there wasn't anybody out there but me. Going that way—.

MC:

One day we're sitting at the table, Uncle Newman and I, and aunt Honey comes in and she walks in and she said, "Casey, something's wrong with my car. It's just not steering right, you got to fix it" and we went out there and she had a right flat—tire flat. [HW laughs] The right front was flatter than that.

HW:

Well, something was wrong with it, wasn't it?

MC:

Yeah, something was wrong with it.

DS:

That effects the steering, you're right. [laughter]

MC:

There's—you know, we had those old canvas awnings. So you can park underneath them.

HW:

Oh, gosh, those storms would tear them up.

MC:

You'd have to replace them and then we had a lot of neon that the storms would—would tear up neon signs back then.

HW:

Uh-huh.

MC:

Dial-a-Burger. That was interesting.

HW:

Yeah, that was interesting because there was no drive-thrus. In those days, no drive thru windows, you know. This was the first one in Abilene and it was totally—nobody knew anything about a drive-in—a drive thru window, so they just—we just—Casey just made that up and it stuck. [Laughs]

DS:

It stuck. Well I think you told me a story—

HW:

It was a free standing place. It wasn't a—wasn't—didn't go along with the restaurant or drive-in or anything. It was a free standing building and that's all we did was take call in orders and we had a window there and like a bank, we had the little push-out doors that would just go right into their window. We didn't know you could just hand them to them. [Laughter] Be a lot easier and cheaper.

MC:

He was also trying to figure out what all to serve at the car with carhops and, you know, you had hamburgers, you had chicken burgers, you had French fries, chili dog, hot dog, and then he came up with the—the idea of steak fingers. He cut a chicken fried steak in strips and breaded it and fried it in a fry-o-lator and gave a waitress five dollar prize for naming it chicken—steak fingers.

HW:

Steak fingers.

MC:

Now, of course, they're all over the place.

DS:

So y'all invented steak fingers?

HW:

We did, we did.

MC:

Yeah.

HW:

[Laughs] We didn't have it patented, but we did. I was going to show him that—this was at one of the restaurant conventions and—

MC:

Yeah, they were in the Texas Restaurant Association and acting members.

HW:

They'll be more about that out somewhere else.

MC:

One time he was president, wasn't he, T.R.A.? Then later, Ms. Casey here was president of the T.R.A.

HW:

That's of the Abilene area, not of the state.

MC:

Abilene area. State—he was state or? Was he state or?

HW:

No. No, never state.

MC:

Is that the carhops? Yeah.

HW:

That wasn't—no, those were the waitresses at The Little Red Barn. That's Mrs. Warren.

MC:

Yeah. Yeah, he went into specialty restaurants. Old number one became The Barn Door and the other one was a ranch house that's still down here, and then the third one was just called The Little Red Barn.

DS:

Can we uncover the mics over there that way?

HW:

Oh, I'm sorry. Oh, is there one there?

DS:

No, it was over there. I just want to make sure that—

HW:

It may not be. There's one called the ranch house.

MC:

Yeah, that's the ranch house. That building's still down here on Tredway.

HW:

Yeah it's a ice cream parlor now, I think. But that's one that he—we operated for about five years. [Laughs] He liked it.

MC:

Now, here's a—here's a picture of the ranch house there, and then that's the barn door with the big widow there.

DS:

Oh, quite the—pre-birthday cake, huh?

MC:

Yeah and that's The Little Red Barn right there.

HW:

You built that one. Floor up.

MC:

That's Uncle Newman—is that Uncle Newman or not? I can't see. I can't see it—might be Mr. Warren and Mrs. Warren.

HW:

Yeah, no it's me and—me and your—and Newman.

MC:

Okay, isn't it—her and Newman and that's Penny. You saw her yesterday, remember?

DS:

Uh-huh.

MC:

Yeah.

HW:

That's— [laughs] so little.

DS:

So Penny's your daughter?

HW:

Yes.

DS:

Oh, okay.

HW:

That's her and that—I think our other two kids are in there, aren't they? We have this—another daughter.

MC:

Yeah, there's Newman, there's Lana, yeah, they're all three in there. They had three kids.

HW:

Besides Mike. [Laughs]

MC:

Beside me.

DS:

Yeah he told me about that.

MC:

I'm sort of a temporary. [Laughs]

DS:

You were his corrections school and boarding school all in one?

HW:

[Laughs] Yeah.

MC:

Yeah. She was a great lady and if you walked in here—eat with your hat on, she'd knock it off your head. "Don't you come in my house with your hat on" and if you lived here you had to make your bed before you went any place and you had to go to church on Sunday or you didn't live here. [Laughs] If you said a cuss word, you had in your mouth what I wouldn't put in my hand [laughter] or a couple of years ago I—what'd I bruise my arm, remember, real bad?

HW:

Yeah.

MC:

I walked in here and she said, "How is it?" I said, "It hurts like—" and she slapped the hell out of me for that word.

HW:

I did not slap you.

MC:

Yes you did.

HW:

I may have pushed you around, but I didn't slap.

MC:

Oh, you slapped me in the face, yes you did. You—you beat me I'm going to call Child Protective Services. [Laughter]

HW:

We're going to have a fight right here. I never slapped anybody in my life.

MC:

Oh, well you might or hit me or pushed me.

HW:

I'd hit you, but I'd hit you. Usually on the butt.

MC:

Another shot of the Barn Door ranch house. Little Red Barn and This Old House dining room. There's the Abilene Restaurant Association. That's Mack Emplane there—

HW:

We love Stuart Hamilton and he wrote this—"This Old House" and you remember and—"It is No Secret".

MC:

Stuart Hamilton, yeah.

HW:

That—he was a friend of—he and Stuart Hamilton started together in—as carhops in California.

MC:

Was that how he met him?

HW:

Uh-huh.

MC:

Hm. [Inaudible], "Wanted: Horse stealing."

HW:

Those are little sacks that we used to—when we made our burgers—our sandwiches—we'd slip them in those slacks and send out to the outside.

DS:

The TEXO Double Burger.

HW:

Boy, that TEXO Double Burger was a good burger. You can see I didn't—I guess I didn't know how to make scrapbooks or else things were not available. Good, good stuff because they're kind of falling apart a bit.

DS:

Yeah, the only thing is like—what really destroys it—stuff is stuff—with adhesives because that eats through the material of the paper after a while.

MC:

Yeah.

HW:

Yeah. Yeah, I can see that a lot of the paste that I used from the back and it would be— I—

DS:

Yeah and stuff like this can be—we do digital microfilming now, so we use a camera basically to photograph images and that's what they can do a scrapbook and make a digital copy of that nowadays.

MC:

What's over here?

HW:

Oh that's just junk. I think those are gift receipts. Mike, I think, yeah.

