

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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Randall C. Ferguson Sr.
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
September 30, 2009
Camden, 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 16th 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

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**Scott Lunsford interviewed Randall C. Ferguson Sr. on
September 30, 2009, in Camden Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Okay, we can get started now.

Randall Ferguson Sr.: Okay.

SL: Um—today's date is September 30, 2009. Is that right? Is it
ten?

Bruce Perry: Yes, it's thirty.

RF: Yeah.

SL: It's just nine. Okay. And—uh—we're at the—uh—Randall and—
uh—Lizzie Ferguson residence here in Camden, Arkansas. My
name is Scott Lunsford, and I'm gonna be interviewing Randall
Ferguson. And, Randall, is that your—what's your full name?

RF: Randall Carter Ferguson.

SL: *C-O-T-T-E-R.*

RF: *C-A-R-T-E-R.*

SL: *C-A-R-T-E-R.*

RF: Yes.

[00:00:35] SL: Okay. And—um—Randall, when and where were you
born?

RF: I was born February the seventeenth, nineteen and nineteen in
Hope, Arkansas.

SL: Hope. That's—that's good. Uh—before we go any further, let me ask you this. Randall, we're gonna take these recordings, and they're gonna be housed and archived and preserved forever at the University of Arkansas in—in Fayetteville, Arkansas, in the Mullins Library in the Special Collections Department. And I've—we're both audio and video recording, and I need to ask you now if it's okay that—that that happens with this material and—and you're comfortable with us recording it today.

RF: That's all right.

SL: All right. Thank you very much.

RF: I'm satisfied.

[00:01:23] SL: That's a great answer. Um—so Hope, Arkansas?

Um—um—you—what were your parents' names?

RF: My mother was named Lula Hawkins, and my father was named Henry Walter Ferguson.

[00:01:39] SL: Okay. And—um—what—um—what did your father do for a living?



RF: Well, he did a lot of different things. He was a—well, he was a-studyin' to be a lawyer when his father died.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: And so he never did finish because his money was cut off. And

so then he—he started a—had a—had a—he had a farm . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: . . . and worked on a farm. And he—he was—he was—he was a politician. He got [*tapping sound*] out and beat the bushes for people to get 'em elected. And—uh—he was appointed—uh—postmaster of Fulton in the 1800s, and—uh—when they found out he was black, they burnt the post office down.

[00:02:38] SL: Now is this your father or your grandfather?

RF: My father.

SL: Your father was the—was the postmaster.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: In Fulton, Arkansas. Now where . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: Is that close to Hope? Is that . . .

RF: That's bout fourteen miles . . .

SL: Fourteen miles.

RF: . . . from Hope.

SL: And—and he was—in the 1800s, he . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: So—um—wow! Uh—and—um—let's talk about that for a moment now. Your—um . . .

BP: S—in the shot.

[00:03:10] SL: How—how did your father become the—the
postmaster there?

RF: He was appointed.

SL: He was appointed. Uh—who—who was it that appointed him?
Was it . . .

RF: I think—I imagine the president—I think is the one that appoints
them.

SL: Yeah, I think that's right.

RF: Mh-hmm.

[00:03:26] SL: Uh—um—and—um—how long was he postmaster?

RF: Fourteen years.

SL: Fourteen years. Now—and did—did I understand that that post
office got burnt down? Is that . . .

RF: Yes, and—uh—they sent United States marshals down there to
guard him till they built another one.

[00:03:46] SL: Now what was all the ruckus about? What—why did
they all of a sudden have this thing about burnin' the thing down
and marshals comin' in to protect your daddy?

RF: Well, because they—they found out he was black.

SL: They—so for fourteen years, that community—Fulton
community—thought that their postmaster was white.

RF: No.

SL: No?

RF: They found out right after he came there.

SL: Oh, okay, okay.

RF: When his wife—they didn't know when he came there. They thought he was white. But when his wife came, they found out he was black.

SL: Oh.

RF: And they burnt the post office down. So the United States marshals came there and guarded him until they built another one. And they appointed him a—a deputy marshal to take care of hisself. And he stayed there fourteen years without anymore problem.

[00:04:32] SL: Now how about that? What—when was it that they burnt that thing down?

RF: It was in the 1800s.

SL: You . . .

RF: I don't remember . . .

SL: . . . don't remember when?

RF: . . . the exact date.

[00:04:41] SL: [*Sniffs*] Um—that is something else. Um—so—and your mom—your mom was a—a housewife—just raised the kids—stayed at home—raised the kids?

RF: That's right.

SL: Uh-huh. Um . . .

RF: But my mother was—it—not—my mother was his second wife.

