

**Oral History Interview of
Bette Ramsey**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
October 20, 2015
Amarillo, Texas**

**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 Bette Ramsey on April 2, 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:

Ramsey, Bette Oral History Interview, October 20, 2015. Interview by Andy Wilkinson, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses over 6000 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.

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: 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews: Bette Ramsey was also interviewed in 2017, on September 5, September 6, and November 28 and 29. Previously, she had been interviewed on January 11, 2008 and March 7, 2016.

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Andy Wilkinson

Audio Editor: Elissa Stroman

Transcription: Elizabeth Groening

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Bette Ramsey, who discusses her family genealogy and her time growing up and teaching in West Texas.

Length of Interview: 02:35:12

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Background and family	5	00:03:15
Her dad and all of his jobs	12	00:18:31
Living on the military base in Dalhart during World War II	16	00:35:21
Her short stint living in Albuquerque	20	00:44:15
Details about her mom	25	00:58:28
Genealogy on her mother's side of the family	28	01:05:40
How she would describe her mom	34	01:30:45
Her friend, Robert	38	01:39:16
The relationship between her aunt and her mother	41	01:48:00
Teaching right after integration	47	02:06:44
What Amarillo was like as she was growing up	50	02:20:08
Feeding the kids at school and her Home Economics class	52	02:26:59

Keywords

Family life and background, World War II, education, integration

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

What is today? The twentieth of October I think that's right.

Bette Ramsey (BR):

You can look on my cell phone but I don't really know that—

AW:

Yes, the twentieth. Andy Wilkinson with Bette Ramsey at Bette Ramsey's house. Where she's all laid up still from her accident. She's going through some things in a box and these are things that I'll be taking back today?

BR:

Actually Amanda wanted, I think she wanted to maybe go through and copy some of this because--.

AW:

No that's fine I just wanted—

BR:

She had never seen a bunch of this.

AW:

I just wanted to figure it out, if that was--.

BR:

Okay. Yeah I had hoped you could but.

AW:

I'm going to set this here to get the recorder up a little better. [Picks up Recorder]

BR:

This is a—I wrote on here, but This is a grid that they used. We kept a few of Buck's ashes because the tree branch is a very special place that we spent a lot of happy hours when we were younger and when Amanda was younger. They're like family.

BR:

[phone rings 01:25] Oh great. Just a minute. Hello. Hello.

Phone:

Is this Bette Ramsey?

BR:

It is Bette Ramsey.

AW:

I'm going to put this on pause. [Pause in recording]

AW:

Okay now we're back after I hit the wrong button. With all that's going on if you get calls it's no problem we'll just put it on pause and take care of it. We're just getting started now on these interviews about you.

BR:

Okay this is about me.

AW:

So I'm going to ask things—well I mean you'll still talk about Buck and Amanda and all kinds of other things. Because we haven't recorded anything yet, correct?

BR:

Nope.

AW:

We've just talked. So just to warn you I'm going to be asking things that you know I already know. I want to make sure they are here for somebody a hundred years from now. Sometimes I think to say for the recording would you say whatever but sometimes I don't think about that so, anyway. Let's start with some very simple genealogical data so it can be useful later on for people tracking things down. Date of birth?

BR:

August 16, 1939.

AW:

Which is almost exactly our wedding anniversary only it's the seventeenth and not quite 1939 but sometimes I think we've been married that long. Now, where were you born?

BR:

Melissa, TX.

AW:

I know where that is but tell us about Melissa, TX.

BR:

Well Melissa, TX was a little town right outside of McKinney. We lived in a little yellow house. I don't know if it was in town, it may have been on the outskirts of town, but I also know that I was born in that little yellow house.

AW:

So born in the house, not in the hospital.

BR:

My grandmother and my aunt actually delivered me because the doctor did not get there in time, he came after I was born. I know that—my mom said she had been sick a lot through the pregnancy. I think she must have had some kidney problems or something. I'd always been told this and I didn't really know whether to believe it or not but my aunt verified it, and I knew my aunt was there and very honest. Some of my family has a tendency to elaborate and embellish truths so it makes a better story. My uncles in particular and sometimes my mom. I knew my aunt did not do that and I specifically asked her about my birth. Evidently when I was born I wasn't breathing and they were worried because they spanked me and I still—they put me in a bowl of warm water and then I started breathing and opened my eyes is what my aunt said. So that was my birth.

AW:

That's pretty interesting. You have brothers and sisters as you mentioned. Where do you fall in the?

BR:

I am number five.

AW:

Just quick rundown of all those ahead of you.

BR:

I have an older brother who was ten when I was born, so he's ten years older than I am, and then I had a--.

AW:

His name?

BR:

His name was David Clark but we called him Skeezix because my dad.

AW:

How do you spell Skeezix?

BR:

Skeezix? S-k—

AW:

Like the comic?

BR:

Like the comic strip. Skeezix was a popular comic strip in those days. My dad started calling him Skeezix and it just stuck. I've always called him Skeez or Skeezix. I still do and I even found him a Skeezix marble for one of his birthdays when he got older. There's Skeezix and then there was Phyllis Gene and she was either two or three years younger than he was. Then there's Patricia Ann and she was two or three years younger than Phyllis. Then there was Drucella Jane.

AW:

And that's D-r-u-s—

BR:

D-r-u-c-e-l-l-a. She goes by Drew.

AW:

I knew her as Drew but I don't think I've ever seen Drucella or knew how it was spelled.

BR:

Then there's me. Drucella—it was three years younger than Pat, and I am three years younger than Drew. They named me Bette Lou because I had an Uncle Lou. My sister Phyllis tells me that they used to give out Bette Lou spoons in the boxes of salt I think. She found me a Bette Lou spoon and gave it to me—

AW:

That's L-o-u?

BR:

L-o-u. When I was in my thirties. But I always told my mom that if I ever got the chance to change my name I was going to get a real name because everybody else had a real name and that was a nickname. I said, "I'm going to change my name," and she said, "Okay." When I was working for Sylvan [?] [0:08:10], I actually changed my name to Elizabeth Louise because it's a real name. And so, anyway—

AW:

When did you do that?

BR:

I did that oh two or three years ago. I said— I always felt like you should name children something that if they were going to be president of the United States it wouldn't look silly on a card. It didn't need to be Billy Bob it needed to be William Robert, you know.

AW:

I'm David Andy. I mean that's my actual name.

BR:

Instead of Andrew.

AW:

But I was named after an uncle that was David Andy and after my grandfather who was Andy Young, and an uncle— with him. So it was somewhere along the line they dropped the Andrew and we've all been stuck with it.

BR:

Well it's a Texas thing, you know. Because I can remember having a group of cowboys over here when they had them here for a rodeo. Buck always got frustrated because they didn't pay them hardly anything to come and it costs money, and he said, "Well the least we could do is feed them," so I was always the one that was having them over for the big meals. Well one of my friends called me and she said, "Well who—" I told her I had a bunch of cowboys. She said, "Well who all's over there?" I said, "Well RW, and JB," and I named one or two other names and she said, "Isn't there anybody there that has a name other than initials." I got tickled I thought well they all do go by their initial now.

AW:

My father in law when he was born he was given initials only. When he got to the military they gave him a name. [Laughter] I think about that ever since. When Mary Ann and I started having children I said, "Well what do you think about names?" And she said, "Whatever you do we're not going to call them by their middle name." [BR laughs] It's really this naming business is a lot more complicated than we think.

BR:

The naming business is complicated.

AW:

Now B-e-t-t-e was how you were born? B-e-t-t-e not B-e-t-t-y?

BR:

No. My mother spelled my name—I didn't know this because for years I didn't have a birth certificate and I would go to school and I wouldn't have a birth certificate. The kids would tease me and say that I wasn't born [laughter]. I was real embarrassed about not having a birth certificate, and I was going to a little-- we moved around. I was going to a little school and it wasn't as imperative that you had them back then. Then I came to Amarillo and they insisted that I have a birth certificate. Mother had to mail off for one because she had long since lost the copy in all the moves and everything. She had spelled my name B-e-t-t-y-e L-u-e. I thought I don't like that at all I said, "I am not going to spell my name B-e-t-t-y I'm going to spell it B-e-t-t-e because it looks better." So I did that on my own.

AW:

When you were a little kid?

BR:

Yeah and I just changed it on my own. Then I didn't like L-u-e that looked dumb to me so I changed it. I never liked Bette Lou and I never liked being named after a spoon. I didn't think that was very dignified. I do remember my uncle Lou. I had an Uncle Orn and an Uncle Lou.

AW:

Orn, O-r-n?

BR:

Uh-huh and they were these old farmers that lived in the same old house. Never was painted, had the same furniture that they grew up with in that house. I remember going to see them and just kind of being fascinated because they had gotten skin cancer. One of them had his ears kind of eaten off and the other one had his nose. They just, I don't know, they didn't do stuff back then I guess. I always felt bad but they were sweet, they were just the sweetest old guys. They never married and they lived with an old maid aunt named Aunt Lizzy. Aunt Lizzy would bring your meal to the table and if you didn't eat everything on your plate then when it was time for the next meal she brought your left overs. [Laughter] They were my dad's aunt and uncle and I so I guess they were my great ones. That's who I was named after, the Lou part.

AW:

You said you moved around a lot. What did your folks do?

BR:

I was born in '39 and that was after the depression and during all the dust bowl days. My dad grew up on a farm in east Texas, his dad owned a farm. He grew up in a family with—there were thirteen in his family, and of course, all the brothers and sisters helped around the farm when they were growing up and then as they grew up they would get into, they had businesses. Because I remember the first time I went to Princeton which was a town close by to Melissa it was real strange for me to see my name on businesses around town. I never—.

AW:

What was their surname?

BR:

All of my dad's brothers were named after presidents which was well, that's what they did.

AW:

What was your dad's name?

BR:

My dad's name was Theodor Lewis.

AW:

L-e-w—

BR:

L-e-w-i-s yeah. He was named after Teddy Roosevelt. He had a younger brother named George Washington who went by GW. He had another brother I think he was James Madison, I'm not—anyway—no it was James Monroe. That was Monroe. He had one after Cleveland but he was called Stubby and I'm not sure, it was the Cleveland name.