MC:

Oh, the ranch house, yeah,

HW:

What's in here, in here?

MC:

This is—

HW:

Let's see what's in here.

MC:

What's this? The street of Old Abilene Town.

HW:

It'll probably be in that other one.

MC:

Sherry singer dream now God [?] [00:22:05] “From Abilenian here, Bowman [?] [00:22:12] suggest folks build an old west job. In doing so, they proved what a grand idea W. N. Casey had three decades ago. Mr. Casey died this month on his eightieth birthday provided the vision behind something called Old Abilene Town. When he announced his plans for the antieville Root n’ Tootin Old West Theme Park in ‘65” and was supposedly rival Six Flags and probably if he’d built it in Dallas or Fort Worth, he would have made it. But, Abilene didn’t have that much business and back then Abilene wasn’t interested in history until Roots came out, then all of a sudden all the people on Sales Avenue wanted to brag that they used to have an outhouse and live in the country. But before that, they wouldn’t dare admit it. That’s the world’s tallest windmill that he had built.

HW:

But it never did get that.

MC:

Yeah, the blade on it—

HW:

The fan.

MC:

But I watched the guys build it and they jacked up their old—the rear end of their old car and they had a wheel hub with another welded on it and they took the tire off and stick this other hub on and that was their ____ [00:23:21]. They had a rope going up as far as they were building, you know, and the guy wrapped two turns around the rope and tied it and it would pull that thing up as he did this and then they’d lower it, take another piece and hang—put it back up. So the whole thing was built with a—that car thing, you know, and a rope and two guys. But it was three-hundred foot tall. Here’s us in a parade with the old Model T he had.

HW:

Well I think they all do it—is the—I think those are duplicates of what’s in here.

MC:

Oh, is it? Okay.

HW:

Because that—this is Old Abilene Town. Just Old Abilene Town.

MC:

Oh is it? All right. Well let's see if they're—they're all in here.

HW:

Before we get into—you know.

MC:

Okay and what's in here? This one?

HW:

That's junk—that's duplicates too.

MC:

More junk?

HW:

Uh-huh. More junk.

MC:

This is what?

DS:

Oh that's the—the release forms that I—didn't get y'all to sign.

HW:

That's his.

MC:

Oh, that's yours?

DS:

I forgot to get your—I forgot to get you to sign yesterday. So—

MC:

I ain't signing nothing man.

DS:

Yeah you can—you can—you can edit it as you want to since you're good with contracts. That's how I'm glad how he is with contracts. Works for us. [Laughs]

HW:

So my daughter and her husband went with you for dinner last night?

DS:

We met them there and they were a great couple.

MC:

Yeah. Oh they are.

HW:

[Laughs] Good, I'm glad you enjoyed yourself.

MC:

How long they been married now?

HW:

Fifty years. In August, it'll be fifty years.

MC:

Yeah. Next year I'd a been married fifty years to the first one. [Laughs]

HW:

It started the first.

MC:

Huh?

HW:

Oh, oh, this is not the first. Well, this—

MC:

That's you. Distinguished lady.

HW:

Yeah.

MC:

That's at the T.R.A.

HW:

I was the Distinguished Lady of the Year for the state.

MC:

That's pretty good.

HW:

This is a—least I forget I had a friend—a friend—that a—banker down here—our banker.

[Laughs] He made—he put this all together for me. Sent me a note.

MC:

You know, Uncle Newman—

HW:

I never got it—

MC:

--Toiled with antiques all his life and we went to probably every western town and Knott's berry farm in the country and he'd look at them and see what all they was like.

HW:

He would drive us crazy—

MC:

Then he sat down and took a menu placemat and he drew this and then he went to an architect and had him draw it. But here's the museum and then here's the restaurant, the western town.

HW:

Doesn't look exactly.

MC:

Doesn't look exactly. But he was going—he had the rodeo arena down here and this never got developed here and he wanted an amphitheater there. He built a tank down here and he was going to have an Indian village down there, but that didn't happen. There's the Indian village there. But he had Main street and the—what was that, I forget. But we had like the first post office from Bradshaw, Texas and in the saloon we had a bar from Gonzales, Texas, an old back bar.

HW:

Oh, it was gorgeous.

MC:

He said, "The bullet holes have unknown history." Can I tell that? [Laughs]

HW:

They were bullet holes too.

MC:

Yep.

HW:

You know why they had—I'm not going to tell this. [Laughs] Turn that off.

MC:

But anyway, he—he and—got partners with Mack Keeplin and the Mayor Byrd and they started planning it, but Byrd backed out and Mack Keeplin back out, and Casey hocked everything he had and went out there with a hammer and built the town. Basically.

HW:

That's why it didn't get developed to—like that. There were three of them going to do that together, but.

MC:

And they three wouldn't. They didn't get along.

HW:

I don't know. Two of them—if they started with two it might have worked, but.

MC:

But here's the newspaper. Old Abilene Town News, "Western Park Announced Abilene History Comes to Life", and there's more of it.

HW:

Oh here's the—

MC:

The three partners originally.

HW:

The three partners. That's the—

MC:

Mayor Byrd was good to get city water and sewer out there. Because he happened to be the mayor.

HW:

Yeah, but he didn't—wasn't very good at it.

MC:

Yeah. Oh there's an old steam tractor. It's a Rumley oil pull. No, this is a—this is an old steam—that ran. It wasn't oil, it was steam. We also had an old Rumley oil pull. We had a lot antique cars and stuff and schools—school busses used to come by and go to the museum and they'd tour the museum.

HW:

Oh yeah.

MC:

Because we had a lot of stuff in there. Then when it caught fire, years later, that's when Casey had his first heart attack or stroke?

HW:

Uh-huh.

MC:

Yeah. When the fire department put it out and unloaded a bulldozer to bulldoze down the two buildings so they wouldn't start again, he had to be held back he didn't want it—he wanted to try to save some of it, you know, but. There's the western front of the street there. There's somebody in an old dress.

HW:

That is the—sort of the story.

MC:

Yeah. Good old Wayne Hines, the construction foreman. You know when Strange Ellwood was put in the steam locomotive and see that big belt there—that wheel? That rode—that held the leather belt that would go to a thresher. So you could thresh wheat or whatever. [Pause] We had long horns down in the rodeo arena and we had buffalos. One time the buffalo and the long horn bull got from—through our fencing and got into a fight and we thought the buffalo would kill the longhorn but they're short winded, and later the longhorn broke the buffaloes front leg and they were both on their knees and the longhorn was just hitting the buffalo with its big horns and we

had the vet come out and I had to go shoot it, bury it, couldn't save it. Singers out here, I guess. There's Lyndon Johnson.

HW:

You know, we had John Conley—we had—a banquet out there.