SL: Okay.

RF: His first wife passed . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . and then he married my mother. But after he left the saloon—after he left the post office, he—he bought a saloon in Texarkana, and he operated it until Prohibition days. And he had a bartender [*SL coughs*] named Richardson, and—uh—when the Prohibition came, he sent him to school to be an embalmer. See, my daddy was a casket maker, too. He built all the caskets, you know, for people. And he sent him to school, and he established—uh—Richardson Funeral Home in Texarkana.

SL: Well, how bout that?

RF: And it's still goin'.

[00:05:43] SL: It's still goin'. So—father was a—a postmaster and a—a—a casket maker? That's some mighty fine carpentry work there . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . to do that. He was in the saloon business till Prohibition, so that—that takes us up to—in the [19]20s—1920s, I guess.

RF: Mh-hmm.

[00:06:05] SL: Um—wow, what a rich life he had. Now did—uh—
what about his parents?

RF: His parents—his mother was a slave.

SL: Okay.

RF: And his daddy was a slave owner.

SL: I see—there in Hope?

RF: Yes. His name was Elijah Ferguson. And my mother—
grandmother's name was Sophie Ferguson—Sophie Davis.

SL: Sophie Davis.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: But she was a slave.

RF: Yeah.

SL: And he was her slave owner.

RF: Yes.

SL: And that—that was really not very uncommon back then, was it?

RF: No.

[00:06:47] SL: Um—golly! Well, did you ever know either one of
them? Did you ever meet . . .

RF: Yes, I knew my grandmother, and she lived to be a hundred
years old.

SL: How bout that.

RF: But I never did know him.

[00:07:04] SL: Well, did she ever talk about him at all or . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: Well, what'd she have to say?

RF: Well, she just talked about their life, you know, and . . .

[00:07:14] SL: Um—so—uh—did she ever—what—what kind of work
did she do as a slave?

RF: She worked—a domestic. A—uh—worked in the kitchen.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Cooked. Prepared food for 'em.

SL: Um—so—um—was your—uh—was their relationship kind of
accepted in the community? I mean, was it open and—and—or
was it kinda hidden?

RF: Well, I don't know. I wasn't [*unclear words*]. [*Laughs*]

SL: She never said anything about that?

RF: Yeah. Hm-mm.

[00:07:51] SL: Well, did she feel like she had a good life?

RF: Yes.

SL: So now—so his name—your grandfather's name was Ferguson
and—and . . .

RF: Elijah Ferguson.

SL: Elijah Ferguson.

RF: And my brother had—my daddy had a brother named Elijah Ferguson. He named his son after him.

[00:08:15] SL: So—uh—did he have—did—uh—Elijah also have—um—children with—did—was he married? Did he have a—a wife?

RF: Yes.

SL: His—uh—and—uh—did he have children with her, too?

RF: Yes.

SL: Did—does that lineage ever—do y'all ever cross paths at all?

RF: Well, his—uh—half brother, Jim Ferguson, was the governor of Texas—Jim and "Ma" Ferguson.

SL: Is that right?

RF: And I got a L.C. Smith shotgun in there he gave me . . .

SL: We might have to get a picture . . .

RF: . . . when I was a baby. I don't remember him. I was just a baby when he gave it to me.

SL: So . . .

RF: It's way over a hundred years old.

SL: So there—there was acknowledgement . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . of the two families and . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

[00:09:03] SL: . . . and—and—and the—that's—that's—that's strong, I think. I think that's wonderful. Um—well, what did Elijah Ferguson do for . . .

RF: He was a mail clerk.

SL: Mail clerk.

RF: He sent them to school along with [*SL coughs*] the white kids.

SL: Is that right? In the same school?

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: Same classroom? Now that's unusual, isn't it?

RF: Yes.

SL: That's very unusual. So—um—there in Hope?

RF: That's right.

[00:09:35] SL: Hmm. Um—and that kind of explains how your daddy—uh—got in the postmasterin' . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . business, I guess. So his other—his—one of his white sons became governor of Texas. Is that what I'm—I'm tryin' to keep all this sorted out here.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: This is kinda complicated. Um—well, my gosh, do you think that—um—his—um—uh—your—um—daddy's—um—half-brother recommended him for the postmaster to the president? I

wonder who the president was at the time.

RF: I don't know.

SL: Huh. I bet there was some politicking goin' on there.

RF: Yeah.

[00:10:29] SL: So—uh—you—do you remember meeting your—uh—
grandfather?

RF: No, I don't.

SL: You don't?

RF: Don't remember.

