

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center  
for  
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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**Arkansas Memories Project**

Parker Westbrook  
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford  
September 22, 2011  
Little Rock, Arkansas, Arkansas

## **Objective**

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

## **Transcript Methodology**

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
  - annotations for clarification and identification; and
  - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

### **Citation Information**

See the Citation Guide at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu/about.php>.

**Scott Lunsford interviewed Parker Westbrook on September 22, 2011, in Little Rock, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Okay, Parker, my name is Scott Lunsford. You're Parker Westbrook. We are at—um—Bud and—and Kim Whetstone's house here in Little Rock, Arkansas, on this date of September 22. The year is 2011. And we're here to do a Pryor Center interview [*camera clicks*] of you, Parker Westbrook. Now, let me tell you a little bit about [*camera clicks*] what this is. We're recording in high-definition audio and video. And—uh—we're gonna preserve this recording forever. And we're gonna make it available to the public schools here in Arkansas, and we're gonna put this stuff on the web, and we're gonna encourage not only students in the public schools, but college students, graduate students, researchers, documentarians—we want people to use these stories and—and—and use the history of Arkansas to get a better picture of Arkansas than what we've been able to do in the past. And—uh—you will get a DVD of all the interview, the raw footage. You will get a transcript of this interview. And we're gonna ask you to look at and to read that transcript, and if there's anything that we say today that you're not comfortable with, we'll take it out for you. We want this to

be the way you want it to be. We transcribe verbatim. We don't change the grammar. We—we talk about how people talk, and we wanna impart that character. And when we're done reviewing all that s—the raw footage and the transcript, then we're gonna post this stuff on the web, and the whole world's gonna be able to see this. So if you're comfortable with that process, we're gonna keep goin', and you need to tell me that it's okay.

[00:01:55] Parker Westbrook: Well see, I am because that's my nature as a court reporter. [*SL laughs*] Verbatim.

SL: Okay. [*Laughter*] That's—that's what we do, and we think it's a—we think [*PW clears throat*] it's more valuable—uh—to do the verbatim, rather than to kind of put words in there that were not said.

PW: Yeah.

SL: So . . .

PW: Yeah.

SL: . . . we're—we're very particular about this. Listen, Parker, it's been a long time coming for me to get to sit across from you and do this. Now, David Pryor's gonna come in this afternoon, and he's gonna wrangle you through your—uh—career in Washington, DC, and forward. This morning what I wanna do is

I wanna talk about your earliest memories. I wanna look for the oldest story that you were told as a child growing up. I want to learn about your parents and your grandparents. I wanna know what kind of house you lived in, what the circumstances were in the—in the area that you grew up in, all your early stuff. I'm gonna try and get you through grade school and high school and get you close to Washington, DC, so when DP comes in . . .

PW: Mh-hmm.

[00:03:00] SL: . . . y'all can talk about your career.

PW: Mh-hmm.

SL: So first—my first question is generally where and when were you born?

PW: Well, I was born January 4—that's significant as the story unwinds—1926—uh—in Nashville, Arkansas, in my family home, which had been my maternal grandfather's home. Nashville, Arkansas, 903 North Main Street. Ten-room house on nine acres of yard. Pecan trees, smokehouse, storm cellar, all of those things. So—uh—that was—uh—there. One of my early memories, frankly—uh—is probably been when I was four years of age, the school building, a framed building, high school building in Nashville, Arkansas, was burning. Uh—and some of the young people—uh—and we were standing in the yard of my

family home watching the high school burn. Well, it turns out that the high school had possibly burned because the—one of the—the principal, who was also a teacher, mentioned to some football players that we were in this old, worn-out school building, and it ought to burn [*SL laughs*] or something [*laughs*] like that.

SL: Oh no! [*Laughter*]

[00:04:38] PW: And so the night that it was burning, we were all standing and watching it, but I, at about four years of age, was being held by some of the football players who were blending with the crowd and holding me because I was four, four and a half years of age [*laughs*] watching the fire, and they were the ones who had probably set the fire. [*Laughter*]

SL: That's hilarious.

[00:05:09] PW: So that was an early memory. And so from there, you know, life goes on. Uh—school was held after that time, and I think my sister—uh—who was—uh—six or seven years older than I am . . .

[00:05:27] SL: And what—what—what is her name?

PW: Lucille. And she died in 2004—one of the most brilliant people in the state of Arkansas. Uh—she—she was in school, and so high school classes were held in the tabernacle of the Baptist church.

And the tabernacle had a s—a sawdust flooring in it, and some of the boys realized that you could—that sawdust would—uh—float. So they would dig a little hole, fill it full of water, put sawdust back over it, and this teacher, Odessa Hicks or whomever, would come through and step in a puddle of water. [*Laughs*]

SL: Hmm.

[00:06:16] PW: Well then, of course—uh—uh—a nice, wonderful high school building was constructed after that, and I think my sister actually graduated—talking about her—in 1934. And so she was very brilliant—uh—and—uh—uh—you know, has quite a history in her own life as a historian and whatever. Uh—so—uh—you know, childhood was very interesting—uh—when you look back on it after several years. But my family had gotten to Arkansas—frankly, my ancestor by name, Allen T. Westbrook, had gotten to—uh—Sevier County, Arkansas, in 1832 from—uh—Georgia. Uh—Greene County, Georgia, and—um—so that was that part of the family. Then a little later—uh—the Joneses, very common name, came from middle Tennessee having earlier lived in South Carolina—uh—[*clears throat*]*—uh—they got to Corinth, Arkansas, just north of Nashville in 1847, 1848, and my ancestor there Rebecca Norman Jones was buried in the Corinth cemetery in 1859. And I could figure it out, but she was my six or so—*

the—probably sixth-generation ancestor. Had twelve children.

SL: Wow.

[00:08:06] PW: Uh—her husband had been buried in Tennessee in 1833, but she didn't die until eighteen-four—[18]59. So in any event—uh—that was that—that side of the family, and from there we might want to talk about some of that later. But then on the maternal side of my family, Burton Parker and Maggie were in Wadesboro, North Carolina. And they got on the train with nine children in 1904 and came to Texas, near Bonham, Texas, on the Red River, and farmed. Well—uh—I think a lot of—all of those children were so that they would have cotton pickers and [*laughter*] be guaranteed . . .

SL: There was that.

PW: . . . of—uh [*clears throat*] . . .

SL: Big families meant . . .

PW: . . . uh—children to . . .

SL: . . . good labor.

PW: . . . do the farming.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:09:09] PW: So after—uh—one year, most of a year, my grandmothers realized that they were not doing well. They didn't like the water. They were having—uh—malaria and

various problems, and he said to [*clears throat*] Grandmother Maggie—Maggie—she had been a Belk, in fact, and descended from the Belks of North Carolina, who still have the Belk Department Store throughout America—*B-E-L-K*. And so, in any event they didn't like Texas, so my grandfather got on his horse, rode to Arkansas—at Martha, Arkansas, a little town three miles down the road from present-day, 2010, Dierks, Arkansas.

SL: Dierks.

PW: Now see, Dierks was not even formed until 1906 when the Dierks lumber and coal people from about Kansas came down and bought thousand of acres in Arkansas of timberland. So Grandpa visited with the Sheffields there, and they told him that they had heard that there was a nice farm over at Nathan in Pike County—uh—and so he rode—for sale—and he rode over and looked up Mr. Jim Dixon, and on the sight bought Jim Dixon's farm of 375 acres and went back to Texas [*clears throat*] and told the family, "Okay, let's get all the crops in because this winter we are moving to Pike County, Arkansas." And so they did. [00:11:04] And one of the wonderful stories early in my life was hearing the story from my mother, whose name was Wincie—*W-I-N-C-I-E*—Wincie Parker. And to my knowledge, she never had a middle name but had a wonderful memory and

very—uh—creative in things that she could do. So she said that the trip from Texas to Arkansas by wagon—four or five wagons—and furniture that they had bought after they got to Uncle Cull's farm in Texas—uh—they were hauling all of that, and so they went—it took about four days . . .

SL: Yeah.

[00:11:48] PW: . . . by wagon to get from there to Pike County, Arkansas—Nathan. And so my mother said that was one of the great memories of her life because—uh—it was kind of like she saw later in television shows—uh—that they would camp out. They would stop—uh—at nighttime—at—late in the day. The horses, mules [*unclear words*] with the wagons were tired and whatever, and they would kind of camp out, have a fire, and—uh—surround the fire, having food and whatever. And she said in her memory, that was a wonderful memory of the days that it took them to—uh—travel from—uh—Bonham, Texas, to Arkansas. So we, you know, are a part of our memories. All of us are a part of our memories, and—uh—I think our memories sort of—um—uh—outline the lives that we live throughout our life. And so that all was very interesting. [00:12:57] So we lived later—uh—uh—they moved—my grandfather moved—uh—from the farm down to Nashville, having bought a house that

later was on the National Register of Historic Places—uh—a large house—um—and had a storm cellar built—1921. He bought the place about 1915 because two of his children, the youngest children, Joe and Martha—Joe and Nell—uh—Joe and Nell—uh—were still in school, and he wanted them to go to the good Nashville High School.

[00:13:40] SL: And this is your grandfather.

PW: My grandfather, whose name was Burton Parker. And if he ever had a middle name, I have never found it. Uh—but—uh—middle names were well known, and lot of 'em ended up in people's names [*laughs*] through—throughout the 'era?. But—um—that was—uh—growing—uh—Burton Parker. But at that time my grandfather John Allen Westbrook and my father, Walter Westbrook, who never had a middle name that I'm aware of—uh—they had a store in Nathan, Arkansas, a mercantile store, general mercantile store they would call it. And—uh—so they thrived and did well there. [00:14:29] But in 1925, before I was born, cotton was playing out. We were getting in the beginning of a depression. Uh—cotton prices were going down. Uh—they decided to sell the store and move down to Nashville, which they did do. But while we're at the store, there was—uh—a wonderful family of—uh—African American people there near

Nathan at Bullock Springs, and—uh—Uncle Spencer Polk—uh—had a brilliant and wonderful family. Uh—they had all come to Arkansas—uh—first to Montgomery County, Arkansas, and they possibly were related to the brother of President Polk.

SL: Polk.

[00:15:25] PW: And Uncle Spencer Polk—uh—having five or six children, would come to the store in Nathan, Arkansas, to buy sugar and flour and all of those things for a family of six or eight—uh—children, a wife and six or eight children, and all of these people, the Polk family later became very good friends of—uh—mine, my family's, my grandparents, and the whole community. But Uncle Spencer Polk came to the store one time, sitting on the porch of the Nathan store, the Westbrook store, and—uh—uh—people would, you know, come there to get goods, and they would sit on the porch and smoke a pipe or a cigarette or a cigar. Cigarettes were not that popular at that time. But they noticed one day that everybody was standing around sitting, resting, reading the newspaper. Uncle Spencer Polk was reading the newspaper, but he had it upside down. [*Laughter*] [*Clears throat*] And so that—and it was recorded by certainly family members, but they were wonderful people. [00:16:46] And while we're talkin' bout the Polks—uh—later—uh—a

granddaughter of Uncle Spencer—uh—they are all buried—whites and Blacks are buried in a cemetery—uh—called the Muddy Fork Cemetery, which was a Church of Christ—uh—supported, organized cemetery. And Ruth Polk Patterson—uh—she had been—uh—you know, Ruth Polk, but she was very well educated. She met and married the superintendent of the Childress—uh—School in Nashville, Arkansas. And Ruth Polk Patterson—uh—was highly educated; in fact, to my memory, had a Ph.D. degree, and—uh—uh—when David Pryor was governor, we appointed Ruth Polk Patterson to the State Commemorative Commission, and she was elected as chairman of that commission. Well, a state senator objected—uh—to the fact that she was African American. Uh—I will leave that senator unnamed.

SL: Hmm.

[00:18:07] PW: But he called and [*clears throat*] talked with me in Governor David Pryor's office—uh—and he was concerned about the fact that an African American was chairman of the Commemorative Commission. And I said, "Well now, sir, how long have you been in Arkansas? How long has your wife been in Arkansas?" And they had not been in Arkansas very long, shall we say—several years. And I said, "Well, incidentally—uh—

Mrs. Patterson has been in Arkansas since about 1827 [*SL laughs*] through her ancestry." [*Laughs*] And [*clears throat*] so that was, you know, part of a—a memory in Arkansas politics and David Pryor's administration. [00:18:56] But—uh—life was very interesting, and as time went on—uh—it became time for me, backing up a bit—uh—to enter grade school in the Nashville Public Schools. Very fine schools. Nashville has always had—uh—very fine schools. And Nashville was actually named probably by Isaac Cooper Perkins, who was a very early minister, Baptist minister, in the Nashville area. And so—um—the schools were there, and I was—uh—four years and about nine or ten months old. Uh—uh—actually, I was five—uh—five, but you had to be six years of age to get in public schools.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:19:53] PW: So my mother knew the first grade teacher whose name was Mrs. Bozeman. And Mrs. Bozeman had taught first grade for centuries, maybe. [*SL laughs*] Many [*laughs*] years. And she was a friend of my mother. And my birthday, as we've mentioned, was January 4, 1926. My cousin across the street was born December 9, so she was six years old. And so my mother said to Mrs. Bozeman, "Well, it's going to break up my

child from all of his friends." And Mrs. Bozeman said, "Send him on. I just simply won't recognize for some time that he's not six years old." [Laughs]

SL: Six years old. That was good. Now . . .

PW: So therefore, throughout my life I was kind of below the average age of all of my colleagues, shall we say? And thus, I graduated from high school when I was seventeen years of age.

[00:21:07] SL: Let's talk a little bit—let me—what was your father's name?

PW: His name was Walter. Walter Westbrook. And see, he would have been the great-grandson of Allen T. Westbrook. Allen T. Westbrook had a son named Henry Jackson Westbrook, and he was in the Civil War, living at Corinth, Arkansas, Pike County, at that time. And so he went to the war and was killed in the battle of Wilson's Creek near Springfield, Missouri. And Henry Jackson Westbrook never got back home. We don't even know where he was buried. Probably eaten up by varmints. But Allen T. Westbrook and Henry Jackson—we do not know exactly where they were buried or in what way. But the news of Henry Jackson Westbrook's killing—being killed—was brought back to Arkansas by a cousin whose name was *H-O-L-T*. Mr. Holt had been a cousin, and he brought the news back that Henry Jackson

Westbrook had been killed. And then Henry Jackson Westbrook was the father of John Allen Westbrook, my grandfather. And my grandfather, John Allen Westbrook, married Martha Jane Copeland, and they were all Church of Christ people. I think maybe they were called Campbellites at that time from middle Tennessee—had gotten to Arkansas in the late 1840s and, actually, they established the Second Church of Christ in Arkansas at Corinth, Arkansas, and that church was established, Church of Christ, in 1850. In fact, I went to the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the church at Corinth . . .

SL: Corinth.

[00:23:35] PW: . . . Arkansas. So in any event, that gets us to Nashville, Arkansas, in school. And so in high school, we had a Latin teacher named Jessie Bohannon Leslie, who had been teaching Latin for forty-three years, and my sister had learned to virtually talk in the language of Latin. But Mrs. Bozeman had gotten a little contrary and over-demanding, possibly, [*laughs*] and so several of us boys, for instance, did not want to take Latin from Jessie Bohannon Leslie, whose husband was the lawyer in Nashville. And so to get enough credits to get out of school in the Nashville High School, we all calculated that we would take shorthand, Gregg shorthand, very popular at that

time, invented by John Robert Gregg of Illinois somewhere. And so four or five of us boys and ten or fifteen girls took shorthand. Well, ironically, in teaching of that commercial subject, you might say, they also taught typing. [00:25:02] And so we all learned to type. And I would go down to—I was probably fourteen years of age at that time. We—I would go down to the Howard County Courthouse, which was constructed in 1938. The earlier Howard County Courthouse had been constructed in 1906 when the county seat of Howard County, the seventy-fourth county formed in Arkansas—Howard County was formed in 1873. And the county seat was at Center Point, centrally located in a long county from top to bottom—Howard County, Arkansas. [00:25:53] And so we had a great graduating program there, and I graduated with a knowledge of shorthand, and during that time I would go to the courthouse and record deeds, mortgages, whatever, in the circuit clerk's office. My cousin was the circuit clerk. His mother had been Lela Frances Jones [*clears throat*] and would've been my father's sister. In any event, a good connection of people, but by knowing shorthand and by working in the county clerk's office as a volunteer, and he would get in his car, a [19]37 Oldsmobile, as I remember—I later drove it myself many times—and go to his

farm. So while he was farming, I was in his office recording deeds and whatever and taking papers for registration, documentation. And so, in any event, that was an interesting experience, and I had met a lot of lawyers, judges, other people in the courtroom because as a child I would go up and sit in the courtroom and see proceedings among the lawyers there. And I met prosecuting attorneys, chancery judges, circuit judges, all of them. And so by having the knowledge of shorthand—and we were getting into the beginning of World War II, see. I graduated from high school in 1943 at seventeen years of age. So that made it possible for me to, you know, start studying shorthand. And I went to Chillicothe, Missouri, in northern Missouri, a few miles from Kansas City, Missouri, and attended a school called Chillicothe College because they were highly qualified in teaching people shorthand, typing [*clears throat*], bookkeeping, telegraphy, teaching you how to rule your life by preserving nice etiquette. Mrs. Frances Potts was the etiquette teacher, the wife of a Presbyterian minister. [00:28:53] So it was quite a polishing. And so after that time, I became very proficient at high-speed shorthand writing. I even went to Chillicothe to the Gregg College in Chicago, Illinois, and studied high-speed shorthand writing. And during the time that I was

there, I had a telegram—no e-mails at the time. [00:29:28]  
And I had a telegram from Boyd Tackett, who had been the prosecuting attorney. I had known him. He was getting ready to run for Congress in 1948, and I had even taught shorthand at Chillicothe College for several years in the meantime there. And his telegram said, "If wish gamble my career, come home, work in campaign. We go to Washington."

[00:30:01] SL: Okay now, just a minute. Just a minute.

Kris Katrosh: He needs to back his car out, so I just wanted to—  
whenever you . . .