MC:

Now here's the inside of the restaurant, you see there? We had antique oak tables and antique chairs, round oak tables on the floor, and then we had tables here and here and then we had alcoves here it was called the Governor's room.

HW:

Should be a good picture of it in there somewhere.

MC:

Yeah and we had entertainment up on the stage or showed silent movies.

DS:

Those the ones you were talking about—the special effects? Yesterday?

MC:

Well, no in the club upstairs he recorded a thunderstorm out here and then he put flood lights next to the windows and had hoses going up on the roof to PVC pipe with holes in it and people were eating there and say, "Casey make it rain," and he'd go over and turn on the tape recorder that had the thunder, rain, and lightning and then he'd turn on the—the water and it would start dripping off the—the roof and then he'd take those flood lights and flash them like lightning when you heard the lightning on the tape, so, and he did that all by himself. He was pretty genius. We also had a big polar bear in this little alcove when you first walked in the main restaurant.

HW:

Waiting room.

MC:

You know, it was eight feet tall standing up, you know, and little kids would go over there and Casey had a microphone at the register and he'd pick it up and go [growls] and those kids would just have a fit. [Laughs]

HW:

Oh boy and they'd back up. I'm not sure we have a good—because there was a picture of Lana and that bear on the card. I'm not sure I have one of those then.

MC:

Yeah. There's another old car. We found a '23 Studebaker in a barn with three thousand miles on it and somebody had broke the front spindle and I went down and got a front spindle made with a little oil port on it for eight bucks at a machinist here and then Casey put the sparks plugs out and they had double—double points for the spark plugs. But he filled it full of WD-40 or liquid wrench and we let it sit overnight and then we put twelve volts at six volt battery to start it and ran [laughter], and we restored it and it was great to run around town it. He had a—a what—1926 Franklin too with an air-cooled aluminum block engine. There's old Tex.

HW:

Oh, I know. He'd come up from Lubbock every summer to play cowboy.

MC:

From Lubbock?

DS:

Lubbock?

MC:

He was a school teacher in Lubbock.

DS:

What was his name?

HW:

Tex—what was it—Ewing, I think, was his last name.

MC:

Yeah, Ted Ewing.

DS:

Ted Ewing.

MC:

Uh-huh.

HW:

Ted Ewing, yeah.

MC:

“The Longhorn Herd Headed This Way.” They had a cattle drive that went through here.

HW:

Yeah.

MC:

In sixty—

HW:

A real one.

MC:

Sixty-five, wasn't it? Or '66?

HW:

Somewhere in there.

MC:

Anyway, I've got a belt buckle that looks like Ranger—Texas Ranger badge but it says “Centennial Longhorn Cattle Drive” and they came through here with the cows. Here's a shot of the old Main street and right over there is that little water trough I built. Built it out of two by twelves and tarred it and everything and filled it full of water and it leaked like a sieve. Uncle Newman felt so sorry for me, he took it down to a sheet-tin place and had an insert made of sheet-tin so we could fill it up and then he had a little hole made so when we shot behind—at somebody behind the water trough we'd pull a string and then thing would start squirting water. It'd look like we shot a bullet through it.

HW:

[Laughs] Those chairs—these chairs are not—

DS:

It's not wanting to do what I want it to do. [Laughs]

HW:

[Laughs] No, it never does.

DS:

Sorry, I—my video already cut out so, you know, there's not that much memory left on the phone, so I just—

MC:

I think that's me right there.

HW:

You need to plug it in?

DS:

No, no it's the memory. It's the—yeah, yeah. Because video takes up a lot more than taking photographs.

HW:

Oh.

MC:

That's the other side of the restaurant, see?

HW:

Of the—does it show the floor?

MC:

Yeah.

HW:

Okay. Served good food too out there.

MC:

Oh yeah.

HW:

You know, when we first opened out there—

MC:

Casey picked out his steaks. He was a cook. He'd go down to Gooch Meat Packing and he'd pick out the quarter of cow that he wanted cut and have it aged, you know, and he cooked good steaks. Now dad wasn't a cook, my dad so he just—we had a good chef. But dad would always

just build it and leave and wonder why he went broke. Dad was good at picking locations though.

HW:

He was a good people person.

MC:

Here's Aunt Honey's distinguished service award.

HW:

Yeah.

MC:

Yeah. Yeah, in Old Abilene Town she ran the hostesses and the waitresses and he ran the cooks and the dishwashers, you know. Because he couldn't do it all by himself he found out and she explained to him, "Well I'll do the front and you stay out of it," [laughd] and he finally did, didn't he?

HW:

Yeah. Now, we couldn't do it together, that's for sure.

MC:

Yeah. He wanted to run everything, but he couldn't. There's a gun fight.

HW:

He could as long as we kept smaller and smaller areas, but Old Abilene Town got to be just too much because we had this town too. We had a gift shop, and that I oversaw, and that was too much, [laughs] without doing the other part. Eventually—originally I didn't work out there, except in the gift shop. I took care of the gift shop from the very beginning and which made it really, really nice. But, as time went on, and some of the original help started falling out, getting married or dying or changing locations or something, it just it got too much. Then his health started fall—failing.

MC:

He had Parkinson's.

HW:

Oh, yeah. Way early and it just gradually—

MC:

But when he was sixty-five he still water skied out there and held one foot up like I used to do. Well I learned that from him, you might have seen that in one of the pictures.

DS:

Yeah, I saw that one of the photographs.

MC:

Yeah. Well, he taught me how. It was funny, we'd go out water skiing every weekend and stuff and he'd drive the boat and we wouldn't let go, you know. So if we didn't let go when we came by here, he'd take us down to the end of the lake and as fast as he can go, and we had the fastest boat on the lake too, and then he would cut a real big turn and gun it and you'd be out on that edge going seventy miles an hour and you'd let go. [Laughs]

HW:

[Laughs] You would let go.

MC:

And you'd skip over that water like a rock. [Laughter] So you better let go when he wants you to get off or he'll take you down there and throw you off.

HW:

Had to take turns with the kids.

MC:

Yeah.

HW:

Sometimes Mike—he wanted more on his turn.

MC:

Well it took me fifteen times to just get up. It was just—Casey said, “One more time and I’m quitting,” and finally on the fifteenth time I got up and then I loved it. But, Penny could ski slalom, little Newman could ski slalom and nearly touch his shoulder at the lake and did Lana ever learn to ski or not?

HW:

You know what, I don't think he did, no.

MC:

They were trying to teach her—

HW:

Lana he never did learn. She—I don't believe until today if we tried to teach her to learn ski, I don't think so.