SL: But—um—uh—I wonder if you ever did or if he—surely he—he
was—he probably—um—knew of you. May—uh—did he die—
uh—early or—I wonder how long he lived.

RF: I don't know.

[00:10:56] SL: Okay. Um—well, now let's talk about your—uh—
grandmother now. Um—she lived to be a hundred years old.

RF: Yes.

SL: And—uh—did she ever live with you-all?

RF: Yes.

SL: Is that—so you got to know her probably pretty good.

RF: Mh-hmm. Yes, I sure did.

[00:11:16] SL: Well, do you remember any—uh—particular
conversation you may have had with her that kind of impressed

you or that you've kept with you all these years? Is there—do you—tell me about her a little bit. What was she like?

RF: Well, she was—she was a very kind woman. She liked to cook—liked to can stuff, and she just was a good, you know, house mother and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: . . . and she's just takin' care of us like we was her kids, you know.

[00:11:49] SL: Well, now how many of—how many of you were there that she—uh—how many grandchildren did she have?

RF: It was twelve of us.

SL: Twelve. [*Laughs*]

RF: My oldest brother heart burst, and he—he died when he was a baby.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: It was six boys and six girls. I was the seventh child.

SL: So that kinda puts you in the middle . . .

RF: Yeah.

[00:12:14] SL: . . . a little bit. Um—well, what kinda house did y'all grow up in?

RF: Well, it was a—what they call a bungalow.

SL: [*Coughs*] Okay.

RF: It kinda went up like that, you know, and down, and there's a porch on the front. [Gestures to show sharply angled roof and flattened out sides perpendicular to the ground]

[00:12:29] SL: Mh-hmm. Uh—how many to a room?

RF: Well, the girls had a room, and the boys had a room.

SL: So there was six boys, six girls.

RF: Yeah. Well, no, the—the first—the—the—I—first one died . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . durin' child . . .

SL: So it ended up being five boys and . . .

RF: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and—and six girls. Um—that's a lot of—that's a lot of—uh—kids . . .

RF: Yes.

[00:12:56] SL: . . . in one house. Uh—now I'm assuming that y'all—all of you helped around the house.

RF: Oh, yes.

SL: What—so—um—your dad was postmaster. What did you-all do around the house?

RF: Well, now I—I wasn't—we wasn't born then.

SL: Oh, okay.

RF: We came on later.

SL: Okay.

RF: See, I don't remember. I just know him tellin' us about this—
bein' postmaster. And we didn't—we wasn't actually there then.
We wasn't born then.

[00:13:20] SL: Okay, okay. Um—so—um—well, let's—let's go ahead
and talk about your daddy for a while. What do you remember
about your dad?

RF: Well, [*clears throat*] he was a—when he—uh—when they left the
saloon business—when the Prohibition day came—well, he was
appointed United States marshal then, and he served United
States marshal for eleven years.

SL: Was that kind of unusual?

RF: Well, I don't know. I can't remember.

SL: You can't remember?

RF: Yeah, I can't remember that. I—I . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: But anyway, he was married to my mother then.

[00:14:04] SL: Uh-huh. I see. Okay. Um—[*coughs*] so these—uh—
brothers and sisters—some of them were half brothers and—and
half sisters. Is that the way that . . .

RF: No, we were all full sisters and brothers.

SL: Is that right?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Okay. Um—so he—he didn't have any children with his first wife? Is that . . .

RF: No, no . . .

SL: I see.

RF: . . . didn't have none with his first wife.

[00:14:32] SL: Okay. Did y'all ever know her or . . .

RF: No . . .

SL: . . . know anything about her?

RF: . . . we never did know her.

[00:14:36] SL: No. Okay. Well—um—did he ever—uh—take you fishin' or . . .

RF: Oh yes.

SL: Oh yeah.

RF: Yes.

SL: Well, what . . .

RF: Huntin' and fishin'.

SL: Huntin' and fishin'.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Well—uh—do you remember any—any particular fishin' trip with him that you went? Can you describe to me what kind of fishin' y'all did and where you fished and . . .

RF: Well, we—we had a place named Bois d' Arc Creek, and we lived not far from it. And we used to fish—fish on it a lot.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: And we—we would set out hooks at night and catch catfish.

[00:15:22] SL: Uh-huh. So did you—did you catch—uh—little panfish durin' the day and use them?

RF: Yes. Yeah, them sun perches.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Breams—they call them now.

SL: Yeah. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And were those droplines and trotlines? Did you do . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . both of 'em? Now did you—would you run those at night?

RF: Yes.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: See, you set 'em out late in the evening, run 'em at night, and— and then run 'em again the next mornin'.

