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## Arkansas Memories Project

Interview with

Frank McWilliams  
El Dorado, Arkansas  
14 November 2007

Interviewer: Scott Lunsford

Scott Lunsford: I just want you to tell me and we'll stop.

Frank McWilliams: No.

Joy Endicott: I'm rolling.

Trey Marley: I'm rolling.

SL: You got speed? All right. We're going to start over now.

FM: All right.

SL: Today is November 14. The year is 2007. We are at the—is this the Newton House?

FM: [Raney?] Newton.

SL: [Raney?] Newton house . . .

FM: Yes.

SL: . . . property in El Dorado, Arkansas. It's a restored pre-Civil War structure.

1849, I believe, is when it was built. We're going to be talking with Frank

McWilliams, and my name is Scott Lunsford. And we're doing a—an oral and

visual history interview for the Pryor Center [for Arkansas Oral and Visual History] that is housed at the University of Arkansas in Mullins Library. This recording will be archived in the Special Collections unit at the Mullins Library at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville campus.

FM: Yes.

SL: And Frank, I need to ask you if this is okay that we are videotaping this interview with you.

FM: It's all right with me.

SL: All right. Well, thank you very much. We're going to—I'm going to ask you, first of all, is Frank McWilliams your full name? Do you have a middle name?

FM: No. When I was drafted by the Army they wanted a birth certificate. And to get a birth certificate I had to go back to where I was born, and I found out that my first name was Joseph. And that's my grandfather's name.

SL: Yes.

FM: Joseph McWilliams. My father was also Joseph.

SL: Well, now, is Frank short for Franklin?

FM: No, it's just Frank.

SL: It's just Frank.

FM: I went to school and far as I knew all that time, my name was Frank McWilliams.

SL: [Laughs] Well, so—and when were you born, Mr. McWilliams?

FM: When?

SL: Yes.

FM: February 27, 1916, and I was told it was 8:00 Sunday night.

SL: And were you born in Texas?

FM: No, it's—actually, at that time we were on the way to Arkansas. It was in Texarkana.

SL: Is that right?

FM: Yes. My sister was born in Texas, but I was born in Arkansas.

SL: And you had—did you have other siblings—were—besides your sister? Was it . . . ?

FM: No, I only had one sister.

SL: One sister.

FM: Yes.

SL: And what were your—what was your father's name again?

FM: Well, Joseph Frank McWilliams.

SL: So you were kind of a—you were a junior, then?

FM: Junior.

SL: Okay. And your . . . ?

FM: After we secured the birth certificate.

SL: [Laughs] You didn't know that 'til then.

FM: Nobody had asked me until the Army came along.

SL: Yes. And what was your mother's name?

FM: Ethel Florence Floyd.

SL: And where was she from? In fact, where were your mom and dad from?

FM: All of them east Texas.

SL: Yes.

FM: My father and my mother are all from east Texas.

SL: Were they—did they come from a farming—ranching family or . . . ?

FM: Farming. Yes.

SL: Yes. Was there a particular—what town were they closest to in east Texas?

FM: I understand they went to the area of—in Texas, almost to Dallas, where the black land is, and it's supposed to be very rich. They went there and stayed three years.

SL: Yes.

FM: Drought—no rain. And they moved back to east Texas part where there was rainfall and rivers. So they migrated back toward the east in Texas and somewhere from—between Marshall—Jefferson—Texarkana.

SL: Okay.

FM: Cass County.

SL: Cass County. Do you remember your grandparents at all?

FM: Yes, I do.

SL: Both—both sides? Do you remember their names and were they settled there in east Texas as well or . . . ?

FM: My mother's father was named Dee Floyd, and I think that's D double E—Dee Floyd.

SL: Yes.

FM: And his wife—I don't remember her name.

SL: Yes.

FM: As far as I know, she was "Big Mama."

SL: "Big Mama." [Laughs] And then what about your—now that was your . . .

FM: Mother's.

SL: . . . your mother's side?

FM: My mother's parents.

[00:04:46] SL: Now, what about your father's side?

FM: My father's father was known as Joe McWilliams. He was a farmer—preached on Sundays—Baptist.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And my grandmother was a better preacher than he was. She was a Baptist, and she had, she told me, walked from the Carolinas to Texas when she was four years old behind a two-wheeled ox cart and everything they owned or had was in that and on that ox cart. Four years old and she walked.

SL: So, gosh, when would that have been, then?

FM: Her name was Sally [Insley?].

SL: Sally [Insley?].

FM: And then she was four years old. It was probably 1840—1850 or some—sometime like that.

SL: Weren't many roads back then.

FM: Pardon?

SL: There weren't many roads back then. A lot of—there weren't very many roads to . . .

FM: No. There weren't any roadside parks or facilities either.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: And she told me that one afternoon she decided to go out into the cane patch and met a bear face to face within two feet. She opened a cane and looked forward and met the bear, and she said [FM gasps] and the bear ran.

SL: [Laughter] That's a good story. So—but they ended up settling in—in—where did they settle? Where did your grandparents settle? Do you remember?

FM: In I would say Cass County, Texas.

SL: Yes.

FM: And that's—that's the eastern part—someplace near—either rainfall or water or—not as rich farming land, but they did have water.

SL: Do you remember visiting your grandparents when you were growing up?

FM: Do I remember them?

SL: Visiting with them and staying at their house?

FM: Oh, yes. I used to go stay two to three weeks in Texas. And my mother's farm, which was directly across the road from my father's farm—so they were neighbors.

SL: Yes.

[00:07:22] FM: And my Grandfather Floyd—I was allowed a plow mule—feed them—hunt on the property—fish. And I spent many summers there when I was growing up. And I think there were six families of blacks. The Depression came along and they had to reduce their farmers. And they packed up and went to California and they retained two families—quit farming and bought four milk cows—milked the cows—walked three miles to town and sold the milk for ten cents a gallon. At that rate and in that manner, he was able to pay the taxes and did not lose the farm, while others around were still trying to farm. Ten—cotton was, like, ten cents a pound, and not much future in cotton farming. So my uncle—my mother's brother managed the farm—bought the cows and sold milk—paid the taxes and kept the farm.

SL: How big was that farm? How big was it?

FM: I don't know, maybe 120 [acres] or . . .

SL: Yes.

FM: It was pretty large. It's adequate area for hunting.

SL: Yes.

FM: I spent lots of time in the woods and I was required to learn marksmanship. My father and all his brothers—in fact, he was one of ten boys and one girl. And all the brothers were experts with a rifle. And, of course, I had to show the same proficiency.

SL: Did any of your—I guess those would be uncles—did they . . .?

FM: Nine uncles.

SL: Nine uncles.

FM: And one aunt.

SL: Did they ever have to go to any of the wars? Did they serve in any of the wars?

FM: The most insulting—I really was knocked over by my uncle—one of them. I was about seven years old.

SL: Yes.

FM: He was back from the war in Europe, and I showed him my twenty-two [.22 rifle], and he had such terrible remarks about my weapon. I thought it was the greatest thing I'd ever had, and he said, "I wouldn't—I wouldn't be seen with a pop gun like that."

SL: [Laughs]

FM: And he was a—he had returned from World War I where they fought in the trenches. But—but I never did forgive my uncle for making such remarks about the weapon that I was so proud of.

SL: Yes

FM: And I could shoot.

[00:10:52] SL: Mhmm. Hmm. Well, tell me how—what was life like in east Texas when you were growing up? What was your house like?

FM: What was the house like?

SL: Yes.

FM: Well [laughs], there were two runways, you'd say, on either side. In the center was two bedrooms and in the middle between the two bedrooms was a fireplace, which opened to either—either room.

SL: Yes.

FM: And then across the hallway was another bedroom. And on the south part of the house was another bedroom separated from the center part. And then on the east side of the house was the dining room and the kitchen. And just off of the kitchen not too far was the well—the source of drinking water—bathing, cooking or whatever you needed. And also served as a refrigerator to store milk, butter, or whatever, and drop it down in the well to keep it cool.

SL: Was the kitchen separate from the house?

FM: By one of those hallways.

SL: Yes.

FM: Sometimes they refer to it as a dogtrot.

SL: Yes.

FM: But if you look at the front of the house, there's two wide walkways and in the center the two bedrooms, and then separated across the hall would be a bedroom, a bedroom, and on the east was a dining room and the kitchen.

SL: That sounds like a pretty big house.

FM: Well, it was—it was adequate. That was my mother's. I didn't spend much time in my dad's farm across the road because there was so many boys.

SL: Yes. Well, now, so when you're saying your mother's farm, is that actually her parents' farm or . . . ?

FM: Yes, where my mother grew up.

SL: Where your mother grew up.

FM: My mother grew up in a farm on I'd say the north side of the road. My father grew up on a farm on the south side of the road.

SL: Yes. Well, when did—when did your mom and dad—what—did they have their own house once they got married and—and—and raised you? What was that like?

FM: My dad—of course, you want to get off the farm if you can. My dad took a job in Texarkana at the [Prairie Tune?] Book Store, and he was a salesperson in there for a number of years. And I remember riding a bicycle to work back and forth in—when I was, like, four or five years old.

SL: Yes—early 1920s.

FM: And we did have a house. And the flu epidemic of 1919 or so, when 700 or 800 people in Texarkana died, we were all sick, and all four of us in the bed—my sister and I and my mother and father. And from—occasionally—maybe two or three days apart—someone would come in and prepare food or see about you or maybe some medicine. But it was a terrific flu epidemic, and many, many people died. And we were in a house that I remember very well, and that's where we lived in Texarkana.

SL: And it was probably much smaller than the house that . . .

FM: In the farm?

SL: . . . than your mom grew up in.

FM: Oh, yes. It didn't cover the area, but I guess we had two bedrooms.

SL: Yes.

FM: And we did have a indoor bathroom, which was a nice feature.

SL: Yes, that was something else back then.

FM: My father left the [Prairie Tune?] Book Store and went to work for a company known as [Bookhan and Bonn?]-two names of individuals in Texarkana. And they had a agency to sell automobiles-Studebakers.

SL: Yes.