MC:

They were trying to teach her and she was out in the middle of the lake yelling, crying and we had a German Shepard names Pizon and he heard her crying and he jumped in the water and went out to save her, we had to pull him in the boat to save him. [Laughter]

HW:

Oh, I tell you.

MC:

There were a lot of goose out here that—we had some geese and Lana was in the water and big a goose came over and attacked her and they can be mean.

HW:

He did, I didn't know.

MC:

He was pecking the heck out of her and Casey went out there and grabbed him, swung him around and threw him and he was fine, you know.

HW:

We thought surely Casey had broken his neck, but he didn't.

MC:

Yeah. Surely tried, but—[Laughs] he just—he swam away.

HW:

But, that bird, we didn't know he was that big either. But, he just went like this at Lana and her right ear, you know, and those wings would be just going like this, hitting her in the face and the head and shoulders. Man, I thought she—I thought it was going to kill her before anybody could do anything.

MC:

Here's when the museum burnt down. That's Casey and Lana, I think. She's hugging him.

HW:

Oh yeah, I imagine it was Lana. She took it harder than anybody.

MC:

Yeah. Says, "Flames forty-feet high stripped Abilene of a priceless fortune of its heritage Friday when the museum at Old Abilene Town containing several hundred thousand dollars' worth of old west relics." We had about a million and a half. We had old Model T's on the boardwalk around it, we had covered wagons, surreys, you know, and inside we had a collection of old dresses, Billy the Kid's guns, collection of old music machines like player pianos and those big metal plate things that you wound up it played those little—with holes in the middle. One played a violin-drums and the piano at the same time.

HW:

Oh, that one. I hated to lose that.

MC:

Yeah. It was, probably priceless, I never seen one like it. But, it all burnt down. Two bikers caught the back of it on fire, the grass on fire in the back. I don't know whether they did it on purpose or not.

HW:

No—no nobody thinks they did it on purpose. When they left, their bikes sparked and it was real dry.

MC:

"Museum owner says he isn't rebuilding. He built it from scratch ten and a half years ago and last year there was thrity thousand paying visitors, this year there won't be any, he said, 'I don't have any plans to rebuild it. There's nothing here I can replace. The insurance was a drop in the bucket compared to the value.'" I think we only had seventy-five thousand in insurance.

HW:

[Laughs] Not much.

MC:

He never was big on insurance.

HW:

No, but we should've been.

MC:

Now there's an old horse drawn hearse there, we had. That wasn't in the museum, so it got saved. But, you had an auction at the rest of the stuff in town?

HW:

Yeah, when we closed.

MC:

Yeah, when you closed. I think they—what'd you make seven hundred or something?

HW:

I'm sorry?

MC:

Seven hundred thousand dollars?

HW:

I don't remember.

MC:

It's either seventy-five or seven hundred and fifty thousand. On the old cars and everything?

HW:

I just counted the tickets and Casey took it to the bank. [Laughter]

MC:

Yeah, he had that '23 Franklin. He had a '40 Cadillac convertible, it was beautiful, and a '23 Studebaker and some Model A's and Model T's. There's the longhorn bull. There's some band people playing.

DS:

About how many people would y'all employ out there? At peak season.

HW:

Oh my goodness. Because we operated three shifts in the restaurant and two in the—in the old town, probably about, say, 150 people. Would that be an over estimate? Let's see, the restaurant would have three shifts.

MC:

No, probably not. There's the polar bear I told you about.

DS:

Oh, okay.

HW:

Oh yeah, I knew that we had it.

MC:

This is a hand-carved carousel mule. Hand-carved out of the wood. This is old stagecoach, old covered wagon. There's the old bank. That's an Etsell—horse collar.

DS:

That's a great scrapbook. [Laughter]

MC:

Yeah, look, here's some of the cars we had. Model T, the '26 Franklin, that's an old pickup, that's the '23 Studebaker, or that is, one of them. That's—

HW:

Now, what does this say?

MC:

What? "Old Abilene town auction, December 4th/5th". There's that horse drawn hearse, the stagecoach, that's a wagon that I used on Mice and Men. [Laughs] Casey bought it for me after Mice and Men was over I hauled it here. Bought it from an Amish farmer for three hundred dollars.

HW:

We sent you the money for it.

MC:

Yeah, yeah he did. There's an old steam tractor and there's an old steam roller, looks like for paving.

HW:

We didn't buy from him—

MC:

Lifetime collection sold.

HW:

—so he just [laughs] brought it here and left it. So, when we sold it we just gave him the money.

HW:

What's this?

MC:

That's the restaurant, in color. You ran the gift shop?

HW:

Oh I don't—yeah.

MC:

You probably knew my first wife, didn't you? [Laughs]

HW:

I bought the—I went to Dallas and bought—

MC:

Bought stuff?

HW:

Bought the stuff and—

MC:

One minute it's green then turns into a nightmare.

HW:

I had—I have some video of the—but I couldn't find them—I want—thought if you had time you might want to see them. [Laughs]

MC:

Penny said you had—Casey took pictures of a dirt car race. Mud cars in the mud racing?

HW:

Yeah, that's in our home, that is.

MC:

Yeah. You still got the film?

HW:

Not very much of it though. Yeah.

MC:

Yeah.

DS:

Yeah. Because that another area that we do—we do motor sports. So that would be great to have that. Because wasn't one of your relatives also involved with racing or hot rods?

HW:

Yeah they were—were just hot rods and dusty, woo. No place to sit except the on the ground or stand against your car. [Laughs]

MC:

About his funeral. March 3rd, 1993. He had a stroke and was in a rest home for like a year.

HW:

Eleven months.

MC:

Eleven months, yeah. He couldn't move.

HW:

But he was sick for a long time.

MC:

That's me right there. That red hat.

HW:

Yep. That's our real cowboy. [Laughs]

MC:

Yeah. Tales from Old Abilene Town—all the old hostesses used to get together—Honey's in there—they'd talk about old times, you now.

HW:

Betty and I are the only one's still living.

MC:

Really?

HW:

Um-hm.

MC:

Betty White?

HW:

No, Betty Curry.

MC:

Curry—Dwayne's wife?

HW:

Uh-huh.

MC:

Yeah.

HW:

Oh those are just permits and tax—I don't know why I kept them. They just happened to be with the—bunch of junk.