AW:

Grover.

BR:

Grover Cleveland, that was Stubby. Anyway they were all named after presidents. He did have a set of twins in his family, and the boy twin died of German measles when he was about six years old. They were Opal and I'm not sure about the boy, it might've been Orn after my uncle but Opal lived, Aunt Opal. —His mom died before I was born and she was a tiny little lady and her husband never remarried. They met when they were in grade school. My grandfather was chosen as the boy in the brown hat, to be on her spelling bee team and my grandfather won the spelling bee. They were sweethearts all through and married young. She died when she was fairly young,

and that was before I was born. But she was tiny, a tiny little lady. All of my dad's sisters, I don't know if any of them ever reached five foot, I don't think they did. I think they were all like four— four foot something. My sister, Drew, even though she claimed she was five foot she was never five foot. She was always about four-eleven and a half but she's shrunk now so she's probably about four-ten now. They're all little, I was the tallest girl in my family. I was five-four but now I've shrunk too, so the doctor says I'm-- I think I'm five-three and a half now. I was the shortest one all through grade school and junior high.

AW:

Even amongst your peers?

BR:

Amongst my peers, Janelle Cormack was on one end and I was on the other because we were the two shortest in the class. I grew a lot in high school, I grew several inches but Janelle never did. Anyway, I was the tallest girl in my family.

AW:

Your dad was farming when you were in Melissa?

BR:

My dad grew up on a farm. My dad did a lot of things to make money, I can remember some of the things. When he graduated from high school—he graduated valedictorian, he was very smart and back then they read in Latin and they read the classics in Latin. He loved school but he was ornery too. He'd tell us stories about tying cow's tails together and doing some ornery things but he was also—the teacher liked him because he was really smart. He did go to college but he and his brother, Skeeter, and I don't remember what Skeeter's real name was because I only knew him as Uncle Skeeter. They opened a furniture store—they had a furniture store, I think it was in Princeton. My dad went off to college and Skeeter wasn't a very good owner of a furniture store I guess, he didn't know how to manage. My dad had to quit college and come home and try to get it out of trouble. I don't know how long they were in that business. Then it was hard times, there weren't jobs. My dad, I remember him saying he plucked turkeys for fifteen cents a turkey. He drove a Coca-Cola truck for the Coca-Cola Company, my dad until the day he died never drank a coke until he held it up to the light to see what was in the bottle, because there had been mice, tacks, you know all kinds of things that had gotten in the bottles. That's just something I remember him doing. He also—the funny thing about my dad is he knew sign language.

AW:

Really? How did he learn that?

BR:

They played with a deaf boy when he was growing up. My dad was a big baseball fan and he wasn't a real big man, he was probably about 5'8' but he loved baseball and he played baseball. He coached my sister's girl's baseball team when we lived in Pleasant Valley. He was just a big baseball fan all his life. Anyway, they played together, he played with this kid. I remember my dad driving, and he would talk to himself in sign language and he wouldn't even realize he was doing it.

AW:

It wasn't to keep y'all from knowing what he was saying, it was just a habit.

BR:

He was just talking to himself in sign language. One time I was sitting in the front seat and I looked over at him and he had been talking to himself in sign language. I said, "Well daddy what did you say?" And he said, "I was spelling out that sign that I saw." He said that's the way I learned sign language is I used to read the signs and I would spell them out in sign language. That was the way I practiced it. When my dad would spell he would spell by the sounds, you know he'd say discipline and then—he called it discipline, and he would spell it out d-i-s-c-i-p and anyway. I always thought was funny too. But he could quote old English language.

AW:

Chaucer and such.

BR:

Yes he could do that old English rhyme. When I studied old English rhyme, we didn't study it until college but when I studied it I thought how in the heck did he ever learn. To me those words were hard to say when you read them, I mean Dr. Smog could do it and it was rhythmic and everything and I loved it but reading it because of the spelling and everything it was just hard for me to get the rhythm of the poetry. My dad did that you know. He'd just do it and we would just laugh but he just did it to entertain us.

AW:

I interrupted you, you were saying something about because he knew sign language something about his working, and so did that come in?

BR:

No he didn't use it in his work but he just knew it and kept that skill all of his life. I guess if he ever ran into a deaf person. I do have a niece that does it and I think she does it voluntarily through her church, she and her husband both. It's a wonderful skill. Amanda, when she was young they had the deaf kids at Wolfland. They had a class for the other children that wanted to

learn and she took it and knew it some when she was younger because they had those deaf children that went to school with them.

AW:

You know Andy Hedges and his wife Alyssa—this was Alyssa's doing. When their first little girl Maggie Rose, or their first child was born, before she was speaking they began—because Alyssa had read that this is a way that children can learn sign language first and so they worked with her and she could communicate what she wanted before she was able to speak.

BR:

How wonderful.

AW:

Yeah that's what I thought because it had never occurred to me that it would be faster because obviously their brains know what's going on and they just don't yet have the language skills but they can do this.

BR:

Sign things.

AW:

Yeah. It's quite an interesting thing. Did he pick that up just as a little kid with his friend and his old English, did he pick it up in high school?

BR:

My dad you know back then I don't think they even went to the twelfth grade. I think—

AW:

Eleven.

BR:

Eleventh was—yeah. They were doing—

AW:

Reading in Latin and in old English.

BR:

In old English and you know doing all that.

AW:

What high school did he go to?

BR:

Well I'm pretty sure he graduated from Princeton High because he went—after my mom died, you know my dad had never been on a plane. After my mom died he actually flew to Princeton and was the oldest one there I think at the reunion of his high school. Of course I don't know how many times my dad read the Bible but he would get up early in the mornings and read the Bible. He probably read through it more than once.

AW:

Was he a religious person or was this part of his education?

BR:

I'm going to tell you, when I was growing up—I know my mom took us to some different churches. I remember going to the Methodist church and getting my head sprinkled.

AW:

Yeah no dunking in the Methodist church.

BR:

I remember having the Seven Day Adventist come into our house. I remember going to a Catholic church and my brothers and sisters—my little brother and my older sisters all went to Catholic school. They started doing that in Albuquerque because my mother didn't think the public schools were that good and they started going to Catholic school with my two older sisters. —When we moved to Amarillo, all three of my—well not Phyllis she graduated from Amarillo High I guess, maybe, yeah. Pat and Drew and my little brother Terry all went to Saint Mary's. Both of my sisters graduated from Saint Mary's and Terry just went there until we moved over and he started to Wolfland School. I guess my mom thought that the catholic schools were better and they probably were because those nuns were very well trained and also the priest. I had the option to go but I didn't want to go because I wanted to go where my friends were so I went to all the public schools.

AW:

So your dad's Bible reading, it sounds is if it was almost as much part of his educational.

BR:

It was.

AW:

I know people did that at one time.

BR:

Exactly. —He always read the newspaper and he always made us—if we got the newspaper before he did, he always made us put the newspaper back together exactly the way it was supposed to be. I mean we got chastised if that didn't happen. He always made us put the end of the toothpaste, the lid on the toothpaste. He always made us turn the lights out. He always made us when we washed dishes to clean the stove top and the cabinet top, and the sinks. If we did not do it I can remember getting up at five o'clock in the morning doing that.

AW:

To do what you hadn't done?

BR:

Yes and I still do that because of my dad. People make fun of me when I go around washing the cabinets and the stove, and the sinks and turning out the lights and all the other little things but that's because of my dad. He always taught us, you don't borrow from people but if you ever do you take it back better than you found it. He was just a good teacher. Every single brother in law that I have felt the same way. You know they, they learned from that—well they worked for my dad. My dad went through—you asked me what he did, he went through during the war he moved around a lot to find jobs. He owned a filling station and a hamburger-beer joint in Snyder. He owned that property, I don't know, forever until he finally sold it I think maybe when I was in high school or college he still owned that place in Snyder. He ran that for a while and I remember my mom probably cooked there and waited there because she said that she used to open beer bottles with her teeth [AW Laughs]. I don't know but they had that. Then he did carpentry work and when the war came we moved to Dalhart and worked out at the base. Well we didn't—well I did, I learned how to color margarine during the war because it was white. I had to put the yellow pattern. I used to do that, that was my job and cleaning bathrooms, that was my job. My mom volunteered at the base, she was a gray lady. My dad and my grandpa even came up and stayed for a while and worked at the airbase and maybe an uncle I'm not sure. Well yeah my uncle went up there, my aunt and uncle went there. We lived in that base housing because I remember those little—they had these little places where they kept coal, these little houses. I just remember that when I was real young.

AW:

Yeah because the war had started in '41.

BR:

Yeah. I remember all of the things that you couldn't have during. We were in Dalhart and my mom always had extra people because she was a good cook. We always had young people from the base and some of them stayed with us and some of them didn't, I don't know but I always got to sit on the bench. The bench was usually a couple of big cans with a board across it. I was little and light and I always had to sit on the ice cream thing to hold it down while they made the ice cream.

AW:

Did you have to do that once they switched to electric?

BR:

Well we didn't have an electric, we just had the crank.

AW:

I remember we always had to sit—that it was my job to sit on the crank but once they got an electric you still sat on it because the thing jumped all around the counter. It would give you this little slight tingle of electricity.

BR:

We never got to the electric part. We always just had the—

AW:

It's probably better, you know.

BR:

I have the electric ones now but they never make the ice cream hard enough. You have to make the ice cream and put it in the freezer to let it get hard enough. I still like the old churn but I don't want to do it.

AW:

Right. So you were in Dalhart through the war?

BR:

We were in Dalhart—I started first grade in Dalhart. My dad was working at the base and my mom was the gray lady.

AW:

You might just mention gray lady. What that means.

BR:

Well, see I really need to research that. I know it was volunteer work and I remember her wearing the gray uniform, but I think they just did whatever they needed to.

AW:

They weren't hired help but they were part of the war effort.