FM: And my father had experience in selling automobiles, and when the boom occurred or the oil-oil boom occurred in El Dorado, we moved to El Dorado so he could open an automobile agency, and we did.

SL: Now, when did that oil boom start?

FM: 1921.

SL: 1921. And so you would've been about five or six . . .

FM: Six.

SL: Six years old.

FM: Yes, about five-six years old.

SL: Yes. Well, so when you got to El Dorado the boom had already started.

FM: Yes.

SL: And . . .

FM: People were living in tents and sleeping on the street or on the sidewalk, and there was quite a bit of criminal activity.

SL: There—they came in on the trains, didn't they?

FM: Any way they could get here, but roads were almost impassable if it rained.

SL: Yes. Now, before the boom the population in El Dorado was just a few thousand people—is that—or even that. Was it even that?

FM: I'd say less than—less than that.

SL: And at its peak it was probably 40,000 or 50,000 people in the area or . . . ?

FM: At one time I understand that it was as many as 50,000 in this area—trying to get an oil lease—they did not have a legal document to cover it, and they negotiated, such as, "I'll lease your land for fifty years," and they signed it. It was recorded. Somebody drilled a well. And it happened here—at the end of fifty years that producing well was turned over and back to the [fee?] owner of the land. We didn't have what's known as an oil and gas lease now.

SL: Hmm.

FM: So it was—it was a sad day when the oil company had to give the wells—property and all—back to the person who—I'll think of some others that it happened to, but Gulf Oil and Murphy [Oil Company]—just a lack of legal . . .

SL: Well, they didn't have the mechanism—the legal mechanism to . . .

FM: We didn't have the legal mechanism . . .

SL: Yes.

FM: . . . as we do have now that's—it's—it's all the same.

[00:18:21] SL: Well, so then you started going to school in El Dorado schools, then.

FM: Hmm?

SL: You started your school life in—in El Dorado?

FM: In El Dorado.

SL: Yes. And what were the schools like then? I mean, you came in during the boom, so . . .

FM: What was it like at school?

SL: Yes.



FM: Sherwin Williams and DuPont had never heard of yellow paint when I went to school. There was no such thing as a school bus. We always got to school the best we could, in whatever manner and regardless of the weather. And one of the features nowadays that you don't find in a schoolhouse is a facility called a cloakroom. Because we had to wear a lot of different garments and boots and things, we'd have a space to go through and remove it, and there were hangers on either side. And this—this cloakroom was about the width of the regular classroom. You went through the door from the hallway through the cloakroom. At the end of the cloakroom, then you'd enter the classroom. It's—it's—it's rather sad, but that's—that's one of the learning devices that we don't have anymore. There's—there's a lot of students who'd see the light in the cloakroom even though there's no incandescent bulb in there.

SL: Yes.

FM: That was a great teaching facility.

SL: [Laughs] You learned to interact.

FM: That's right.

SL: Many social skills learned in the cloakroom.

FM: You—you got the message.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: And it worked.

SL: And it worked. [Laughs]

FM: Yes, I recommend it.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: Because I've had it.

SL: [Laughs] Well, that's—how—so did they have the cloakroom all the way through  
...

FM: [Laughs]

SL: ... elementary school and into junior high and ...?

FM: We always had cloakrooms.

SL: Always did. That's fun.

FM: High school was a little different here.

[00:20:37] SL: Yeah. Well—so your father was in the car business.

FM: That's right.

SL: Your mom was a housewife and mother to the ...

FM: That's right.

SL: ... family—took care of the house and ...

FM: That's right.

SL: And ...

FM: She was learning to drive the car in the sand, and the sand ruts were so deep here  
that many times we—we got stuck. The streets and the roads were abominable—  
just terrible. Either the sand was too deep, and if you didn't stay in a rut you were  
stuck. You could get just as stuck in a sand bed as in a wet red clay hill. And we  
had one here. It would cost you \$2 to get up the hill, and you had to be pulled by

a device called—I'll think of the name of it—Fresno.

SL: Yes.

FM: And that is a device pulled by three mules side by side, hitched to the front of the car. The mules had to walk the other side of the ditch, not in a road—the other side of the ditch. And sometimes you had a team of mules on either side of the ditches to pull a car in the middle. There was no footing. There was no way a mule could get in the road and pull the vehicle up the hill. That's the kind of—and that's out here—a place called Timber—Timber Lane—the intersection of Timber Lane and Hillsboro. There used to be a small creek—I'd say about a foot of water in there most of the time.

SL: Yes.

FM: And if it rained—if you wanted to get up that hill—it was named Pistol Hill—you had pay at least \$2 to get up that hill in the bad weather.

SL: That's—\$2 back then was a pretty good hunk of money.

FM: A monstrous amount of money. But that was quite—quite a feat to see those mules on either side. And the hill—it doesn't seem to be as tall as it used to be, and they filled in at the bottom.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: So it was—it was something that you remember having seen that a number of times and . . .

[00:23:11] SL: Well, in the early [19]20s were there many cars or were there still mostly wagons and—and . . .?

FM: We had many wagons, but in [19]24, [192]5, and [192]6 we had—the cars were predominant. We had a lot more vehicles at that time. But we didn't have roads.

And one of the things that I remember going to Texarkana back to visit—when we'd get to Garland City, my daddy always had to get some nickels before we started a trip. And we'd get to Garland City and we crossed farms, and he'd pull up to the gate and give a nickel to a small black fellow, who would open the gate. And we'd go through the gate and on—a small black fellow on the other side would get a nickel to close the gate. And then we crossed the farm and we'd get to the other side of the farm, and the same thing happened. It was not a highway. We were crossing somebody's land and paying somebody to open and close the—you could get out and open the gate if you want to, but if you want to pay somebody it's a . . .

SL: Yes.

FM: You were welcome to cross the land.

SL: That's interesting.

FM: No highway.

SL: Now, back in—when you would go to Texarkana, you would visit—who would you visit in Texarkana? Who would you all go see—just friends or . . . ?

FM: Well, we'd go through Texarkana.

SL: On the way to . . .

FM: Going to . . .

SL: . . . Cass County?

FM: We always say Texarkana is just a stop in the road.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: But it might take six hours to get from El Dorado to Texarkana, and sometimes we'd go on to Rock Wall—the name of the town I couldn't think a moment ago.

Rock Wall County—that's before you get to Dallas.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And sometimes some of my mother's relatives—we'd go on to Rock Wall.

[00:25:21] SL: Mhmm. There was probably a big contrast in your mom's farm—her family farm—and your life in El Dorado. I would assume that—on the farm did you—were you ever engaged in any of the chores back at your—at your mom's family farm? Did you milk the cows? Did you ever do anything . . . ?

FM: You do anything that a young man is going to try when he's on a farm.

SL: Yes.

FM: You—primarily, you carried a bean shooter. That's your weapon.

SL: [Laughter] So they didn't have you killing chickens or slopping the hogs or any of that?

FM: No, I did chop some wood. I could—I would be responsible for the kindling. And the kindling is to begin the pinewood that's used to cook—the cook stove. The heat for the—for the cook stove is from pinewood. But also we had some pine kindling that you had to begin. You'd begin the fire with some small pieces of rich pine, and then that would ignite some smaller pieces. And that would heat up the stove so the oven was hot or the surfaces is hot enough to fry eggs, bacon, or some kind of salt—salt pork . . .

SL: Yes.

FM: . . . which Grandfather got in the smokehouse.

SL: So he had—that . . .

FM: They—they cured the food and put it up, and we had milk, butter—that sort of thing. But my—my chores had to do with wood to run the stove, which I was—I

had a great deal of interest in—especially that stove—like apple pie and that sort of thing.

SL: [Laughs] Did you ever get to watch them do any of the hog killing or . . . ?

FM: Oh, another chore. When the cold weather comes—frost—my job was to keep the fire around the pot. And in this pot they scald the hog's skin.

SL: Yes.

FM: Yes, I was there when they made sausage and killed the hogs and slaughterhouse. I also helped to run the cattle and the hogs through the—it's a—it's a pit. You had to dip your animals occasionally for ticks and other kind of skin vermin, and, yes, I helped prod them through this—you get the—you get the cattle up there and give them a push, and then they go down over their head . . .

SL: Yes.

FM: . . . in some medication. And then they're able to sort of swim and go up the other side, which is an angle, and they get out. I hope they felt better after that treatment. [Laughter]

SL: Well, I just know that those hog-killing days were kind of—set the family up for getting through the winter and maybe until the next frost.

FM: Yes, and . . .

SL: I mean, all the way for a whole year.

FM: Other things I did was sit on the ice cream freezer on the Fourth of July. My job was to sit on it to keep the ice and—and the turning mechanism working.

SL: Yes.

FM: Yes. And peach ice cream was—was a choice item—excellent.

SL: So they grew—they had peach trees?

FM: Yes, we had—the expression was “that wind is right through the peach orchard.”

That means it’s going to be cold, and then they said “a blue norther.” A blue norther means you better get in the house and have some firewood because it’s going to get cold.

SL: Get cold.

FM: And the peach orchard was always on the north of the house . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . as well as other facilities [laughter] because the wind came from the south.

SL: That’s right.

FM: Yes, blowing north. Yes, you learn certain things when you live on the farm and . . .

SL: Well, was that a—a two-holer [outhouse] or a three-holer or just a . . .?

FM: Well, it could be a friendly affair. [Laughter] Two.

SL: Two? Yes.

FM: Two. Yes. And that’s quite an inconvenience when it’s, like, about five degrees outside and it’s 4:00 in the morning and it must be 100 feet from the house.

SL: Yes.

FM: Not the best. It’s not like Holiday Inn or . . .

[00:30:37] SL: No. No. What about—what about chickens? I guess they raised chickens, too?

FM: Oh, I had chickens of my own. I had—I preferred Banties.

SL: Yes.

FM: And I had a little—Bantam, I think, is the proper word.

SL: Yes.

FM: But I had Banties—colorful—different colors of feathers.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:30:57] FM: Yes, yes. I did all of those things. I plowed a mule.

SL: Yes.