SL: Okay.

[Tape Stopped]

[00:30:08] SL: Okay, Parker, we took a little break there to—our host, Bud Whetstone, had to leave for work, and [*PW laughs*] he didn't want the car to make noise while we were talking. We—you've given me a really quick rundown of some of your ancestry and your high school involvement that kinda directed your path a little bit to where—for your career. But I really wanna go back to your home there in Nashville, and you—I wanna learn as much as I can about your father. What was it that your father did for a living?

[00:30:50] PW: Well, my father had been a merchant at Nathan. But

after he—they closed up the store, and my grandfather, John Allen Westbrook, had actually died, I believe, along about that time, 1931. But they were closing up the store in Nathan, Arkansas, and my father and mother, Wincie Parker, and my sister, Lucille, and my brother, James Allen—throughout our generations, Allen was in the name. My ancestor we mentioned earlier was Allen T. Westbrook—*A-L-L-E-N*. My grandfather was John Allen Westbrook. My brother was James Allen Westbrook.

SL: Allen Westbrook. [*PW laughs*] So Allen was prolific.

[00:31:53] PW: So in any event, we all—they moved down from Nathan to Nashville. And my grandfather, Burton Parker, had died, as I remember, and so my father, mother, sister, and brother moved in the house with my grandmother, who a lot of the people called Aunt Mag—we called her Grammaw—*G-R-A-M* [*SL laughs*]-*M-A-W*, I guess, Grammaw, and she was the one who descended from the Belks of North Carolina. [00:32:32] So we were there and actually at a time, my Uncle Joe, Joseph Reed Parker, was still there, but shortly after that, he moved to Little Rock. And so we grew up in the ten-room house at 903 North Main, Nashville—Route Four at that time for mail purposes—and it was a beautiful 1878 house constructed by probably—earliest part—Amaziah Lewis, who was the first

postmaster of Nashville, Arkansas. Then the house was bought—property—by David Dickens Womack, D. D. Womack—*W-O-M-A-C-K*.

[00:33:33] SL: This is your house that you grew up in?

PW: In Nashville. Yeah.

SL: Well now, what was it that your [*camera clicks*]*—*what did your father do when y'all moved to Nashville?

PW: So after leaving merchandising in Nathan, in Nashville he and Uncle Jim Floyd, a cousin, did have a grocery store in Nashville.

SL: M'kay.

PW: Floyd and Westbrook for some years. But time was passing on, and my father became the local agent for the Louisiana Oil and Gas Company called LORECO—*L-O-R-E-C-O*. He was the franchiser for LORECO oil, gas, and all of those things that you put in automobiles and your kerosene lamps if you live in the country, and so forth. And so he was the agent and—for that company. Sooner or later, he had two service stations himself, from which he probably also sold groceries. But that was the livelihood of my father. And my mother was very talented. She was taking care of her own mother, who didn't die until 1941.

[00:34:59] And she also was a very creative person. She could hook rugs. She could make beautiful quilts and, in fact, several

of her quilts right now are in the collection at the Historic Arkansas Museum, formerly known of the territorial restoration where I have been on the commission for thirty-six years—still am. And so she was very talented, and it was she who knew a lot of people, such as the—Mrs. Bozeman, the schoolteacher, and other people there in Nashville. And she was very creative and very talented and would, just for fun and possibly a little income, would make wedding dresses for girls who were being, you know, married. [00:36:02] And in addition to the fact that she could quilt and do all of that sort of thing. And she told me that a good quilter would get ten stitches per inch as she quilted all of the material—thickness of quilts. And so she was a very good quilter, and so that was growing up in that house as children.

SL: Was the . . .

PW: But of course, we didn't have water.

SL: Okay.

[00:36:35] PW: I remember in about 1940, the City of Nashville provided public water across Dodson Creek, where we lived right by Dodson Creek with nine acres of wonderful yard, cow pasture. [SL coughs] So it was a, you know, a nice livelihood, in a way, and parents, you know, working all the time, busy doing their

things. But we had no water. We had no inside plumbing. We had the well on what by that time was the front porch, and that well had been dug there, I think, by my grandfather when he bought the place to have a good source of water. And we all cried the day we cut down a magnolia tree because the roots of a tree that my grandfather had planted in front of that beautiful house—the roots from the magnolia tree were growing into . . .

SL: The well.

PW: . . . the well, seeking water. And to keep the well, which was bricked all the way down, we had to cut down the tree to keep those roots from growing into their water support—a very traumatic time. But wonderful growing up there. And . . .

[00:38:12] SL: What about electricity? Did the house . . .

PW: Oh yes, we did have electricity. Throughout all of those years we had electricity there, and it was a—it was really a very fine house for its time. A beautifully constructed, beautifully detailed, band-sawn porches and . . .

SL: Two story?

PW: . . . banisters. One story.

SL: One story?

PW: All on one ground, and so it turned out to be—and is still there—it turned out to be a very fine residence and a beautiful location.

And that was in what they called old Nashville. Even before my lifetime that was already a development that was known as old town. Later, when the railroad came to Nashville, the business area moved farther south, and that was what they called on maps new Nashville when the railroad had come to Nashville, and that's also when the county seat had moved from Center Point to Nashville.

[00:39:26] SL: So you saw the railroad developed and . . .

PW: Well, it had happened before my lifetime.

SL: Oh, okay.

PW: The railroad had come to Nashville in 1973, [19]74, from Hope, Washington, to Nashville, but it didn't go on to Center Point, the county seat. But a nice growing up, and we had Muscadine vines in the back yard. We had groc—had a garden. We had pet squirrels, Jack and Jill, [*SL laughs*] in a cage, and my brother had made the cage for Jack and Jill, a pair of squirrels. He probably got 'em somewhere. He hunted all the time with a friend of his, and so those squirrels were so pity—petty type—that we could get in the cage with them and sit and put pecans above our ears, and the [*squeaking sound*] squirrels would walk up your arm and get pecans and peanuts off of the top of your ear. [*SL laughs*] Never occurring to us children that [*laughs*]

the squirrel might decided he wanted your ear.

SL: Yes! [*Laughter*]

[00:40:49] PW: But that was a fun part of growing up, so it was the typical childhood. And we lived across the street from our cousins. My father's sister, Ella Mae—we called her Ellie—she had married Millwee Floyd, and they were parents of Denver Eva Floyd, who was a month older than I was—December 9 to January 4. And we all played in the neighborhood together, boys and girls, and we were by the creek. We would all go to the creek to swim and just had a great and typical lifetime.

[00:41:42] But one thing I remember, and I have never forgotten it, for some reason, as we walked six or seven blocks to the old grammar school where I was in the first grade with Mrs. Bozeman, I was told about Santa Claus. We were in front of the house of Martha Littlefield and—four or five of us kids—and they were telling me that there is no real Santa Claus.

SL: Uh-oh.

PW: And I had not known that Santa Claus, you know, didn't come while you were asleep and leave something under your pillow or hanging in a stocking on the fireplace mantle. Our house had one, two, three, four wood-burning fireplaces in it. That was their source of heat at the time, because natural gas was not

available. And also, that was as the Depression was coming on, and my one good memory of not only Santa Claus, realizing who Santa Claus was—I didn't understand a depression. [00:43:02] And I wanted some peanut butter. All the kids in America eat peanut butter on crackers and bread or whatever they have, and we were out of peanut butter. And so I said to my mother, "Well, I can go to the store and charge it—and a bottle of peanut butter." And she said, "Well, we have to watch our livelihoods" because, you know, people were going through the Depression. So even in my memory, I was affected by the Depression coming on in the [19]30s, see, by the fact that I couldn't have peanut butter. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, now . . .

PW: But . . .

SL: . . . I . . .

PW: . . . it was a good upbringing.

[00:43:51] SL: So you had a brother and a sister.

PW: Yes.

SL: And that's it for the siblings in your family.

PW: Yeah.

SL: And did y'all work the garden . . .

PW: Well, yeah, yeah. And in fact, my mother got up early. In the

Nashville area there is a lot of gravel and a kind of a heavy soil which later turned out to be very good for peaches. Nashville was known for some years as the peach capital of the world because there were orchards there with as many as a million peach trees.

SL: Wow!

[00:44:32] PW: And so my mother would go out early in the morning, particularly in the summertime before it got older—before it got cold—well, before it got hot, and she would be hoeing around the tomato plants and other growing vegetables, and the neighbors later said, "Well, Wincie is out there waking us up [*SL laughs*] at five o'clock in the morning, beating on those rocks." [*Laughter*] So some, you know, little tidbits of memory that you have. [00:45:11] But all in all, it was a good time, and then we got into not only grade school—I could tell you right now the names of every one of my schoolteachers. Mrs. Bozeman was the first grade. Mrs. Reid was the second grade. Ila Williams was my third grade teacher, and it was while I was in the third grade that Ila Williams, who actually was related distantly to me, she taught us all how to count time and to read time and to study the calendars. And also she brought a canary bird to the classroom just to show us how things grew and hear

the canary bird sing. [00:46:08] But also in the third grade, someone had a little pencil sharpener, and it disappeared. So Ila Williams put a box in the cloakroom and asked all of the children to go through the cloakroom, and if they had the pencil sharpener, to drop it in that box—in that box—and no one would know who had unfortunately . . .

SL: Taken.

PW: . . . picked up the pencil sharpener. Truly, after about thirty of us went through the cloakroom, the match—the pencil sharpener appeared in the box. But then my fourth grade teacher was named—well, her name was *F-O-X—Vera Fox*. *F-O-X—Vera Fox*—fourth grade. And then fifth grade was Dell Shofner, who came from the Corinth kinfolks, a group of people. And she was our teacher and she—we liked her so much, we—but she was related to one of the members of the school board, Mr. Henry, so she had to have the signature of everybody that they would not object to her because she was related to . . .

SL: Right.

PW: . . . a member of the school board. But then we got into the seventh grade.

[00:47:49] SL: Now, did you give me your sixth grade teacher?

PW: We had her two years.

SL: Oh, okay.

PW: And her brother was—brother-in-law was Byron Nelson from Texarkana, Arkansas, the famous golfer of his time. Byron Nelson, a famous golfer, American golfer from Texarkana, Arkansas, had married the sister named Reese of our sixth grade teacher. And then in the seventh grade we were getting really highly organized. The seventh grade teacher was Miss Hill, Vera Hill. Vera Hill. Yeah, a name much like the earlier teacher. And then Mr. Robert Cassidy and Miss Mertie Adcock, and she was very overbearing, and if you—Mr. Cassidy would whip you. But Adcock would make you turkey walk, and she would spank you if you [*SL laughs*] needed a spanking while you were turkey walking. And then, of course, Robert Cassidy ended up being the eighth grade teacher of the Nashville Public School.

[00:49:26] SL: How large a town was Nashville?

PW: Oh, Nashville was about thirty-five hundred people.

SL: That's a pretty good-size town.

PW: And it has continued growing over the years. Nashville is probably now five thousand.

[00:49:41] SL: Yeah, yeah. [*PW laughs*] Well, now, it's—was it kind of unusual? I mean, you had a—for the most part, a different teacher every grade.

PW: Yeah.

SL: So did each grade have its own room in the . . .

PW: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Every room—the school building was probably 1910, a very early two-story brick, nicely . . .

SL: Nice building.

PW: . . . constructed school building. In fact, in the basement of the school building were the restrooms, and they had divided some rooms off. And a music teacher whose name was Lewis, I think—she would teach piano down in the basement room below our third grade. And so we could hear people learning to play the piano because it was down below the third grade classroom on the first level. And then—high school was the new school for me, which was about two blocks from there. And that's . . .

[00:51:00] SL: The—back at home, did y'all have any musical instruments in your home?

PW: Well, we had a piano.

SL: Okay.

PW: We had a piano. And my mother could play the piano by ear. And we borrowed that—we loaned that piano one time for a singing, they called it, on the second floor of the courthouse. And some of us kids had hidden a little cast-iron pot in the bottom of the piano in the music box. Well, as they were

moving that upright piano to the second floor of the courthouse—that would've been the old courthouse—it dislodged and rolled and made a noise. And everybody discovered in the family where probably my brother and I had hidden this because, for some reason, our mother didn't want us to have it. [SL laughs] So that was revealed. [SL laughs] [00:52:13] So—of course, on the musical instruments—while I was in high school, I adopted the accordion, and you played it—pump, pump—accordion.

SL: Sure.

PW: And so even in high school, in the general assemblies and whatever in the Nashville High School gymnasium, which was named for John Garrett Whiteside—Garrett Whiteside had worked for many years with congress people from southwest Arkansas, and he later ended up working with Hattie W. Caraway . . .

SL: Caraway.

[00:53:01] PW: . . . the first woman ever elected to the United . . .

SL: US . . .

PW: . . . States Senate. But the man behind the woman there was Garrett Whiteside. And so some good memories of all of that growing up in high school, and of course, everybody had a

subject or two that they were interested in, musical instruments and whatever. Later, while we're on the musical instrument, I ended up—even after I was in Washington, DC, trading the accordion for a zither. *Z-I-T-H-E-R*. And I had heard the music one-man theme or something—"Third Man Theme" that was played by Ruth Welcome, the wife of a lawyer in Little Rock, Arkansas. And so I traded the accordion for a zither. And that zither is right now in a house in Washington, Arkansas.

[00:54:07] So some interesting—but my sister could also play the piano, but she was so brilliant. She missed the—skipped the third grade and the tenth grade because she made nothing but straight A's in the Nashville Schools. And one thing that is missing from our family collection of papers is the report cards of my sister. And I think she probably threw them away because she was embarrassed that she had made straight A's.

SL: Straight A's. Hmm.

PW: And my brother and I were marginal [*laughter*] and not as brilliant as she was, and I think our report cards remain somewhere. [*SL laughs*] [00:55:00] But some, you know, some great memories of growing up with family, active parents and a sister and brother. My brother died at thirty-eight years of age, a farmer in the family with my father and brother. We had

a farm between Nashville and Washington, Arkansas, and after my brother died of kidney failure—hunting so much with his lifelong friend, John Wesson, a medical doctor who married a cousin of ours on another side. He passed away in 1960 from kidney failure. But then my sister and I continued to live in the house—I was spending much time in Washington, DC. My sister passed away in 2004, after we had lost our parents, both of them, and they're all in the Nashville Cemetery. And I even have a headstone in the Nashville Cemetery myself because the mortuary maker—monument maker, Rita Riley, was a friend of my sister. And after she died and my brother had died, my parents had died and buried in the Nashville Cemetery, Rita said to me, "We want to prepare your headstone because we're getting ready to sell our business in Murfreesboro and Nashville, and we want all of the headstones to match." So I said, "Okay." And so there is a headstone in the Nashville Cemetery of twenty-two hundred burials. And someone saw my cousin, Odean Floyd, who grew up across the street—married George Reynolds. She is yet alive in Nashville, Arkansas, at probably ninety-five years of age. And someone said to Odean, "Well, I knew Lucille died, but I didn't know that Parker died." [*SL laughs*] And Odean said, "Well, he didn't die. He's just preplanning."

[*Laughter*] And so she was concerned about seeing my headstone. But you know, funny things happen. A lot of times it's just kind of a misunderstanding or not having all of the information. So that happens when you have a headstone before you die. But all of my other relatives are buried in the Corinth Cemetery. And in the Nathan Cemetery, the maternal family, Parker family, are all in the Nathan Muddy Fork Cemetery. And then my parents, brother and sister and I are all buried in—to be buried in Nashville. So funny, funny things happen.

SL: The—when it . . .

Trey Marley: Scott, we should probably change tapes now. Excuse me.

SL: Oh, we need to change tapes?

TM: Yes.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:58:31] SL: Parker, we're on our second tape. So you have survived your first hour [*PW laughs*] as a Pryor Center victim. And we're gonna keep going here for a little while. And you've done a wonderful job so far and I—but I do want to get back to your home. And I'd like to talk a little bit more about your mom.

You told her that she was a wonderful quilter. I'm assuming that she also cooked. Is that . . .

PW: Oh, yeah.

SL: Did . . .

PW: But she also was very intelligent, like my sister. And see, my mother was born 1892, and when they came to Arkansas on the train to east Texas in 1904, I think, she was just a teenager. But she went to the farm at Nathan, and she was so brilliant that my grandfather, Burton Parker, sent her to high school in Center Point, Arkansas. This would've been 1910, 1911. She married in 1916. But she was very intelligent, and the best high school in the area of southwest Arkansas was at Center Point. And she went—graduated from high school at that time in Center Point. And she was so intelligent that she took an examination by the Board of Education and got a license to teach with no college work at all. She was so smart, and she taught at Bluff Springs, a one- or two-room schoolhouse in Howard County. She taught at the Payne Schoolhouse near Center Point. She taught about three years in public schools. And we even still have the classroom bell that she would ring when she was a teacher. So she was very intelligent and taught school three years with Eunice McAdams and several people, so a good memory of that.

[01:01:15] But she was also very personable, had a lotta friends, member of the DAR. Also member of the UDC.

[Laughs]

SL: Now, the DAR'd be Daughters of the American Revolution.

PW: Revolution.

SL: And UDC is . . .

PW: Through her ancestors in North Carolina. Belk and Sampson, Belk and others, who were in the Revolution. Well, then she also was eligible to get in the UDC.

[01:01:44] SL: And what does that stand for?

PW: Yeah, yeah.

SL: But what . . .

PW: United Daughters of the Confederacy.

SL: Okay.

PW: Yeah.

SL: All right.

[01:01:50] PW: And she and my sister both were—actually, they were members of a group of people who organized the Mine Creek Chapter of the DAR in Nashville, Arkansas, and that woulda been in the [19]60s, probably, or somewhere along there. So very outgoing and very brilliant. And that may be where my sister got her brilliance. But a good record there and

very popular.

[01:02:25] SL: What about—so let's talk about the meals at the home. What . . .

PW: Oh, okay.

SL: Were they very structured? Were you expected to be at the table at an appointed time?