BR:

Everybody was doing the war effort during World War II. Everybody that was around me. All of my uncles all served in World War II, as did Buck's. One of them was in the navy; one of them was in the army. I remember them bringing home—one of them was in Japan and brought all the Japanese memorabilia—the flags. I remember seeing all that stuff but I wasn't as enamored with the guns, with the knives, bayonets, as the men were you know because I was just a little girl. The flags were pretty and I remember him telling the stories. The other uncle that was in Germany, he would never really talk about it. He had a lot of mental issues, it may be because of the war I'm not sure, maybe he would've had them anyway. He always did had a lot of issues. He said that he was a cook in the navy part of the time. I know he was out there where some of the bad stuff happened. The other one was an officer in the army. I think my uncle might've—I think both of them may have been—one of them got above sergeant. I think the one that was the cook was probably a sergeant or something, I'm not real sure. The other uncle, they all served and they all came back. I don't know if they, I don't remember any of them having major injuries or anything. I'm sure they had mental issues because a lot of those guys couldn't talk about anything.

AW:

People just didn't. I was interviewing a fellow in Fort Stockton last week who had served in the same air force unit that Jimmy Stewart did, the actor, and he said—and this is the first time I've ever had anybody say this, which was this clear. He said that Stewart told him, you're going to have to do some things that you don't want to do and that you would never want to do again but do your job and then don't talk about it. I thought that was really very interesting that it would be that clear. You know, none of us like this so there's no point in making other people suffer through what we've got to do. It wasn't like to be manly, it was more like save the other people. Yeah and I thought that was--

BR:

Save the other people. Some of those guys that are still living are telling some of the stories now but they never would. I remember asking Roy Vineyard and he never, ever said anything but he still had the resentment and still called them Japs. I've forgotten what they'd called the Germans.

AW:

Well they'd called them all kinds of things, Krauts.

BR:

Krauts, yeah. I don't think I ever heard him say Kraut because his daughter married a German. I guess he sort of forgave the Germans, I think he did more with the Japanese. He never, he always said Japs and never could ever talk about it. Just tears would come to his eyes. When I asked him about it and he never would say anything. I remember how it affected the kids because I was a kid. We couldn't get bubble gum except once every six weeks or a month. We had an old refrigerator that had a block of ice and we had our place on the ice where we kept our bubble gum.

AW:

That's a step better than a bed post.

BR:

That's one way it affected us. Of course I remember the butter and I remember my sisters rolling their hair in tin cans. You know cutting the tin cans, the sardine cans, and the tin cans up and doing their hair. Luckily I always had naturally curly hair so I never had to do that. But you can imagine how uncomfortable that had to be but they didn't have bobby pins.

AW:

It'd be hard to sleep like that.

BR:

Oh yeah but women have suffered years to try to be beautiful.

AW:

That was pretty soon—the dust bowl was just ending.

BR:

It was and that was—

AW:

Do you remember some of that in Dalhart?

BR:

See I don't remember about Dalhart being in the midst, I mean in the center of the destruction. I finally made it through that book about the dust bowl that Ken Burns based a lot of his documentary on, and oh my gosh. I had to read it in increments because I do remember Dalhart

being very stark and a lot of dirt because I loved playing in the dirt. I use to love to go out and pick up those cracked pieces of ground because it was like a puzzle.

AW:

Yeah when it would curl up after it dried.

BR:

Yeah peeling it off and you know just playing in the mud, well making mud and making mud pies. --Because she was volunteering mother always had somebody keeping us some baby sitter. Of course my sister Phyllis was old enough that she felt like she could. My sisters and brothers worked, you know they worked at the drug store and worked behind the soda counter. We got to go and get ice cream and things like that. So everybody worked, they had to so the family could survive. They were gone a lot and so we had baby sitters. The baby sitters would assign all of us to jobs around the house because we had to keep the house and we had to take care of the food and do different things. I just remember doing a lot of little things that I could do. Like I said I got to clean the bathroom and do the little jobs like make the butter and color the butter, do little jobs, set the table, and stuff like that.

AW:

How much longer were you in Dalhart?

BR:

Well, I think we just lived in Dalhart two or three—it was probably just a couple of years. My dad came back to Amarillo and opened a paint store. I'm trying to think, yeah I think we moved from—we did have a stint in Albuquerque for a while.

AW:

Um-hm. Was that before you came to Amarillo?

BR:

That's what I'm trying to think. I need to get in the right sequence because I went to school for a little while in Albuquerque because I remember being late to school one time and the halls were dark and I was scared. The principal came and picked me up and took me to class crying, I remember that. I don't remember a lot about going to school in Albuquerque except I was afraid. I think we went to school with a lot of different nationalities there and I don't think I had done that so much. I remember in Dalhart—well we did have different nationalities in Dalhart too because I remember having to be checked for lice a lot in Dalhart. I remember having to stand there and let them look through my head for lice. I remember my neighbor girl that I use to play with I think her name was Mary Margret and she had beautiful long red hair. Her mom was a

very fastidious house keeper and Mary Margret got lice and she literally gave that girl a GI. I mean it was pitiful.

AW:

Got rid of that long hair?

BR:

Yes got rid of that long beautiful hair and just went into a frenzy in her house over having lice. I don't remember any of us kids ever having lice, none of us did. There were six of us and I think Mary Margret I'm not even sure if she had a sister. I just remember her being an only child.

AW:

I know that the tape recorder can't see it but Amanda just brought us each a nice ice tea. Thank you.

BR:

Yeah a Texas tea. But my dad like I said, he moved where the work was. In Albuquerque he owned a paint store and in Amarillo he owned a paint store. I think we moved to Albuquerque from Dalhart and I think it may have been toward the end. I remember we had to live in a motel for a while that was next to the paint store that he had and we had several rooms in that motel. It was one where it had a little stove and stuff. I remember that my mom hated—and my older sisters hated the color that was in the motel. My oldest sister Phyllis was babysitting us when mother and daddy went out and it Halloween, or it was getting close to Halloween. My older sister gave us all Crayola's, and pencils and pens and we got to draw all over the walls and the ceiling. We could draw anything we wanted. I remember having so much fun drawing witches, and pumpkins and I remember when mother and dad—you know the older kids drew on the ceiling, they drew all over because mother had been trying to get daddy and my sisters had been trying to get daddy to paint those rooms.

AW:

To paint motel rooms. That's really interesting.

BR:

There were a lot of people that lived—it must've been one of those places that you could rent for—

AW:

Rent by the month or something.

BR:

Yeah until you could find a place to live. There weren't any places to rent.

AW:

Yeah. Well during the war I mean there wasn't construction.

BR:

Yeah they didn't have any. I remember us driving around trying to find houses and so we lived there. Well when mother and daddy came in I can remember them looking around and all they could do was start laughing because we were so proud of our artwork all over. My sister—

AW:

So you didn't get into trouble?

BR:

Unh-uh they just laughed. Of course they got it painted. That was one of the good memories. But then my dad and brothers and I guess whoever they had helping them built in the back of the store, they built like bedrooms and kitchen.

AW:

In the back of the paint store?

BR:

In the back of the paint store, and we lived in the back of the paint store until we moved back to Amarillo where my dad had another paint store. My little brother was born in Albuquerque, I said that—no he may have been born in Dalhart and we moved there, but he was a baby in Albuquerque I remember that. He was born in Dalhart yeah. My dad owned paint stores until his partner ran off with all the money.

AW:

Really?

BR:

Yeah. Then my dad had all these paints and materials and he started contracting.

AW:

How old were you when that happened?

BR:

I was probably about in the second grade.

AW:

So you were still small when his partner—

BR:

Yeah and I didn't know that until I got older because you know they didn't tell me stuff like that. He was good at contracting because he was good with numbers and could bid jobs good and he was very honest. He worked for some of the big builders.

AW:

That was sort of what he did as you were growing up then. A painting contractor.

BR:

Yeah he was just a painting contractor. He worked until he was in his eighties. I mean he was still painting and working. He never would let us be around any of the painters because you know he had all of us girls, he had four of us and he didn't like the way they talked. He just kept us away. My dad would never let us say anything that—now we couldn't say gosh or golly or anything that had any reference to God.

AW:

Yeah or any curse word?

BR:

Curse word. I said, "Bull" one time.

AW:

Bull?

BR:

Bull when I was little and my dad said, "Now you can't say that word." Well I didn't know what—I mean a bull was a big ole cow to me, you know I didn't know. I looked at my sister and I said, "What is wrong with saying bull?" I had heard somebody at school say it and she said, "Well do you know what else they say with that word?" she told me and I thought oh no wonder. You know we just couldn't ever say anything. I don't remember my dad ever saying anything, a curse word except when he really got angry he might say damn or hell but he never said anything. He said, "Don't ever say anything bad about anybody. If you think about somebody and you can't think of anything good to say about them, say 'he sure can whistle.'" That was his word of advice.

AW:

He sure can whistle.

BR:

He sure can whistle. I never heard my dad say anything bad about anybody. Like I said he was a good man, a good teacher. As far as religion goes, he didn't start even going to church until—I was the one that started going to church because my friends went to church and that was part of the social life. I started going to the church that my friends went to which was only about two blocks from our house. I remember my mom and dad came and saw me baptized. I must've been in junior high I think.

AW:

That was here in Amarillo?

BR:

Yeah. I would go to all the church events, bible school and helped with vacation bible school, went to vacation bible school and went to church camp, and went to all the Christian endeavor, the evening things because that was my social life. That and girl scouts. We just did all that stuff until I got to high school and started figuring out that Jews weren't terrible and Catholics weren't terrible. I never bought the idea that there was this mean, horrible, vengeful God that brought all these maladies down on people. I thought why would somebody create this beautiful world and all these people and then try to take it out and destroy somebody because they didn't believe this way or they didn't believe that way. I just never bought into that. That's what I was getting from the raising of the church so I kind of quit going somewhere in high school.

AW:

What denomination was that?

BR:

It was Christian; it was like the church of Christ with music. My dad started going to that church because he really liked the preacher. They became really good friends. My dad became the Deacon and went to that church for the rest of the time even though I—

AW:

You quit

BR:

I quit. I would go every now and then but I got really angry with one of the people. I don't even remember what it was about but it was something that I was very adamant about and he was too. I just never wanted to go back because I thought he was wrong, whatever it was that he was thinking.