MC:

Remember one time a health inspector came out to the restaurant. The dishwasher water is supposed to be like a 160, you know, or 180 or something, and it was a little low. So he said, "You know, I'm going to have to shut you down," and Casey said, "Go ahead—and then we're going to get in my Cadillac, we're going to go to every restaurant in Abilene and if their water temperatures bad then you're going to shut them down too," [laughs] and the guy backed off. Because he meant it, he would've put—made that guy get in his car and take him around. He could be pretty bossy if he wanted to. [HW exits] You didn't cross him, I'd guarantee you that. He always told me, he said, "If there's a customer giving you trouble, just get him behind the counter, then he's not in a public area and make some coffee, you know, start pouring that gallon of hot water that we put in the coffee and [laughs] that other guy, he wouldn't do anything, you know. He'd lose his will to fight really quick. One time there was a fight over at number one, the air force guys and the high-school kids or college kids, you know, they didn't like the air force, you know, they're girls, you know. But there's a big fight there and Casey got on top of his car

and jumped right in the middle of them and stopped it. [Laughs] I don't know what happened to him that day. Where'd she go? [HW enters again]

HW:

Hi. I was talk—talking about that dirt car. They're on our home video and I showed it not too long ago to somebody and to—and I don't—I don't know where it is. God may know—and I couldn't find the video of the fires had to— well, just of the restaurant fires.

DS:

Yeah. Well, I'm pretty sure that Monee will come back. So, you can gather all that stuff and when Monee comes back you can—

HW:

I'll try. [Laughs]

MC:

After we sold the—after she, not we, I wasn't involved in it. They owned it, I didn't. But, we all liked to think it was ours, you know. I remember I helped build some of the boardwalks and he had this huge twelve inch table saw with a five horse motor on a belt, you know, cut through anything. So I was trying to rip a piece a two by twelve to, you know, fit along the boardwalk, and I just learned how to use it and I was pushing like this and that saw stuck and it backlashed and that board hit me. Oh ho, ho. I always learned to do this from then on. [Laughter] Man.

HW:

Oh well, you live and learn, don't you?

MC:

Yeah. Those were fun times though.

HW:

Remember, somewhere, Casey would go to auctions and—to find antiques and stuff and one time he came back with a whole trailer load of—you remember—

MC:

Player piano?

HW:

Oh. What'd you call those steppers [laughs] that you go up in—fenders?

MC:

Oh, Model T.

HW:

Fenders. Just a whole truck load of fenders. He decided that—I mean he—when he saw them he thought, this—

MC:

They're running boards. Model T running boards.

HW:

Running boards. Not fenders.

MC:

Made a walkway out of them. Welded them together. [Laughs]

HW:

He thought this'd be a great idea because they wouldn't wear out and they wouldn't break down and it'd be a good maintenance deal. But when he laid them, and it would rain or get wet or something, oh gosh. [Laughs] We threatened to be sued every day because somebody fall on them. So finally we had to take those things out, but it wasn't—it was a good idea it—but it not—it didn't work. He tried lots of stuff.

MC:

Yeah, he built this mystery house by his self.

HW:

Oh, he did!

MC:

Yeah.

HW:

Well he had some—Wayne helped him.

MC:

Wayne the carpenter, yeah, but Wayne had never probably seen one. But Casey had seen 'em in some of these western towns you go in and, you know—and by the second room you think you're standing upright but then you see a bowling ball right—right up hill and then you see

water going uphill. But it's all, you know, a trick because your—the buildings like this now, you know, or like this.

HW:

I'd forgotten all about that.

MC:

Yeah, he built that mystery house.

HW:

We'd been in a couple of them and he thought it was really fascinating. He said, "I bet I can build one of those."

MC:

Yeah we used to have a two story boat house out there and one half was a screened in porch and the other half he'd drive the boat in the water and then push a button and the boat would come up and you'd step out on the porch. He got a—a old lift from Coco-Cola that they used to lift, you know, all those cases of Coke on to a truck and he rigged it so it'd pick up the boat.

HW:

Yeah he had it welded or something so it would fit the boat's body, you know, if it was flat—the one he bought.

MC:

Then we had stairs and we had a second story up here with a little lighthouse with a beacon on it. So you could go out there and sleep on the top deck or dance on the top deck or go inside he screened in porch and sleep while your fishing and stuff. We had a diving board out there and everything. That was a lot of fun.

HW:

We had a lot more fun before we started building Old Abilene Town and then that took up a lot of his time. However, he did make time.

MC:

He was determined to make that thing work. He went out there a lot of times with a hammer.

HW:

But I wish he could have stayed in better health longer.

MC:

Yeah, well that sort of ruined his health as hard as he worked out there.

HW:

Well, it did. It did.

MC:

We were pushing this old—into the general store—he had a bought an old meat freezer with a glass over here, you know, and the doors were over here so the guy reached in to get you the meat and it must have been twelve feet long and he and I were trying to push it down the boardwalk to the general store and we got it about half way there and he had to sit down and hold his chest and rest and finally he said, “Okay lets go,” but you know he was hurting there. You know, but he wouldn’t admit it for the world.

HW:

But, you know, his heart was very strong.

MC:

Yeah, unlike mine.

HW:

He—his heart lasted longer than he did.

MC:

Yeah, wish I could have that heart. I’ve got 60 percent heart failure, you know. It sucks. Oh well, I’m tired of talking for a while. Is that still on?

DS:

It’s on, yeah.

MC:

[Pause] Do you want me to talk about something else?

DS:

Well, I was going to ask—

MC:

Why don’t you ask her? I’m getting a drink.

DS:

How should I introduce you?

HW:

Honey Casey. [Laughs] Honey Casey.

MC:

She's ninety-one by the way.

HW:

Hey Don—Mike? Get—Sanchez.

MC:

Do you want a drink? Soft drink?

DS:

A water would be fine. If you have water.

HW:

Want to have water or I think we have Pepsi or a Diet Pepsi?

DS:

I think a water would help my throat.

HW:

You know where to get the ice, don't you?

MC:

Yeah. [Exits]

HW:

But, I'm okay.

DS:

Let's talk a little bit about your—your life. When were you born?

HW:

[Laughs] A long time ago. Nineteen twenty-seven. March the sixteenth.

DS:

Where?

HW:

In Brownfield, Texas.

DS:

Brownfield?

HW:

Which is not far from Lubbock.

DS:

No it's not.

HW:

I was partially raised there. We—I was born when we lived on my grandfather's farm and it was, you know, real sandy and in those days, boy, it was really sandy. No conserving of the ground or anything. So, my dad had a sister that lived in El Segundo, California and that's where the Standard Oil Company is and he worked for Standard Oil. So, he told my dad to come out there and he had him a job. So we went out there, but three years later the depression really set in. Even out there. So, they had to laid out—lay off people. So, the last ones hired were the first ones to be paid off. So, that was my dad. So, we—they decided that we could—or that they could homestead property in New Mexico. Which is where another of my dad's sisters lived.

DS:

What was your dad's name?