[00:15:53] SL: Now if you're like me, when we would be running our trotlines, we'd also be frog giggin'.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Did you do that, too?

RF: Yes.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well—uh . . .

RF: And sometime, we'd gig fish. [*Laughs*]

SL: Is that right?

RF: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

SL: Now I never did that.

RF: Yeah.

SL: I never did that.

RF: Well, a lot of times, you throw your light down in the water like that, and you could see a big fish down there and just . . .

[Makes stabbing gesture to demonstrate gigging]

[00:16:18] SL: Now, see, I never had the sense to do that. I bet we could've done that, too. Um—do you remember the biggest fish you ever caught?

RF: Mmm—about a nine-pound bass—caught him on a trotline.

SL: That's a pretty—that's a big bass—in a creek—in—in Bois d' Arc Creek.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: Now I'm assuming it was Bois d' Arc Creek 'cause there were a lot of Bois d' Arc . . .

RF: Yeah.

[00:16:48] SL: . . . out there. Orangewood—some people call it Orangewood. Well—uh—so how far was the house from Bois

d' Arc Creek?

RF: Oh, around a mile.

SL: Yeah. So you-all were kind of—you lived out in the country then?

RF: Yes.

SL: And—um—uh—and this is over by Hope. Is that right?

RF: Yeah, bout six miles from Hope.

[00:17:16] SL: Six miles from Hope. What do you remember about the town of Hope?

RF: Town of Hope?

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: Well, it was a—now Washington was the capital—was the county seat—capital county seat—but they moved it to Hope . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: . . . and—uh [*SL coughs*]*—Hope was a pretty busy town. They had a lot of—they had a handle factory there. They had a basket factory there and—not like the big industry they have now, but you know, those mostly individual owned.*

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: And made baskets—made—and they had a head mill there where they made heads for barrels.

[00:17:59] SL: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. Well, did they have a—a fruit

orchids—orchards out there at Hope?

RF: That was up in Nashville. They had the largest peach orchard in the world up there. It was one of the seven wonders of the world—up in Nashville.

[00:18:17] SL: So is—is that where they—the—the—is that what supported the barrel makin' was—was . . .

RF: No, the barrel makin' was—uh—just for whatever you wanna put in a barrel.

SL: Okay. Okay. Well, I know up in northwest Arkansas, they had a big—uh—apple business and that big barrel business up there to—that supported shippin' the apples and—uh—but I don't know a whole lot about raisin' peaches and pickin' peaches, but—um—what about—um—how big a place was Hope? Do you remember how big it was or . . .

RF: Nope. No, I don't remember now. I . . .

SL: Okay.

RF: . . . can't remember how large it was, but it wasn't too big though.

[00:19:03] SL: Uh-huh. Um—what kind of school did you go to there?

RF: Well, I went to a school called Wayne Chapel till I finished the eighth grade.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And then I had to go to Hope to Yerger High School to the end of the ninth grade.

[00:19:20] SL: Uh-huh. And both of those schools were segregated schools?

RF: Yes.

SL: Um—was your—the first school that you went to, was it—uh—a good-size school, or was it a one-room school or . . .

RF: It was two-room school.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Two teachers there. One taught from the first through the fourth, and the other one—fourth through the eighth.

[00:19:42] SL: Uh—did you enjoy school?

RF: Yes.

SL: Did you have a favorite subject?

RF: I liked math.

SL: Math. Uh-huh. Um—so . . .

RF: But at that time, they called it arithmetic.

[00:19:56] SL: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. Uh—what about—um—uh—did y'all do any kind of farmin'?

RF: Yes.

SL: So was it sharecroppin' or—or did you own the . . .

RF: We owned our own farm.

SL: That's good. So what kind of farmin' did you do? What kind of chores did you have?

RF: Well, I'd get up in the morning. We had six cows. I'd go out there and milk them.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: And then come in and eat breakfast. Then we'd go to the field. We'd chop cotton. I chopped cotton till I got old enough to plow, and then I started plantin'—uh—Oliver Cultivator. I dig cotton with it.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:39] SL: Mh-hmm. How old were you when you started—now when you were plowin', were you plowin' with mules or . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: So did all the kids in the family help with the farm?

RF: Yes.

[00:21:00] SL: [*Coughs*] Was your-all's kitchen in the house or did you have a separate building for the kitchen?

RF: No, the kitchen was in the house.

SL: In the house. And was it all wood burnin' . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: Y'all musta had a big table . . .

RF: ?To get? . . .

SL: . . . to sit that many kids.

RF: Yes.

SL: Sit that many people. Did . . .

RF: We had a long table in the dinin' room, and all of us sat around it.