AW:

I noticed it's 12:30 if y'all want to stop and eat.

BR:

Yeah let's get something to eat.

AW:

Okay we'll stop right there and I know right where to come back and ask—get us going. We're going to stop for a few moments.

[Pause in recording]

AW:

All right, Andy again with Bette. We're back after a really delicious lunch of your homemade clam chowder with the cayenne pepper which was even better. One of the things, just as we were stopping I thought about or I was thinking that we should touch on, in talking about your young life you talked a lot about your dad but hardly talked about your mom.

BR:

I didn't talk about her much, did I?

AW:

I think that's because I was asking you questions about your dad and never let you get back to it.

BR:

Well my mom I think was, she was raised in a family of eleven. There were nine—

AW:

What was her name?

BR:

Her name was Ellen Louise.

AW:

And her last name?

BR:

Woodard.

AW:

Woodard that's right I should know that.

BR:

Her family grew up on farms mainly in the West Texas area like down around in Abilene, well I say west Texas. Not down but—

AW:

Abilene considers itself West Texas.

BR:

Yeah I'm sure they do but in that—she was born in Colorado City. They lived you know they moved around a lot too because they really were on farms. I guess when the government did those was it CPA or something like that, those farm they gave people plots?

AW:

The resettlement projects. In fact there's a really well documented one right outside of Ropes.

BR:

Okay yeah. Mother remembers from her childhood that at one point in time when they were, when she was young, really young when Oklahoma territory opened up and people were doing the land rush. She remembers—she said they went to Oklahoma in a covered wagon. They found a place and it was next to a creek I mean it was close to a creek and he was doing the settling there. They had a flash flood and it swept a lot—nobody died or anything but—

AW:

It took a lot of their goods.

BR:

It took a lot of their goods and things so they didn't stay there. I don't have any idea what her age was but I know my grandpa, his name was Estes Roemiller Woodard.

AW:

Roemiller?

BR:

Uh-huh. He was from a big family of boys. I don't really know if he had sisters or not. I know my cousin has a photograph of the Woodard boys. They look mean [laughter]. They had a lot of Native American. I don't really know, I know that my aunt says that the Native American—I think this man, one of the ones that came from Tennessee had two different wives. I think he had

some children by another wife that may not, I don't know which one was the Native American but, she tells me that, my aunt told me that the Native American woman just walked off at some point in their lives and left and they had children. She said she's buried at, I want to say something like white something down around by the Dallas/Fort Worth area. I can't—white hall or white something, starts with white. I'm not remembering the full name but its white something in a cemetery there. My uncle kind of looked, he was more interested in family history than anybody else, especially the Woodard part of it. He kind of seemed to know and that's how my aunt knew. Anyway it's, the Woodard boys were all hand—I mean there's a lot of handsome and pretty people on my mom's side of the family and my dad's too. My aunt Virginia, I have pictures of her when she was young and she won beauty contests and so did my aunt Genevieve. They were just young beautiful women but the Woodard boys—I had my cousin's mother, my grandmother was a Buck—

AW:
Just one moment. It just dawned on m thee—

BR:
Oh we need to turn that off.

AW:
Yeah. I don't know why maybe I smelt it.

BR:
I'm glad you thought of it.

AW:
Let me, I'm going to turn that off.

BR:
Yeah just take it off that and put the lid on it.

AW:
Yeah I will.

BR:
You might give it a stir to make sure it's not sticking.

AW:
It's starting to bubble pretty good. Oh no, there's some sticking to the bottom that's what I smelt.

BR:

Oh. Well just take it off the unit.

AW:

Yeah I am. I'll put the lid back on it too.

BR:

Yeah I forgot about it.

AW:

Yeah I did too, I shouldn't have forgot about it, it was so good. [Long pause] Okay

BR:

Okay. My grandmother's name was—oh, well I'll wait until you start recording.

AW:

No that's all right go ahead.

BR:

My grandmother's name was Ademae Buck.

AW:

Ademae Buck. B-u-c-k?

BR:

Buck. Uh-huh, Buck. Isn't that weird. Anyway my grandpa's name was Estes Roemiller Woodard.

AW:

How do you spell Roemiller?

BR:

R-o-e-m-i-l-l-e-r. The interesting thing about that name is when my sister and I were in San Antonio at the Alamo we were going through and looking at things and there was an Estes Roemiller Woodard that was written in one of the books where people kept their expenditures and they would list their expenses and I guess their earnings and everything. There was an Estes Roemiller Woodard that was paid, you know a pittance but he wrote it down, for his taking care of the horses.

AW:

So you think that was a grandfather?

BR:

It's such an unusual name I just can't imagine that it wasn't. My grandpa—he was one of the youngest of the boys but he was a wheeler dealer and he traded horses. He was into horse trading and all kinds of things. He was always doing something—of course he had a bunch of kids. What had happened, my grandmother was raised and her family had a little bit of money. They had some land and my grandmother had some rights to some oil wells that you know her family had had down there where they were drilling oil down around in that Midland/Odessa area. We laughed because I got a twenty-five cent check one time [AW laughs] from grandma's oil rights. She never did sell her rights but you know she had so many kids. Anyway, she was—and my grandpa was real handsome and my grandma was probably pretty—her family was pretty strict. I don't know how they met but they eloped. There's a history, it's very interesting in my family because my great, great, great grandmother eloped. I think it was my third great, might've just been my second great. Then my great grandmother and grandfather eloped. My grandmother and grandfather eloped. My mother and my dad eloped. All three of my sister eloped. My two brothers eloped. I'm the only one in my family that changed that and did not elope. Then Amanda ended up eloping and I think Kim did too. It's just kind of like hey—

AW:

Is that because of the parents at the time didn't want them to get married? That's usually what you think but it can be for financial reasons.

BR:

Mother knew on all of them, I don't know whether daddy did. He may have known about some of them, of my sisters. On the grandmother's—it was my third great grandmother I'm pretty sure, eloped. She was a young widow, her husband I think she was just about eighteen or nineteen. Her husband had died in the flu epidemic. She had a little girl that was not very old, I don't know, probably less than two or three. She was the daughter of a rancher and of course the rancher didn't want his daughter to marry one of his cowboys. My third great grandfather remembers that when he was a young boy his mother and a well-dressed man came to him and they left him with a couple named the Paige's and they were school teachers. This was up in the Boston area. She told him that she was leaving him with these people but she would come back and get him, and she never did. Then the Paige's—my cousin—I have all this because he's done the genealogy on this side of the family and it's written and he's a really good writer.

AW:

We would love to get a copy of that.

BR:

I can give you a copy of it. Yeah.

AW:

A lot of people come to the archive doing genealogical research and that would be a real asset if we could—

BR:

Yeah my cousin is a really good writer too because he makes it interesting. He documents things that you know—and then what he can't document he kind of hypothesizes, tries to rationally kind of what he thinks might have happened. He hypothesized that the Paige's probably left that Boston area by boat and came down and settled in the Louisiana area. When Stephen F. Austin started taking settlements over to Texas to resettle, you know he negotiated to be able to do that. The Paige's were part of that settlement. My cousin said if you really wanted to be a daughter of the Texas, whatever—

AW:

DRT, daughters of the republic of Texas.

BR:

Yes, then you know you could. My grandmother was because I went to the reunion that the Bucks' had down, way down close to Corpus and my nephew said, "Aunt Bette you're going to see the ugly side of the family this time." He was right, I didn't see very many pretty people on that side.

AW:

Oh he meant physically? Not mean.

BR:

Yeah physically, not mean just physically. My cousin that wrote this genealogy, his mother is the one that said, "Oh those Woodard boys, they were some of the handsomest men I've ever seen" and I am telling you when I've seen pictures of my uncles and aunts when they were young, they looked like movie stars. My uncle—I couldn't believe what my uncle Morris looked like. I thought well no wonder my aunt fell in love with him he looked a lot like Tyrone Power, just real handsome guys. I'm sure that's—and I know that's what happened with my third great grandmother too because he was a handsome guy and he was a cowboy. He left the Paige's when he was about less than fifteen—just like those kids in Buck's story. Left the Paige's because he thought that they had kidnapped him, because they left. He had always thought that—they left and his mother never could find him so he left to go find his mother. Of course he didn't get very far. He got down some place where a rancher took him in and let him work and taught him. By

the time he was in his twenties he was working for this big rancher that had this young widow daughter and they ran off and got married. Of course he didn't like it and would not speak to the daughter until they had a son which was my great, great grandfather I guess. He sent her a grand piano. The grand piano my cousin knows where it is.

AW:

Wow, that's interesting.

BR:

Yeah because somebody named the Birdsong's have it. I can remember that piano because my grandmother, I think it was the same one and I can't be really sure, but my grandmother's brother who was in World War II, it might've been World War I, who my cousin thinks was probably a pedophile, e by the way, but he was a really good photographer. I remember going to that house—well see, first of all my, grandfather was real handsome but he didn't always tell the truth. He was raised—he was pretty smart because I read some of his letters and my grandmother was real religious. He would kind of tease her about being so religious. They met at some party you know when he was driving cattle and they met somewhere at a party and would drive back and forth. But my cousin has those letters and he played the fiddle and my cousin has his fiddle. It's a really pretty one with a lot of inlay, it's a foreign fiddle. He told her that he had some land, well he did, but he lived with his mom. There's some land down there that they lived on called Buck Hollow and it's in that Abilene, all that area somewhere. When he married my grandmother, he didn't bring her home because he was afraid to. He went home and told his mom that he had kind of lied and she told him that, "Well if she really loves you she'll come with you," and of course she did. That's kind of the story of them. My grand—that grandfather died and my cousin doesn't know if it was from having consumption, he had a horse wreck and was injured. He doesn't know if it was a result of—I think his horse stepped in a gopher hole or something don't remember. But it was a horse wreck, this is what's so ironic.

AW:

Where did that happen? Near that Buck Hollow.