HW:

He was W. S. Smith and he was born and raised around Winters. Texas. So, we—and he was in the tanker. He—his brother-in-law was a tanker, he drove trucks. I don't know whether they moved water, or oil, or gas, I was just a baby you might say. I was four—I was four years old when we moved there and that did not work. My little sister passed away while we were there, they couldn't get her to the doctor in time with just a horse and buggy, you know. Boy, I've lived a long time. Before cars and everything else. But, then, so my dad said he'd had enough of that and so we moved backed to the same farm that we had left and we lived there and I was seven years old when I stated first grade. My sister that was older than me—my—my grandmother that lived in Winters, is where my dad's mom and dad lived and he was D. R. Smith. They lived in Winters and—and he was in the grocery business, so he was—and he had a ranch. He was pretty well to do and he had owned the farm that we lived on. So, my grandmother took my older sister

to Winters when we moved to New Mexico so that she could go to school, because they're weren't schools out there where we were. I don't even know where we were. We were out in nowhere. But, and that—so then—and then after the war started, we moved to Abilene and my dad was a trucker. He moved vegetables from El Paso to Abilene twice a week—go that route—and sold it to the grocery stores here. The vegetables and fruits and different things. Then, we moved here in '42 I believe and—so that's—we've been here ever since. [MC returns]

DS:

So did your sister move back to—with the family at that time?

HW:

Oh, yes. When we moved back to Brownfield, she moved—they brought her home. I don't think until the day she died that she was still mad at momma and daddy [laughter] for sending her to Winters. She—she missed—you know, she was homesick.

DS:

It's understandable, right?

HW:

Yes, very. But, it was certainly understandable that she needed an education. You know, three years is a long time for a little girl like that. She—well she's five years older than me, so she certainly didn't need to lose her education at that time in her life.

DS:

Do you remember any of growing up there in Brownfield? What—what it was like?

HW:

Oh, yeah. We went to town on Saturdays, if we finished our chores in time and everybody got a bath. [Laughs] We'd either hop on a wagon or finally a car before we left there, but—and we'd go to Brownfield and spend Saturday afternoon. We kids got a quarter for the afternoon and for mine, I bought a nickel hamburger, a nickel Coke, and a penny Babe Ruth, and a nickel for the show and that was twenty four cents—I mean twenty one cents—and I saved the other four [laughs] and I've been a saver ever since. [Laughs] My dad taught us that—well he didn't mean that for when we were kids and just had a quarter, but I just remember him teaching my older brother and all—well he's teaching all of us, I guess—that if you worked and worked and worked hard, that you should—out of every paycheck—you should be able to save something and if you can't save a penny, you're going backward. [Laughs] So, I always remember that and I—and no matter what I made I tried to put up something out of every paycheck and sometimes it was just a penny. But in those days, a penny was a penny. I went to—when—a lot of times after I got a little older, I would—my—I had an aunt that lived in Brownfield and she worked as

a waitress in one of their cafes there. So you can see I've been associated with restaurants all my life. But, on—if we get there early enough on Saturday night—at Saturday—I could wash dishes where she worked and make fifty cents in about two hours. So I thought man, that is—that is real money, and it was, you know. So, I'd make my fifty cents and in—I didn't get to do that but two or three times a month because we wouldn't get there in time. I'd have to be there by about eleven. But if we could get away from the farm early enough to do that. I couldn't. But—then we moved to Abilene.

DS:

What was that like?

HW:

Well, it was uptown to us from the small town of Brownfield. I'm sure—it hadn't been long since I went through Brownfield, and it has grown. But, back to Brownfield, on that—on the Saturday afternoons we would—when we'd get through with the movies—and sometimes, you can see movies over and over and sometimes we'd see it maybe once and a half or once—maybe two times—but, when dad came in to get us, they always knew where we were, unless we was on the courthouse lawn and we'd be on the courthouse lawn. They had a gazebo and that's where all the ladies met. All the women who are mothers and watch us kids play on the lawn and everything. So—and then that's—when the guys—my dad, he played dominos. I think they bet a little bit [laughs] for money. Of course, probably not much. But, he was a good domino player, he always came out with more money than he went in with. We were always happy about that and he loved to play dominos. So—and—but after he come out, the family would all get together on this—that knew each other—were friends—in this gazebo and we would—they would plan something that—for that night. That they'd meet at somebody's house. We had a—there was a fiddle player and there was a guitar player that was in our group—or in their group. So we'd all meet at somebody's house and the kids would play and the—and they'd move everything out of the living room and it wasn't big. Wasn't as big as one of the bedrooms these days, nobody's was. They'd move everything out and set it—all the furniture out and set it in the yard [laughs] and then—and dance. That fiddle player and guitar player would go. Of course they wouldn't be over like, at the very most, five couples and usually I'd think about four. Four families is about all I can remember. But, there's plenty of room for them to boot scoot and they had a good time and we kids had a good time. But that was our Saturdays and that was—that was a lot of fun. I guess. Is I—best I can remember.

DS:

How did those weekends change once y'all moved up here to Abilene?

HW:

Well, changed tremendously and of course, we were growing up too. So, our life was changing as well and then, about a year after we moved here, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and that was before chemo or anything like that, so. She became ill and was in the hospital a lot, but they did treat her with the—

MC:

Radiation?

HW:

Radiation. Thank you. With radiation and in those days, they quarantined you when you were being treated with radiation and we kids just have to go up there and look at her through the window, you know, and wave at her and—while she was taking that. But it—it's really hard on the body but it—she lived for at least four years after that. So, we thought that was, you know, tremendous. She felt pretty well most of the time. She made some trips back and forth with my dad to El Paso and every once in a while one of us kids would make a trip with him back and forth. I don't know how he made that trip twice a week. He'd play the radio and sing sometimes. But, I told him, "Don't run across a domino game or you'll never make it." [Laughter] He'd rather stop and play dominos, I'm sure. Then after we saw Ernest Tubb here when he was just a—you know who Ernest? You're too young to know Ernest Tubb. [Laughs]

DS:

Yeah, no. I'm not young at all. [laughs] I'm sixty.

HW:

[Laughs] Well.

MC:

You're not sixty.

DS:

Yeah.

MC:

You're kidding. You look about forty, at most.

DS:

Thanks. I'll take it. [Laughs]

MC:

I look eighty, darn it. [Laughter]

DS:

Remember both of us were having a hard time walking yesterday. [Laughs]

MC:

Yeah. Did you try that Mackenzie thing I told you?

DS:

I actually did, yeah, yeah.

MC:

Yeah? Laying on the floor and crunching?

DS:

Yeah.

MC:

Did it help?

DS:

Yeah, it helped a lot. I'm not—I think it also may be something with the way I sleep because today I'm doing a lot better than I was yesterday and that's the way it is. Some mornings I wake up and—

MC:

I'll show you another little—stretch your legs and really help your back too—in a minute. She also had some brothers. Buster joined the Marine Corps as a private and retired as a kernel. He worked his way up the hard way, he wasn't an officer.