FM: In a cotton patch you plant the cotton and then you bar it off. You run a plow by one side of the row after it comes up. Maybe it's two to four inches tall. You run a plow on one side up close to it. Then you go to the end of the row and turn around and come back and make the same removal of dirt from the other side. That makes it easier to chop. Then when these black families come along with the hoe, it's not so deep and it makes it easier. Then that throws a lot of dirt out in the middle of the rows. "All right, Junie," I was called. "All right, Junie, you can run out those middles tomorrow." So I had a plow that—with a hill sweep on it, and all of this dirt that had been put in the middle of the row, I could plow it and throw it back against the two rows of cotton.

SL: Cotton.

FM: So I could—I could plow that with a mule. I had a mule—two of them, in fact. I'd get on a mule and ride back to the barn. I came over here in El Dorado—had horses—raised them for a while. Seventy years old—I can't get within five feet of a horse. For a while—for ten or fifteen years I did have a—you might say a nose problem. As long as I have a sleeve I could take care of that, but when it—finally determined that this allergy was causing my eyes to close, and I only had fifteen minutes to get off the horse, cross town, and get back to my house.

SL: Hmm.

FM: At seventy years old I can't get within five feet of a horse now. My eyes will

close.

SL: That's interesting.

FM: That's the most peculiar thing I ever saw. I was around mules and horses and had one as a child—horse and a dog—right in El Dorado. But allergy—I can't—I can't get anywhere near.

SL: That's—that's—I've never heard of that.

FM: It upset me when I had to give up my horses. It's just like breaking up house-keeping.

SL: Yes.

FM: I'm—I'm—horses were—I was there when the horse was born. The mare wouldn't pay any attention to him. I had to lock her on one side in the barn and see that the foal would nurse before I could leave. My mother sent my boy down there at 4:00 in the morning—"Why aren't you home?" "I can't get this fine Arabian foal that I just had to nurse and ol' mama won't pay any attention." She had it out—I locked her in the barn. She had a fit raring up. So I had to open the gate. She went outside and had the foal, and this was, like, 2:00. There are ways to tell when a horse is going to foal within twelve to fourteen hours, and I got the message by looking at the horse—the mare.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: So I stayed with her. My wife didn't know where I was [laughter] and was somewhat concerned. So when I got the foal to nurse, then I went home. But my problem is I don't have any horses. I really, really liked them.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Had one all my life—or a mule. And so I'm allergic to horse.

[00:34:54] SL: Well, it sounds like to me that you did your fair share of chores on the farm.

FM: I've done most all of them. I know what it's like, and I never did—I helped drill a well, but I never did get down inside. They drill a well—drill it is a loose use of the term. They put a big round device sort of thing on the ground and then they dig it out and it drops down. And it's sort of like soil pipe except it's huge.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And you get in there and dig the hole and throw out the dirt and it drops down. And you keep digging and you keep putting these . . .

SL: Sleeves on.

FM: . . . sections on.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And going down until you get to water. And sometimes you're in the water—you can stand up in the—in the soil—sand.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And sometimes you may—you better go on down, so you have to throw him a rope there to be—yes, I'm familiar with digging a well, too. Sawing—we—trees were cut down by a two-man saw. We didn't have chain saw.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Yes.

SL: East—east Texas is hilly and has forest on it, doesn't it, or—or is it just hills?

FM: You know, my saying so—that is the sorriest soil I ever saw.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: Absolutely.

SL: Huh.

FM: You couldn't get a—I thought that five acres wouldn't raise one bale of cotton there. It was disgusting, I thought.

SL: Hmm.

FM: And on a cold winter day when the cows are sort of scrunched up, and you look out there and the trees are barren, the soil is brown, and the leaves are—why would I ever want to be here?

SL: Yeah.

FM: That's the last place I'd want to be.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: It's terrible.

SL: Well, okay, so let's get . . .

FM: A bale of cotton was \$50. And \$50 you made one year with it. \$50.

SL: Hmm.

[00:37:04] FM: And the sharecroppers—and there were—there were seven share-cropper families on the farm. And when the Depression came, you couldn't feed them—couldn't take care of them. And you have a choice—you can stay or you can go to California. Most of them went to California, and there's no such thing as “turn to the government.” Nobody helps out anybody except the brother helps the brother. We didn't have Social Security or Welfare or somebody to come along and take care, like floods in New Orleans [Louisiana] . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . or Dust Bowl. Yeah. Not—I'm not going to—I don't criticize that. It's just there was no help from the government.

SL: Right.

FM: And they didn't—they didn't holler for the government to save me. It's up to you. It's not the way. They did it on themselves and they helped each other.

[00:38:05] SL: When you—let's get back to moving to El Dorado . . .

FM: Yes.

SL: . . . during the start of the oil boom. You—your dad was selling cars. Your mom was at home.

FM: Yes.

SL: And you—did you have any—did you do any work around the house? What kind of work did you do around the house in El Dorado?

FM: Well, I mowed the grass, but I spent time at the—in my daddy's garage.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: A little argument over at the school ground one afternoon after a marble game caused me a lot of difficulty, and my opponent won his marbles back, and I didn't intend to give them back to him. And I didn't know that the superintendent of schools was looking out the window and saw what happened after school.

SL: Yes.

FM: After that, I had ten minutes to get from the school ground to my daddy's place of business, and I was restricted. I was restless and I didn't have anything to do, and I'm complaining—I said, "What—I need something to do." "Get your lessons." "I've already done it." "Well, come outside. I'll show you something. You see all those cars on the back row out there—all those old trade-ins?" He said, "You can have any and all of them you want if you can get one of them to run." I took a new attitude.

SL: You bet.

FM: Things were really looking up. When I was twelve years old I drove out of my daddy's garage in my own car that I had worked over the engine—transmission. It was a Model T Ford, 1923—no top. But it ran, it was mine, and I could go where I wanted to. I felt like somebody.

SL: You were at twelve years old.

FM: Twelve. Yes. There was no such thing as a driver's license at that time and . . .

SL: Yes.

FM: Anyway, I thought I had accomplished something, so I spent a lot of time at my daddy's garage—not of my own choosing, but I was restricted. And it worked out that I was able to have some wheels, as the young people say.

SL: Well, did he—so I guess he held to his word. He let you keep the car and . . .

FM: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. And later on I traded it for one that had glass in the doors. This is—this is right up-town, right akin to having a bathroom in the house. I had glass in the car doors. Yeah.

SL: Now, what about the rooftop on the car?

FM: Oh, it was a—it was a sedan-type.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: I think it was a twenty—about a 1925 Model T.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: But they had glass—oh, yes, it had a top on it.

SL: A hard top?

FM: Yes. Oh, it's a—first class.

SL: Hmm.

FM: Yes. I quit speaking to a lot of friends.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: But you'd be surprised at the friends you have the next day. As soon as they see your car—I had just gobs of friends.

SL: [Laughs] Uh-huh.

FM: But I didn't have room to carry them all.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: I could only carry two people in the—in the coupe. And the Ford was not wide. You didn't have a lot of room for the seat.

[00:41:43] SL: Mhmm. I'll bet that made you pretty popular with the girls, too.

FM: I was a little slow. I spent a lot of time with the Boy Scouts, and I wanted to be an Eagle. And I worked and I worked and I went to camp. And I passed everything except lifesaving, and there was no place here to go swimming.

SL: Hmm.

FM: And they told me that I'd have to wait a year to pass senior lifesaving. So I had all my merit badges except one. That kept me from being an Eagle Scout.

SL: Hmm.

FM: No, no swimming pool. Later, they had a hole out here called Willow Lake, which was nothing but an open pit. No such thing as—treat the water or filter it—nothing—just plain. If it rained, that's good. That's all we had—rainwater in a—in a open pit—Willow Lake.

SL: Now, let's see, you got—you were about six—five or six years old when you got to El Dorado, and by the time you were twelve you had fixed up your own car.

FM: Yes.

SL: And the oil boom was still going pretty good then.

FM: Business was good, yes. You know, gasoline was about ten cents—normal weight—ten cents a gallon.

[00:43:13] SL: Mhmm. And the population—people were . . .

FM: Well . . .

SL: . . . renting cots for a dollar a night or a dollar every eight hours or something like that, weren't they?

FM: Well, the—the—the population dropped off suddenly in about nineteen and twenty-nine—thirty—thirty-one. We had a resident here, Mr. H. L. Hunt. He didn't live here much, but his family did. [Hassie?] Hunt—[Harrelson] Lafayette Hunt, Jr., was buying up oil leases in east Texas and we heard about it. Many, many people from El Dorado moved down to Longview—Tyler—because there was—there was employment down there and it was becoming a—a big center for oil production. So we had lots of people leave here, so our population was going down in thirty—thirty-one. So we had a decline of people that—familiar with the oil business.

SL: And when you were in—let's see. So that would've been—you would've—gosh, you would've been in high school when that decline started going down.

FM: That's right. That's right.

[00:44:43] SL: Were—were you active in sports or did you play football or . . . ?

FM: Baseball.

SL: Baseball.

FM: Baseball. I played in the band. [Laughs] I might mention something else that happened here. I was I—well, I'll start over. My daddy sold cars. He was very

easy-going.

SL: Yes.

FM: He was not the kind of person that would collect a bill. He loved selling cars, but he was too much businessman. He—he sold a car to a person whose wife was a piano teacher. Well, instead of collecting the notes, I had four years of piano lessons for the notes. My sister had two years, too. He sold a car to the local band director—band salesperson. He sold trombones and saxophones and—the music director.


SL: Mhmm.

FM: [Sighs] I was given a—I can't think of the name of it—two or three instruments—but . . .

SL: Trombone?

FM: I also took lessons took lessons on the marimba, drums, clarinet, except I couldn't make that clarinet work, so I had to give it back.

SL: Mhmm.



FM: But I did stay with the drums, so I played drums in high school. And then I'd help out with a little group that played at noontime on the radio from a local hotel known as the Randolph. And up on the mezzanine, some of us interested in music would gather around 11:30 from school and go over and play some music. And it was put on the radio. Well, here's a shock when the police came. It seems that—that there were some complaints about this music and some advertising. So we didn't have tape recorders in those days, but we did have radios. Some smart cookies came in here and brought their radios and got two carloads of witnesses and drove down there across the line in Junction City on the Louisiana side. They

turned their radios on and they could hear this music from the Randolph Hotel.