BR:

Yeah that area and he had had some college is what my cousin said. He was kind of like, he kind of became—I don't know what in the community. They were well liked in the community because my grandmother played the piano. My grandfather played the fiddle and they would have these community gatherings at their house, does that sound pretty—

AW:

Sounds awfully familiar to me.

BR:

I was going to say, "Oh dang it, it's in the genes!" Good lord.

AW:

You can't escape it.

BR:

That's what my grandmother and my mother, my sister, me and anyway. I just thought it was kind of ironic that all this happened. The other thing that my cousin discovered in the family is and this was up to a certain point and unfortunately there has been more since then. He had discovered thirteen suicides on the Woodard side of the family. I think probably bipolar was—I'm pretty sure my little brother had it, I'm pretty sure Pat had it. I know that I had—I can remember a cousin that killed himself, he had crippling arthritis or something. It started young and he ended up shooting himself. I just remember—and my uncle Clyde the one that I said I remembered had that piano that he let me play and I think that might have been the grand piano that was handed down another way. But I remember he had all these pictures of Shirley Temple around his house and he—

AW:

As a little girl.

BR:

As a little girl. I couldn't figure out—because I knew who Shirley Temple was but I can remember asking him why he had all those pictures of a little girl because here I was as a little girl. He was real attentive to me and of course I was just little, I don't even know how old I was. I was little enough that I just wanted to go plink on the piano. I remember—you know as a kid you don't really know, but you know something, but you can't put your finger on it but you just kind of figure there's something weird. I remember we had been back, we had walked back in this room and I think he was, well I don't guess he was in a wheel chair because I remember him sitting down by me on the piano, you know because I was interested in that, and kind of showing me a little bit about the piano. Just taking a lot of extra interest in me, but I remember they kind of walked out of the room and I was still sitting in there with him at the piano and my older sister came back and got me. She said, "Mother said we're leaving, you have to come." I knew something was—nobody ever told me anything I just knew something was kind of weird because he took such a special interest in me. When—my cousin has pictures of my mother and a couple of her cousins and they're all standing—I had never seen pictures of my mother when she was young, little, like a young girl. She was probably about ten maybe and they all had their dresses and were standing on these rocks in a creek. It's a great picture and I'd love to have it, and they all have their dresses holding them up spread out like this, kind of like those famous paintings of I've forgotten the name of it—

AW:

The Nymphs?

BR:

The nymphs on the seashell yeah.

AW:

The dryads?

BR:

Yeah well here they were you know with their little dresses spread out all three of these pretty little girls. I remember going to that Buck reunion and those pictures were laid out and I'd never seen my mother but I recognized, I said, "That's my mom." The lady across the table from me that I didn't know, was Neil's mother and she said, "Are you Louisa's daughter?" I said yes and she said, "Oh I just adored your mother. I followed her around. I wanted to be like her and just followed her around everywhere. And those Woodard boys they were the handsomest boys I've ever seen." Well my mother really was a pretty girl. I think she—she had all those brothers and they called her sister, she was one of the oldest and she had to be responsible for a lot of those little brothers. I don't think—she ended up having two sisters. My grandmother had all those boys and then she had EJ and then she had mother and then she had uncle Donald and uncle Bill and, golly, the other one, I'm trying to think of his name now, uncle Bo. They're all the ones that served in the army. EJ is the one that stayed at home on the farm and he was affected by the drought, because he was married and had kids, shut his house up—the farm because of the drought. Left everything in the house that they couldn't put into this Model T, went to California to pick fruit and never came back to Texas and left the farm. His kids still have that farm. I don't know if anybody went in and robbed the house or whatever but they still at least, the last I heard, they still have that farm. That's by Cee Vee out, that's where my grandma lived. My grandpa would go off to find work and leave my grandma in the cotton patch with all those kids. Of course all those boys would go out and work so that they could bring in enough food and money, cash, to help my grandma. They always you know they joined the army as soon as they could or some part of the service and then served but they would send money to my grandma. My mom always helped my grandma. My grandpa was out dilly bopping around. The thing I remember about him is he had a great sense of humor, he was just funny to me, and was a lot of fun and he loved watermelon, and his son interviewed him and had him on a tape recorder before he died somewhere late in his life, Uncle Bill. He said on my tombstone I want wrote, "Two thousand watermelons went down this throat." [Laughter] I just remembered that.

AW:

I hope they did it.

BR:

He just you know, he was a watermelon guy. Mother said that he had been an alcoholic and I don't know if he was or not but I guess he drank a lot. She said he was walking home and fell into a bar ditch and got bitten by a spider. She said after that he never drank again. I don't know if that's true, I don't not believe it I just couldn't ever verify it. There's just a lot of stories about the Woodard boys that somewhere somebody was supposed to have murdered another person and then somebody else came back and retaliated and cut somebody's head off and stuck it on a fence or something and that's why they left. I've never verified that story but seeing that picture of those Woodard guys I can imagine that they could've been like that but I just don't know. As far as the Native American woman, I've never known there's some different names in the family that Neil has you know of family names and there's some interesting names that could be Native American. Neil says there is on that Woodard side that there is Native American but he was more interested in finding more out about the Bucks from my grandma when he was writing because that's where, he's a Buck. The Buck's and the Woodard's—the Buck's always felt like they were better because they had money and the Woodard's didn't. From what I've heard about my grandma, my grandpa was always leaving grandma in a cotton patch someplace with all those kids and then her brothers would come and rescue her. They finally told her hey we're not going to do this anymore and she stayed with my grandpa until she died and he didn't live to much longer after she died. I guess they loved each other. The story of the elopements was that when my grandma eloped her mother knew about it. She climbed out of the window and they went in a horse and buggy twenty-five miles. They had to drive some place to get married. Then they drove to one of his brothers and stayed all night with his brother. Her dad was so mad at her that he gathered up all of her clothes and went down to the creek and threw her clothes into the creek, this is what my aunt told me. Then he just sat down on the creek bank and cried, then went out and gathered them all up again. I'm assuming that's a true story too but that's just a story I heard so I don't know, it's interesting.

AW:

Well you described your dad as a teacher. If you described your mom how would you?

BR:

My mom was—she was more of a social activist person. My mom was ahead of her time. I never had—my mom never bought candy, chewing gum, soda pop anything's like that when we were young and growing up except Christmas and Easter she would. I can remember her buying, well we always had nuts and some of those hard Christmas candy.

AW:

With the flower in the middle?

BR:

Yeah and the ribbons for the stockings. But always had the orange, apple and the nuts and all of that.

AW:

Yeah we did too. We wouldn't have thought it was Christmas without that.

BR:

No that was the big thing that was the exciting thing. She would always buy those they were like peanuts but they had a hard candy shell on them, they were kind of red berry looking stuff.

AW:

They were red, yeah, with a peanut in the middle. Yeah and they were hard you could crack a tooth on them.

BR:

[AW and BB speak simultaneously] They were hard and you could crack a tooth on them yeah.

AW:

We loved those.

BR:

I did too.

AW:

They were kind of a roasty taste.

BR:

Yeah roasted taste. Also, at Easter—and I still love those almonds, those candy coated almonds. I've forgotten what you call those. You know what I'm talking about.

AW:

Yeah.

BR:

You can still get them if you find them in the right place, and I still get them. We never had deserts. We always had my dad—my mother raised chickens all the time we lived—well and my dad had chickens in Amarillo until the neighbors made him. The roosters crowed and woke them up and they didn't like that. We always had a garden. Daddy always had they bought half the beef and sometimes pork, not as much pork as beef though. My dad did not think a meal was a

meal without meat and potatoes. My mom never bought canned goods except she would buy canned spinach, they didn't have fresh spinach at the time, and canned tomatoes. That's pretty much all the canned things she would buy. She always bought fresh or frozen and had a garden you know raised things. My dad brought corn, kraut, hominy and canned tomatoes every time he went to the store. If we didn't have anything else in the pantry, we always had corn, kraut, hominy and tomatoes. I don't know that any of us ever ate the hominy except daddy.

AW:

Oh really?

BR:

Yeah.

AW:

Our family, we ate hominy all the time.

BR:

We didn't eat the hominy but we ate the corn. Mother would do kraut, she would do spare ribs and kraut and you know different meats with kraut when she would get around to doing the kraut. She would use the canned tomatoes and make things with canned tomatoes. My dad would open a can of tomatoes and just eat it out of the can. I guess mother would sometimes heat up the corn or put it in soup or whatever. Always the roast and the steaks got cooked first and the hamburger meat. Mother never planned a meal ahead of time, it was always, she was a great cook but she was a fast cook so she didn't—

AW:

Yeah that sounds just like my wife.

BR:

Yeah she'd just come in and put something together at the last minute and it would always be good. But never would have time to thaw the hamburger meat it had to thaw in the pan and some kind of slumgullion something. So we never had meatloaf, we'd just have something you know. We would have hamburger soup and different things but nothing where you had to plan ahead to make it. Nobody to this day, not anybody in my family ever learned to fry chicken and fish like my mom. She never—I can do those but not like my mom. Drew is the closet, but not like my mom. I don't remember mother ever cooking less than two chickens usually it was three and when we had chicken it was chicken and sliced tomatoes. Occasionally if she did it, one of our favorite breakfasts was fried chicken, biscuits and gravy.

AW:

For?

BR:

For breakfast.

AW:

Was this chicken left over from the night before or fried up that morning?

BR:

No it was fresh fried in the morning.

AW:

Gosh that's a lot of work.

BR:

I know my mom—but she could not cook an egg that any of us would eat. My dad you know was a great breakfast—egg you know, bacon, egg that kind of cook. If mother got up she'd make pork chops or fried chicken or something like that, biscuits and gravy and all that, we just didn't have the eggs or they'd be scrambled. My dad we loved the way he'd did eggs because he would cook the bacon or the sausage first and drain that off and he'd leave a little bit of grease in the pan, he'd put the eggs in and he'd put a little bit of water in to cut the grease. They were like poached eggs you know kind of basted eggs basically is what they were. We fought over the goldest egg. We didn't like pale yellow eggs because we were used to having gold eggs because they were home grown. Phyllis always got the goldest because she was the oldest, and she's the one that got the goldest. Drew was second because she was more hard headed than Pat or me. Pat and me got whatever was left. But we all love the gold eggs. I still do, I don't like pale eggs.