HW:

He was in Marines.

MC:

Yeah, he was in the Marines for thirty years, I guess.

HW:

Well, twenty-something. I'm not sure. [Phone rings]

MC:

Twenty-something. But, he didn't start out as an officer he started out as a private, went to, you know, sergeant, master sergeant, warrant officer one, two, three, four, second lieutenant, first lieutenant, and second kernel and kernel. I played taps at his funeral. She had another brother Kenneth Smith who lived in Odessa. He had twenty-five drive-in restaurants. [Laughs] Stars Drive-Ins there were called. So, a lot of people were in the restaurant business when they—

HW:

[Speaks into the phone] Ms., I'm sorry, I'm occupied. Bye-bye.

MC:

Isn't that how many Kenneth had? Uncle Kenneth—twenty-five restaurants?

HW:

No.

MC:

No?

HW:

No.

MC:

I thought he had twenty-five. He had a bunch of them—Stars.

HW:

Yeah, he did and we bought him his first one.

MC:

You did?

HW:

Yeah, in Sweetwater? We bought that for ourselves but we decided we didn't want to.

MC:

So that was his place.

HW:

Kenneth needed—Kenneth needed a job and we didn't—

MC:

Just gave him a restaurant? That'd keep him busy.

HW:

Well we didn't give it to him, we sold it to him.

MC:

No, sold it, yeah.

HW:

But he—he would never have gotten a loan on his own.

DS:

Well, you know, we were talking about Abilene when you came—when you first came here. What was the school system like? Where did y'all go to school and—?

HW:

Well, after we moved here. [door opens and shuts] I didn't go back to school. I quit when I was a junior in high school. My mother became ill, as I told you, and there—somebody had to take care of my mother and, you know, back in those days, family took care of family. There were no such things as a nursing home. We wouldn't have probably allowed her to go to one anyway, because she was not that ill, just somebody needed to be with her all the time. My dad had, you know, he was making these trips to El Paso and back so he wasn't there. He was gone four nights a week—or two nights. Yeah—go up—yeah two night a week and four days, you know. So, it was left up—I was the only left at home. My other siblings were already—my two brothers had joined the service and my sister had married, so, and she had a little girl, she didn't live here. It was up to me to take care of her and didn't think anything about it just, you know, just take care of your own. So I didn't go to school, but after my mom—as she got better, well I decided that I needed to go to Draughon's Business College, in which was the one I told you about I worked across the street from the restaurant. Draughon's Business College was on the—on the corner of First and Butternut and it—that was seven blocks—it was eight blocks from where I lived and I walked back and forth to work. But then—I mean to school and I'd go to school, eat lunch at the restaurant, and then go to Draughon's and then go home and walk. [laughs] People wouldn't walk like that today, but I guess it didn't hurt me. I guess it made me well—pretty well. But that's my education. Up to junior in high school and Draughon's Business College and—and the rest of it's been self-education—people educating me, you know, [laughs] along the way.

DS:

Well you mentioned you had started working at the restaurant while you were going to Draughon's. How long was it between the time you started working there and then when you moved on to being married and everything?

HW:

Well, a while. Casey and I didn't marry until '51, and I worked for him for a long, long time. He was married and—and I worked for him for a long time and I was busy with my mother and I dated, you know. Didn't have a whole lot of time for a lot of stuff. So, it just worked out that I didn't get married so—[laughs] and we married in '51. We were married forty-three years and that's quite a feat in the restaurant business. There were a lot of divorces in the restaurant business. [Laughs] I don't know why I accepted that it's—in those days, most of them were operated by the builders or the owners, there weren't hardly any franchises, you know. [Door opens] That everything's set up for you, all you have to do is pay for the franchises. So, it was a lot different in those days than it is now. I hardly think I would be—[MC coughs] and when I started Draughon's Business College I—you know, in those days I just thought I'll be a secretary, some attorney, or [laughs] big deal, or some doctor or—or something like that. But after I started working in the restaurant business I just never quit. It just became part of my life and I had to work close to where my mother was and—and Casey had this restaurant down by Drew Allan's Business College. But then after I finished college down there, he also owned a place at nine—I think it was 926 Butternut and—and I was finished raised and that's where my mother lives. Nine-twenty six Parker—in which was one block away. So just right through he alley and I was at work. So, that—that's where I worked. For a long, long time for him and that's about it and I've worked for him ever since [laughs] and I'm still working for him.

MC:

Want some water?

HW:

No, I don't honey, thank you.

DS:

When did y'all move out here to this property out here by the lake?

HW:

We moved out here in nine—

MC:

Fifty-five years ago.

HW:

Who? How?

MC:

Fifty-five.

HW:

Is that what Beanie said last night?

MC:

No, that's what you told me once.

HW:

Well.

MC:

Paid 36,000, right?

HW:

Paid 36,000 dollars is what we paid for this lot.

MC:

Of course it's a little more now. [Laughs] Probably forty, yeah?

HW:

Yeah. [Laughs]

MC:

It's worth probably a quarter of a million—half a million.

HW:

This house—they were building this house next door when we moved down here. Well, how old is Newman?

MC:

Newman?

HW:

He was born in—he was born in '56, was he not?

MC:

Yeah, '56.

HW:

So—and we moved out here—he was a year old. So we've been here since '57. How many years that makes it. Makes fifty-one.

MC:

Yeah, but a little farther before that. I remember we used to play in the water tower there. There—the water thing.

HW:

Oh yeah, out there on Vogel? Not Vogel. Out there on Bumper Gate. Where Penny lives now.

MC:

Is that where it was?

HW:

Uh-hm. We were down there about where Pat and Buster built their house.

MC:

This time I remembered to bring my pills. [Laughs]

DS:

Oh, that's good.

HW:

Did you forget them last night?

DS:

Yesterday afternoon he—he was started to get a little weak on us.

MC:

We ate lunch and I got stingy and said, "I got to go home and take my pills and take a nap," and then I came back in about thirty minutes.

DS:

Yeah, he just needed to go home and take care of your business and got back up to speed.

MC:

He said I was a different person. [Laughs]

DS:

Yeah, well you—you had just, you know, started to dwindle in the middle of our conversation there at the café or whatever.

MC:

Couldn't remember what I was doing hardly. It happens. She put up with that for a long time.

HW:

You know, Mike had a birthday. Was it Tuesday?

MC:

Yeah. Twenty-first.

HW:

Happy birthday. [Laughs]

MC:

Well, thank you ma'am.

DS:

You know, I'm going to have to cut this short because I've got to meet someone at one.

HW:

Okay.

MC:

You do?

DS:

Yeah, I've got to meet Al Picket.

MC:

Who?