PW: Yeah, yeah. But, here again, I think we used the same bell, and I know where it is right now, we used the same bell, and when lunch and supper were ready, she would ring that bell, and it would resonate throughout the house. Time to come to supper. And we all, you know, all of us who were at home as we were from time to time—we would all have supper in the dining room, which was a beautiful room. [01:03:10] And some of the scanning shots are of the dining room and her and my father's fiftieth anniversary in 1966. They married in 1916, so that would've been [19]66. But very active, and good food because at that time people did a lot of canning. Later, we did actually have a deep freeze, but my grandfather had built in 1921 a in-the-ground storm cellar which was also a cellar where you had shelves on each side of the mid-ground level where you would put your canned fruits, vegetables, peas, beans, peaches, and all that sort of thing would be stored in the cellar until you needed

'em in the house. And some of those canning jars are yet in existence [*SL laughs*] at Washington, Arkansas. So you know, the typical small-town livelihood of people who had come from farm backgrounds—they all knew how to grow vegetables, tomatoes, and I mentioned earlier that she would wake up the neighbors by working the tomato plants and beans and whatever at five o'clock in the morning, beating on the rocks. So it was [*clears throat*] a typical small-town family life. And we were not wealthy, but we were marginally able to get along, like everybody at the time was able to do.

[01:05:13] SL: Did y'all have a smokehouse?

PW: Oh yes. In fact, the smokehouse is still there. The cellar is still there. And the entire place is on the National Register. David Pryor and I can talk about that at a later time. But see, when I was working with Governor David Pryor, the property—he appointed me to the state review board for historic preservation. And I am yet on the state review board thirty-six years later. [*Laughter*] And so that property is on the National Register, and the smokehouse is a part of the property that is registered on the National Register. And the smokehouse dates to 1878 thereabout.

SL: Wow.

[01:06:13] PW: And clapboarded on the exterior like the house. But the basic building is vertical board-and-batten that they would put houses and outbuildings—with a board on the outside, a vertical board-and-batten. And the vertical boards were one-by-twelves, which were nailed on a foundation and up to a rafter plate on the top.

[01:06:43] SL: Do you member hog days?

PW: Oh yes, many times. We would call the neighbors, relatives, and we grew hogs in Nashville, Arkansas, within the city limits because we had a nine-acre piece of ground with barn, which is still there. And so, yes, grew hogs. And this was a big event. And talking about my Aunt Lela Floyd, who had been Lela Frances Westbrook, she always liked to have the legs of the hogs and the—maybe the jaws or the brains. You didn't throw away anything . . .

SL: Anything.

[01:07:32] PW: . . . that was edible. And so Lela always would come and help us. And we'd build a fire around the fire—well, the wash pot—around the metal cast-iron wash pot—build a fire and have hot water while they were cutting up the hogs and hanging the hogs by their back feet and whatever. So all of that was done in our back yard at Nashville, Arkansas.

[01:08:06] SL: So they . . .

PW: Dressing . . .

SL: . . . scalded the hog in the pot.

PW: Oh yeah. Yeah, and then the thing—you immediately had tenderloin for supper. I think somebody liked to have liver. So all of that, you know, was available by your neighbors and a lotta times these people, particularly men, would come and help you dress hogs because there was a lot of weight to a three-hundred-pound hog and hams and whatever. And of course, you hung the hams and sometime even the shoulders and bacon things in the smokehouse and smoked it. And you had a hole in the floor of the smokehouse where you could safely build fire, which would be technically on the ground, and then a little bit up would be a wooden floor with a hole in the middle of the smokehouse. And one of those smokehouses yet remains in Washington, Arkansas. But it was quite an achievement, and I remember that myself, killing the hogs and dressing them out and help—somebody would get fresh sausage, and you'd grind up and make sausage and save the brain and things for what they called saus—*S-A-U-S* meat or something like that, which you could still buy of—some people liked to eat that part [*unclear word*]. So that was quite an event. [01:09:43] And

you did that ordinarily after you had had enough cold weather that it would be cold and your meat would be kept cold until it kind of cured. And smoking, of course, was part of the curing process also.

[01:10:03] SL: Uh-huh. Well, don't you think that—I mean, you came in just ahead of the Depression or right at the beginning of it. Don't you think that the families that were self-supporting, had a garden, had hogs, had chickens—they weathered the Depression Era much better than folks that were more [*TM clears throat*] urban and . . .

PW: Well, probably so. And my grandfather, Burton Parker, he liked corn bread to the extent that he had a local foundry in Nashville, Arkansas, make a corn bread stick—a pan that you could pour your corn bread mixture in this stick-made pan. It was cast iron, and therefore, you got a lot of brown, crusty edge on your corn bread. And never would they put sugar in the corn bread. A lot of people like to doctor up corn bread with other things, but never in my memory was sugar in corn bread. But it was all good and crusty.

SL: Yeah.

PW: And with your turnip greens and your turnips and all of those things you grew in the garden, you would have a pan of fresh

corn bread. [*Laughs*]

[01:11:43] SL: Back at the dinner table, was grace always said at the table?

PW: Yes, but my mother was from a Methodist family, and my father was Church of Christ.

SL: Christ. Uh-huh.

PW: And they sometime did not agree on their religion, so we didn't get heavily into saying grace. But if we had neighbors or friends—cousins come to have dinner with us, my mother would always ask somebody to say grace. Oh yeah, yeah.

[01:12:24] SL: So was there a Bible readily available in the house? Did . . .

PW: Well, there . . .

SL: Was there any studying . . .

PW: Yeah, but it was not heavily pursued.

SL: Okay.

PW: My grandmother, whose name was Maggie, short for Margaret, she was a member of the Methodist Church, and my father was a Church of Christ. And my mother would go to the Church of Christ to urge my father to go to church. [01:13:01] But my—they would drop off my grandmother at the Methodist Church—magnificent building in Nashville, Arkansas, to let her attend

Methodist Church. And then, timewise, they would pick her up after they left church at the Church of Christ. Nashville, Arkansas, today has probably five hundred people to the Church of Christ on Sunday morning. Now, probably many more than come to the Methodist Church because that area is heavy on Church of Christ people.

[01:13:40] SL: So were—did you attend Sunday school or church every Sunday?

PW: I did. I did, as all children, I guess, from our, you know, countryside did. But along the way, later in my life I became an Episcopalian in Fayetteville, Arkansas. And that story [*laughs*] is impending. [*Laughter*]

SL: Is that after you'd spent . . .

PW: This afternoon . . .

SL: . . . some time in Washington or . . .

PW: Well, yeah, yeah.

SL: Okay. All right.

PW: Yeah. And so, in any event, I became an Episcopalian forty years ago, fifty years ago.

[01:14:23] SL: Well, your mother, being smart and sharp and brilliant and a schoolteacher—you were—kind of alluded to—that you and your brother were not the best of students . . .

PW: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . growing up.

PW: Yeah, we were not. My sister got [*unclear word*] all of the brains. [*SL laughs*] And probably my mother was the reason for that. I don't know that my father ever really helped us study, but yet we did study [*clears throat*] and get our lessons and have our satchels and whatever. And my brother would have been—he was born in 1921. I was born in [19]26. So he was five years older than I am, and you know how, you know, important your age is at that time.

SL: Yes.

[01:15:20] PW: What you do, who you play with. Of course, one of the best remem—memories that I have, a reminiscence, was a neighbor of mine, after I started making Muscadine wine, my neighbor across the street in a house of the Holts—*H-O-L-T-S*—Holts—he liked a little bit of wine. So I would call over and say, "Mrs."—whatever the name was—"can your husband come out and play?" That meant, "Can you come out and drink some wine with me?" [*Laughs*]

[01:16:07] SL: Now, how old were you when that . . .

PW: Oh well, I—oh, I was—well, I was, you know, later.

SL: Yeah, okay.

PW: Yeah, much older. I didn't start making wine until even in the [19]60s, and so it was fun.

SL: That's a very sweet wine, though, isn't it?

PW: Yeah, oh, it is. It's very good and I, talking about the wine, I still had made wine—Muscadine wine for years, putting it in auction sales at the Historic Arkansas Museum, where I succeeded J. William Fulbright on the commission and am still there. [SL laughs] Was chairman for fifteen years—now known as the Historic Arkansas Museum Commission. But we have a fund-raiser called a gala every two years to raise funds to buy Arkansas-made objects. And so I put wine in the sale, and a society editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, even at that time before the *Gazette* sold, 1991, to the *Democrat*, she named it Parker Westbrook's Famous Muscadine Wine. [SL laughs] And the highest price it ever brought was \$750 for a bottle of Parker Westbrook's Famous Muscadine Wine. Well, even as recently as about two years ago, I had some of the wine of the vintage of 2009, I believe, and so I was asked to, you know, bring some more wine. And so because of the fact that I had bottled it, two smaller bottles, in 2009, we gave it a taste test, and several of us agree that it's still drinkable and enjoyable, but it has turned to sherry. So two bottles of famous Muscadine sherry . . .

SL: Sherry. [*Laughs*]

PW: . . . sold for \$500 . . .

SL: Wow.

PW: . . . in a fund-raiser. So [*SL laughs*] some fun with wine making, and your hobbies get out of hand. [01:18:34] And my hobby got out of hand . . .

SL: Uh-oh.

PW: . . . some years ago with saving historic bridges—historic buildings—which is probably a thing we might want to talk about at a later time. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, I can't . . .

PW: So . . .

SL: . . . believe that that can get out of hand. That's such a great cause.

PW: Oh well, it did. But some, you know, great memories—as you start reliving some of your memories, they crop up into your mind. It's amazing. As you get older, and I think I'm not the only one who has this thing, you ruminate your memories. When you were five years of age, when you were ten years of age, when you graduated from high school at seventeen years of age—and what do I do now? All of those memories roam around in your mind.

[01:19:32] SL: Let's talk about radio.

PW: Well, a radio—I can remember we had a boxy radio. But I also remember—and I was in Washington, DC, in 1950 with Congressman Boyd Tackett of Nashville when I had the first television. But until that time, it was always a radio of some form, and people on Saturday night would sit—neighbors, kids—listening to some program on the radio. And of course, then when I went to Washington, DC, at twenty-two years of age with Boyd Tackett, congressman, television had arrived. [01:20:28] And so after the—some time he ran for governor of Arkansas in 1952 and gave me their television set.

SL: Wow.

PW: So that was the first time I ever owned a big, boxy television set that sat on a four-leg table.

[01:20:50] SL: Do—was the radio already there when you were young or . . .

PW: Yeah . . .

SL: . . . do you remember it . . .

PW: . . . we had radio and, as I remember, it was one of those kind of things that sat on the floor and was a large thing. Sound equipment, I guess, in the bottom, and you'd turn your dials up here. And that was our radio.

[01:21:13] SL: And was that every evening that the family would gather around . . .

PW: Well . . .

SL: . . . or . . .

PW: Not really. Not really, because you were studying. People were working and so, you know, we didn't do a lot of radio listening. But there were certain programs that you liked and wanted to continue from day and day. *Lum and Abner*.

[01:21:44] SL: Everyone loved *Lum and Abner*.

PW: Oh yeah, and see, they were from Montgomery County, Arkansas.

SL: Oh.

PW: *Lum and Abner*. And those special programs—old house—*Little House on the Prairie*. And things like that that my mother liked to watch. So—but not a lot of radio listening.

[01:22:08] SL: What about sporting events? Did you listen to sporting events over the radio?

PW: What kind?

SL: Sporting events. Boxing or . . .

PW: Oh no, no.

SL: No?

PW: No, no.

SL: Football games?

PW: No, no.

SL: Nothin' like that?

PW: No.

SL: Hmm.

PW: My brother was not athletic. I was not athletic. And we didn't listen to those things now, and I still do not watch athletics on television. Because as Martha Mitchell from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, said about J. Edgar Hoover, "When you have seen one director of the FBI, you've seen them all." [SL laughs] And my theory is when you've seen one football game, one baseball game, you have [SL coughs] seen them all. [Laughter]

[01:23:01] SL: That's funny. [PW laughs] Well—so let's talk a little bit about—if you had electricity, then you had a refrigerator, I would guess.

PW: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

SL: And washing machine?

PW: Well, not at that time. A neighbor of ours named Pearl—Pearl and her daughters came across Dodson Creek and did the washing in the wash shed, which was a little building with a shelf, tubs, wash pot, and they did the washing about once a week. Maybe every Tuesday or something like that. And Pearl

and her daughters were very good friends. We got along well with Pearl, and she worked with us for several years.

[01:23:57] SL: So was that an African American family?

PW: Yes. And see, at that time, we—it was even before we had city water, and the well was on the front porch. So they would go on the front porch and draw water, pour it in a big funnel that went down into a pipe and ran it under the house to a tub at the back of the house, close to the wash house and the wash pot. And that was the water supply of—actually drawing water from a beautiful well of water, and it is still there till this day. But that was the water supply before the City of Nashville had public water north of Dodson Creek.

[01:24:55] SL: I'm just going to assume that the road in front of your house—was it a gravel/dirt road?

PW: Well, it was at a time. Yes, it was, and I remember when it became blacktopped because—north of Dodson Creek was very popular with living spaces. But a lot of the utilities had not come across Dodson Creek, and so that made a difference in what was available to your—electricity, of course, was there, but natural gas and water were not for some time. But some good memories of the days that all of that was very simple. And see, that was even a fact that entered into your curing and

slaughtering hogs . . .

SL: Sure.

PW: . . . was the availability of water—heating the water and whatever.

[01:26:02] SL: What about telephone?

PW: Well, we always had a telephone. Our number was 1-3-7. And [laughter] our kinfolks across the street also had a telephone, and I think their number was 3-7-W. Something like that. But you would also—neighbors would go to a neighbor's house and use the telephone, and I think at a time our kinfolks across the street, uncle and aunt, had a telephone before we have may—may have had a telephone on our side of North Main Street.

[01:26:51] But a great story about telephone is that Murfreesboro, Arkansas, which is only fourteen miles from Nashville—a family-owned telephone system and her name—Mr. and Mrs. Babbitt. And Alma Babbitt operated the switchboard, and so she called someone over at Delight one day, and the operator said, "I'm sorry, he's OMC." And Alma Babbitt said, "Honey, I have been sitting at this switchboard for twenty-five years of my life, and I have never heard that report before—OMC." And Delight operator said, "That means he's out milking the cow." [SL laughs] "OMC." [Laughter]

SL: That's a precursor . . .

PW: Telephone was kind of . . .

SL: . . . to texting.

[01:28:00] PW: Yeah. Well, and talk about telephones—my Aunt

Nell, who I mentioned earlier, had married Owen Elam—*E-L-A-*

*M*—in Forks of the River. That is where the Muddy Fork Creek

runs into the Little Missouri River close to Murfreesboro,

Arkansas, and they called it Forks of the River. And I would go

over there and visit my cousin, John Burton Elam. And we were

about the same age. And so, in any event, they had a

Murfreesboro telephone, and they had a rural telephone side by

side in their fireplace room, which meant the fireplace room was

also the living room. [*Claps hands*] That was even a log house,

and the big room was the fireplace room. So they would get a

call from somebody at Nathan wanting to send a message to

somebody in Murfreesboro, so my Aunt Nell or Mary Evelyn or

Uncle Owen would get on both phones and relay messages from

somebody at Nathan to somebody in Murfreesboro. But at that

time, see, we were all growing up and visiting and whatever.

[01:29:42] And a memory that comes back of my mother and

three of her sisters—there were ten of the children—and three of

her sisters were all having children the same year. It turns out

that they wanted the name of Parker in the names. Well, it turns out that I was first, so they named—in January of [19]26 they named me Parker Lucas—*L-U-C-A-S*—Westbrook. My cousin was born. They named him John Burton Elam because Burton was his grandfather's first name.

SL: Yeah.

[01:30:30] PW: Then there was another child who was growing up in Hope, Arkansas, on North Hervey Street, and his name was Joseph Parker Floyd. So we all got Grandfather's . . .

SL: Father . . .

PW: . . . name, one way or another. I got the first name, and the other child was a girl, and she was named Emma Jane.

[*Laughter*] So even your family name gets involved when you have three—four sisters having children the same year.

[01:31:06] SL: Same year. [*PW laughs*] That's fun. That's fun. Well, I'm just wondering—what about the neighborhood that you grew up in. Did you have playmates that you played with that . . .

PW: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, this was . . .

SL: Well, what kind of games did y'all play?

PW: Oh well, I've told you about having pet squirrels.

SL: Yes.

PW: But we would bury the pet squirrels, and we would bury the dogs, and my brother was a very good carpenter. He had developed the smokehouse into a vice mechanism and counter, and he could make anything out of wood. And so we would take pieces of two-by-six boards, or two-by-eights if you had them, and carve a name on there, such as Jack the Squirrel or Jill the Squirrel. Or Foxy—*F-O-X-Y*—the Dog. Foxy. And you would put headstones. You'd [*SL laughs*] paint 'em white, and you would put headstones on the burials of these animals, squirrels, dogs, cats, or whatever died, or even a chicken. You would have headstones. And you could find by archeology probably some of those bones still [*laughter*] south of our house in Nashville, Arkansas.

SL: So you had a pet cemetery.

PW: We had a pet cemetery. But yeah, games were much a part of your life, and I remember we, you know, we tried to play baseball—not very good—and tennis and all of those things at one time or another. But it was just not a time that there was a great activity among a lotta children in games. [01:33:05] But we had—we would draw a circle in the yard and throw ice picks, and you would draw a line where you divided—somebody—you would throw into their quarter, and you would keep dividing that

into areas of land by where your ice pick would hit the ground. Dangerous, probably, but we did it frequently. And then, of course, we played marbles, and had marble holes across the yard. And you'd deal in marbles. We had croquet and all of those things. Yeah. And you know, croquet was quite competitive.

SL: You bet.

PW: My cousin across the street had a croquet set in their yard, and croquet was a fun game and very competitive. So we had the games.

[01:34:08] SL: So do you remember when World War II started?

PW: Well, I do. I do. And see, I had been—gosh—to school in Chillicothe, Missouri, and whatever, and I was sent a note. I had to register, of course, at twenty-one, I think at the time was, and you registered. And then, of course, a whole busload of us went to Little Rock for examinations for World War II.

SL: Yeah.