They had evidence—verbal—that “I did hear it.” They came up here and arrested them. FCC [Federal Communications Commission]—no license.

SL: Oh, I see.

FM: So they had the evidence but no tape recorders. They had to take the witnesses—said, “I heard it.” That shut it down. So some poor musicians—I went out the back of the hotel. [Laughter]

SL: Yes.

FM: There was a considerable uproar in the Randolph Hotel that day when they came up, so . . .

SL: Well, was music a—a part of your—I mean, even before you started taking lessons, was music a part of your household? Was . . .?

FM: Oh . . .

SL: I mean, did—did your dad play a musical instrument or your mom or . . .

FM: Oh . . .

SL: Did they . . .?

FM: I can't find middle C and I can't sound it, either, but my dad sang in a quartet at churches and they had a quartet. You know, what you call like a . . .

SL: Barbershop quartet.

FM: Barbershop or something.

SL: Yes.

FM: He and his brothers.

SL: Yes.

FM: They can sing. I can't—I can't sing anything—can't play the piano—only thing I

can play is a drum. I did—I did play the drum in the band and then—yes, I went out for football . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . but I wasn't quite big enough.

SL: Right.

FM: So then the coach decided I could be the manager.

SL: Manager. Okay.

FM: So he did give me a—a football letter for having been a manager a couple of years, so . . .

SL: That's good.

FM: But I did have a high school group, and—and I played with them, and then I became the manager. And we played—adults at such places as the Gulf Camp.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Different places around in the county where they were producing oil, and we'd go to one of these [standin ups?] or one of those locales. And they always—always had a baseball team—a facility someplace.

SL: So was it, like, Big Band music? Was it . . . ?

FM: Big Band.

SL: What kind of—what kind of music did you all play?

FM: Big Band music—other than marches in the high school—and the march we played to the president and . . .

SL: Right

FM: That's Mr. Souza's . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: All of Souza's . . .

SL: Yes, John Philip Souza. Yes.

FM: We played all his marches in high school band, but then otherwise on the mezzanine floor of the Randolph Hotel it would be Big Band music.

SL: Did—did you have a favorite that you—that you liked?

FM: [Sighs] Yes, sure—any of them.

SL: Any of them? [Laughs]

FM: Any of them. Yes.

SL: Yes.

FM: And we had some musicians in there that went on to—to quite—quite an expense. One of them left here and he was an arranger for a number of bands in Chicago [Illinois]. And he worked for—the man that's going back to San Francisco. What's the guy's name from Lebanon that sings . . .? Lee . . .

JE: Cat Stevens?

SL: No. Oh, you mean Cat Stevens?

FM: Who?

SL: No, not Cat Stevens.

FM: No, the singer—the . . .

SL: "I Left My Heart in San Francisco."

JE: Oh.

FM: Yes, the man . . .

SL: Well, that would've been . . .

FM: The one—the singer.

SL: Yes, was that Perry Como or . . .? [Editor's Note: Tony Bennett.]

FM: Well, one of our musicians went to work for him and another one went to Wayne King—Freddy Kirkpatrick—saxophone player. We had a number of musicians that—in which they made it big.

SL: Yes.

FM: Went to Chicago and played in a dance band. The man's name that—"I Left My Heart in San Francisco."

SL: Yeah, I'm trying to remember that, too, but . . .

FM: Well, anyway, he was a—he was an arranger for him.

SL: Yes.

FM: And worked for him a long time. But, yes, we spent time with the music.

[00:52:21] SL: Now, what about—what about church and . . .?

FM: About . . .?

SL: About church and—and religion? Did—did the church play a part in your household? Were you all—did you all go to church every Sunday and . . .?

FM: Oh, yes.

SL: I mean . . .

FM: I come from Baptist people, but we came over here and my mother preferred the Methodists, so . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: . . . we went to a Methodist church.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: Except I went to the Baptist church when it was a white—white structure. We have a nice, big Baptist church now, but, yes, they were doing construction on it, and I tore my knickers—I had to wear shorts . . .

SL: [Laughs]

FM: And I hung one and tore them up. I got into a little hot water for that. I should've come home right after church when—instead of staying up there to play. But I didn't—we just lived about a half a block from the Baptist church.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: So I could crawl around and look at construction and see what they were doing and first thing you know, you're hung on a nail somewhere that you weren't watching.

SL: That's right. [Laughs]

FM: And you get hung on another one when you get home, too. [Laughs]

SL: Your mom wasn't too happy about that, was she?

FM: Yes.

[00:53:30] SL: [Laughter] That's fun. So let's talk about your high school times.

Did you—were you a good student? Did you make good grades?

FM: Well, we weren't overrun with money. We didn't have any—any excess.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: So I took a job at a—we—we didn't call it fast food. We called it a pig stand.

[Dewey M's?] pig stand. And I worked there three and a half years.

SL: Yes.

FM: And I went to work at 4:00 in the afternoon and I would get off anywhere from 10:00 to 2:00, and I worked seven days a week. And it did affect my schooling somewhat.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: But I'll also tell you that—very few people believe this—every sandwich we sold

was five cents—hamburger; bacon, lettuce and tomato; barbeque; cheese—it was five cents. Coke [Coca-Cola] was five cents. Candy bar was five cents. So my job was to hop cars—take the orders and take them back to the car. I did. And when I went to college—LSU [Louisiana State University]—I did the same thing. I worked in the cafeteria. That’s the way I went to school. We—we didn’t have any excess cash. But it’s—it’s true that every sandwich we sold was five cents. It had a top and a bottom and mayonnaise and some meat in it.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: It wasn’t—it wasn’t—it wasn’t nothing. It was a sandwich. And we had a good business. And I understand later on that he built a restaurant and—and we weren’t allowed to leave until he’d get home on Saturday night. And lots of nights I didn’t get home at a decent time to get to Sunday school, but I—I managed to get up, but the wife would tell us, “When he gets here you can—you can go home.” Well, I make \$7 a week. It doesn’t matter how long I stay.

SL: [ ]

FM: There’s no such thing as time and a half. So—but the thing I could do was I could tell when he was coming. I said, “Here he comes.” “Well, I don’t see him.” “I do. Look at the tops of those trees up there and the top of that telephone pole.”

SL: Lights.

FM: “What do you mean?” “Well, you see the lights?”

SL: Yes. [Laughs]

FM: Well, I don’t want to tell you his name, but—but he’d go to a place called Warren, Arkansas.

TM: Scott, we've got to change tapes.

FM: And only . . .

SL: Oh, just—just one moment. We've got to—we've got to change our tape in our . . .

FM: Well, I'm glad he didn't put this in there because I'm going to tell you his name.

SL: Okay.

[Tape Stopped]

[00:56:46] FM: "How do you know it's him?" "He got fifty gallons of . . ."

SL: Moonshine [homemade alcoholic beverage]?

FM: ". . . hooch in the back of that car."

SL: [Laughs]

FM: I don't want to tell his name, but . . .

SL: Well, you don't have to tell his name, but . . .

FM: It is, but . . .

JE: Rolling.

TM: We're good, Scott.

SL: Okay.

FM: There was—there was a friend of mine—he was a boy from Illinois.

SL: Yes.

FM: They moved down here. His name was Howard [Keats Perrin?].

SL: Yes.

FM: And he and I worked at the pig stand and we took care of all the traffic. We took orders for the food and inside. As I was saying . . .

SL: You had to stay 'til . . .



FM: Saturday. Saturday night we couldn't go home until—the wife wouldn't let us go home until the owner got back to his place of business. And I kept telling her, “I see him coming.” “How do you know? There's no lights. Nobody's over the hills yet.” “Look at the lights up in the top of those trees.” She said, “How do you know it's him?” “He's the only one coming down the road with a back end filled with something that's, like, about forty gallons. [Laughter] It makes his headlights see the top of those trees.” And I said, “Squirrels are jumping out of those trees with that bright light.” [Laughter]

SL: So he was bringing back a load of moonshine.

FM: That's right. It was from Warren, Arkansas—wherever—wherever—whoever it was. And that's . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . that's what we understood. And we were not allowed to go in the quarters where he lived. He lived in the back part of the . . .

SL: Restaurant.

FM: . . . pig stand. And we were not allowed in there under any circumstance. So he built us a facility [outhouse] out in the back.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Normal-looking like anybody else's. It had moons and stars on the sides and all. And he had a cousin—I mean, a nephew—his brother's boy—worked at a circus, and he'd come home from time to time, and he wanted to help us out. Well, the only help we got out of him was he picked up the tray off of the car and took the tip.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: Well, we took a dim view of that.

SL: Yeah.

FM: And the other thing about it was when a dance would break up someplace—like intermission—would come about twenty cars, and they'd come in all—and blowing the horn and hollering. And instead of him helping, he'd disappear. Well, we decided we'd just find out where he went. So there was a car that had come in—we saw him, and he went out to the facility and sat down. Well . . .

SL: [Laughs]

FM: I just lost a couple of twenty-cent tips, and I was somewhat upset. And I told Mutt—Mutt [Perrin?], my friend—I said, “Mutt, we need to cure that guy.”

SL: [Laughs]

FM: It was Christmas. And I know he's out there in the facility. I said, “We'll go out there and I'm going to stand on your shoulder, and I want one of those three-inch firecrackers. And I'll stand up there and you light it.” Well, I looked over and, sure enough, he was in there. He lit it. I dropped it. It went off. Well—[laughter] whoever constructed that facility wasn't too wise because [laughs] to get out the door you had to pull it in. [Laughter] And he didn't stay long enough to pull it in. He pushed the door out and went out on the ground. [Laughs] But it was—it was—it was tragic. It did burn his leg pretty good.

SL: Oh!

FM: But we didn't have much trouble with him after that. Of course, the—the [fighting?] took place inside the facility, and his uncle finally decided with us and decided that he'd just terminate him and not—and not have him come back anymore. But I thought there was a lot of damage inside the place.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: But I didn't have to pay for it.

SL: Well . . .

FM: But anyway, we thought we gave him a proper treatment. But that man had decided on that door opening in. [Laughs] He was wrong. That door ought to open out.