AW:

I don't either. They're the best when they chickens have a lot of grasshoppers.

BR:

That's why buck wouldn't eat chicken, he hated chickens. He said have you ever watched what they eat because they had chickens too.

AW:

My mother grew up, her father ran a hatchery. I never saw my mother eat chicken, she never ate eggs. Now she'd cook it for us but she had been around to many chickens.

BR:

Yeah, never eat it. Buck didn't like chicken and of course I love fried chicken. If somebody asked me what my last meal would be, it'd be fried chicken and Drew's the same way, and a lot of us are in my family. Buck would eat pheasant and other kinds of fowl but he didn't like chicken. Robert, our friend Robert whose dad is really the one, Robert is somebody that would be interesting.

AW:

What's Robert's last name?

BR:

Wait a minute. [Long pause] Dadgummit. I'm excited so I'm going to have to think. Roberts's dad is the one that's instrumental in getting the quarter horse here.

AW:

The quarter horse museum?

BR:

The quarter horse association. He's the one that drove to Fort Worth and brought the records and things. He was editor of the western horseman, is that the name of that magazine?

AW:

Uh-hm.

BR:

Robert has editions of that magazine no telling how far back they date. I told Robert, I said, "Robert somebody would really probably love to have all those, they'd be valuable." Robert lives in the house that his mom and dad had. His dad raised palomino quarter horses and sold them all over the world at one time. Poor Robert, Robert left home—well his dad talked somebody into getting him into the army, Robert didn't want to go. It was during Vietnam and Robert didn't want to go. He didn't have any desire to participate in the Vietnam War. He was in the army somewhere I don't know if he was in Germany or some country and he just left.

AW:

Oh went AWOL [**Absent Without Leave**]?

BR:

Yeah and ended up I guess he's gotten, I have no idea if he's ever got out of that or what happened.

AW:

Is he back here?

BR:

Yeah. Or if he just stayed under the wire or whatever, but anyway he just left. His name is just not-- I know Robert as well as I know my own name and it'll come in a minute.

AW:

That's alright when it does just—

BR:

Yeah I'll say something.

AW:

What does he have to do with chickens?

BR:

Well he grew up, they lived on a ranch I think outside of Stephenville for a long time and then they moved to Amarillo. When Robert came back I guess he was in Sweden and he wasn't going to come back home but his dad got sick and he came home to help with his dad and help his mom. He was going to go back, and then his mom got sick so he stayed until she died. He ended up having-- I've forgotten how many horses that he had to take care of. You know the last few years with the drought and everything he still had about eight horses that he was having to feed and he was working himself to death because hay and everything was so high, you know they didn't have any grass. I don't know how many he's down to now, but he's such a tender hearted person. He had one horse that was found that he was worried about. He came by to get something and he had to leave, he said, "I got to go home and see about my horse." She was down and he said, "I can't shoot her so I'm going to have to call a vet or something," but anyway she had died.

AW:

So he didn't have to do that.

BR:

So he didn't have to do that. He said she was the prettiest one. I felt sorry for him because he does all that sprinkler stuff and he's-- anyway—he just knows a lot about all that early stuff with his dad. He was talking about having all those magazines and I think he said that he had talked to somebody and nobody seemed to want them. I said well I bet somebody would because that's you know. Anyway I'm just telling you about Robert and I'll think of it.

AW:

Well that's all right I'll ask our friend Jim Flugger he'll know him.

BR:

He probably will, he's younger than I am. He's probably three or four maybe five years younger than I am. I remember knowing about him and he knew Buck, he use to play poker with Buck when Buck was playing poker with all those high rolling guys.

AW:

You mean Benny crowd and all that?

BR:

Well not, Buck was playing poker with like Tommy Wagner [?], some of those guys that played poker you know and Robert was too. Robert was running around with all those guys because he was kind of in their age bracket. A lot of his contemporaries had died because they got drunk and ran into a bridge or a concrete wall or whatever, a train. I said he's lucky to be alive because he was doing all that stuff too and he's got all kinds of stories to tell. He's a friend of David Dean and I know you know about David don't you from Buck building and all that group so Roberts in-- and he knows all those stories too. Knows John Blackburn and everybody and he's more in that age bracket I think. I don't know why his name is not coming to me and it's making me mad. I kind of got off the subject so where should we pick up?

AW:

Well we were talking about your mom.

BR:

My mom oh yeah. My mom, she studied massage and physical therapy and all that and gave treatments—she had a massage table. There is nobody that could rub your back and pop your neck and pop your back and pop your hip and you know.

AW:

Like her?

BR:

Like mother. We just loved it if she would let us climb up on that massage table and she had these wonderful lotions that she would rub us down with. We all learned to pop necks, and backs and hips.

AW:

Oh really? Now did she do this to make money also?

BR:

She did it to make money.

AW:

So she was ahead of her time?

BR:

Yeah way ahead of her time. She never—we used to go on—my aunt and my mother were real close because mother was close to uncle Morris I guess.

AW:

What was your aunt's name?

BR:

Virginia. They came up, well uncle Morris was also affected by the drought because they came up. He got in his Model T Ford and left the farm and came up down around by Cee Vee.

AW:

Cee Vee?

BR:

Cee Vee uh-huh. It's—

AW:

Spell it for the transcriber.

BR:

It's C-e-e V-e-e.

AW:

Is it two words?

BR:

Uh-huh. I don't know if it even is there but that's where my brothers and my dad—they used to all go down there because they knew people down there to go bird hunting, when the season went open.

AW:

Now is this around Robert Lee?

BR:

Well I'm trying to think. It's down there, it's on the way to Austin. It's not that far from Snyder and all those places. It's just farm country and I'm trying to think. Lawn, TX is one of the towns but that wasn't the big town. We could go to the grocery store there and they had that gyp water. When we'd go see my grandma out on the farm, which I loved doing. We couldn't drink the water because she hauled water out of a tank and it tasted horrible. Then if you went to town to get water it was jip water so I didn't like water when I was growing up. Mother would go to the store and buy orange soda pop and different kinds of drinks for us to drink because we wouldn't drink the water when we would go see grandma. She didn't have running water and she didn't have an indoor bathroom. My sisters just hated it but I was young enough that I just loved being out and helping her feed the chickens and gathering eggs and doing all that kind of stuff but they hated to go. Mother would go down there and take grandma clothes, groceries, and visit and take us and just help her mom out. She just lived pretty pitiful. Mother took her-- I think both-- I don't think aunt Wanda I think aunt Wanda got married fairly young, but aunt Rita lived with us for a year or two, her last years in high school. But Aunt Virginia and Uncle Morris came to town and lived with us too, we lived in a big duplex over on Washington, well actually it was Adams. It turned into Washington. I went to McKinley school, which was right across the street. They lived up stairs and we lived—well they lived on part of the upstairs and we lived downstairs and upstairs. It was a big ole two story house. Aunt Virginia, we loved Aunt Virginia to cook because she made cakes.

AW:

And your mom didn't.

BR:

Mother never made cakes and Aunt Virginia could make really good cakes. She always made cakes for our birthday. She'd wrap a dime in wax paper and put it in the cake. Anyway, we didn't live that far from Elwood Park [?]. So in the summer time they had that swimming pool and we would walk down to Elwood Park with my sisters and we would play at Elwood Park. Mother—at that time you could do that, and mother always warned my sisters not to let us go to the bathroom by ourselves that somebody had to go with us. We'd just play and then my aunt and mother would walk down and meet us with a picnic lunch and we'd have picnics at Elwood Park. Aunt Virginia would have the sweet stuff that we could eat if she came along because we never got them. Mother, you know like I said, she just always made sure that we had fresh fruits and vegetables and good things to eat, not a lot of junk. She was I guess she learned about—she didn't like canned things because a lot of people got poisoned with canned things. She didn't like to put mayonnaise because they made mayonnaise with eggs—

AW:

And it would spoil within and instant.

BR:

She would never make potato salad with mayonnaise and never put mayonnaise on sandwiches.

AW:

Yeah growing up you had mustard on sandwiches because if you took a sandwich out to the field or out to school—

BR:

It'd ruin.

AW:

Yeah. I remember that.

BR:

So we never and she never bought white bread. She never let us eat raw dough.

AW:

What kind of bread did you get because it was hard to find something that wasn't white bread?

BR:

She would-- I guess there was whole wheat somewhere along the way because she would never buy white bread.

AW:

Yeah, boy she really was ahead of the curve.

BR:

She was. She would make biscuits, she'd never made yeast breads, but she'd make biscuits. I remember her making one cake and two green apple pies. I'm telling you I watched my mom—now this was when I was in high school and have taken several Home Ec. classes and learned how to make pies and bake and do things. My mom took a couple of handfuls of flour out and put them in the pie pan, put the flour in the pie pan and took a dab of Crisco and put it in the pie pan and did it with her fingers. Then she took the pie pan over to the faucet, turned the water on and you know did this and did it with her fingers, pressed out the pie dough in both of the pans. Had those home grown green apples that somebody gave her, quartered them and left the rind, you know the apple peeling on them. Chopped those apples up, stuck them in, sprinkled a little sugar and a little cinnamon and whatever on them and then made a topping. I guess she had kind of pressed out a top, put them in the oven. Those were delicious pies but I was appalled watching her make those pies, never measured a thing.

AW:

Yeah I remember my granny was going to teach me how to make biscuits I think. She would say now here's a pinch and then he's just a pinch which was smaller than a pinch. Then here was a handful and of course her hands were little tiny. Even as a little kid my handfuls was a lot bigger than hers. I never could learn. But she was the same way, she never measured a thing and they came out the same every time she cooked them.

BR:

I know. It just amazes—just throw something in her hand and throw it in. But we never had any measuring stuff so when I would come home and start cooking I would have to go buy measuring spoons, measuring cups so I could bake. You know with cakes and things like that. I could do other things but.

AW:

Do you think that's why she didn't cook cakes? Because it required all that equipment.