[01:34:52] PW: And so I ended up with persistent tachycardia. I'm, you know, several years old by now, and it never bothered me, but it disqualified me for being in military service. And that's an abnormally rapid pulse rate or something like that. Persistent tachycardia or something. So I never served in the military. But

in all of that time I was going to school, studying shorthand, and I even taught two years in Chillicothe College after I had become so famous at speed writing and had been a court reporter in the Ninth Judicial Circuit of Arkansas when I was eighteen, nineteen years of age. I had grown up, as I mentioned earlier, in the courthouse. And so I had understood shorthand, and so I did all of that, and then became a court reporter, official court reporter of the Ninth Judicial Circuit. And I was writing 175 words a minute and have all of those medals right now that are in Central Arkansas Library, things that I gave there, and so the judge, E. K. Edwards of De Queen, of that judicial circuit, would require the lawyers to enter into an agreement that the integrity of the record will not be questioned because of the minority of the court reporter. [*SL laughs*] There I was, eighteen, nineteen years of age, recording all of these murder trials and several other famous trials in shorthand and not even out of my—what they called minority. [01:37:17] So some good memories of all of that. And that is really what led me into my political life, because during that time I had met Boyd Tackett, a prosecuting attorney. And in 1948, when I was twenty-two years of age, teaching at Chillicothe, Missouri, I got the telegram saying, "Come home. Campaign. We go to Washington." So I went to

Washington, DC, at twenty-two years of age with Congressman Boyd Tackett from Nashville, Arkansas.

[01:37:56] SL: Where exactly was this Chillicothe school?

PW: Well, it was at Chillicothe, Missouri, which was on the railroad, whatever it was, between Kansas City and Iowa or somewhere.

It was in northern . . .

SL: So it was north of Kansas City.

PW: Oh yeah, it was north of . . .

SL: That's big . . .

PW: And at . . .

SL: That's big travelin'.

PW: . . . that time, I met in a conference that the school promoted of having speakers and operas and whatever for the development or aggrandizement of the students—J. C. Penney. When I was [*laughs*] going to school in Chillicothe, Missouri, I met J. C. Penney, and he was a merchant in Hamilton, Virginia, which was on the railroad between Kansas City and Chillicothe. And I don't know where Chillicothe comes from, but there's a town in Illinois or Indiana named Chillicothe. Probably an Indian word.

[01:39:03] But a famous time, and so, see, that then entered me into a long-time career, twenty-six years in Washington, DC, where I first met later Governor David Pryor. He was a page boy

at the time for Congressman Oren Harris—probably sixteen years of age—and I think I'm about nine years older than . . .

SL: DP.

PW: . . . David Pryor. And so a great career in Washington, DC. But I attribute all of that, actually, to the fact that I was meeting a lotta people, and a lotta people in politics. And knowing a lotta people, and certainly, when I went to Washington with Boyd Tackett, my career of meeting a lot of Arkansas people developed.

[01:40:05] SL: Well, other than going to that school, were you pretty much in Nashville . . .

PW: Well . . .

SL: . . . up to that point?

PW: . . . not for a year at a time. I would come home in my [19]48 Ford automobile—white on the outside and blue on the inside—and it was shaped like an egg. [*SL laughs*] And I would ask people to drive home with me for Christmas, and they would drive. I would drive. And the best way to get to Chillicothe was down Highway 65, which comes down into Arkansas and maybe even comes into Little Rock. But that was the way of going through the middle part of the country to Chillicothe, Missouri.

[01:40:57] SL: What was the—what about the racial climate in

Nashville, growing up?

PW: Well, it was I'm going to say good. It was good. And in my own life it was not a real problem. We had separate and different schools, and I have mentioned Ruth Polk Patterson . . .

SL: Yeah.

PW: . . . from a Black family. But she was a friend because we had known them at the store my parents had—grandparents. And they were highly regarded in the community. And in Nashville the schools were segregated, but the public school for Blacks was named Childress—*C-H-I-L-D-R-E-S-S*—the Childress School District and the Nashville School District. And all of the schools in Nashville are and still are good public schools. North Central Association and all that accreditation—highly good schools.

[01:42:10] But as time went on and as Little Rock occurred in 1957—later on that story—things started melding. And I think as early as about 1960, the public schools in Nashville, Arkansas, integrated. Of course, the first integration was where? Hoxie, Arkansas. And then about Charleston, Arkansas, as early as maybe 1954. And the University of Arkansas integrated rather early on. So . . .

SL: [19]48.

PW: . . . far as integration was concerned. So . . .

[01:43:04] SL: Fayetteville also was early.

PW: You're exactly right. Fayetteville's . . .

SL: In fact, there's some debate as to . . .

PW: They were being transported to Fort Smith to go to school.

SL: It became an economic issue. You couldn't afford it.

PW: Yes, yes, yes. And I think that had happened maybe in Hoxie.

They had a problem there with transportation from Hoxie to Jonesboro or something like that. So there were all sorts of things that entered into that, and certainly, public money available for school purposes was one of them. But this is where, also, Ruth Polk Patterson from—the grandchild of uncle Spencer Polk—she was a student at Childress High School in Nashville to go to a good school. And she met Mr. T. E. Patterson, a principal of that school, and they married.

SL: Ha!

[01:44:08] PW: And T. E. Patterson, aptly, was in David Pryor's office

in the [19]70s as an educational advisor, and that's when we appointed his wife to the Commemorative Commission—Ruth Polk Patterson.

SL: So this was an interracial marriage.

PW: Yeah. Oh, no.

SL: No, no.

PW: Oh no, all Black. All Black. But they were very top quality— certainly, African American people of the highest order. Well educated. Popular in the community and all sort of thing. And right now, as a member of the state review board for thirty-five years—in Nashville is a ?arty? gatepost constructed of conglomerate stones. That means whereas the earth was settling, kind of a masonry between clay and stones would meld together and make a stone. [01:45:24] And those gateposts were at Bell's Academy, which is a school that was supported by Mr. Rosenwald, who was the president of Montgomery Ward, I think, with much money, and he assisted in the construction of Black schools throughout the South. Numerous of them in Arkansas are on the National Register. The first one I discovered was between Delight and Antoine in Pike County. And that school—two building—two rooms in one building is on the National Register. And then possibly coming up for our December meeting of the State Review Board is going to be the gateposts at Bell's Academy in Nashville, Arkansas. The school building is gone. But it was a one- or two-room building [*door closes*] and the gateposts were a conglomerate stone like is true in the Nashville American Legion hut, and it's on the National Register. So I seek to get the gateposts at Bell's Academy on

the National Register, hopefully when we meet on December 7 this year.

[01:46:51] SL: In the—back in the town of Nashville, did y'all have a movie theater?

PW: Oh yeah, yeah. But now, talking about that, my playmates when I was growing up, all of us playing in Dodson Creek, swimming and whatever [*clears throat*—my neighbors across the creek were Bubba and Hortense Kelly. And they were friends, and we were playing together all the time, eating together—I think the first place I ever met—et—ate—the first place I ever ate turnip greens were in Hazel Kelly's kitchen with Bubba and Hortense and my cousin Eva and two or three kids, all of us who played in the creek together and thought nothing of it.

[01:47:52] SL: These are white children and Black children . . .

PW: Yes.

SL: . . . playing together.

PW: Yes.

SL: And once y'all became of school age, did those relationships start to drift?

PW: Oh—well, yes, as you got older. Yes, they did. And they still are friends. I think Bubba and Hortense are still alive. She's in New

York City, and Bubba lives in Shreveport, Louisiana. And they still own their family home on Leslie Street in Nashville, Arkansas, and we've now sold our house [*clears throat*] north of the creek in Nashville, Arkansas—2007—2005, I think, after my sister died. So in any event, we played together, but you know, you're still friends, but you went to school elsewhere.

[01:48:49] SL: Yeah, I—I've heard this before that you thought nothing of the interracial . . .

PW: No.

SL: . . . playmates, but once the institution—institutional segregation—when you became of age . . .

PW: Yeah.

SL: . . . those relationships started to drift apart.

[01:49:08] PW: Well, and you know, coming back to dining, Ruth Polk Patterson and T. E. Patterson have continued to be friends, and in—as late as in the—gosh, 1990s or thereabout in Nashville, Arkansas, we would have Ruth Patterson to dinner with us in Nashville, Arkansas, and thought nothing of it.

SL: Yeah.

PW: Our . . .

SL: Now, I was ask . . .

PW: Our friend . . .

[01:49:36] SL: I was asking you about the movie theater. There was a movie theater in Nashville.

PW: Well, [*clears throat*] we had the Elberta Theater. We had the Howard Theater, and Howard Theater was next door to Hale and Hale's Drug Store where, as a seventeen-year-old kid, I worked every Saturday for Dr. Hale. He had a medical degree, and he and his father had had a drug store, Hale and Hale. And next door to that was the Howard Theater. But down a farther block down, the Nashville Historic District is now on the National Register as a National Register Historic Commercial District. And that district was the formation of the Dillard Department Store in 1938. [01:50:38] But I remember that my cousin Eva—same age [*taps something*] [*clears throat*]*—that we went to see *Gone With The Wind* as children, about 1938. And we had to get reservations. It was so popular that we got reservations to see that, and I think we probably paid two dollars and fifty cents for tickets, and Mr. and Mrs. Jord Watson sat right in front of us and made it kind of difficult for us to see, but [*laughter*] I even remember who was there. [*Laughs*] And [*clears throat*] so that was *Gone With The Wind*. And I have probably seen *Gone With The Wind* five times. It's one of the greatest . . .*

SL: It is.

PW: . . . theatrical productions—that that's the only time I ever saw it in a theater. I think the other times have been on public television.

SL: Yeah.

[01:51:40] PW: But it is a great show and a great memory. But also, up at the Howard Theater was the birth of the Dionne quintuplets in Canada. And they became so famous as five children that there was a movie, maybe based on their birth or whatever, at the Howard Theater. And they had the children all over the front of the building, and I have a remembrance of the Howard Theater because it was quite a popular theater, but also it was the first time I'd ever known of and heard of the Dionne quintuplets.

SL: 'Tuplets.

PW: Yeah.

[01:52:33] SL: Were the African Americans allowed in the theaters?

PW: In the balcony. I don't think the Howard Theater even had a balcony, but the Elberta Theater did have, but they would buy their tickets and go upstairs . . .

SL: Stairs.

PW: . . . and sit in the balcony. Yeah.

SL: Yeah, that—it was like that in Fayetteville, too.

[01:52:57] PW: Yeah, yeah. But I don't even—in a way, I don't even like to think of those years, you know.

SL: It's uncomfortable.

PW: It is.

SL: But you know . . .

PW: It is.

SL: . . . you can't—it's not necessarily right not . . .

PW: Well, and talking . . .

SL: . . . to acknowledge it.

PW: . . . about that—Hortense, living in New York City now, possibly no longer with us—she and my sister to—continued to letter exchange for years because they, Hortense and her brother, Bubba, still to my knowledge own their family home unoccupied in Nashville, Arkansas. And we kept a relationship for a long time, and I can remember that a couple who worked at the Northum Dairy Farm north of Nashville about a mile and Irene worked with [*unclear word*] while my mother was doing other things Irene would clean up the house and whatever while my mother was quilting and making a wedding dress for somebody. But my mother kept in touch with them for years. [01:54:18] But the famous thing about Irene and Mizer—his name truly was *M-I-Z-E-R*—last name forgotten at the moment. But he would

milk cows for the Northums—all [*clears throat*] yellow-looking Jersey cows. And my father had sold petroleum products to Mr. Northum, oil and gas and whatever, for years, and Mr. Northum owned my—owed my father some money. But the agreement was every time we wanted a cow, we would go up and pick out a jersey cow and bring them a mile down the road to our barn. And so at first we had a cow named Jenny. So one morning my father got up and was looking at the world, and Jenny was lying out in Main Street dead . . .

SL: Oh!

PW: . . . in a—on a gravel road. Well, he called the Nashville Meat Market, Mr. Nowell—*N-O-W-E-L-L*—and said, "Jenny has been hit by an automobile." And they came up and got Jenny and dressed her out and probably sold her—hamburgers and steaks all day long [*SL laughs*] in Nashville, Arkansas. [01:55:54] But on the Northum cows, they all had names, and along the way we had Ocie. We had Jenny. We had Martha and Nancy as daughters of Ocie the cow. [01:56:13] And so, in any [*laughs*] event, up at the Northum milking shed the cows were so intelligent that Mizer, Mrs. Northum, Hazel, and maybe Mother Northum were all milking cows. They could be in a certain stall where they had their buckets and whatever . . .

SL: Yeah.

PW: . . . taking good care of the milk, and they could name the cow. "Ocie, come on. Sook, Ocie. Come on." And Ocie would leave her compatriots and go in the barn to that particular stall for her to be milked. Well, about that time somebody would yell, "Jenny. Jenny, come on. Come on, Jenny." Jenny would leave her companions and go to the stall. And it was amazing—those cows were so smart, they could even acknowledge their name and go to the . . .

SL: Their stall.

[01:57:24] PW: . . . proper stall for the same person to milk them who regularly milked them. And so we would get cows from there from time to time down the road. And our cows were equally as intelligent. They know exactly where to go to the stall; exactly where to go to a feeding box; exactly what they're gonna do. And my mother and I could milk Ocie on both sides, which is kind of unusual to milk a cow from other than her right side. But my mother could milk on the right side, and I could get on the left side and milk the cow. And see, a Jersey cow gives—good Jersey—four gallons of milk a day.

SL: Wow.

PW: Which was a good cow. And they also had milk with a lot of

cream in it. And I can remember as a child going to a lard bucket where they would pour up—where we would—I even did it myself—pour up gallons of milk through a cloth to strain it. And the milk—cream would come to the top. And for breakfast you would take a spoon and just go across and get the cream and put it on your shredded wheat for breakfast. [*Laughs*]

SL: Sounds good, doesn't it?

PW: It does. [*Laughter*] And it made good ice cream and, [01:58:56] in fact, on ice cream, my aunt across the street would take two different-size buckets and fix all up for freezing, and you would put your ice and salt in—on the ice in the bigger bucket and then your big—smaller bucket would be in the middle. And you would turn that before they even had a freezer. You would freeze ice cream in two buckets, and we folks thought it was just wonderful. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, it was wonderful.

PW: It was.

TM: Scott . . .

SL: No question about that.

TM: . . . we need to change tapes. [*Clears throat*]

SL: Change tape?

TM: Yes.

[Tape stopped]

[01:59:36] David Pryor: Well, Parker, it's good to be with you again. Of course, we've known each other for a long time. Old David Pryor here, and [*PW laughs*] we're just so honored—the Pryor Center is so honored that you would grant us this interview to talk about your life. This is phase two of the interview. Scott Lunsford, of course, did phase one. And now he's assigned me the high honor of [*PW laughs*] taking you to Washington, DC, taking you out of southwest Arkansas, Howard County. And you became, and I think some of this has been covered, a court reporter. You went to school and learned Gregg shorthand. You still know how to do it today, don't you?

PW: Yes.

[02:00:20] DP: And you became a court reporter in the courthouse.

PW: Ninth Judicial Circuit of Arkansas.

DP: And what year would that have been?

PW: Oh, gosh . . .

DP: Sort of a . . .

PW: It would've been in the [19]40s.

DP: And you would've been about nineteen or so . . .

PW: Oh yeah.

DP: . . . years of age.

PW: Yeah. And the fun of that was that Judge E. K. Edwards, circuit judge of De Queen, Arkansas, Ninth Judicial Circuit, would require the opposing counsel to enter into an agreement, which was a part of the transcript that the integrity of the record will not be questioned because of the minority of the court reporter. That was a part of every transcript that I did in appealing cases to the Supreme Court of Arkansas.

DP: Interesting. So . . .

PW: The fact that I was a child court reporter.

[02:01:14] DP: A child [*PW laughs*]*—*you were nineteen years of age.

PW: Yeah.

DP: And . . .

PW: Eighteen and nineteen years of age.

DP: And you had learned this in college.

PW: Nashville High School.

DP: In Nashville High School.

PW: Started there.

DP: And you even taught some shorthand, I believe . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . in the high school.

[02:01:27] PW: Oh, yeah. But see, I didn't want to take Latin from Jessie Bohannon Leslie. And so I took shorthand as four or five other boys did to give us enough credits . . .

DP: Gosh, I wish I'd taken shorthand.

PW: . . . to get . . .

DP: I wish I knew it today.

PW: . . . to get out of high school. And so that, in theory, that and growing up in the courthouse in Nashville, Arkansas, with my circuit clerk cousin probably provoked my getting into politics.

[02:02:02] DP: Right. And so here you were, you were nineteen. You hadn't reached your majority age yet. Couldn't even vote at that . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . age . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . at that time in the state or in the country. And so you were engaged in court reporting and learned—having had learned Gregg shorthand, which is a lost art today.

PW: Yeah.

DP: Probably . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . one-thousandth of one percent of the people . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . know how to do Gregg shorthand these days.

PW: It's been mechanically . . .

DP: I wish more and more people have it—yes, right.

PW: . . . overcome.

[02:02:36] DP: Well, Parker—so one day you got a telephone call from someone from Washington, DC. And who was that phone call from?

PW: Well, the call was still while he was prosecuting attorney.

DP: And who was he?

PW: Boyd Tackett. And so I . . .

DP: Congre—who ultimately became congressman.

PW: Yeah. And see, I was in Chillicothe, Missouri, teaching shorthand at that time at Chillicothe College, and a telegram came. The telegram apparently was a way [*laughs*—the predecessor to e-mail and all of those things—it said something like, "If wish to gamble my career, come home. Campaign. We go to Washington." Telegraphically worded. And so I did that. And that would've been in nineteen forty . . .

[02:03:33] DP: How had you known Boyd Tackett? Or better, how had he known you?

PW: Well, because I had been court reporter . . .

DP: In the courthouse.

PW: . . . and he was prosecuting attorney, and I had known him.

And Boyd and Norma actually lived in Murfreesboro—in  
Nashville.

DP: All right.

PW: And so I knew Boyd Tackett from that experience in the  
courthouse.