SL: [Laughs] That's terrible. Well, so . . .

FM: That's my experience during high school. And I didn't make—and the principal of the high school told me, "Your sister is straight A. I want you to do something about your grades." I said, "Well, I'm starting out slow, but I'm going to improve."

SL: [Laughs]

FM: Well, when I graduated she said, "I want to tell you, you did improve." But I had to go home and work on mine after I got off from school. But it's difficult not having enough money and trying to get an education, too.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: It's—it's not easy.

[01:02:33] SL: Well, so what did you do when you got out of school—out of high school?

FM: I went to LSU.

SL: LSU. Now, how—did you get a [scholarship] . . .?

FM: I hitchhiked.

SL: You hitchhiked?

FM: I packed my suitcase and I had \$5, and I went to LSU. And that's what happened.

SL: So did it cost you anything to go to LSU? How did you get into LSU?

FM: Nine football players from here were in a championship team of Arkansas. Two years we won the championship.

SL: Yes.

FM: [19]32 and [19]33. The coach from LSU came up here and said, “You can go. You can go. You can go.” And some of the players said, “What about him?” He says, “This is college.” Well, through them and coach Bernie Moore, I got to go.

SL: Good. That’s a blessing.

FM: So by just knowing some friends and—says, “Come on.” And then I helped them with their math and—and things to make them a—passing grades.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: We had an all-American named Gaynell Tinsley, but nine of them from El Dorado went.

SL: That’s a big recruitment.

FM: And I’d say five of them became starters.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: We had a good football team.

SL: So you ended up—did you end up finishing college? Did you go through all . . . ?

FM: Yeah.

SL: . . . all of . . . ?

FM: No, I stayed down there, and then I decided that I had a little money and I didn’t want to live in Louisiana.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And I thought I needed to go back to Arkansas, and I’d go to Fayetteville and

graduate at Fayetteville. And then I say I'm Arkansas—I'm not going to live in Louisiana. I had difficulty breathing. The allergies and stuff bothered me.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: So I went to Fayetteville . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . and graduated from the business school.

SL: Mhmm.

[01:04:36] FM: And then I—I took a job in Pine Bluff for [Arkansas] Power and Light Company. We were going to build Blakely Mountain Dam over in Mountain Pine.

SL: Okay.

FM: And that's when I was working under Mr.—excuse me—Mr. Harvey Couch's direction to buy up all of these leases and get ready to dam up the water so he could generate electricity. He already had two—he had Lake Catherine and Lake Hamilton.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Are you from Arkansas?

SL: I am. I was—I was born and raised in Fayetteville.

FM: Well . . .

SL: I know where Lake Hamilton and Lake Catherine . . .

FM: You know where Lake Catherine is?

SL: It's right next door to Hamilton, isn't it?

FM: Lake Catherine. And then Lake Hamilton's up above.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Well, Mr. Couch says, “I’m going to build a dam up there and I’m going to generate electricity twenty-four hours a day, and I’m going to do it with water.”

“Great.” “I need somebody to go over there and be in charge of the accounting and be sure that we—we properly allocate the cost of the dam construction to the cost of the Power and Light property so we can earn our six percent,” which we’re supposed to earn on—that’s your return on the investment.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: At that time it was six percent.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And he had a certificate of convenience necessity—I did this with Professor Johnson with the school.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: I told him the same thing. We had instructions from [US] Postmaster General James A. Farley in New York City. He told Mr. Couch, “Come up here.”

“Okay.” I’d never been there. Well, anyway, Mr. Farley says, “Harvey, I’m going to take that certificate of convenience and necessity away from you—the one to build that Blakely Mountain Dam.” That’s all we’d ever called it—Blakely Mountain Dam. I had all the leases and everything around the shoreline arranged to—to clean out four cemeteries—take the bodies out and . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . put them some put them someplace else—two highways crossing what’s now Lake—Lake Ouachita—we never got to that where we were going to build the dam. Lake Hamilton is named for Mr. Moses C. Hamilton. Moses—that was Mr. Couch’s lawyer—Ham Moses. But he named the first lake down there for his

daughter.

SL: Okay.

FM: And she married a guy named Pratt Rimmel. Well, the dam on the lake has been named Rimmel Dam.

SL: Rimmel Dam.

FM: So that's named for Pratt Rimmel. And then you come up to Carpenter Dam. I never did know who—who that Carpenter Dam was named for, but it's Lake Hamilton, and then we were going to build—anyway, they took the certificate away from him and Mr. Couch says, “Well, now, Jim, buddy—” you know, Harve and all that stuff. He said, “Now, Jim, tell me why you're taking it away from me?” Of course, when he went in he said, “Harvey, sit down. I got to—” “Oh, you don't—I'm not standing up. And anything you can tell me about—” You know, a lot of conversation.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: But when he finally told him he was taking it away from him, he had already put a million in this project. He did sit down. I would, too.

SL: Yeah.

FM: But then I had to sit down because he said, “Tell me why you're taking the certificate away from him?” And this is what shocked me. “There's going to be a war in Europe, and we're going to be in it, and we're not going to let you have the materials nor the manpower to build that dam. We're going to be out 100 percent war effort.” Well, this is, like, 1938 or 1939 and they're already talking about draft and I'm going to have to register for the draft. There goes my job and there goes me in the war. So it's kind of—I was just as down—a downer as Mr. Couch.

I could see my future, and sure enough, it happened. I got drafted and I got sent over there, too.

SL: Now, this was in [19]39— 40?

FM: Yes. And he told him that—and that’s what—“How does he know? How does he know that—that we’re going to be in it?” But that’s what he said. And Mr.—Mr. Couch was not allowed to—to build that dam, and it was 1954—the U.S. [Army Corps of] Engineers built the dam. [Editor’s note: the dam was built by the Corps as mentioned; however, construction actually began in 1948 and was completed in 1953, creating Lake Ouachita. The dam was built under the Flood Control Act of 1944. Power production began in 1955.] And then the Southwest Power Administration was selling electricity. See, Mr. Couch didn’t—didn’t get the—the facility there that he wanted. It was his vision. That’s what he was going to do—build the dam and generate electricity. Well, that’s the thing to do—great. But all these problems up there and two or three of these little stores on the corner that you’ve got to pay them and move them.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: But the big problem was moving those cemeteries.

SL: Yes.

FM: It—it wasn’t so much digging them up as where to put them. You get over in Hot Springs—everywhere you dig you hit a rock or . . .

SL: Yep.

FM: You—you don’t have the facilities. You can’t just dig them up and store them someplace. That was a problem.

SL: So he just lost his million dollars.

FM: Hmm?

SL: He just lost the million dollars.

FM: Yes, yes. Well, I think he put it on the fire company . . .

SL: Yes.

FM: More than likely. [Laughs]

SL: Right.

[01:10:37] FM: By that time, he had sold his interest to Electric Bond and Share.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And Electric Bond and Share had another holding company below it called American Electric Power Company. And all of the people that we saw were from American Electric Power—come down and inspect and talk about . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And Mr. Couch still had his job and whatever he got for selling the company, but . . .

SL: So were you . . .?

FM: I was out of a job, but I stayed with the power company until I got drafted.

[01:11:12] SL: And you were—let's see—you got drafted in what year? What year did you get drafted?

FM: Well, I registered in 1940 or 39—when I was going to go a year—a year and a day. I was over in Pine Bluff . . .

SL: Yes.

FM: . . . waiting on Mr. Couch, and I decided, “Here’s a guy in Pine Bluff when he ought to be in El Dorado.” And if hadn’t [laughs] have been in Pine Bluff, I wouldn’t have been early called.

SL: So you got drafted when you were twenty-four? Is that right—twenty-four years old?

FM: Yes—twenty-five—something like that.

SL: Twenty-five?

FM: Yes. And—well, when they sent me down to the doctor of the Draft Board, he's the one that had been checking me for allergy.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And he put me in 1-B for a while until they could get this allergy bit—I didn't have to go at that call.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: I—I had a—a later time. Then I decided after all this stuff started, "I'm going to have to go. I don't want to be a draftee . . ."

SL: Right.

FM: ". . . so I'm going to go back to my ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] from LSU and Arkansas and I'll just apply." So I turned up a second lieutenant.

SL: And I heard something about you being in the trenches. Were you . . .

FM: Being what?

SL: . . . in the trenches. No, that was your—that was some of your uncles that were in the trenches. Where did you serve in the war? Where did you serve in the war?

FM: Where?

SL: Mhmm.

FM: [Laughs] You mean—I trained all over the creation, but, yes, we went from New York to over in North Africa.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And the Mediterranean and then went up Rome Valley—[Sorrel?] River—  
Saaerbrucken?] and turned south on Black Forest.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And went down there to where they were making airplane engines. Anyway, all  
of that—that time. That's 7th Army it was. [General George S.] Patton had been  
down in—in Africa with his tanks, and [Erwin] Rommel was the one we were af-  
ter. And then that English—English general . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: I've forgotten his name.

SL: Well . . .

FM: He came down. It got over to—almost to—well, almost to—well, they were get-  
ting to Egypt. But we went into Marsailles, and I think I walked from there, just  
about.

SL: Wow.

FM: Yes.

[01:14:07] SL: Well, did you—did you ever get wounded or hurt in anyway?

FM: No. Well, not from—not from combat.

SL: Enemy—right.



FM: I—I liberated a German motorcycle one time and I—[laughs] I decided I'd ride it  
a little bit, but . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . but this was in France and . . .

SL: [Laughs]

FM: I'd had a motorcycle and—I'll try it out. I went down the road. I told the ser-

geant, "I'll be back." I crossed one railroad and it was okay. But the next railroad went like this. Well, when I hit it, my motorcycle went that way. And, you know, those cars over in France—they're very, very high off the rails.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: I'd say—well, the motorcycle went under the—the car.

SL: Oh.

FM: I went over backwards—busted my knee. Yes, I got—I got wounded [laughs], but I was doing something I didn't have any business . . .

SL: [Laughs]

FM: I just told the sergeant, "I'm going to ride this motorcycle and see what the Germans . . ."

SL: [Laughs]

FM: Well, we were all trying out the captured stuff. I had a—I had a command Volkswagen I took over for a while. That thing would run.