BR:

I just think that she wasn't interested in all that. I really—see I love to bake. I don't like cake, I will very rarely eat a piece of cake. If I do it's got to be like a pound cake that's not very sweet or something like a cake that's heavy and has nuts.

AW:

Like apple cake or something.

BR:

Yeah something like that but not hardly any. I don't like icing at all.

AW:

Me either. You and I have the exact same taste. As you're talking about this I'm trying to think about, have I ever had cake here? I've had more wonderful food here than almost any place on the planet but I don't remember eating any cake here.

BR:

I have made lots of cakes. I remember all those cowboys when I was feeding them, I made all those different kinds of and I'd make three and four layered cakes. I remember JB eating, what was that, it's like the hummingbird cake. You know that hummingbird cake is really good, it's a heavy cake, you put coconut and pineapple and I don't know what all in it, icing, the whole smear. I know I made a least a three or four layer cake. Those guys can eat two big slices because I made that hummingbird cake. I'm the one that made a leg of lamb and JB had never eaten lamb in his life and he ate two big helpings.

AW:

And admitted it? Because a lot of cowboys don't want to admit they eat lamb.

BR:

He liked it and he did admit it. He'd never eaten it but he said he'd try it. I didn't even think about feeding lamb to cowboys. It just didn't dawn on me because I love lamb.

AW:

Well you know it's very interesting those interviews I was doing last week in Fort Stockton. Most of those ranchers and cowboys grew up with sheep. They didn't get cattle until into the seventies. I mean literally they were sheep men from day one. I said, "So you like lamb," and not a one of them ate lamb. They raised—

BR:

Raised them but didn't eat. I know the difference between sheep and lamb because I've had some sheep and sheep are pretty hard.

AW:

Pretty tough.

BR:

Yeah pretty tough and pretty hard to even think about. But a good piece of lamb and now they're selling ground lamb at United. I love to buy that and just make little ground lamb like—

AW:

Turkish.

BR:

Yeah like something. I even made some for the stuffed baked potatoes last night you know just used lamb. Amanda loves it too. I was really proud of myself because the other thing about JB that I'm not sure a lot of the people know. He and Margaret use to come when we would have cowboy stuff here and we had that little guest house and we'd let people stay out there. They came up here for something, and we had been somewhere, and we came in late, might've been when the rodeo was here I don't know, and came in late and stayed up late probably until about two or three in the morning. Ellen Craddick who they were friends of the Vineyards and her mom was Marianne's best friend when they were growing up, and Ellen was this beautiful daughter that they had and she had this boyfriend that was quite wealthy that collected belt buckles. I guess it was the rodeo because he had come to look at all the vendor stuff and buy belt buckles for his collection. They had been by and had visited with all these different people, cowboys, well I invited Ellen and her boyfriend to come and have breakfast with us. Well I had

been up until two or three in the morning with Buck, and JB and people, I don't know whatever was all going on. The doorbell rang early in the morning and I knew as soon as it rang I thought oh I forgot I invited them over for breakfast. I jumped up, ran to the door, ran in the kitchen and started taking things out of the refrigerator to make breakfast and I kind of got things on. I made Buck get up to start talking and entertaining, made coffee and stuff like that. I ran out to the guest house and knocked on the door and here came JB, he had just barely just gotten his britches on and he didn't have a shirt on. He had tattoos. I could not believe it. I thought, Who would've think that JB would be covered in tattoos all up and down. You probably saw him at one time or another.

AW:

Yeah and Margaret when he would be railing and ranting about people drinking, whoever was standing there by her would get us over to the side and say, "JB has tattoos and you know sober people don't get tattoos." That's what she'd say.

BR:

I know and someone told me that Margaret was pretty good about holding her liquor in their younger days. So I suspect that they had their times. They've got those pretty daughters and one of them I think was kind of worrisome to JB and Margaret both as daughters can be.

AW:

It's really interesting about your mother being you mentioned being the gray lady just fits right in, she would volunteer to do something for a cause instead of staying home.

BR:

Exactly and she was always out—she was very interested in crippled children and worked in that area. She would treat kids that had different. So I was used to growing up—at one time I remember her being a foster parent and we had this little baby that was the sweet-- she was a little baby and we just all loved her, she was so sweet. Then she got adopted and we had to give her up and it was like giving up part of the family. Mother never did anymore foster parenting after that. She was always doing things. She had a very open mind about people. I remember in Dalhart I remember Maisie was a black lady that came and worked you know and helped mother. Did ironing, housecleaning and stuff while mother was out doing other things I guess. She brought her little girl with her and I played with that little girl, we'd go outside and play together. I never knew the difference between—I never even thought about black kids, colors, none of that. I don't think any of us ever did and I don't think mother and daddy ever said anything about being prejudice we just never, it never dawned on me. I can remember and I know I've told this story before, I can remember when I was little we'd go in these bus train stations or bus stations and they'd have these fountains and it'd say colored fountain and I would want to go over there and drink out of it because I thought the water was colored.

AW:

Me too, that's exactly what I'd did and I'd get a spanking from my grandmother, now not my mom but my grandmother.

BR:

Yeah and my sister would jerk on me. I'd say I want to go drink out of that one you know. She'd pull me over and I'd say, "I want some of that colored water." My sister finally said that's not--. I know that we grew up with nigger toes and nigger shooters and I never made—

AW:

We never connected them.

BR:

I never made an association. Never connected anything. It's so weird to hear that word now. I remember when the first teaching job I had, I walked in to the Amarillo school system the year that the Feds told Amarillo that they, "Would integrate their schools." They told them over the summer, "Or we're going to pull every federal dollar out of your system," and they very quickly closed Carver which—

AW:

Was the all-black school?

BR:

All black school. Won all kinds of awards because they had Jabo Johnson and all those great athletes winning all kinds of stuff. Those kids came to my class and they had their bandanas on their heads and they were angry and mad. Well I don't blame them. They closed the Carver school and they made sure that they only put a few kids in this school, in this school, in that school. Bussed them across town because they didn't want them to be in numbers to cause a lot of problems. The problem that came up was they were angry, and I didn't have sense enough to let them intimidate me. You know I'd just treat them like everybody else, and if they didn't act right I'd fuss at them and do whatever that I needed to do in the classrooms. Those teachers would let those kids get by with murder—I had some black mothers come up to my classroom for—I'd have different parents come up to teach different things that I wanted the kids to learn from different cultures, because I had Mexicans and blacks. That's where I really had to confront my own prejudices that I didn't even realize I had but you know you do have them and you don't know until you start confronting your own conceptions of things. But those other teachers—I can remember those mothers saying-- they'd be talking or acting out someway in a classroom or something ,and those mothers would look at those kids and say, "You shut your mouth girl I'll—" I mean they'd just jump right on them and say you know better than that. It just kind of floored me that the teachers would let them act awful. I said I would have been fired because I

remember one time, these weren't black kids but they had me over at the old Elizabeth Nixon School I mean place, they built me that restaurant and I was supposed to be teaching these kids that couldn't make it in any other situation.

AW:

How to work in a restaurant.

BR:

But I had to teach them job skills. One thing was-- and they were menial jobs and I felt guilty about that because I had kids with, some of them had high IQs and some of them were barely educable, but they were trouble makers basically. They sent them so that they could learn job skills so they could be a part of society and not have to draw income from some social program that was basically it. Well I didn't just want them to learn that, I wanted them to learn as much as they could because some of those kids didn't even know what an orange was, I'm not kidding. Some of them had never been to a grocery store, never been out of a four or five block radius of their homes. I would pile those kids in my car and take them places and do things with them because my classes were small especially if some of them didn't show up. I figured out real quick I couldn't tell them what we were going to do ahead of time because if they didn't want to do it they didn't come to school. Then I would have to change something and do something really fun that we weren't even going to do but those kids missed out on because they didn't come. I'd just have to stay a jump ahead of them. I can remember I had a home room, they made me do a home room and I had all these sophomore boys and they were upstairs and it was a gymnasium, no chairs or anything. They had like this wrestling mats and plastic bowling pins and you know gym equipment all around. I had these wild sophomore boys, they were regular students, high school boys. Well they started wrestling on the mats well then it got serious. I went over and told them to stop it, stop it and they wouldn't stop it. I picked up one of those plastic bowling pins and I was standing over those guys, one of them was on top of the other one and I could tell they were getting serious. I started hitting that kid [laughter] on the back I wasn't even, "Get off of that boy," you know and he looked up at me and they started laughing. It stopped but I would just do things. Then I remember another time this boy and girl in my classroom started fighting. Well I didn't have any sense I just went over there and just weaseled in between them you know, both of them were a whole lot bigger than me. But the good thing about it is the kids, I had already bonded with them, and they helped pull them apart and kept them separate. Then I remember when I was at Tascosa by then I had got to plan my classroom with the architects because I knew what I wanted. I told them how to lay it out, told them the different things because I knew from having that smaller kitchen in that other place. We served about sixty people two days a week and we served really good food. They learned how to use all the equipment. I will say that I've ran into several of my students and they were doing different jobs, not necessarily in a re--well Benny went to work and washed dishes, he could do the dishwasher really good, that's about all he could do. I did stay five hours one day in the

summertime while he made one pie. I let them take the pies home you know, I let them bring their own pie pan, we were making pie crust. I said you bring your filling and you get to take your pie home and bring the pie pan. He did, and it took him five, well maybe longer than that because I stayed there all day long while Benny made that one pie. When his mother came and got him he stood in front of me and he said “Ms. Ramsey, this is the first thing that I have ever made all by myself.” I thought, I’m so glad Benny. He’s been a Walmart greeter at Walmart and he’s also been a dishwasher and he was a night guard some place I don’t know but anyway that’s Benny. At Tascosa I had this really nice restaurant and teachers would bring their kids over to see that because if—I taught in the summertime too and if they wanted to come to summer school and learn they could come in the summer. So they’d bring them to show them what we did. Well, I had this big Japanese girl, I think she was half Japanese, one of the children from World War II, big husky girl, tough, and I really liked her a lot. She and some girl from Caprock had gotten into some kind of little tiff over the weekend. I didn’t know anything about it, neither did the Caprock teacher who was my friend that I had been the only columnist with at Southwestern Public Service. She was in the kitchen and she saw this girl sitting there eating a cheeseburger, Carol went over.