[02:03:57] DP: Now, in southwest Arkansas, Boyd Tackett was  
known actually throughout the whole state, as a matter of fact,  
as a legendary courtroom attorney.

PW: That's right.

DP: He had a great presence . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . in a courtroom and . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . course, you got to observe not only Boyd Tackett, but other  
attorneys in—throughout the . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . that district.

[02:04:18] PW: Well of course, I had, you know, met people in  
chancery court—Judge Pilkington from Hope and Washington.

DP: James Pilkington.

PW: E. K. Edwards was the judge. Later, Wesley Howard was the circuit judge. So I knew a lotta people in politics through having worked with them in the field of the judiciary. But then, see, in the 1948, campaign Boyd Tackett ran for Congress. And he was very—as you've mentioned, he was very prominent, well known, had a great speaking voice, and very prominent in the law field. And so he ran for Congress in [19]48 and was elected. But then in the [19]50 census, we lost a congressperson, and we had had from 1900 till eighteen—till 1950—seven congressional seats.

DP: Seven members of the House.

PW: That's right. And so as a result of the 1950 census, we lost one district. And the—on the rumor that Boyd was going to run for governor in [19]52, they gave the bottom half of that district to Congressman Oren Harris of El Dorado. [02:05:54] And the top half of it to Judge Jim Trimble. And so that did away with the old Fourth Congressional District, and Boyd Tackett was elected. And then in [19]52 on the rumor that he was going to run for governor—that ?solved redistricting?.

[02:06:19] DP: And so at that time, just to sorta make things a little more relative—in [19]52, 1952, I guess that Governor Sid McMath was still governor, and he was opposed by Chan—Francis Cherry, and Cherry upset McMath during—in that

campaign . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . as I'm not . . .

PW: And also . . .

DP: . . . if I recall correctly.

PW: . . . the disturbance there was Ike Murry.

DP: Ike Murry from Fordyce.

PW: Yes. Too many people in the race who were trying to share the same vote.

[02:06:52] DP: So you took Boyd Tackett up on his offer and . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . you said, "Okay, I'll—I will start campaigning for you, and if you get elected to Congress, I'll go up there and be one of your assistants."

PW: That's right.

[02:07:06] DP: What—did he offer you a particular position . . .

PW: Well, I was . . .

DP: . . .in his office?

PW: At that time, I was called the top secretary.

DP: The top secretary.

PW: There were three of us on his staff: Ruth Collins from Ashdown, Arkansas; and we had a young woman from Hope who was there

because of the fact that—the rumor was that he might be redistricted. [02:07:37] So in any event, a good time, and we were called top secretaries at the time. Later they started calling it AA.

DP: Administrative assistant or legislative . . .

PW: Administrative assistant.

DP: . . . assistant.

PW: Yeah.

DP: But I bet—I imagine you did just about everything. [02:07:52] About what size was a congressional staff at that time? Do you recall?

PW: Three.

DP: Three people.

PW: Three people.

DP: Unbelievable.

PW: Three people.

DP: Now it's probably forty, I imagine . . .

PW: Yeah, yeah.

DP: . . . and a senator is probably . . .

[02:08:03] PW: But we . . .

DP: . . . sixty or so.

PW: . . . also did not have the Internet. We didn't have . . .

DP: No.

PW: . . . all of these technological ways of . . .

DP: Right.

PW: . . . communicating like we have now. You did a lot of letter writing, and of course, you had to do a research on legislative matters, do that.

DP: Right.

PW: And then you had to answer all the other requests for information from and with the federal government. So it was quite an interesting . . .

[02:08:33] DP: And so here you were, in Washington and you were in the office of Congressman Boyd Tackett of Arkansas in the southwestern part of the state. And you were a top secretary, as they called it. And how long did you remain in this position with Congressman Tackett?

PW: Well, he was there four years.

DP: Four years.

PW: And at . . .

[02:08:54] DP: And so you were there four years?

PW: With him. And then at that time I had learned about Washington, DC, and decided I wanted to stay. So I was able to get a job with Took Gathings, congressman from the First

District of Arkansas.

DP: E. C. "Took" Gathings.

PW: E. C.

DP: E stood for Ezekiel.

PW: Ezekiel—Ezekiel something.

DP: Some—E. C. Gathings.

PW: Gathings.

DP: Uh-huh.

PW: Yeah. Oh—Chandler. C . . .

DP: Hmm. Chandler.

PW: *C-H-A-N-D* . . .

DP: From western—from West Memphis, I believe.

PW: Yeah.

DP: Or Crittenden County.

[02:09:32] PW: And he had come as a child from Mississippi and—  
when he five years of age and lived at Earle, Arkansas. As he  
got older, went to law school, and in 1938 he ran for Congress  
still having not married at thirty-eight years of age. But he  
married Tolise Gathings—Tolise Kirkpatrick from Forrest City,  
whose father later became postmaster of Forrest City. And so  
things went along fine with Took Gathings because it gave you a  
chance to know another range of people—I guess to describe it—

all the way from Crumrod to Success.

[02:10:24] DP: And you got to know the delta region of the state,  
just as you had known . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . the southwestern area of the state.

PW: From that southern end, Elaine, Ratio, Crumrod, to Success in  
the top of Clay County, Arkansas.

[02:10:44] DP: So here we go up into the [19]50s, and you are with  
Congressman Gathings, and we go through the McCarthy Era.  
We go through a lot of civil-rights issues and legislation and let's  
say some pretty rough ?sledding? along that time in . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . some of the civil rights concerns and issues and challenges,  
let's say.

PW: That's right.

DP: And so . . .

PW: And we also had a staff at that time of one, two, three, four, five  
in Took Gathings's office, 1035 House Office Building.

DP: In the House Office Building.

PW: Yeah.

[02:11:26] DP: Now, what happened with [*PW laughs*] Took  
Gathings and your relationship?

PW: Well . . .

DP: Let's talk about having—first, there was a cafeteria downstairs in the House Office Building . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . where people would go and have breakfast and coffee and lunch and . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . what have you. And I imagine it would stay open until the Congress went out of session or the House went out of session.

PW: And you met people from all . . .

DP: From everywhere.

PW: . . . over the nation.

[02:11:50] DP: So what happened there?

PW: Well . . .

DP: Something—an event took place.

PW: . . . next door to Took Gathings's office was a congressman from California, who had on his staff a young woman named Faricita Wyatt, and she was African American. Well, I knew people from Chicago in the Congress who had African American staff people. I also knew the manager of the National Theatre down on Pennsylvania Avenue.

DP: Right.

PW: And the manager of the National Theatre was Scott Kirkpatrick, who had gone to Catholic University, majoring in drama. And he was the manager of the National Theatre. Well, Scott Kirkpatrick would call from time to time and say, "Bring eight or ten people with you tonight and sit on the first row in the first balcony and see a show." And so that was very popular with many of my [laughs] friends to get a free ticket to see a National performance. And so, in any event, I would invite six or eight people, all delighted to go. Many times we would have dinner together and then go to the National Theater to see a production of whatever it might be, *Damn Yankees* or whatever. So a good experience. So that was a great, interesting part of my life. [02:13:37] During that time, being young in Washington, DC, I went to drama school, for one thing. I took courses in parliamentary procedure at George Washington University. I took the Dale Carnegie course. I was, you might say, adding to my lifetime and experiences. And one of my friends at that time was Steele Hays, the son . . .

DP: The late Steele Hays.

PW: . . . of Congressman . . .

DP: Yes. Mh-hmm.

PW: . . . Brooks Hays. And Steele was a great friend. We did a lot—I

think he and I and—among others—took the Dale Carnegie course, and [02:14:20] then I went to Arthur Murray Dance Studio to learn how to dance. [*Laughter*] And later did a performance of dancing the tango with a young woman, wonderful friend, Jane Wojak, in a fund-raiser for something that the Congress was supporting—the House. And in there we had a tune, and it went, "We're revising and extending [*DP laughs*] for this is an event." And Jane Wojak and I were doing the tango, so we raised some money, put it . . .

[02:15:02] DP: To revise and extend the remarks. That was a . . .

PW: Yes!

DP: That was a . . .

PW: Revising and extend . . .

DP: . . . a term of art in the House of Representatives . . .

PW: Yes! Where the Congress people . . .

DP: . . . at the time.

PW: . . . who are always extending and revising their remarks.

[02:15:15] DP: So after about seven years with Congressman

Gathings from the Delta region of the state, Parker, you had a little—let's say a dustup in your relationship. If you would be so kind, if you would sorta reiterate that?

PW: Well now, what really happened—it was in the midst of the Orval

Faubus days, in that time.

DP: [*Unclear words*].

PW: And so one day after Took had gone—he was called Took, remember.

DP: Mh-hmm.

PW: He and his family drove all the way to California to a National Democratic Convention in a four-door Nash automobile. And remember the Nashes were shaped sort of like an egg.

DP: Mh-hmm.

PW: An elongated [*laughs*] egg. [02:16:07] Well, he came back from California with his wife, Tolise; his daughter, Tolise Jr.; and his son, Royston.

DP: His daughter was named Tolise Jr.

PW: Tolise, like her mother was.

DP: Interesting.

PW: And I think about three generations of that, they were all named *T-O-L-I-S-E*. Tolise. And so he stopped off at home in West Memphis at the country club to have lunch with his friends, and so an old county judge named Oliver came in. and among others, they sat at the table. And Judge Oliver said somewhere along in there, "Well, Took, what's the hit—what is this I hear about your supporting Joe Hardin for governor?" And he said,

"Well, well, well! Well, well, well! I haven't being doing that.  
I'm supporting Orval Faibus."

[02:17:13] DP: Now, this would've been [19]56 or [195]8—along  
that . . .

PW: It would have been [19]60.

DP: Oh, [19]60. Okay.

PW: Exactly 1960. And so I was supporting Joe Hardin for governor  
because we had all known him and his work in Farm Bureau,  
farming, all the other things that Joe Hardin—*H-A-R-D-I-N* . . .

DP: From . . .

PW: . . . was . . .

DP: . . . Grady, Arkansas.

PW: Grady, Arkansas—was involved in.

DP: Southeast.

PW: His wife was very progressive in schoolwork and whatever. Big  
farmer. And so that kind of scared Took Gathings to realize  
that . . .

DP: To know that one of his staff . . .

PW: . . . one of his staff people . . .

DP: . . . members . . .

[02:17:54] PW: . . . was supporting Joe Hardin and not Orval Faibus.

And he said, "You could embarrass me. I've known for some

time that we don't read the Bible [*DP laughs*] the same way. I have known that you and I don't read the Bible the same way."

DP: Wow!

PW: "You could embarrass me."

DP: Oh brother.

[02:18:17] DP: And then he said, "I know that you've been working on a congressional redistricting plan"—1960 census had been taken—"and you could embarrass me." And I thought after this length of time of discussing how I might embarrass him, I said, "Well, Mr. Gathings, I tell you what. I want to tell you that for some time I've been embarrassed to work in this office."

DP: Wow!

PW: "Well, well! Well, well!" I think he truly wanted me to change my life's philosophy and say, "I'm sorry, I'll be your slave." But I said, "I quit." And I did. And I went then to J. W. Trimble's office and talked with Judge Trimble about the situation. He was always very popular. Lotta people liked [*squeaking sound*] Judge Trimble. He had been a circuit judge himself before he ran for Congress. And we decided that I would also go and talk with Senator J. W. Fulbright, which I did do. And after communicating, I had become friendly with Senator Fulbright and Mrs. Fulbright, Betty. And so he said—I had been given a

two-month vacation to make the transition. Took was willing to do that. [02:19:55] So I went to Senator Fulbright's office and told them what had happened, and he said, "Well, why don't you disappear for a few weeks and come back and work with us." So I actually went to the University of Arkansas and took several courses at Fayetteville. Among others, a journalism course. I studied the Spanish language and several other courses and had a good time and went back to Washington, DC, and started . . .

DP: With Senator Fulbright.

PW: . . . with Senator Fulbright.

DP: And you'd had a few weeks or months off . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . basically from . . .

PW: Yeah, yeah.

DP: . . . Washington. You know, it is hard for—especially younger people—to relate to those particular times and the civil rights challenges. The intensity of those fights in civil rights . . .

PW: The feelings.

DP: . . . is hard . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . to explain.

PW: Yeah.

[02:20:56] DP: Yeah, the feelings and families broken in two  
because . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . of various positions that . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . respected members of the families . . .

PW: Well, and see . . .

DP: . . . might take. And businesses broken up because . . .

PW: Yes.

DP: . . . of this. And . . .

[02:21:07] PW: Yeah. And see, Took Gathings had been on the  
Agriculture Committee, which was appropriate, for some time,  
but had never become chairman of his committee. And as it  
turned out, he actually was there thirty years exactly, going to  
the Congress when W. F. Norrell, William Frank Norrell and  
Wilbur Daigh Mills and Took Gathings all had been in the State  
Legislature, except Wilbur Mills, but they were in politics, and so  
they all were elected to the Congress in 1938. And then I was  
there at this time, 1960. So I went to Senator Fulbright's office  
and goofed off for a few months at Fayetteville, went back and  
worked fourteen years.

[02:22:06] DP: Now, at that time—once again, a little

retrospective—the Fulbright office—you went back to Fayetteville. You took some classes at the University of Arkansas, and there was a great newspaper, still is a newspaper—it's not family owned anymore by the Fulbright family, but this was Mrs. Fulbright, the *Northwest Arkansas Times*.

PW: Roberta.

DP: Their family owned the newspaper in Fayetteville.

PW: The *Northwest Arkansas* . . .

DP: Yes.

PW: . . . *Times*. They also controlled the First National Bank. They had the Coca-Cola distributing business. They owned, with Fulbright Wood Products, a sawmill over at Elkins, Arkansas. And so they had come from northwest Missouri when J. W. Fulbright was actually five or six years of age and settled in Fayetteville. And one thing that Jay Fulbright, the father, Roberta's husband, bought was the Springfield Wagon Company. Springfield, Missouri. And so they started manufacturing wood dimensions out of oak material. And so they had the Fulbright Wood Products Company and very busy. And Senator was doing well. He had gone to school—he—in Washington, DC, after he came back from Oxford University, Pembroke College.

[02:23:46] DP: Where he had been a Rhodes Scholar.

PW: Yeah. Well, he told me that when he became a Rhodes Scholar, he had never been east of the Mississippi River. But he and his mother got on a train, went to Washington—New York—got on a ship and went across the ocean to Pembroke College.

DP: Mh-hmm. To England, yes.

PW: And that was the first time he had ever been east of the Mississippi [*laughs*] River. And of course, highly intelligent. And Fulbright came back home, worked in Washington for some years, getting a law degree at George Washington University.

[02:24:34] And he had met Betty Williams from the Main Line in Philadelphia. And they were much in love. So he went to law school and actually became a lawyer—an instructor at George Washington University for a time while he wanted to be near Betty. They ended up marrying and moving to Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he helped his mother take care of the family businesses. And as you may remember, Roberta was very active in politics herself. And they had been supporters of Carl Bailey, not Homer Adkins, because Homer was a little more . . .

DP: Not quite as . . .

PW: . . . outside . . . [*Laughs*]

DP: Not quite as progressive, I guess you'd say.

PW: Yeah, out of their line of thought. [02:25:43] So somewhere along there, Roberta as editor/publisher of the *Northwest Arkansas Times*, had in her column, "As I See It," her column was titled—"Well, well, the 'governor' has come and went," meaning Governor Adkins had come to Fayetteville and left. Well, there was bad blood between them philosophically, and so on homecoming morning, 1941, Homer Adkins had gotten control of the Board of Trustees, and they voted five to four to relieve J. William Fulbright as president of the university.

[02:26:40] DP: He had become president of the . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . university at a very young age. How old?

PW: Thirty-four years of age.

DP: Thirty-four years of age.

PW: Yeah, yeah.

DP: [*Clears throat*] He had become president in Fayetteville, and to this day, when you see Old Main and Peabody Hall there on the campus, on the beautiful Old Main campus, this is where J. W. Fulbright went to kindergarten and grade school, right there at the base of Old Main.

[02:27:05] PW: And actually a bachelor's degree.

DP: And—all right.

PW: We used to kid Senator about spending about seventeen years on the campus or something like that. But he'd gone all the way from the kindergarten, Peabody Academy, to a bachelor's degree in which later he won the Rhodes Scholarship.

[02:27:32] DP: So Homer Adkins had—the governor at that time—bad blood with the Fulbright family, with the newspaper, and with Mrs. Fulbright in particular. He gathered the trustees together in a vote, and by five to four, relieved Senator Fulbright . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . of his position . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . as president of the University of Arkansas.

PW: That's right. All politics.

DP: And he fired him, basically.

PW: Yeah.

[02:27:59] DP: And so Fulbright was thirty-four or so at that time, and then what was his next career?

PW: Well, along about there, he had become very desired for public speaking. That was really not his forefront because he was more academic. But he had become a rather good speaker and did a lot of visiting. So in 1942 he ran for the House of

Representatives from the Third District and was elected to the United States House of Representatives. Very popular there. I think it was during that time that some of his interests started developing in international study because he had benefitted from that, and actually, after he got his Rhodes degree completed, he traveled Europe for about a year with an Austrian gentleman, a former professor himself, who made sort of a hobby of taking affluent young people on tours of Europe. So Fulbright toured Europe for about a year before he came home to Fayetteville.

DP: Right.

[02:29:28] PW: And that had broadened his horizon. And so a very interesting career, and it gave him an understanding of world affairs. The people throughout the world. We are not alone. There is an entire world out there. And so somewhere along there, as I remember, he introduced legislation to create the United Nations, a world league of people to be concerned with public affairs. And so that was sort of the forerunner of the United Nations, frankly. And he was very prominent in the Congress, but then in [19]44 there was a seat available in the United States Senate, and it was, of all people, Hattie Caraway. And so he entered the race and defeated Hattie Caraway after she had become the first woman ever elected to the United

States Senate.

[02:30:44] DP: But the word was is that Senator Fulbright, or at that time, Congressman Fulbright, decided to take on Senator Caraway, not being necessarily against her, but because he sensed, and he felt, and his friends felt that someone was going to challenge her and win that nomination.