SL: Yes.

FM: I got on the Autobahn, and it didn't weight three hundred pounds, but it sure would run.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: Yes. Well, we were—you know, you kind of mean to try everything that the Germans had. [Laughs] Of course, I tell a lot of people they were shooting wooden bullets at us. And the bullets were made out of wood. They didn't have any metal.

SL: Hmm. They ran out of that.

FM: I used to have some of those wooden bullets. I brought them just—people

wouldn't believe it. But, yes . . .

SL: I had never heard that.

FM: Yes—had a lot of snow, but that—yes.

SL: That Black Forest was in the snow?

FM: Get up toward—you may remember the [big bolt?]. They made—they made one big, final push.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And causes us a lot of trouble. The snow was on the ground about that deep. I think I—I spent three weeks in the woods with no place to lie down, sit down, or other things. [Laughs]

SL: Yeah.

FM: It was pretty uncomfortable. We took our sleeping bag and cut the tail of it of and put it over us. And we had sleeping bags on top of everything else we could—you know, you stay two or three days in the woods and snow . . .

SL: It soaks to the bone, doesn't it?

FM: It's uncomfortable. When you put it to three weeks, you're somewhat uncomfortable.

SL: Yes.

FM: You've got on boots and everything you can put on, and you're freezing.

SL: Well, now, you hadn't—so let's say—okay, you finished with the war and you come back to El Dorado?

FM: Well, I got an assignment back to the [United] States, and I went to Red River Arsenal.

SL: Okay.

FM: A general—he—he got up a crew that had been over there. There was twenty-six officers over there—twenty-four West Pointers [officers who had been trained at West Point Academy] and two of us goons.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: So I was over there about three years.

SL: Now, was that the Red River between Oklahoma and Texas?

FM: Yes.

SL: Or here in Arkansas?

FM: Well, Red—well, Red River Arsenal. It's out of Texarkana . . .

SL: Okay.

FM: . . . on the way to New Boston.

SL: Yes.

FM: It's eighteen miles. It's eighteen miles long, and I lived on the post.

SL: Yes.

FM: My son was born while I was living on the post.

SL: Okay, now, so did—you got . . .

FM: But this was the reason.

SL: Okay.

FM: Somewhere in my records they discovered that I had had accounting experience.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And there's—assumed that I was. So the—War Department—we call it the Department of Defense now—decided that they would change the accounting from congressional appropriation to what they call industrial accounting. And they would make an accounting like American industry. So I got a job—I was as-

signed over at Red River Arsenal as a planning management fiscal officer over there for the budget and—and operations.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And we got all this money from Washington [DC] and we had to proctor—certain projects—things we had to do. A lot of—a lot of equipment was coming back from overseas we—we had all that stuff to rework and . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: I think finally they decided never mind to rework—just sunk it—sink it in the ocean is what they did. It was too expensive to bring it back and then they not—we had—we had a facility down there that had many, many roads on it. It's ammunition—a storage facility.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And we had these igloos and we had it scattered out everywhere. And they brought all these trucks and vehicles over there and they parked them in the road. If you'd had an explosion you couldn't get to anything. It just—just clogged the roads.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: So we had problems over there. And our base shop was running—renovating as many of these as we could and put them back into service. They finally just—too hard to service.

SL: [Too hard to service?].

[01:20:16] FM: And then [sighs]—the trouble is you go to school in—in the Army and then you're expert. I went to the engineers on landmines and booby traps.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: That's when I got the shock of my life when they sent me [sighs]—on the thirty-eighth parallel in Korea.

SL: Hmm.

FM: They couldn't figure out why they were having so many personnel casualties. Landmines were ninety-eight percent fatal, and that's too high a percentage. You should have—personnel leaving in Germany when we had “Bouncing Betsies”—the facilities were—fatalities were not that high. Well, if I hadn't talked so much—in Italy some smart operator decided that you can detonate that landmine with a piece of plastic, and—and that is the hammer-type effect, which will hit that cap and ignite it and—and cause the primer to explode the charge.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Well, yes. I'm too smart. So I said, “Well, yes. Well, we need some guys over there.” “So you get over to Korea and see what the trouble is.” I said, “Yes. Well, it's just like in—in Italy, they're not using metal. Your metal detectors are not going to find the landmines when they're made out of plastic.” Sure enough. Well. And then after that I'm back. I'm back here. Never mind. And I had—I had a lot of disagreement about whether I ought to stay over there two years or not.

SL: Right.

FM: They wanted—they—the war was over and it was peacetime, and they told me, “We want you to volunteer to serve in a combat zone, and consider the—the facilities and serve over there two years, and you'll not be allowed to come home nor will you be allowed to have your family over there.” I said, “Well, if I've got to volunteer over here to this stuff, I'm—I'm ready to go home.” “No, you don't

have any choice. You have to sign.” I said, “If I have a choice at all I’m not signing.” “You might get court-martialed.” “If I have a choice, I decline to sign it.” I didn’t sign it. I’m in—I’m back home. I’m out. I go to Fort Sill [Oklahoma] and get turned back to—and then I came to El Dorado and then they talked me into the reserve. So “Okay, reserve, I’ll stay with you.” And then we built a reserve facility here, and I named it for my friend who was killed on D-Day.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And it’s Rufus Napoleon Garrett, Jr. facility over here on 8th Street.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And I was the commander of that unit over there and—and retired in [19]76 when I was sixty—sixty years old. On my sixtieth birthday I—I’m out and—and I’m a retired officer now.

[01:24:13] SL: Well, now, you didn’t mention anything about getting married before you went to the war. When—how did that come about?

FM: Yes. I—I went to Fayetteville and met this young lady . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . up there. She was a fine dancer. And we danced and . . .

SL: [Laughs]

FM: . . . we got acquainted. She was a Chi Omega and I belonged to the Kappa Sig[ma] fraternity. And we had parties among the groups. The second year, I think, we were what you call engaged or pinned . . .

SL: Mmm.

FM: . . . or something like that. And then I—and she had another year.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And I came back to Pine Bluff to see about this . . .

SL: Draft thing.

FM: . . . job over—yes. But then she came—she had finished and came back to Pine Bluff and took a job teaching. And then while she was teaching—I think the end of that year we got married. And her home is Dumas—Dumas, Arkansas, and she wasn't too far from home. And at—at Dumas, while I was in the service, she had a dance studio. She taught dance and such things. Yes.

[01:25:58] SL: And did you all end up having any children?

FM: Hmm?

SL: Did you have any children?

FM: Two.

SL: Two?

FM: Yes. We had a daughter, and my son was born while I was in Texarkana.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And I was officer of the day, and I got in some hot water that day. [Sighs] My mother-in-law was over in Texarkana. We lived on the post.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And they were on their way to the hospital.

SL: Mhmm .

FM: And this was Sunday at about 11:00, and she called me and said, “Your wife is about to have a child and she’s at the hospital and she wants you to be there.”

Well, I’m officer of the day. What am I going to do?

SL: Mhmm.

FM: I went over to the barracks and found a captain. And I said, “Captain, get up and

put your clothes on and meet me over at the headquarters. You're going to be the officer of the day." Well, I thought that cleared me.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And then I called the sergeant of the guard and I said, "Drive me to Texarkana." He did. Tuesday I'm informed that I'm going to be court-martialed.

SL: Oh!

FM: Well, the general is out of town and his wife's with him. And his wife and I were pretty good bridge players.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: We were good buddies.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: They got back to town and these orders in there—and that's court-martial—I had left my post of duty and I had used government transportation for personal use.

SL: Yep.

FM: Well . . .

SL: [Laughs]

FM: I was in pretty much hot water.

SL: Yep.

FM: Boy, when the general's wife got home Friday, they tore up the papers and forgot all about it.

SL: She straightened them out, didn't she?

FM: That's right. She said, "The war's over. You can't make that stick." She'd been married to a Air Force—I don't know what his name was, but he was the chief of the Air Force.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: She had been married before and she—all those upper-level folk kind of marry each other . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . and stay in the same group.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Anyway, she said, “A man’s—a husband’s place is with his wife if she’s having a child. And that’s where he ought to be.” So we didn’t hear any more about that.

[01:28:46] SL: That’s good news. That’s good news. Well, now, when you get out of the service and—and you’re back in El Dorado, did you ever—were you ever a part of the oil business itself here in town?

FM: Not other than making tax returns for people here that . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . that in oil business.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Yes.

SL: Well, I mean, you were here for most of the boom. I guess you were here for all the boom, weren’t you? So you saw it start and you saw it pass . . .

FM: Yeah, it was in . . .

SL: . . . go past . . .

FM: It was in—it was in service. It was going when we came.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And I saw it die down. I saw a lot of people move to east Texas and, now that a few stray wells around, they’re trying to continue to pump them and I can—I can

show you some wells between here and Smackover that were pumping in the [19]20s—still pumping today. And I think that’s fantastic that . . .

SL: That is fantastic.

FM: . . . that they’re still pumping oil.

[01:29:53] SL: Mhmm. Well, did you ever know the Aldersons or the—or the Murphys? Did you work—do their books for them or—? How did you come to know Boyd Alderson?

FM: When I came back, the first job I had was with the Arkansas Public Service Commission.

SL: Okay.

FM: And I was doing an audit over at Crossett.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: My brother-in-law here—lived here in El Dorado—my sister’s husband—phoned up and says, “There’s a man here that needs some help. He wants an accountant.” So I came over here and talked with him and took the job, and his name was [Breemo?].

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And he said he had some people, but he—he wanted somebody to turn the office over to, and it was kind of embarrassing to hire me in front of his help . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . saying that he didn’t have anybody he could depend on and he wanted somebody to take charge.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Well, his clients at that time—I don’t know if I’m supposed to reveal the names of

his clients or not—whether that’s exactly proper—but—Mr. C. H. Murphy.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Now, that’s not Charles. It’s Mr. C. H. Murphy.

SL: Uh-huh. I—ya, I am confused. It seems like there were two different Murphys involved in the oil business and . . .

FM: O. G. Murphy is . . .

SL: Why—was he . . .?

FM: Jewel—Jewel Murphy Alderson’s daddy.