AW:

This is the Japanese--?

BR:

The Japanese girl and grabbed that girls—this girl had long hair, she grabbed that girls hair and had ahold of that hair. I had four coaches sitting at one table, some other people around adults, you know the Caprock teacher, and all her students and my students in the kitchen. Carol had this girls hair, “Get up, bitch,” you know and I saw that. I ran over and I put my hand—because this girls eyes were going like this you know from her pulling her hair. I ran over and grabbed that girl’s hair underneath carols hands so she couldn’t pull it as hard. I said, “Let go of her hair.” She didn’t let go, “Let go of her hair.” She didn’t let go. Finally about that third time I said, “Carol let go of her hair,” and she jerked on her hair, let it go but jerked some hair out of that girls head. I said, “Get that girl out of this room,” told my student, “Get her out of here”.

AW:

The victim?

BR:

The victim, the teacher, “Get her out of here”. The teacher and all the other kids, I mean it was towards the end of what they were eating anyway, they were talking. Carol started after them. I grabbed Carol around, she dragged me—she was a big girl, she was dragging me down the hall with my kids following her and finally getting her to stop and getting ahold of Carol and shuffling her back inside. Those coaches, nada, not one thing. I walked back into my classroom

and they said, "Oh well we would've been glad to do something but we didn't want to hurt her." I thought, Yeah right, yeah big deal. So I mean I would do things like that but you wouldn't be able to get by with that nowadays. It's just like, well I only sent one kid to the principal the whole time I taught all those kids. That principal made me stay in that room and he humiliated that kid so bad that I made up my mind, I would never ever send another kid to the principal, that I would handle my own discipline and I never did. I apologized to that kid all the way back to class. I said, "I am so sorry, I did not know that you were going to be humiliated like you by this." It was this idiot principal that we had. He actually I think he was the assistant. I thought you don't do kids like that I mean you can give them a swat. This kid was I don't know, but the kids I had it didn't—that's all they knew was being mistreated, most of them.

AW:

I'm going to have to leave in just a little bit so I can get back to Lubbock today. Before I go would you talk a little bit about what Amarillo was like when you were a kid growing up here?

BR:

Yeah when I was a kid growing up we had—I lived over in the San Jacinto area, I went to Margaret Wells and Sam Houston. We would get up and we had a group of people that we would walk to school every day. We had a route that we would take and we would pick up friends all the way you know they'd drop in and go with us on the way to school and on the way home. This was at Margaret Wells and Sam Houston. Unless it was really cold and then sometimes daddy usually would drive us because he was usually going to work. On Friday nights—this was in junior high, they had the Rex Theater and we would meet-- my best friend and I. The road was a dirt road by our house I lived on the corner of Fairmont, and she lived in two or three different houses, her dad had a butcher shop but he became an alcoholic and you know the business got bad and they had to move out of the—they lived on North Carolina and then they lived on-- no they lived on Virginia and then they lived on North Carolina and I think they lived on Louisiana, they were getting closer but the house was getting smaller. But we would start out and meet in the middle of that road and either I spent the night with her or she spent the night with me on Friday nights. We would walk to the Rex Theater and they always had a movie, and sometimes our parents would pick us up but sometimes we would walk home. We—after the movie because we would go early and get out you know, it'd be dark but it wouldn't be late. I can remember most of the time somebody was at my house I mean very rarely was the house ever just where nobody was there. We'd walk home and there was a block or two where they didn't have street lights. They had a street light on the corner of my house, but I think there was a couple of blocks where it was dark. We'd get to that place where there wasn't a street light and it was dark and we would be out in the middle of the street and run through the dark part just as fast as we could to get to where there was light again, I remember that. But you didn't have—you know there was a lot more freedom. There was a person that had lived on the next-- didn't live on the corner but had a house right next to the corner with a big vacant lot and they always had this huge garden

every year. It was a beautiful vegetable garden and I loved that garden. For years after we moved away I would drive by it to see if that garden was still there. It was there for a long time way after we left there. We would walk to-- the park was right across the street from Sam Houston and we'd go over there when we'd have time off or before school, after school, at recess or at lunch. Then there was a little place that had burgers, they weren't very good but they had little burgers that you could go—they had a drug store and they had a place, I've forgotten the name of that place now but there was a guy over on 6th street that put in a burger place and it was probably about three blocks from school. If you hurried you could go down there and he made really good cheeseburgers and he always put a stuffed olive on top.

AW:

A stuffed olive?

BR:

He loved having that stuffed olive on top and really good French fries.

AW:

After you put that bun on that stuffed olive on top of that like a garnish.

BR:

Yeah it would be the garnish, he would wrap it up and put the stuffed olive on top to hold the paper on. His stuff was really good so sometimes we would go there. In those days they served really good food in the cafeterias because they made it from scratch. They made the breads, they made the pies, and they made the cakes.

AW:

We looked forward to eating in the cafeteria.

BR:

We did, we did because the food was good.

AW:

Yeah and they had a kitchen there and you could smell it all over the building while they were cooking.

BR:

Exactly. I volunteered to work in the kitchen and I got my meals for free because I worked in the kitchen. I thought it was great. I think other people probably thought I was dorky but. I cleaned the plates and rinsed them and put them in and the trays so they could be in the dishwasher and they let me do that. I don't guess they do that anymore but they let me do that.

AW:

Well they don't cook in schools anymore.

BR:

No they don't. It's just, I call it pre fab food and it's awful. When I was teaching and the other thing I did when I had those kids in my classroom, I let those kids eat. I didn't make them pay. I might've made them pay something if I knew they could but I had kids, you know I knew kids that—

AW:

When you were a teacher?

BR:

Yeah. Knew they should've been on free lunch but they were too embarrassed at the time. You know they didn't have it to where you couldn't tell. Now I think they've made it so you don't know if it's free or paid for or something. They don't have it where kids are discriminated against. But I knew that I had kids that didn't have a bit of money and didn't apply for anything because they were too proud and they just didn't eat. I always let those kids have whatever it was that we had, that we were cooking. I never let a kid go hungry. I just absorb that. I had to keep my own budgets and everything so I knew exactly what my costs were for what I fixed. I had access to a lot of government things because it was a teaching program. I used a lot of subsidies too to supplement. But I knew what it cost me for every kid in my class you know I had to figure out all that stuff. I had that program and nobody else knew how to do it, and neither did it. I just had to figure it out by guess and by golly. The first test I gave I thought, Well this is pretty futile, because those kids couldn't write. A lot of them couldn't read. They wrote phonetically and I could figure it would because I knew Melinda had already figured out how to read phonetically but I thought, This is a waste of time. They're going to have to learn by doing and me showing. I would have to show them. I figured out real quickly that I could show them how to do something and I could let everyone—I'll just take frosting you know, like chocolate frosting. I could demonstrate, I did a lot of demonstrating. I would show them exactly how to make it, what it was supposed to look like. I could have fifteen students making fifteen frostings and none of them would be the same color, none of them would look exactly alike and they used the very same recipe, the same thing you know. I always thought it's really stupid for people to be territorial about recipes because it doesn't matter, nobody cooks alike anyways. I thought, I can have a recipe but that doesn't mean I'm going to do it exactly that way or that I'm going to follow it. I might-- my salt might be a little more heaping or I might throw some cayenne you know depending on my mood, it differs. So I thought that was pretty stupid. My kids made good food and I never let them get by with being sloppy or not doing something right. I was hard on those kids and I know I was. When we had—when I was at Tascosa I had this big classroom and I always did a lot of things at Christmas time. I'd have a theme, and we would do the whole room

you know we'd do like gingham dogs and calico cats for instance. We would make the gingham dogs and calico cats. We would have the tree decorated with gingham dogs and calico cats, I'm talking, I'd buy the materials. I would include every part of whatever and teach them how to do the decorations. I didn't want them just to learn about serving burgers, I wanted them to learn how to serve buffet, how to serve family, we did it all different ways. If we made Mexican food I had a Mexican woman come up, show us how to make tamales. Show us how to do the real stuff, make it from scratch. Same thing with Chinese. Brought in different things about the culture, learned about what we could. I'd talk to my Chinese friends and find out about what was traditional and try to bring everything that I could learn so they could learn. Had people come in and show us how to use chopsticks and serve everything. Those kids—we'd have Christmas open house. I invited the regular Home Ec. classes to join us and do this big Christmas open house in my room. We did all the tree, all the decorations, had it really pretty. The kids made beautiful cookies that they decorated and made all kinds of good Christmas things, candies and punch, all these things. They were so proud of all their things. I could just see it, they felt really good about. Those regular students came in with their products, my kids—now these were the underdogs, they started looking at what they made and started laughing. You know. "Do you see the stuff that they brought," ugly, thrown together stuff. I wouldn't have let anybody serve anything like that. I mean if it was supposed to be cold it was cold, if it was supposed to be hot, it was hot. It was good or it didn't get served. I remember, they'd be making something and I'd look across the room and see somebody doing something wrong and I'd say, "Unh-uh-uh-uh!" I'd just start out, "No no," and everybody would just stop, they'd hold up whatever they had, just like statues. Nobody knew who was doing what wrong but I'd run over and grab it. It was hard work. That's where I learned I don't ever want to cater, I don't ever want to own a restaurant, none of that but it was a good learning experience. Stanley offered to set me up in a restaurant by the way.

AW:

Well any of us who come over and eat would patronize your restaurant.

BR:

Roy Vineyard came all the time. Every time we had—on Tuesdays we would serve a meal and on Thursday we would serve burgers or vice versa, I don't remember which. But he always came and brought his buddies and ate because I think we charged two dollars or something for a really good home cooked meal and we did everything. We made it all. So yeah we served the public.

AW:

I'm going to stop it for today. Next time I want to start with high school.

BR:

Okay.

AW:

Thanks this was fun and again, speaking of cooking the chowder was great.

BR:

Good I'm glad you liked it.

[End recording]



© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library