PW: That's right.

DP: And they would be basically ensconced for a good while. Maybe ten, twenty, thirty years in the United States Senate. So he made that race, and he had—so he defeated Hattie . . .

PW: Hattie Caraway.

DP: . . . Caraway . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . who had gotten elected to the Senate . . .

PW: Actually . . .

DP: . . . in her own right in 1932.

PW: That's right.

DP: In her own right.

PW: That's right.

DP: After Thaddeus, her husband, had passed away suddenly.

PW: That's right.

DP: Yeah.

[02:31:30] PW: And the thing that makes all of that interesting is that Arkansas was rather early in women's participation [*squeaking sound*] in politics. Remember that your own mother was very active in women's rights and things, and Arkansas started permitting women to vote as early as 1920, thereabout, very early. And so Hattie Caraway not only succeeded her husband—and her administrative aide was Garrett Whiteside. A good woman with a man behind her to give her advice.

DP: As . . .

[02:32:18] PW: And so she became very prominent. And then she was very well known, but we had also had Mrs. Oldfield from Batesville, Arkansas, elected to the House of Representatives to succeed her husband in about 1928 or [192]9. Then in about 1930, Effiegene Locke Wingo of De Queen, Arkansas, was elected to succeed her husband, Otis Wingo, and she had been elected at a—to the full—following term. And so Mrs. Wingo actually was quite well qualified to be in the Congress and was there for about three and a half years and became quite famous. So Arkansas did well in Democratic politics or politics at all in those years because women had the right and activity of entering into politics.

[02:33:34] DP: So, Parker, in the Fulbright office you—what—did

you have a particular title or role in Senator Fulbright's office at the time?

PW: Well, I was titled special assistant.

DP: Special assistant.

PW: Which meant that you did just about anything that you could do to be helpful to the office holder, the senator, in this case.

[02:33:58] DP: Now, there was a—ultimately, this would've happened in the [19]60s, but a young student from Georgetown came into the office one day, allegedly. This is the grapevine, you might say, from Washington, and he saw Mr. Lee Williams, who was the chief of staff, called administrative assistant, and he said, "Mr. Williams, I'm so-and-so. I'm from Hot Springs, Arkansas, and I'm in Georgetown, and I'm having to drop out because I do not have the money to complete this semester." Now—and Mr. Williams says, "Well, I'm sorry, but we only have two jobs, and they're both part-time jobs." And this young man says, "I'll take them both." [PW laughs] That was allegedly. And who was that young man, of course?

[02:34:49] PW: Well—and, actually, the precursor to that time was that the uncle of this gentleman, named Raymond Clinton from Hot Springs, an automobile dealer, was a friend of Senator J. W. Fulbright. So he called and said, "My nephew is going to school

in Washington at Georgetown University, and he is about to bankrupt me. And I know that you have student interns from time to time." And Senator said, "Well, send him to see us."

And Bill Clinton came and visited with the senator and us, and he was given a job of messenger boy [*DP laughs*] for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and that meant that after he went to classes in the morning, he would come to the Hill in the afternoon and deliver messages from the three offices back and forth of the Senate Foreign . . .

DP: And visit with . . .

PW: . . . Relations Committee.

DP: . . . everyone along the way.

PW: And visit with everyone.

DP: Yeah.

PW: And his . . .

DP: Meeting a lot of people.

PW: . . . name was Bill Clinton. William Jefferson Clinton.

DP: Isn't that amazing?

[02:36:09] PW: And then in afternoons, the fun of that memory was that I had a [19]58 Thunderbird, the first Thunderbird that came out with a four-passenger automobile instead of the two-passengers, which [19]55, [19]56, and [19]57 had. So a

Thunderbird in 1958 had four passengers. It was black and white. Interior of black and white on the interior. And so I bought a Thunderbird.

DP: Don't you wish you still had it?

PW: I do. I kept it forty-five years. [*DP laughs*] But, in any event, [*DP laughs*] Bill Clinton would come down in the afternoon, get in the Thunderbird with me, and we would drive from the Capitol to Georgetown because I lived in Georgetown at that time. And he would ride with me in my [19]58 . . .

[02:37:11] DP: And he did not have a car at that time.

PW: He didn't have a car.

DP: No, no.

PW: And so it, you know, it was a way of becoming a friend with somebody who was young, filled with aspirations. And we had the famous thing called the Watts telephone line, and we would make it available to Bill Clinton to call his friends in Arkansas and school, you know, wherever. Maybe even Hillary. They had met somewhere along there at Yale, I think. So in any event, some good memories of Bill.

[02:37:49] DP: Parker, I can remember one event in the last few years at the Clinton Library or at the Clinton School—probably at the Clinton School, maybe a luncheon. And Bill Clinton was the

speaker, or he was there, as I recall. And he looked out in the audience, and as he can do like no one else, he scanned the audience. He recognized his friend, Parker Westbrook, and he jolted and said something like this: "Oh, my goodness, here is Parker Westbrook, a walking human computer" or "a human encyclopedia." And I can't remember [*PW laughs*] how—do you remember the term?

PW: Yes, I do.

DP: What did he say?

[02:38:29] PW: Well, a . . .

DP: Encyclo . . .

PW: "The first of the professional encyclopedia."

DP: Yes, that's it.

PW: Something like that.

DP: That's it.

[02:38:36] PW: And actually, from time to time, would say that I was the computer before computers . . .

DP: You developed in . . .

PW: . . . had been invented.

DP: You developed in that office a system, an index-card system.

And if you said, "Now, let's see, who do we know in Marmaduke? Who do we know in Jonesboro."

PW: "Or Palestine."

DP: "Who do we know [*PW laughs*] in Palestine. Who do we know in Levy, Arkansas." You could—course, we didn't have computers. You could just reach in that box and pull out those towns, and there would be a number of people with not only their names but their spouse's name, their children's name, maybe even their dog's name.

PW: That's right.

[02:39:18] DP: Who—because you were an encyclopedia [*PW laughs*] for the state of Arkansas.

PW: And Bill Clinton . . .

DP: And no one . . .

PW: . . . knew that.

DP: . . . else . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . had that in their office except . . .

[02:39:28] PW: Well, that was . . .

DP: . . . Senator Fulbright.

PW: . . . fun. And the fact, actually—see, in a way, I had kind of grown up with Bill Clinton because his mother, Virginia Cassidy, was a friend of my sister when they both worked in Hope, Arkansas, my sister at the Southwest . . .

DP: Lucille.

PW: . . . Proving Ground . . .

DP: Yes.

PW: . . . and Bill Clinton's mother was the anesthetist at the Julia Chester Hospital.

DP: Mh-hmm.

[02:39:58] PW: And so they knew each other. Their friend was a girl named Doris Dunn, whose husband was a policeman in Hope, and he every once in a while confiscated some moonshine [*DP laughs*], and so from time to time [*laughs*] he would give me a bottle, quart jar, of moonshine, and I would take it back with me to Washington, DC, transporting alcohol across state lines, and entertain my friends in Washington, DC . . .

DP: With moonshine liquor from Arkansas.

PW: With moonshine liquor from Arkansas. Some wonderful memories.

[02:40:38] DP: Now, Parker, you had—this is a little sidebar—but one of the little great stories about you and your family and Lucille. Lucille was such a part of your life and such a part of southwest Arkansas, and she herself had an enormous collection of photographs of families, of people, of homes, of businesses—a history of southwest Arkansas. And I'm sure that is being

utilized to some extent in a good way at this time.

[02:41:11] PW: Well, actually, she had been at that time the state history commission headed by Dr. John Ferguson, who was from Nashville, Arkansas, in my graduating class from the Nashville High School. They would designate people to be sort of county historians. So for thirty years, Lucille was the Howard County historian. She was interested in Arkansas history considerably—genealogy also. She also was the interim director, they called it, of the Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives for about twenty-four years. *[Laughs]* So she knew a lot about history, Arkansas, places . . .

[02:42:06] DP: Well, not only . . .

PW: . . . events, people.

DP: . . . is there a Lucille Westbrook Award, which is an award of some acclaim. There's also a Parker Westbrook Award.

PW: Well . . .

DP: These are two awards that are given annually to those historians of Arkansas history who excel in doing—making some contribution.

PW: Well, and that happened, frankly, when you were governor of Arkansas, in 1975 or [19]76. Tom Dillard . . .

DP: Tom Dillard.

PW: . . . now head of Special Collections at Fayetteville on behalf of the Arkansas Historical Association, came through and visited with your friend and my friend, David Demuth, of Benton, Arkansas, who married Cherry Gingles, and [*DP laughs*] he proposed that we help him out by raising funds to create two awards for the historical association. And so after some discussion of what they could do, I said to David DeMuth, "Well, David, you give them some money in behalf or in honor of Violet Gingles, and I will give them some endowment in behalf of my sister, the increasingly famous historian [*DP laughs*], in her honor." So those were established by the Arkansas Historical Commission.

[02:43:41] DP: The Lucille Westbrook and the Violet Gingles award.  
Yes.

PW: Yeah. And they continue . . .

DP: Yeah.

PW: . . . to be given every year by the Arkansas Historical Association. The Gingles Award is primarily for statewide historical matters—history. And the Lucille Westbrook Award is for local, state—local, regional, or people in history awards, and they're still given. And in fact, there is an award given in the name of Susie Pryor that is the Susie Pryor . . .

DP: Our family is very honored that that award . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . is given . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . each year. Thank you.

PW: That's right.

DP: Thank you.

PW: And so we've had some wonderful memories, you and I and thousands of other people.

[02:44:33] DP: Now, Parker, we're gonna come back in a moment to some of the boards and commissions and panels that you are a part of and have been a part of. But let me—let's conclude your time, your tenure, your service in Washington. Senator Fulbright runs for reelection in 1974, and a very popular governor, Dale Bumpers, challenges him in the Democratic Primary at that time, and Governor Bumpers prevails. And Senator Fulbright then steps aside. Dale Bumpers becomes our new senator. And so what does Parker Westbrook do then?

PW: Well, let's [*DP laughs*] also discuss that in some recognition of the fact that Fulbright actually represented—and Brooks Hays and Judge Trimble and Mr. Norrell, to a degree—they all were rather progressive in some of their views. And they were highly

recognized for their interest in world affairs. So that was interesting that that concluded the way it did, because we thought, Betty Fulbright and I thought, and several other people did that maybe Governor Bumpers, who we had helped create as a progressive member of the Arkansas genre of politicians, that we had helped create him and that he had possibly misled Fulbright to think that he might not—that he would not run against him. And of course, before the ticket closed, Dale Bumpers did . . .

DP: That has been a discussion and I—we won't even . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: We don't need to go there.

PW: Yeah.

DP: But that has been a—an issue of much discussion.

PW: That's right.

DP: And—about—along about that time.

PW: That's right.

[02:46:46] DP: But at any rate, you were in Washington with Senator Fulbright, and you helped close his office down.

PW: That's right.

DP: And . . .

PW: Oh . . .

DP: . . . then you came—you said, "I'm coming back to Arkansas," I believe.

PW: Yeah. Tons of papers—documents. He had saved copies of speeches that he had made to civic clubs; copies of speeches he'd made as president of the University of Arkansas. We had all of those papers relating to his entire service. I think we had five or six trucks come from Fort Smith to haul all of those papers back.

[02:47:26] DP: And I want to put in a word. You've mentioned Tom Dillard and . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . Special Collections.

PW: Yeah.

DP: Any citizen of our state today or any of the states—and they do it constantly—can go to Fayetteville, Arkansas, to the Mullins Library; go downstairs and you can see the Fulbright life. You can ask for a speech he made to the De Queen Lion's Club in . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . in 1962.

PW: Yeah, yeah.

DP: And they can pull it up. It's amazing what they can do. And all of his papers, his committee hearings that he chaired on

Vietnam; his discussions with a young Bill Clinton for example.

[02:48:05] Everything that you can imagine about the life of J. W. Fulbright, you can find right there in the Mullins Library that Tom Dillard and his great staff have assembled . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . over the years.

PW: That's right.

DP: Just absolutely . . .

PW: And . . .

DP: . . . a fabulous collection.

[02:48:21] PW: As a part of my assignment to do whatever needed to be done, I oversaw the packing up of all of those boxes and boxes and boxes of things to send to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

DP: Right. Well, they're there today and they're . . .

PW: They are.

DP: . . . being well looked after . . .

PW: They are. They are.

[02:48:41] DP: . . . I might say. So you got all that moved down to Fayetteville to the Ozarks and what have you. So then what did you do, Parker, after . . .

PW: Oh, well . . .

DP: . . . you left Washington?

PW: . . . after that, I decided that I would just retire and come back home and do some of the other things that I've wanted to do. And, actually—see, while I was there with Fulbright—after he won the [19]68 campaign with no problem, I had decided to get into the hobby of saving historic properties. And I bought an 1807 house in Waterford, Virginia, and spent my . . .

DP: Mh-hmm. Very good.

PW: . . . weekends out there restoring a house that had been abandoned for thirteen years and whatever. And so I brought it back in such a way that it won an award from the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce for the excellence of my restoration. And I still have today all of the Quaker furniture, handmade, that was made in the village and vicinity of Waterford, Virginia, by Quakers. It is in my apartment.

[02:50:05] DP: And that's not the first log home that you restored.

PW: Well, of course, a few of them came later along the way, in Nashville, Arkansas.

DP: And they wound up in your back yard . . .

PW: Yes.

DP: . . . in Nashville, Arkansas.

PW: But now let's . . .

DP: And in Old Washington, Arkansas.

PW: Yeah, but let's bring me back up to Washing—from Washington to Little Rock. When Governor David Pryor [*DP laughs*], who I had known as a page boy for Congressman Oren Harris in about 1950, said, "You can't retire. You've got to work with me." So I became, apparently, special assistant to Governor David Pryor. And the fun of that was sometimes seeing who got in to see you and who did not . . .

DP: You were the gatekeeper.

PW: . . . get in to see you.

DP: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

[02:50:57] PW: And you and Shirley McFarland and I were on a triumvirate committee to put people on boards and commissions. So . . .

DP: We met at the governor's mansion out there around that old round table.

PW: That's right.

DP: You member that?

PW: Yes, I do. I do.

DP: Yeah, we would come up with these ideas and . . .

PW: And I remember talking—while you have us in the governor's mansion—your mother, Susie, was there one time and said,

"Now, Parker, what are you doing with the governor?" And I said, "Well, Susie, first, every morning I build a fire in the fireplace." [*Laughter*] So we [*clears throat*]*—*that brings us back to the capitol building. But a part of that—after we clarified that it was safe to build a fire in your fireplace with the chief of fire department in Little Rock, Arkansas, we filled boards and commissions. And that was a good memory because you put some wonderful people [*squeaking sound*] on state boards and commissions who served with great effect otherwise.

[02:52:16] And one of them was Elsjane Trimble Roy. There was a vacancy on the Supreme Court, and I said, "Well, Governor, for consideration, how about the first woman on the Supreme Court of Arkansas?" [*Unclear words*]

TM: You want to get a drink?

[Tape stopped]

[02:52:40] DP: So Elsjane Trimble Roy . . .

PW: Yeah. I said, "How about the first woman on the Supreme Court of Arkansas, and this"—You said, "Who?" And I said, "Elsijane Trimble Roy." And then I think Governor Pryor said, "Who is Elsjane Trimble Roy?" And [*laughs*] so I called. I told the governor who she was. I called her at Fort Smith—a law clerk, at that time, to federal judge Paul X. Williams—and said,

"Elsijane, next time you're in Little Rock, come to see the governor." And she substantially said the same thing that Governor Pryor said. She said, "What does the governor want to see me for?" [*Laughs*] [02:53:29] So she came, and you appointed her to the Supreme Court of Arkansas. She went on to become a federal judge. Then along the way we had another vacancy on the Supreme Court. And I said, "Well, Governor, how about the first African American on the Supreme Court?" And you said, "Who?" And I said, "The judge from Pine Bluff, Arkansas," . . .

DP: George Howard.

PW: . . . "George Howard." And you said you knew him, and you said, "Okay." So you ended up with the first woman and first Black on the Supreme Court of Arkansas.

[02:54:11] DP: And almost the first woman appointed to the State Highway Commission, Patsy Thomasson, but . . .

PW: Patsy Thomasson. You're exac. . .

DP: . . . Governor Cherry had named a woman for a short interim period, as I recall.

PW: And her name was, what, Lawson?

DP: Lawson. Yes.

PW: Yeah.

DP: Willie Lawson. Miss Willie Lawson, I believe.

PW: Willie Lawson from Hamburg or somewhere.

DP: But Patsy became a member of the commission to serve a full . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . term, I believe . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . that's correct.

[02:54:34] PW: And Patsy was well known and . . .

DP: So we blazed some . . .

PW: . . . widely known.

DP: . . . pretty good trails . . .

PW: Yes, we did.

DP: . . . in those times. And . . .

[02:54:41] PW: And then, also, in that same connection along there, see, were several people to boards and commissions. One of them was an appointee to the Henderson State University Board of Trustees, and I said, "How about Mrs. Clardy?" It turned out that when you appointed her to the board of Arkansas—Henderson State University, she was a student at Henderson State University. So that was the first student to be on a board of trustees of a state university.

[02:55:22] DP: Well, another controversial appointment—not because she was controversial, but her position was during that period—a board membership came available or up for appointment at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, and we named a faculty member, Jackie Douglas . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . to the board of trustees . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . at the University of Arkansas.

PW: Okay.

DP: And that was very controversial because board of trustees are supposed to be . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . kind of independent . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . from the faculty or vice versa. But anyway, it worked out well, and she was an outstanding member of the board and gave insight from a faculty member's . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . perspective as to what . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . what the university . . .

PW: Very highly qualified.

DP: . . . should do. So she was very, very qualified and a very . . .

[02:56:13] PW: Well, and . . .

DP: And just passed away in . . .

PW: . . . another person . . .

DP: . . . recent months.