SL: Right. And he was with Marine Oil?

FM: Marine. He was head of Marine Oil Company.

SL: Okay.

FM: Mhmm. And it was a going organization until Murphy bought it.

SL: And so there’s—there’s O. G. and then there’s C. H. ’

FM: Hmm?.

SL: There’s O. G. Murphy,

FM: Yea.

SL: And then there’s C. H. Murphy.

FM: C. H. Murphy’s . . .

SL: And then there’s Charles Murphy.

FM: That’s the son.

SL: Okay.

[01:32:03] FM: There’s only one Mr. Murphy to me. That’s Mr. Murphy.

SL: Okay.

FM: And then Charles came along and [Theodossia?] is here. If we went to her house

we'd—"Get out of here, kids." [Laughter] Yes, that's Charles.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: Charles passed away.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: And Charles had three sisters.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: [Theodossia?] and Polly and—and [Birdie?]. Mhmm. There were four children—Mr. C. H. Murphy . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . senior. Yea.

SL: And was—how was O. G. related to them at all? Was he . . .?

FM: Blood relation—I don't know.

SL: Okay.

FM: I don't—I don't have any idea.

SL: Okay.

FM: Mr. Murphy came here from Louisiana.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: I know about him.

SL: Yes.

FM: Mr. Murphy had an accident on the farm and lost part of his hand.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: And he decided he wasn't going to farm, so he moved into Farmerville, Louisiana, which is Union Parish. He ran for sheriff and was elected two terms. He's about 'this high to me.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: He was little.

SL: A little guy.

FM: And a bad arm.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: Two times. And then he decided, “Well, maybe I won’t be sheriff.” So he bought forty acres of land out there and sold the timber and kept the land—moved up. And he came on up from Farmerville down there—thirty-five miles on up to El Dorado.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And took a job in the bank.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And was here when the oil was discovered. And then he says, “Ahh. Hmm. Oil business.” And it’s just turned out that there’s a lot of oil from here to Louisiana. And he bought a plantation down here—well, now, that’s not first. Anyway, he bought a large plantation down here from a British—I don’t know what his title is. He—but the British officer lived in Tallulah, and there’s 30—38 or 39,000 acres involved, and Mr. Murphy made a deal to buy it. But the reason he bought it was the British Crown told him, “Sell that property. Put the money in an American bank in dollars, and get yourself back home and put on your uniform. We’re going to war.”

SL: Hmm.

FM: So he bought it at a fantastic price and—I can’t think of the name of—anyway, it run from Tallulah all the way back to—Tallulah all the way back this way to [Del

High?])—in that vicinity. At one time it had 276 wells. But Mr. Murphy was the kind of person that didn't always go on his own. He—he said—Mr. Joe Mahoney was his lawyer. He said, “Mr. Joe,” Joe, “do you want to join this with me?” “Well,” he said, “I can't stand half of it.” “Well, let's get some more.” So Mr. Murphy—working in the bank—passed it around. That's where Mr. O. G. Murphy got into it.

SL: Okay

FM: He had a big piece of it. Mr. J. K. Mahoney plus his family had a big piece. Uncle Jimmy Roland had a piece of it. And Mr. Murphy was the kind of person that says, “I'm going to go. If you want to join me, you can. If not, it's just fine.” But that's the kind of person he was. And he—he put them in it and they put up their money, and some borrowed in St. Louis [Missouri] and put up the money and—and very profitable.

SL: Yeah. Hmm.

FM: But, yeah, he was—he was a fine fellow. He was. And I . . .

[01:36:57] SL: Do you—do you . . .

FM: . . . I did a lot of . . .

SL: . . . remember any particular conversations you had with him that—maybe a . . .?

FM: Yeah, about his taxes. [Laughter] Yeah, yeah. But where I went to work when I came from Crossett Audit over here to work for Mr. [Breemo?])—Mr. [Breemo?]) says to run his office. Murphys and the Murphys and the McKinneys and a whole bunch—had them all. Yeah, I've done work on all of them.

SL: Hmm.

FM: Yeah.

SL: Well . . .

FM: Fine people. Very, very fine people. Mr. [Claiborne] Deming, who's now president and CEO of Murphy—his dad was a, was a great friend of mine, Dr. Deming, John was his name. He married Bertie Murphy, the mother of Dr. Dem—Mr. Deming. Yeah. And he was from Alexandria. He told me—well, anyway, I still have the stock he told me to buy.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: Yeah.

SL: That's good.

FM: I did his—I did his work.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: He asked me—"I want you to come down to Alexandria." I couldn't. It was just one of those things when—he said, "I'm—" he was a doctor and he said, "I'm going to go in the real estate business."

SL: Mhmm.

FM: I thought it was a great opportunity, but that's still down in Louisiana where I didn't ever want to live, and I'd had enough of.

SL: Right.

FM: I—I just—it's damp and I—I didn't breathe good. But he was a great fellow, Mr.—Dr. John Deming, he was. He's a fine guy and a nice-looking guy and personable and—good doctor. Good friend. I've never told Mr. Deming here that—that I even knew his father.

SL: Huh, he never knew that?

FM: Hm-mmh, I never told him, hm-mmh.

SL: How come?

FM: Just never have . . .

SL: Just never got around to it. Yes.

FM: Haven't had any occasion to talk with him about his dad.

[01:39:32] SL: Well, what about—what about Boyd Alderson?

FM: Who?

SL: Boyd Alderson.

FM: Boyd? Well, he was on the gas commission. We used to drive out to his mother and dad's. My mother and dad would drive out there to buy vegetables, milk, and butter. Prettiest butter you ever saw. Had those [knife?] places all the way around there.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: That good country butter.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: My mother always said, "Let's go out to the Alderson's and buy something." It depends on whether it's peas or beans or whatever's in season.

SL: Right.

FM: Yeah. And—but Boyd was in my class twelve years over here at school. Every year I was with him. Yeah, and Jewel—I've known her ever since she was in the second grade, too.

SL: So did you and Boyd used to play together and . . .

FM: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . do things together?

[01:40:27] FM: He was in a different high school fraternity when I was—you

know, we had high school fraternities and they were going pretty big. But then the school board decided that it wasn't the thing to do. Some people didn't get in.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: Well, I just—I engineered that one year.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: They had a big squawk, so I got two guys from the group that didn't get in and got in contact with the headquarters—SDP [stands for?]. So we started a third high school fraternity. And the SDPs would—we were trying to get them to take everybody else that didn't get in.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: But they finally—finally fired their principal at the high school for being partial to fraternities.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: She told me that.

SL: Hmm.

FM: We had a lady principal of El Dorado High School.

SL: So did you and Boyd go hunting together or . . . ?

FM: No, we didn't spend a lot of time—just—just at school that we played or did something at school.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: He—he went to his house after school.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:41:48] FM: And we had things to do after school—chores or something at home. We didn't have this hangout time that you talk about . . .

SL: Right.

FM: . . . or see people doing now. We—we didn't have time. And I was working at this pig stand selling these five-cent sandwiches.

SL: Right.

FM: And trying to make seven dollars and twenty cents a week. But the worst blow I ever had was I worked at Kroger's [grocery store]. I went down there one morning—I worked at 6:00 in the morning 'til 10:00 at night and I made a dollar and fifty cents. That suited me fine. I wouldn't complain about it.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: I went down there one morning at 6:00—knocked on the door and a man came to the door and says, "Frank, I can't use you anymore." I had already gotten up and I'm down there at 6:00. I thought, "Scoundrel!" [Laughs] "What's the matter?" He said, "Look at my window." I said, "Well, I see it—NRA. But what's all that?" "National Recovery Act." I said, "Yeah." "Well, today minimum pay is twenty-five cents an hour. I can't afford that."

SL: Hmm.

FM: "You're making ten cents an hour and I—I can't—I can't afford twenty-five cents." He said, "There's two of you working here, and Alton makes fifteen cents now. I'm going to take your ten cents and pay it to him and I'll keep him." [Vestor?] his name—this—this guy—at this time it was [Vestor?]. He's married and that's why he's getting fifteen cents and I was getting ten. "So I'm going to take your ten cents and give them to him, and he'll get twenty-five cents an hour." Well, I have no job so I'm—I'm out of work.

SL: What did you do?

FM: I think that's when I went to the pig stand . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . to sell those five-cent—yeah. I made a dollar and a half. That's great because I'd—most all week I'd still have fifty cents left. But I couldn't stand that.

SL: Hmm.

FM: He couldn't pay me twenty-five cents an hour.

SL: Poor guy that stayed probably had to do twice the work that he used to do, too.

FM: Well—hmm.

[01:44:21] SL: [Laughs] So do you want to talk about—any more about the oil business and what it was like around town? Now, when you came I saw a lot of pictures from Smackover.

FM: I just—friends up there—I had a friend up there—went to LSU. I knew him down there. His dad invented some kind of down hole pump and made a lot of money.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And he was—he was just a nice guy.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: People around living in different—there was a fellow at Louann that had a telephone company that—just people I knew—one reason or another and—friend. But the man that made the picture is a professional photographer, and there was more pictures in Smackover . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . that sort of thing at that time than here. Most of the activity—Smackover really was the center of the—of the oil boom.

SL: Hmm.

FM: They discovered a well out here on—on what they call –I told ya, Pistol Hill—  
that hill that's so hard to get up.

SL: Yeah.

FM: That's where the . . .

SL: Hmm.

FM: It's on Armstrong land.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: They call it Bussey Well Number One.

SL: They consider that the discovery well?

FM: Mhmm

SL: Now, it was—was it primarily a natural gas well?

FM: No, it was oil.

SL: It was oil. It was oil.

FM: It—well, it blew in.

SL: Yes.

FM: All that oil comes from gas.

SL: What was that like when a well blew?

FM: Well, we didn't like it and it was scary, and then at night if one of them—if fire  
breaks out you can see it. It just—on a clouded night, you—everything around  
here is—if the clouds low and the well's burning—somebody has a reference to  
what's it like in a—in a place where a lot of Baptists are going to go one of these  
days. [Laughter]

SL: Is that right?

FM: Yeah.

SL: Well, it—the oil got all over everything, didn't it?