DS:

Al Picket. He's a writer with a—with a local newspaper. He's done a lot of sports history.

MC:

Give him my resume and tell him you were interviewing me and probably Abilene doesn't know, I left here in '69, came back in '05, retired, but I'd like to teach or guest lecture.

DS:

All right.

MC:

You know I lectured at UT. There were fifteen grad students, and they all wanted to be directors and I said, "Well I'm going to show you the reality of filming versus the theory." We got a—I rented a house from the city of Austin and it was boarded up for a buck and it was down in East Austin after the black neighborhood and I told them we were—I made them unboard the house, they had to paint it, they had to do landscaping, they had to decorate the inside of it and then afterwards I had the city drop a power line because they couldn't use regular movie stuff, but they had movie lights that would plug in, so. Then I made them electricians, and sound guys, and cameramen, and gaffers, and grips, and prop man and we filmed a fifteen minute movie about this old lady that lives in this house and these—everything else has been torn down and the owner wants it to, you know, develop it and she won't move. [DS coughs] So, he hires this gang of kids to get her house down and get her out of there and the house sort of comes alive and fights back, you know. I even taught them how to do a stunt. One of these old Studebakers—the kid's sneaking by it and it starts up and moves forward and it hits him and he flies away and I showed him how to—from a camera angle it looks like he got hit, but he didn't and how to get on a little spring thing and jump backwards onto a mattress. Three of them quit [laughs] but I worked them from noon to midnight for fifteen days and then I told them—I said, "Now we're in somebody's neighborhood filming and if they ask you what the heck's going on, invite them for coffee and to watch the film and be friendly" and one guy said, "I a'int going to be friendly to no niggers" I said, "Get out of my class. That a'int allowed" and the professor was there, Dr. Caston—Ira cats? [?] [01:19:06]—and he was an anthropologist, but since he had a doctorate he could teach film and I—always hated about universities, but, you know. As long as you've got a doctorate you can teach whatever you want. But, after the thing was over he told me, "You know, I want to hire you. You know more about movies than I've ever known," and he said "What kind of degree you have?" and I said "High school," [laughs] he said, "Well you'd have to be a—a Bachelor or at least a Master's to—to get hired here," I said, "Yeah, well." But anyway, also when I was starting to teach the class there were, you know, mixed races in there and some kids were black and some were brown and one guy said, "I want to be called Afro-America," and another guy says "Well I want to be called a black man," and another person said, "Well I'm a Hispanic," and another said, "No, I'm a Mexican-American," and I said, "You know, I don't—I'm teaching film, I don't have time to put up with your prejudice bullshit. From now on, everyone is Bob and Bobette."

HW:

Watch it. Nasty.

MC:

So I wouldn't—I wouldn't get into their game, you know, that was stupid. Then after they shot it then they got to edit on one of the early video editing systems but—seven of them got right into film business, you know, after I taught them that. But they learned that not everybody wants to direct, you know. Some guys are cameramen some are directors. I remember when Cade____[?] [01:20:44] had a kid, graduated from UsT—"What do you do?", "I'm a filmmaker," I said, "Well we don't really hire filmmakers. We hire grips, electricians, cameramen, you know," I said, "But you can start out guarding my parking lot and then if you're any good I'll bring you on as a locations assistant." So he did. [Laughter] But—is that thing still on?

DS:

Yeah, let me turn this off right now.

[Pause in recording]

MC:

Two more things about being a location manager. Number one is if a director—assistant director would yell at one of my assistant I would go to them and I'd say, "My assistants don't make mistakes. I trained them. If you've got a problem, you come to me. I'm the head of the department and it's my fault, not theirs. If it's—I haven't trained them right, I didn't tell them enough information, but don't ever yell at my assistants. You can come yell at me if you want something." Number two is when we was filming Sinatra at Universal Studios. We rented a New York street for a 1940's scene with Frank Sinatra and a bunch of bobby socks just waited outside the theater. We had the whole street dressed 1940 cars and all that stuff and a big picture of Frank Sinatra up on the theater and it was fifteen thousand a day to shoot there and we had fourteen page contract. I was with Warner Brothers, but it said we have a unrestricted—no—

DS:

Nonexclusive?

MC:

Nonexclusive use of the studio, the parking lots, the rental equipment, the stages, the western street, the Midwest street, and new York street and I said, "For fifteen thousand a day, I'd like new York street to be exclusive," so they changed that one word to fourteen pages. So, the day we're supposed to shoot, it rains. So we had two more days to wrap the set and move stuff out, so we decided to shoot the next day and McDonald's calls me up and said, "Can you move everything off New York Street? We're shooting a test there tomorrow," and I said, "No you're

not,” [laughs] “Yeah, well we’ve got a contract that says we get New York Street tomorrow.” So, I call the production manager, Sted Newfells, who used to be vice president of Orion. Called Orion’s—I mean, Warner Brother’s lawyers and they met me over at New York Street and universal—and their lawyers were there and McDonald’s and their lawyers were there [laughs] and they showed me the contract and I showed them mine and mine had one word different. It just said “exclusive use of New York Street” and Universal Studios shook their head and said “It’s his?” [Laughs] and the lawyers at Warner Brothers said, “You can sign any contract we got Mr. Casey. We love you.” [Laughs] It just only counted that one word. So you better read all the contracts. Then when I was with Newline Cinema doing eight seconds, I had location agreements and I was sending him to New York and the lawyers called me, “You can’t sign him. We have to have a producer sign him,” I said, “Producers do screen actors, contracts, and music contracts, and, you know, contracts for the different things that they do,” I said, “They don’t do location agreements. I do that and I’ve been doing in for thirty years and I sign them.”, “Well you can’t because we got in trouble up here.” I said, “What were you paying this kid?” They said, “Five hundred a week.” I said, “I get twenty-five hundred a week. You get what you pay for.” I said, “Plus, your contracts suck.”, “Huh?” I said, “You don’t have pro rata in there. That means if we shoot some place and we have to go back because his film was bad, that they guy can charge us anything he wants. Were there for a thousand a day, we have to come back, he’d charge ten thousand if he wants. You got to put pro rata in there,” and I said, “You don’t have anything about filming the name on the property or not filming the name and you don’t have anything that says you can use the property in any way you seem fit in—in the movie,” and I said, “You have to have that in the contract or if you film something that—that he doesn’t like or makes think his property look bad, he can sue you,” and I went on and on. I said in my contract that I’d gotten over twenty years was stealing a bit of this from Universal, some of this from Warner Brothers, and they used my contract, but they still didn’t want me to sign it. So, the producer would initial my contracts before he sent them off. But I thought they were not real bright. [Laughs]

HW:

This man’s got to go, Mike.

MC:

Okay.

DS:

Yeah, thank you, Mike.

End of Recording