PW: . . . who you appointed was our friend whose name was Ruth Polk Patterson, to the Commemorative Commission. The first African American woman to be on the Arkansas Commemorative Commission. And that was unpopular with some people. But a gentleman who was actually a member of the State Senate called and criticized that, and I said, "How long have you been in Arkansas? How long has your wife been in Arkansas?" And he said, "Nineteen-something." And I said, "Well, Mrs. Ruth Polk Patterson has been in Arkansas since 1827 [*DP laughs*] when her family got to Montgomery County, Arkansas." Later, got down to Howard County, Arkansas.

[02:57:19] DP: And now we can see why Bill Clinton looked into that audience and said, "There's Parker Westbrook. [*PW laughs*] A walking encyclopedia of Arkansas history."

PW: Well, I think the fun of that remark was—even Senator Fulbright had said one time—I thought that [*clears throat*—not only did I

know somebody from Palestine, Yancopin, Success . . .

DP: [*Laughs*] Wabbaseka and everywhere.

PW: Wabbaseka . . .

DP: Yeah.

PW: . . . or wherever. But I also knew what kind of dog . . .

DP: That's right.

PW: . . . they had.

DP: That's right.

[02:57:52] PW: And a part of that is on the day that Senator

Fulbright actually resigned from the United States Senate on December 31, 1974, he autographed a photograph for me in which he mentioned that my being a genuine honor or something like that—a—an encyclopedia, a town keeper, such as Waterford, Virginia, and all sorts of things, and dated it 12/29 or 12/30 . . .

DP: Right before his . . .

PW: . . . ?1970? before . . .

DP: . . . retirement.

PW: And a lotta people never realized that he actually retired on the thirty-first of December, before the term began on the third of January. And that is in his biographical directory . . .

DP: That is interesting.

PW: . . . that he resigned, and it was a great memory to have had fourteen years with the Fulbrights. And then I came home . . .

TM: Gentlemen. Excuse me, gentlemen.

DP: Now do we need to break? All right.

TM: We need to change our tape here.

DP: All right.

[Tape stopped]

[02:59:14] DP: Parker, one of the things—and we have mentioned the Clinton Library in passing and the Clinton School and your relationship with Bill Clinton—I should say President Clinton. When Senator Fulbright himself left the Senate, and you were boxing up everything, there was a magnificent bronze statue. And I think, if I'm not mistaken, it was not in his office. I believe it was in the Fulbright home. And today that statue sits in the Clinton School of Public Service in a . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . place of great honor. I was . . .

PW: Of which you were the first dean.

DP: Well, that's correct. [*PW laughs*] I was, in fact, the first dean.

[03:00:02] But let's talk about that statue and . . .

PW: Well . . .

DP: . . . that gift a little bit.

PW: . . . what really happened—he actually somewhere along there had given it to a landlady of when he was going to law school. And to . . .

DP: Senator—Bill Fulbright had?

PW: Yeah.

DP: In Washington.

PW: And what surprised him was after all of those years, she had willed it back to him in her will. So he got a notice from her lawyer and senators talked with me about it—"What am I going to do with a big statue, statuary object?" And I said, "Well, Senator, let me get Fred Favor," our office ?back? man from De Queen, Arkansas, who had been president of the student body at the University of Arkansas—was working on a law degree in Senator Fulbright's patronage [*clears throat*] in our office. And I said, "We'll go and get the statue." And in fact, I still had the Thunderbird at the time. So we went and got it at a given address. And part of it was in the back seat of my Thunderbird—the bronze part on a marble base, which was in the trunk. So took it to his house, called him to the entrance on Dunbarton—not Dunbarton, but an avenue . . .

DP: Right off of Mass Avenue, and I can't think of the name.

PW: Yeah, right off of Mass Avenue, and I'll think of the name.

[03:01:45] And so got him to the door. And I said, "Well, now, Senator, here is your inheritance." And he looked at the statuary part of it and the other part, and he said, "Well, I don't think I want that old thing." And that was just the question [*DP laughs*—the remark that I needed. And I said, "Well, Senator, if you don't want it, I would love to have it." And he said in his northwest Arkansas drawl, "Well, I think I would like for you to have it."

DP: And so you took it.

[03:02:23] PW: So it was a wonderful statue, and I kept it in my apartment in Washington, DC, for some years, brought it to Nashville, Arkansas, and then gave it to the Clinton School of Public Service as it was opening down in the old Rock Island . . .

DP: That's right.

PW: . . . Choctaw . . .

DP: That's right.

PW: . . . Railroad station. And it is a magnificent piece. Still there.

DP: It's a great addition to that school and it ties—it is a—it's a wonderful tie between the relationship of Senator Fulbright and, once again, with Bill Clinton.

PW: That's right.

DP: That tie.

PW: That's right.

[03:03:05] DP: So there's a . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: There's a great tie there, and I really—I know that . . .

PW: And that was an interesting relationship because, see, Senator, as you know, was rather well-to-do. And Bill Clinton had just the opposite upbringing, but a beautiful brain, a wonderful person. And so it was a good place to put it.

[03:03:26] DP: One little tidbit of history that I remember in, wow, [19]68, I think the student, Bill Clinton, was driving Senator Fulbright in a part of his reelection campaign. One little funny incident [*clicking sounds*] I remember—I was over—going to the Arlington Hotel for some convention, County Judges Association or some convention, and Senator Fulbright was gonna be the speaker. And Bill Clinton drove him up under the rotunda, I guess you would say, in the parking garage, let him out, and Bill Clinton was gonna go park the car. But he went into the hotel. He blocked the driveway and started talking to various people in and out of the hotel and visiting with the delegates and whatever. The car was blocking the driveway in and out of the Arlington Hotel.

PW: That's right.

[03:04:21] DP: Cars were stacked up all the way down the avenue there in Grand Avenue.

PW: Central. Yeah.

DP: Central Avenue, of course. Central Avenue. And no one could—he had the keys in his pockets, young Bill Clinton, the driver, did. And no one could find [PW laughs] Bill Clinton. They found Senator Fulbright, but he said, "Bill Clinton must have those keys in his pocket. He's a student driver that I'm"—so anyway, they finally, after maybe thirty minutes found him, but there was a lot of traffic backed up on Central Avenue and [PW laughs] also in the parking garage.

PW: Yeah.

DP: That was one of the little funny stories.

[03:04:58] PW: Well now, one good story there—also on that same trip around, Bill Clinton was driving with Senator Fulbright to Center Point, Arkansas, and called up Bo Reese, who is my uncle. And he was quite a successful farmer and investor and whatever, and they had a wonderful visit and were chatting. And Bill Clinton has told me that he was just kind of shocked—all of a sudden, Bo Reese said, "Now, Senator, I'm gonna tell you what's wrong with you. Your problem has always been you are ten years ahead [DP laughs] of your time." And Bill Clinton

thought that that was just . . .

DP: That was just a . . .

PW: . . . unbelievable.

DP: . . . grand . . .

PW: What was . . .

DP: . . . comment.

PW: . . . Bo Reese going to say to Senator Fulbright? And he . . .

DP: And that was the problem.

PW: . . . chastised him for . . .

DP: "Ten years ahead of your time."

PW: . . . and ten years ahead of his time. [*Laughs*]

[03:06:05] DP: Well, here you were, Parker, you had gone to Washington. You had worked with Congressman Boyd Tackett, Congressman Took Gathings, Senator J. W. Fulbright, and then you come back home. And what you really want to do is engage yourself in preservation and historical interests and redoing old log homes and whatever, and really making a contribution in Arkansas historical projects. And then I call you up when I'm in the governor's office, and I never will forget you said, "No, no, I can't. I'm gonna be involved in all kind of things. I'm out of politics." And I said, "Well, good. I'll see you Monday morning." So [*laughs*] here you came.

PW: At eight o'clock. [*Laughs*]

DP: And here you came to Little Rock, and for . . .

PW: Well . . .

DP: . . . four grand years, we had a lotta fun, and I enjoyed every second of that relationship with you. But since that time, you left the governor's office, and then, really, when you did sort of get out of politics, as you—you really kicked into high gear in the preservation field and in the world of history that you love and you're so committed to. [03:07:15] Talk about some of those positions and boards and task forces that you . . .

PW: Well . . .

DP: . . . have been involved with.

[03:07:22] PW: And what I think partly happened—see, when I was in Waterford, Virginia, I had met a fellow named Mark and Jill something, and he was a developmental developer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Beach was their name. Jill and Mark Beach. *B-E-A-C-H*. And he urged me that when I got back home to Arkansas that I should be appointed to the Board of Advisors of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which was chartered by the Congress in 1949 as a national group to proceed with saving Arkans—the nation's treasures.

And so shortly thereafter, in fact, 1976, when I was working with

Governor David Pryor, I was first appointed to the Board of Advisors of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. And those are three-year terms, but you can be appointed up to nine years. So I served for nine years as an adviser to the National Trust, meeting all over the nation, dancing with one of the best dancers I've ever danced with, and that was Joan Jennewein, an adviser from [laughter] Florida, Tampa, Florida. We danced from coast to coast. She was a great dancer—better than maybe—or not as good ?of? Helen Brown from Egypt, Arkansas, who was one of the best jitterbug dancers [laughter] I've ever danced with. [Laughter] [03:09:20] So it was a great experience. But as a part of all of that, I got to thinking, "We need to do something to save a lotta properties in Arkansas that need to be saved." And also, in 1975 I had been elected to the Board of Directors of the Pioneer Washington Foundation, which is then and still is the oldest historic preservation group in Arkansas, formed May 16, 1958, in Washington, Arkansas, dedicated to serving historic Washington. And there is no town in Arkansas like Washington, Arkansas. In addition to being the oldest continuous postal facility, dating to February 23, 1820, it is also the most historically intact town so as—as so the combination of architectural buildings—mostly Greek Revival—

are still there.

[03:10:38] DP: Parker, it might be of special interest here at this moment of, speaking of Old Washington, of talking about how Washington, Old Washington or historic Washington actually became the capital of Arkansas at one time. Let's talk about that . . .

PW: Well . . .

DP: . . . for just a moment.

PW: In that famous conflagration or division of the nation in 1861, the Civil War occurred. In fact, I had an uncle—a great-grandfather who was killed in the battle of Wilson's Creek, Missouri, in the Civil War. And he was killed in 1864 in the battle of Wilson's Creek. But at that time, it was a bad time in American history. And so the Union forces finally took control of Little Rock, Arkansas, the capital. Remember that the first capital of Arkansas had been down at Arkansas Post, then in 1821, William E. Woodruff and his paper and others moved from Arkansas Post to Little Rock, which became the capital city in 1821. And so the Union forces had taken over Washington and so the governor, whose name was . . .

DP: The Union forces had taken over Little Rock.

PW: Little Rock. Yeah.

DP: Yes, Little Rock.

[03:12:14] PW: And so the governor at the time packed up the records—major records—of the state of Arkansas by wagon and took them by way of Hot Springs on down to Washington, Arkansas. And Washington, being the old city that it was, it—and there is an 1836 capitol building there, which became the Confederate capital of Arkansas. And that building was constructed in 1836 when Arkansas became . . .

[03:12:52] DP: And how long was . . .

PW: . . . a state.

DP: . . . historic Washington the capital of the state?

PW: Oh, only from [18]63 to [18]65.

DP: So about two years.

PW: Yeah, about two years.

DP: And then the capital moved back . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . to Little Rock. Yeah.

PW: And several sessions of the Legislature—Confederate government met in Washington, Arkansas, which was the Confederate capital of the government of Arkansas at that time, which was never taken over down there. But they came down to go to—all through the state. And they were defeated down

about Arkadelphia or somewhere, diverted over to Camden, Arkansas. Battle of Jenkins' Ferry or whatever . . .

DP: And Poison Springs. Right.

PW: Yeah—and right—and came back to Little Rock. [03:13:45] And that was all over. But Washington was very prominent in early Arkansas. It was very traveled. The—an early road in Arkansas was the Southwest Trail, developed from near St. Genevieve, St. Louis, Missouri—came down into Arkansas in the—Davidsonville, which was the first post office in Arkansas—state park there now, Davidsonville—came on down to Little Rock, went on down the way—Malvern, whatever—the Southwest Trail, which ended at Fulton, Arkansas, on the Red River. And across the Red River was the Republic of Texas. And so that gave Washington a lot of notoriety in the history books and in Arkansas's political history, actually. That was a very famous stopping place. About two or three trails cross there. There was a trail from Mississippi River to Fort Towson in Missouri—in Oklahoma—that came through Washington. The Southwest Trail went down, and there was also later a road from Washington down to Shreveport on the Red River. So Washington was very prominent economically and also politically. [03:15:23] Some of the first members of the Uni—well, not first, but some of the early members from

Arkansas to the federal government was Jaka Jones from Washington, Arkansas, who was in the Senate of the United States for many years. Edward Cross was in the House of Representatives. There were—Rufus Garland and his brother, Augustus Garland, who became a senator and who also was a—the head of the Department of Justice . . .

DP: From Washington, Arkansas.

PW: From Washington, Arkansas.

[03:16:05] DP: What was the largest number of people, populationwise that . . .

PW: At that time, about the time of the Civil War, Washington had 750 people. But as a result of the war going on, there were hundreds of other people settling in that area to get out of the hands of the Union forces.

DP: I see.

[03:16:33] PW: So Washington has been prominent for a long time . . .

DP: Yes, it has.

PW: . . . in Arkansas history.

DP: And it has been given new prominence because of you and your commitment to it. I can remember years and years—you would every day drive from Nashville . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . Arkansas to Washington, Arkansas, to help in the restoration effort of . . .

PW: And . . .

DP: . . . Old Washington.

PW: And the reason for that was that Senator Olen Hendrix was from Antoine, Arkansas—local pronunciation "AN-twine." And Talbot Feild—*F-E-I-L-D*—was in the House of Representatives. They promoted the development of a saving of the village of Washington, Arkansas, and they helped Judge Pilkington organize the Pioneer Washington Foundation in 1958, when both Olen Hendrix and Talbot Feild had influence in the state legislature.

[03:17:41] DP: Well, Parker, you're—I think you're downplaying your role in the restoration and bringing back to life Old Washington. You were on the original Old Washington board, I believe.

PW: Well, as of 1975 . . .

DP: I see . . .

PW: I was . . .

DP: Yeah.

PW: . . . first elected to the board down there. But see, that group dates back to 1958, so I was a late person. But a lot of people

who were very prominent in Arkansas affairs—George Peck from Texarkana.

DP: Right.

PW: Earl Jones. Remember . . .

DP: Sure.

PW: . . . the Legislature. Talbot Feild, Judge Pilkington, B. K. Edwards—multi-millionaire construction man from Hope, Arkansas, with a collection of knives and pistols and guns.

[03:18:35] DP: Now, do a little present-day travel promotion. If people were to go to Washington, Arkansas, today or the weekend or whatever, what would they want to see? What is significant there?

PW: Well, certainly—now in 1973 it had outgrown, according to President George Peck's opinion, it had outgrown the ability of a local preservation group of people saving the entire village, showing it, making—taking advantage about it, teaching people about the history of Washington. So they invited the state park people in 1973 to come down with the Old Washington Historic State Park. Well, on that subject, Richard Davies, director, who you had appointed to the Parks and Tourism [*laughs*] Commission. We decided that it was redundant to say Old Washington Historic State Park. So in about 2007 [*camera*

*clicks]* the name was changed to simply Historic Washington State Park. [03:19:58] And the agreement there was the state park people kind of show, maintain, and operate, but the Pioneer Washington Foundation would continue to restore and preserve historic buildings, and in some cases, we even picked up buildings that were in old southwest Arkansas families and maybe in some cases abandoned, such as the Woodlawn house. 1853. Very prominent in the life of many Arkansans, such as Missy McSwain, who ended up right now being the keeper of the National Register properties, sort of the hands-on keeper of the National Register in Arkansas. So she was descended from down there through her mother—grandmother, Mrs. McCrary. So a lot—and we picked up and moved five or six or ten houses, and it has become quite active—thousands—three hundred or more thousand people visit Washington every year becau—for one reason because it is increasingly famous, but it is also only six miles from Interstate 30. And let me remind you that Interstate 30 is substantially where the Southwest Trail came across Arkansas, where the Cairo and Fulton Railroad came down in about 1873, creating Hope, Arkansas. And then the modern-day 1960s Interstate 30 goes right down the same way. So all of those—where areas of transportation are virtually parallel as

they cut the state virtually in half.

[03:22:04] DP: Now, Parker, we've talked about your involvement with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We've talked about Old Washington and the restoration there. Now, talk a moment if you would about an organization that you yourself, I think, had established, and that is the State Review Board. Am I correct in saying that?

[03:22:25] PW: Well, the State Review Board—actually, we wondered—I think you technically may have wanted to appoint me to the History Commission. And I said, "Well, Governor, I'd rather be on the State Review Board." And so Joan Vehik checked that out for us legislatively, and so that was when I was appointed to the State Review Board, where we still do that recommending properties for the National Register. But the thing that happened along the way—I, as a volunteer by this time, became very active at the Pioneer Washington Foundation, and Judge Pilkington Sr. was still there. He grew up in Washington, had become a lawyer in Hope, Arkansas, and so I was elected to that board and had free time by now. And so I became the executive director and restoration adviser to the Pioneer Washington Foundation. But what that really meant is that we were restoring and saving historic buildings. And that

became so active and so widely known that somewhere along there we thought, "Well, why don't we form a statewide preservation organization?" So I called together meeting at the old—at Trapnell Hall, meeting at Trapnall Hall, and the president of the National Trust, Michael Ainslie, was there. And having seen Harvey Oswald—what was his name?

DP: Harry Oswald.

[03:24:13] PW: Harry Oswald of the Arkansas Electric Cooperation, whatever. I called the names of everybody and introduced them in theory to the president of the National Trust, Michael Ainslie. Got to the last one—I was copying all of the things that Harry Oswald did coming to Washington, DC, where he could introduce . . .

DP: He could . . .

PW: . . . two hundred . . .

DP: He knew every . . .

PW: . . . people.

DP: . . . person.

PW: With no note. [03:24:44] And I did it, and they thought it was pretty miraculous, but accidentally. It was really accidental. I did not plan to do it. I got to the last one of about fifty and said, "Of course, all of you know Peg Holder." And she said, "You

don't. My name is Peg Smith." [*Laughs and claps hands*]

DP: Oh, [*laughs*] George Rose Smith's . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . wife. Yes.