FM: It helped a lot of people. But then when it died, things were tough around here in the [19]30s.

SL: Hmm.

FM: It was really, really tough. Picture show was fifteen cents.

SL: Wow.

FM: And we'd go to picture show because they were blowing cool air. And sometimes we might see two pictures and you didn't look at them, but you were cool.

SL: Yeah.

FM: We didn't have air-conditioning. I used to read a magazine—"One of these days your whole house will be air-conditioned." "Baloney. They can't do it."

SL: [Laughs]

FM: But they did.

[01:47:02] SL: Yeah. What about—now, in the old days when they were first doing the oil business, the—they just let the oil go in the ditches and they'd make kind of holding ponds for them. They wouldn't even . . .

FM: Oh, there's a—there's a couple of pits up here on the way to Smackover that—that still caked—there's cakes of oil in the bottom of that pit. Sometimes you couldn't sell the oil well. They'd just run it out on the ground in an old pit. At ten cents a barrel, they didn't think—they didn't think much of it.

SL: Right.

FM: Put it on the ground. You've caused me to think of something else when you asked that question—oil.

SL: Well, when one would blow, wouldn't—I mean, it would be a big cloud that would . . .

FM: If it's cloudy—on a cloudy—cloudy night.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: And that well's on fire.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And it is . . .

SL: It would light up everything.

FM: Everywhere is bright. It's just—it's just daylight bright. But . . .

SL: But didn't the—didn't the oil itself once it—if one blew, like, during the day, didn't it kind of make a cloud as well? Didn't it kind of just engulf and get on everything in the town?

FM: You mean—you mean when oil blowed?

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: There really weren't that many wells near town.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: Now, at Smackover it would get on—the workers would just come in covered, as oil is all over.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And it ruins their clothes, shoes, hair—it's just all over them. If it's blowing there's nothing they can do about it.

[01:49:09] SL: Wouldn't they—wouldn't some people try to skim that oil up off the—the ditches and the ponds and . . .?

FM: One of the—one of the nice features of this oil operation around here was if you

know where to go, you can obtain all the gasoline you need. You'd run what they call the drip. These pipelines that—that flow around through here have a thing called a drip.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: It's a pipe that goes down here where fluid will accumulate. Gas goes through there and you go out and run the drip and you can fill your can with gasoline and that will burn in your car.

SL: Just straight out of the . . .

FM: If you know where to go.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: But I had a regular place to get it.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: And I could—well, from a person, and he ran

SL: Oh I see.

FM: He ran the drip at the proper time when—it depends on what's going through the pipeline.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: It's—it's distillates is actually what it is, and it just turns to liquid and he goes—and then runs it. And for fifty cents I could buy a five gallon can and that furnished the can and all—one of these real shiny—five gallons.

SL: Yeah.

FM: Fifty cents. I bought my—and guess what? He kept probably forty or fifty cans of that stuff under his house. [Laughter]

SL: Oh, gosh. I don't think I could sleep.

FM: Under his house.

SL: Huh.

FM: Yeah. His name was Fox Brown. At one time his—his barn burned first and then a couple years—but not because of that gasoline that he had stored.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: But he did suffer a loss by a fire.

SL: Well, was he getting that—was that illegal? I mean, he just was just kind of pilfering that?

FM: Well, yeah. Well—well, the pipeline goes across his property.

SL: I see.

FM: Yeah, that's—the pipeline company frowned on it. They didn't think take the—the best view of it.

SL: Uh-huh. [Laughs]

FM: Oh, it just—but it's a way to get—get your gasoline. And you can buy a couple of those five gallon cans and you can go—we'd go to Hot Springs and back before we'd ever use it up, but . . .

SL: Right.

[01:51:46] FM: . . . in those days you have to be real good about patching tires. It wasn't so much gasoline that bothered us in those days, it was your tires.

SL: Hmm.

FM: You'd have a flat or blowout or run across something in the road, and you've got to stop the car—jump out and break the tire down and get out the tube—scrape it off, put on a cold patch, pump it back up by hand.

SL: Yup.

FM: Put it back on the wheel—and that was a big problem anywhere you were going.

SL: Can—did they not carry spares back then?

FM: Oh, [laughs] not if you had two flats at once. [Laughter]

SL: Well, there weren't much road—there wasn't any road back then, was there?

FM: Sometimes you'd have a spare, but most of the time you didn't.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: You didn't—didn't want to—you didn't afford the luxury of a spare.

SL: Right.

FM: If you had a car that's—that's something. It's—it—money was short. You just didn't have it. It was tough. And I think the war probably cured a lot of it. It—I wasn't in favor of the war, but it's too bad.

SL: It does something for business, doesn't it?

FM: Too bad. Yeah.

[01:53:13] SL: Well, Mr. McWilliams, is there anything else that you want to say about El Dorado or the oil business or Boyd and Jewel Alderson or the Murphys? Is there—we're—almost one o'clock [p.m.] now.

FM: One o'clock!

SL: It's almost one o'clock.

FM: I was supposed . . .

SL: We've got—we've got someone, I think, coming in at 1:00. I'm not sure, but—and we can—we can . . .

FM: You got some oil . . .

SL: . . . put them off a little bit.

FM: You got some oil people coming at one? What . . .?

SL: I don't know who—I don't know who we've got coming in at one. Do we know who's . . . ?

JE: I'm not sure if it's her mother-in-law, ex-mother-in-law or . . .

SL: Okay.

FM: Who?

SL: I—I—we don't know. We don't know who it is—who's coming next.

JE: Diane [Alderson] has set it up and . . .

SL: Yeah, Diane's got someone else coming in because we originally came down here to interview Boyd and Jewel, but . . .

[01:54:00] FM: Well, I wasn't going to come unless Boyd was coming. I don't usually—Boyd and I happen to be co-executors on some oil people's property.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: And I wouldn't serve unless Boyd would—would cosign. I wanted somebody to back up what I did.

SL: Right.

FM: And the last one we had, a man—the man died first and we had him, and then the woman died. And anyway, I like doing business with Boyd. He's—if he says it's red, it's red. I don't care if it's—if he says, "That's red," that's red.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: That's the way he . . .

SL: The way he is.

FM: That's what I think of Boyd.

SL: Yeah

FM: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

FM: But he's—his health's not good.

SL: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

FM: He's tough. Turn that camera off—I could tell you [something]. [Laughter]

SL: Well, you could probably tell us anyway.

FM: No. But I tell you, if—if—if Boyd's all right and he's in a good mood. But I tell you, if he ever doubles his tongue, you better—you better get out.

SL: [Laughs]

FM: You better take off because he's—he's had it. You know, in the school ground we always had disagreements and you could tell by certain people what's going to happen, and . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: If—if you ever see him—he could kind of double it—ooh!

SL: [Laughs]

FM: But he's—he's tough. He's tough and got a lot of strength. And he's got a brother that you—Hugh. Hugh was a football player that—he's something. He's bigger—muscular. He was just . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: I think he was killed in a—in a accident at a railroad crossing.

SL: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

FM: Hugh Alderson—H-U-G-H.

SL: Hmm.

FM: But he played football.

SL: I'll find out about that.

FM: And nobody stopped him. He was—but Boyd's got boys and grand—grandchildren, I think. And one of them had three boys, I believe.

SL: Yeah.

FM: There's a bunch of boys in there. But, see, I only—Boyd's the one I know. I don't know his—his children too much.

SL: Uh-huh.

FM: But he was with the Oil and Gas Commission. He worked for Marine Oil. He was a outside man, and his brother-in-law that—that married Jewel's sister was a inside man.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: He ran the office and we did the—audit the books and . . .

SL: Yeah.

FM: Yeah, I knew them. I knew them well—Mr. O. G. And he told me he was a Indian [Native American]—Boyd's brother-in-law. Hmm—I didn't believe it. J. T. Bachtel.

SL: Bachtel

FM: J. T. Bachtel.

SL: You know, I have—I have done a—a big interview with Julian Stewart

FM: With who?

SL: Julian Stewart. He—he married Nana Bachtel.

FM: Oh, okay. Okay. Yeah.

SL: So I know Julian and Nana . . .

FM: I . . .

SL: . . . before I ever came here and starting reading about the Aldersons and the

Murphys.

FM: Oh, he knew . . .

SL: So it's kind of a small world.

FM: They tell me she's a real fine person. I—I never did know her.

SL: Oh, she and—she and Julian—Julian both are very fine—very fine people.

FM: Well—there's one more boy. His name was—Jewel's brother.

SL: I've—I've just been reading about them.

FM: Is it in the book?

SL: Yeah, he is.

FM: I don't know what his name was.

SL: Well, maybe I can . . .

FM: But Rudy—wait a minute. The man . . .

SL: Well, no, wait a minute. I'm looking at the Aldersons. I'm not looking at Jewel's side of it.

FM: Well, they—he had a daughter—it was Boyd's—it would be Boyd's niece who lived down at San Anton[io] [Texas]—married a petroleum geologist.

SL: Well, now, Nana and—and . . .

FM: No, this is another one.

SL: This is another one? Well, they . . .

FM: There's another . . .

SL: . . . live in San Antonio, too.

FM: Yes, but that's—that's J. T.'s daughter.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: J. T.'s wife's brother had a daughter.

SL: Mhmm.

FM: And she's my friend, and she had three girls. She told me when she died I was to take care of them from now on.

SL: Is that right?

FM: And one of those girls called up and crying.

SL: Oh. Let's see, now, I'm looking—I'm getting these families confused—the Aldersons . . .

FM: But . . .

TM: Scott, I need to change tapes here.

SL: You going to change the tape? Okay.

FM: I don't remember what—what the brother's name is . . .

SL: Mhmm.

FM: . . . but I—he's a some dresser. He was a—he was really dressed up. He never—he never did work.

SL: [Laughs]

[Tape Stopped]

FM: Fletcher had one daughter and she had three girls.

SL: Yes.

FM: And you see Fletcher?

SL: John Fletcher. Lou—Louella?

FM: No, that's the mother.

SL: Oh.

FM: That's John Fletcher's mother.

SL: Oh, okay. I think that maybe all that three goes there. Well, maybe this doesn't

have them in it.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce Riggs]