PW: I have known Peg Holder . . .

DP: Peg Holder . . .

PW: . . . in Waterford, Virginia.

DP: . . . in Waterford, Virginia. Sure.

[03:25:14] PW: So it turned out to be quite fun. [*DP laughs*] But

we—some people told us that we would—a group like that would last six or seven years. Well, we've made it for thirty years. We have become very prominent, brung attention every day with rambles, advice, and other things to the need, the desirability of restoring and saving and adapting for other uses historic architectural . . .

DP: And also of . . .

PW: . . . structure.

DP: . . . protecting particular areas. For example, the state capitol.

PW: That's right.

DP: The Capital Zoning Commission.

PW: That's right.

DP: The area around the governor's . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . mansion. And . . .

PW: Well, they're . . .

DP: . . . protecting, as I remember, too—I don't remember the details—Trapnall Hall.

PW: Oh, yeah.

[03:26:11] DP: I remember you saying, "We can't tear down that building."

PW: No.

DP: "We've got to keep that building for the" . . .

PW: You needed a governor's reception area.

DP: And so . . .

PW: And so it was declared.

DP: And the old—the Capital Hotel, actually.

PW: Yeah. Well, yeah, yeah, yeah.

DP: It was almost on the . . .

PW: Every . . .

DP: . . . chopping block for a parking lot. Yeah.

PW: . . . politician had his headquarters in the Capital Hotel. And the Cassinelli sisters still owned it.

[03:26:38] DP: And I remember when they were about to tear it down and use it as a parking lot. [*PW laughs*] I remember that

Barbara and I went down there one Saturday morning. We were about to move to Washington, DC, to join the US Senate. And we went there, and they were having a sale of the [*PW laughs*] items from the hotel. We still have a hat rack and [*PW laughs*] a chair or two . . .

PW: That's right. [*Laughs*]

DP: . . . that we bought [*laughter*] out of the old Capital Hotel.

And . . .

PW: And—well . . .

DP: . . . lo and behold, as always . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . the women came to the rescue of the state.

PW: That's right.

[03:27:08] DP: And just like the—just the other—recently I was in Washington, DC, in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building right there next door to—just walking distance from the White House. And that building was almost torn down in the 1950s.

PW: That's right.

DP: And the women of Washington, DC . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . rose up and says, "No!" [*Taps something*]

PW: Yeah.

DP: "We're going to preserve that building." And today it's one of the grand buildings . . .

PW: That's right.

DP: . . . in America.

PW: That's right.

[03:27:34] DP: And so is, of course, the Capital Hotel and others.

PW: Well now, a lot of times, as you're saying, women took the leadership.

DP: Absolutely.

PW: And in Arkansas there was Agnes Loewer at the Old State house. There was Georgia Haynes down at Washington, and there was another woman very prominent in saving property. And one of them was, of course, Louise Loughborough, who saved all of those territorial-period buildings, which are now known as Historic Arkansas Museum, and she talked the Legislature in 1938 into forming the Territorial Restoration Commission. So as you're saying, women were leaders in a lot of things, and that even happened at [*squeaking sound*] Mount Vernon. The president . . .

DP: Absolutely.

[03:28:31] PW: Yeah, where the Mount Vernon Ladies' Society is still in existence today, administering what happens at Mount

Vernon. So a lot of things happened, but we've had a big time at Washington and with the Historic Preservation Alliance, which turns out to be very effective. And we've had several lifetime achievers, your mother being the first one in 1981 when we met in Hot Springs, Arkansas. And I think we felt that you were kind of surprised that we were honoring your mother and inviting you to speak [*DP laughs*] at the same time. [*Laughter*]

DP: I was.

PW: But that has . . .

DP: I didn't know she was gonna be there.

PW: And our last honoree was Theodosia Murphy Nolan . . .

DP: Nolan from . . .

PW: . . . who was one of . . .

DP: . . . El Dorado.

PW: . . . one of the founders of the Preservation Alliance in 1981.

[03:29:29] DP: You've also, Parker, been very, very involved with the protection and making it, once again, a grand place—the Old State House that . . .

PW: Well . . .

DP: . . . now is so functional now and used for so many . . .

PW: Yeah.

DP: . . . wonderful functions. And by the way, a little historical sig—

at one time that was our state medical school. That was the state medical school.

PW: The Old State House.

DP: The Old State House.

PW: You're right. You're right.

DP: It sure was.

[03:29:56] PW: And actually, I was on a commission from President Bill Clinton when he appointed me to the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and asked the Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to appoint me as chairman of the committee on National Historic Landmarks. So I chaired the committee when the Old State House—not for its architectural splendor, but the fact that while it was a medical school, they invented, created, some medical professor there did, a cure or something for yellow fever or a medicine that made control of yellow fever possible. [03:30:47] And so that became a National Historic Landmark, which is superior to a National Register property. It is a landmark of national significance, and so that was designated a National Historic Landmark.

[03:31:04] DP: Parker, not only have you helped to preserve buildings and places and certainly to commemorate areas of interest and to make certain that future generations know about

these areas, but also in the English language you have [*PW laughs*] been very much at what we would call a major player.

PW: Well, and . . .

DP: And let's talk about that. You . . .

PW: Well now . . .

DP: Mr. Apostrophe.

PW: [*Laughs*] Well . . .

DP: How do you get a name like that, a reputation like that?

PW: Well—and the question there is, that is actually not anything new. In 1881 a group of historians, headed by Uriah M. Rose, president later of the American Bar Association—his statue is in Statuary Hall . . .

DP: That's right.

PW: . . . in the United States Capitol. And others—John R. Eakin from Washington, Arkansas, editor of the *Washington Telegraph*, one of the oldest papers in Arkansas—1839—determined in a study of the word—as the French who controlled Arkansas at that time ran into a Quapaw word that was pronounced substantially, "Ooh-gone-kwah." It mean to the Quapaw Indians, "down-river people." Whereas Kansas means "up-river people." But Arkansas River and the word was understood from the Quapaw language as being the name where they were. In

time, that evolved into the word *A-R-K-A-N-S-A*—[*pronounced*] AR-kan-saw [*bird sounds*] with a broad A or W sound because the French do not even have a W in their alphabet. And so the word on early maps, some of which are in—on exhibit right now in Washington, DC, show Arkansas in 1820 spelled *A-R-K-A-N-S-A*—[*pronounced*] AR-kan-saw.

[03:33:42] DP: And no *S* at the end.

PW: And no *S*. If—in that same 1881 study, they said that the final *S* in Arkansas shall be considered silent. So therefore, if a letter is silent, it was determined that you have to have an apostrophe and another *S* to give it the true and rightful possessive sound, Arkansas's history, Arkansas's people. And one of my great supporters in that movement is not ?only? Uriah Rose and George Rose Smith, his grandson, and a federal United States Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals judge at this time, Judge Buzz Arnold—we all consider and every day are introducing people to Arkansas's true and rightful possessive case. And recently, AETN in the last year adopted apostrophe *S*. Other people every day somebody is using more and more the apostrophe *S*, except the statewide newspaper.

[03:35:12] DP: And so move just a moment, just a slight degree.

When we say Arkansan, that is not correct. Is that—I know I

have used that for years and years and years. It's Arkansawyer.  
Is that correct in your impression?

PW: Well, a lotta people disagree with that. In fact, I have proposed to two or three friends of mine that we actually ought to call ourselves Arkansas-ans. Like we say Ouachita-ans. Omaha-ans. Californians.

DP: Chicagoans . . .

PW: But . . .

DP: . . . or whatever.

PW: Yeah

DP: Yeah.

PW: Yeah. But that's not agreeably as definitive. Or to defend as the word Arkansan. [03:36:09] And so we get—keep going with Arkansan, and I have no problem with it. But I think it's more dignified to call ourselves Arkansans than to call ourselves Arkansawyer. I think Arkansawyer connotes a lesser degree of desirability of our people to call them Arkansawyers.

[03:36:32] DP: Well, I know that you have been out to the State Legislature, and you have lobbied the Legislature. You have gotten particular resolutions passed directing the Legislature's attention to this issue and to this challenge to correct something that has long been needed to be corrected. Yes.

PW: And see, and all of that dates back to 1881, frankly, when the final S on the word was declared silent. So you cannot make a possessive of a letter that doesn't even have a sound. And an apostrophe in itself has no sound. But in our use of the language, when you spell a word you need to put an apostrophe and an S. So in 2007, led by Representative Steve Harrelson of Texarkana, Arkansas, Miller County—he introduced at the support of several of us a concurrent resolution, a proposed concurrent resolution which just sort of said that the spelling of Arkansas's possessive case shall be spelled out—S-A-S-apostrophe-S. And in that resolution, concurrent resolution—it passed by a unanimous voice vote in the Senate and in the House, signed by Governor Beebe. The recommendation is that all agencies of the state government use the proper apostrophe S in their communications. [03:38:22] And so we've gotten a lot of publicity out of that, and Steve Harrelson was actually the grandson of the—is the grandson of the congressman I went to Washington with. . .

DP: Boyd Tackett.

PW: . . . in 1948. So he is now on the Board of the Pioneer Washington Foundation.

DP: Steve Harrelson. Representative Harrelson.

PW: Yes, and now Senator Steve . . .

DP: That's right.

PW: . . . Harrelson. And he has a . . .

DP: That's right.

PW: . . . nice family in Texarkana.

[03:38:50] DP: Now, Parker, another issue that you have been involved in to, actually, to a large extent, you are a firm believer in teaching Arkansas history to Arkansas students.

PW: That's right.

DP: And somehow or another, we have not done well with that.

PW: And Tom Dillard is one of the promoters . . .

DP: He's been one of the strong . . .

PW: . . . of that idea.

DP: . . . advocates.

[03:39:12] PW: Because a lotta people—these little esoteric, strange—the things that we're talking about to a degree are a part of Arkansas's history, which makes it very important. But to a lotta people, those things are not that important. But we are a wonderful state of people, a wonderful group of people. We have generally good attitudes about statewide and international affairs, and we need to promote the state of Arkansas. It's one of the finest states in the nation, and we

ought to revere it. And I wrote a letter a few days ago to the statewide newspaper pointing out to them that they ought to get with all of the rest of us who understands Arkansas's true and rightful possessive case. And [*laughs*] get with us on—at the spelling of its possessive case.

DP: Kay. Let's take one quick break there. You don't . . .

[Tape stopped]

[03:40:18] DP: Well, Parker, this has really been fun for Scott and myself to have the honor and the high privilege of sitting with a dear and—I don't want to say an old friend, but [*PW laughs*] a friend of long standing, let's say it that way. And just sort of reminiscing about our lives and how they have intertwined and have intersected together all these many times and many years. But during this interview I kept thinking about how much we appreciate Bud and Kim Whetstone here in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Strong supporters of the historical movements of our state and the preservation issues that challenge all of us. And we appreciate so much the Whetstones letting us use their lovely home here in Arkansas for this . . .

PW: And their collection.

DP: . . . for this occasion, looking out over the beautiful Arkansas River. Parker, you have had—we're going to wind up now. You

have [*squeaking sound*] had the opportunity to travel, to listen, to learn, to study, to read, and to know just about every section of this country and of this state. Let's talk about Arkansas just a moment as we conclude. Tell us about this state and its people. Are we to the right, to the left? Are we populist? Are we progressive? Are we in the Dark Ages? Are we hillbillies? Are—what are we? Who are we?

[03:41:52] PW: Well, in a real observation of that point, I'm gonna say that Winthrop Rockefeller—we mentioned him a moment ago—probably had as much to do with changing the political scene in the state of Arkansas as anybody, because with his knowledge and his name and with his own experiences, familywise and otherwise, his appearance in Arkansas was very popular, and he led us to a rationality that possibly we needed at the very time that Winthrop Rockefeller ran for and was elected governor of Arkansas.

DP: 1966.

PW: Though Republican. Yes. It made a transition—using that word—a transition in the political image, I think, of Arkansas. But in talking about the image of Arkansas, in traveling from Hawaii to Maine with the two presidential appointments that I had, I always time—found the time—took the time to say good

things about Arkansas and its people. We've had some wonderful people—well known—Dorothy Shaver from Center Point, Howard County—grew up in Mena, Polk County, Arkansas—the first woman to become president of a major American merchandising firm, Lord and Taylor. Now, she came to Washington and spoke to us, the Arkansas State Society, in 1950. Years ago. But her father had been the first sheriff of Howard County, Arkansas, in 1873. William Dillard, with his chain of merchandising facilities throughout the nation, came from Mineral Springs, Nashville, Arkansas. His first store was in Nashville. We had Sam Walton, and the Walton stores are known throughout the world. We've had famous, wonderful people . . .

[03:44:12] DP: The Tysons . . .

PW: . . . from Arkansas.

DP: . . . from Springdale and . . .

PW: Yes.

DP: . . . people like . . .

PW: And Maya Angelou . . .

DP: Sure.

PW: . . . who grew up with her grandmother in Stamps, Lafayette County, Arkansas. On and on. We have had wonderful,

wonderful people, nationally known, from Arkansas. Glen Campbell, the musician—other musicians from Arkansas. Recently we celebrated Jimmie—Johnny Cash—grew up in poverty in Cleveland County, Arkansas—got to Dyess, Arkansas, but he could sing. On and on and on. We have had wonderful Arkansas people. Jerry Jones from Hempstead County, Arkansas, with the Dallas Cowboys, is an Arkansan. So we have had a great number of well known and widely productive, influential, desirable people.

[03:45:16] DP: I always feel that Arkansas—among the other Southern states—comparing us, let's say, to Mississippi and Georgia and Alabama and many others that we are a more progressive people. We're a more progressive state, I've always thought, in our thinking process.

PW: Well, I certainly agree with you. I think it is, you know, noticeably—and to have had people—worldwide, internationally known, like J. W. Fulbright. In some countries they said that Fulbright was more known than Coca-Cola. [03:45:55] So we have produced wonderful people. We have had people in the cabinet of the United States. John Snyder and others from all over Arkansas who have been in nationally recognized, responsible positions from the state of Arkansas. And in our

schools of Arkansas, we need to be thorough in teaching Arkansas history. It's not all history. It is something that creates—our lives create history. We are a part of history ourselves. With all of this technological work now, cell phones and Internets and even what we're doing here today was unbelievably by people fifty years ago. But they were wonderful people ?in? making programs possible and available to other people at that time. And what Alice Walton is now doing with her . . .

DP: Crystal Bridges.

[03:46:59] PW: Crystal Bridges is just . . .

DP: I've had calls from friends in several states wanting to know, "When is it going to be open? When can we come to Crystal Bridges?"

PW: November.

DP: It's gonna be mid-November.

PW: Yeah.

DP: I believe.

PW: And friends . . .

DP: Yeah, right before Thanksgiving.

PW: . . . of mine in Florida who I knew in National Trust and other things.

DP: They're coming.

[03:47:17] PW: Presidential commissions are interested in people from Arkansas who they read about in the newspaper. They hear them sing on the television. They are aware of all of the wonderful things we've done in Arkansas. We have been through some bad times. We have survived some undesirable moments in American history. But we have overcome them, and we seek to persevere by doing good things for our image in the world as we make our appearance in the history of the state of Arkansas.

[03:47:52] DP: Well, Parker Westbrook has—I guess you would say has graced us with his presence today for a few hours in talking about his life and the contributions that he has seen made and that he has made. He's also talked about some of the icons that our state has produced. But there's no more iconic figure—more, you might say, ingrained, I think, in the history of Arkansas, than the one that we're interviewing today. [PW *laughs*] And that is Parker Westbrook. [*Laughs*] Parker Westbrook, what a fabulous—what a fabulous career you have had. What a commitment. What a passion. And above all, what an inspiration to the rest of us as we have learned from you, we have watched you, we have seen your relentless pursuits to pass

our history and to pass our state's beliefs and our soul, you might say, on to future generations so that they may gain a few ideas and some knowledge from what we were doing in this lifetime. And we hope that this interview will be played for many years to come to inspire other people to reach out and . . .

PW: Well . . .

[03:49:18] DP: . . . do so some things . . .

PW: I am . . .

DP: . . . that . . .

PW: . . . honored . . .

DP: Worthy to be—things that are worthy to be remembered, and that's what you're doing today, isn't it?

[03:49:26] PW: And I'm honored that you say that, because it's a hobby that got out of hand. [*Laughs*]

DP: And, Parker, we are very honored that you yourself are on our Pryor Center Board of Advisors, and we have a wonderful board of committed people who are out there trying to preserve our history and preserve the life stories of people who have made a difference. And you have made a difference.

PW: Well, thank you.

DP: And we salute you, and we thank you.

PW: Thank you.

DP: Thank you.

[03:49:58] TM: Very good. Very good. We have been doing one thing lately [*clears throat*] where you would look directly to the camera and say, "I'm proud to be"—we had been saying Arkansan. Now, I . . .

DP: Hmm.

TM: . . . tend to like your Arkansian, so whatever you might want to say there, but basically . . .

PW: I could say, "But are we really Arkansas-ans.

TM: There you go. I [*laughs*—and you look directly in the camera for this.

DP: [*Laughs*] Yeah, you could say that. [*Laughter*]

TM: And hold—and I'm ready.

[03:50:27] PW: Well, do—I'm delighted that we've had this opportunity to talk about all of the wonderful aspects of Arkansas people. I could say, "Thanks to all of you Arkansas people, who should be known or could be known as Arkansas-ans," like Ouachita-ans, Ohioans [*laughter*], but in any event, it has been fun to have been reared and educated and being a part of the scene in Arkansas's famous history. Thank you.

DP: Thank you, Parker.

Joy Endicott: Okay, one more. Will you look right at it and say, "I'm

Parker Westbrook, and I'm proud to be from Arkansas."

DP: You say, "I'm Parker Westbrook, and I'm proud to be from Arkansas." Is that right?

TM: It's right here.

[03:51:22] PW: And I am Parker Westbrook from Route Four, Nashville, Arkansas [*DP laughs*], and I am proud to be an Arkansan.

[End of Interview 03:51:34]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff.]