[00:21:28] SL: Was it bench . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . seating? Yeah, my grandma's place was like that. So I—
were the—you've already given me a description of the house.

It didn't have a dogtrot through it or anything, did it? It was a
bungalow . . .

RF: Yeah.

[00:21:52] SL: . . . kind of house. Did the bedrooms have a stove in
them—a heat . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . stove?

RF: Hm-mm.

SL: So the only heat stove was out there in the main part of the
house?

RF: That's right.

SL: And . . .

RF: There was a big—great big woodstove, and it'd heat the whole house.

[00:22:14] SL: Is that—di—was any cookin' done on that stove or was . . .

RF: No . . .

SL: . . . there a . . .

RF: . . . we had a . . .

SL: . . . separate stove in the . . .

RF: . . . cookstove in the kitchen.

[00:22:20] SL: In the kitchen. And what about water? Did y'all have a . . .

RF: We had a pump.

SL: Had a pump. And did you have it fixed where you could pump in the kitchen or . . .

RF: No.

SL: Had—it was outside.

RF: Outside.

[00:22:30] SL: Mh-hmm. So you raised cotton and . . .

RF: Corn.

SL: Corn.

RF: Everything. Every—we used everything we ate. We didn't have to go to town to buy nothin' but sugar, coffee, and salt.

SL: And salt. How often did y'all go to town?

RF: Oh, practically every weekend—on Saturday.

SL: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. That was pretty much where—when all the farmers came in . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . town.

[00:23:06] RF: See, and we had a big syrup mill and one of those cookers, and my grandmother cooked syrup for the whole community.

SL: Now when you say cooked syrup, does that mean that—did y'all have maple trees that you got . . .

RF: No, we raised sugarcane, and we'd grind—they had a sugarcane mill, and we'd grind it—run it through there and grind the juice out of it. And then take it—and they had a big furnace down there with a pan on it, and you put it in on one end, and it come out the other end syrup.

SL: That's somethin' else. My grandma had the—she had cane.

RF: Yeah.

[00:23:48] SL: She worked with, too. So how big was the farm?

RF: Well, we had—the one we lived—the place we lived on was forty acres. And then we had two forty acres up in the bottom—what we called up in the bottom on Bois d' Arc Creek. And we raised

cotton and corn and all that stuff.

[00:24:15] SL: Did y'all have other folks helpin' you work the farm, too, at harvest or . . .

RF: Yeah, sometime we would.

SL: Mh-hmm. And I'm assumin' y'all would get out of school at harvest time? That they'd . . .

RF: Yes.

[00:24:33] SL: . . . they'd let the kids out. What were some of the other chores that you used to do around the house?

RF: Well, I'd say I had to get up in the morning and milk the cows and everything and then [*SL coughs*] just anything to come to hand that need to be done—you know, just feed the horses. We'd go out there and feed the mules in the morning—feed them. And we'd bring 'em in at noon—we'd work till noon, come in and eat, and we'd water 'em and feed 'em again. And then at night, we'd feed 'em, and then we'd take 'em to the pasture and turn 'em loose. We had a big, fifteen-acre pasture out there, and they'd take 'em down there and turn 'em loose and then go out and get 'em in the morning.

[00:25:21] SL: How many mules did y'all have?

RF: Oh, we had about—we had three horses and about five mules.

SL: That's a lot of water.

RF: Yeah, 'cause we had one—he lived to be [*SL coughs*—his—all his teeth fell out. His name was Elick. And my [*laughs*] daddy stopped workin' him and just set him free. He just turned him loose out there. [*Laughter*]

[00:25:52] SL: So now since you were close to the creek, did you—I mean, did you have to pump water to feed the livestock?

RF: Yes, we had a big o—a half a barrel—cut half in two sittin' in front of it. We'd pump it full, and they'd come there and drink out of it.

SL: That's a lot of animals to water . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . by hand like that. So you probably had your share of turns . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

[00:26:17] SL: . . . on that pump. So by the time your dad had left the postmasterin' business—is that when the farm was real, or was he still . . .

RF: No, when he left the postal business, he went—he bought a saloon in Texarkana, and he stayed there till Prohibition days.

And then—after then, he was appointed po—uh . . .

SL: Deputy sheriff or . . .

RF: No, he was appointed a marshal.

SL: U—a U . . .

RF: United States marshal.

SL: US marshal.

RF: Yeah, and he stayed there for eleven years. And he went after a man once, and the man looked just like—it's—two of 'em looked just alike, and he was wanted, too; but he wasn't the fella my daddy was after. [*SL laughs*] So when he saw my daddy, he shot at him six times. And when he missed him, my daddy just turned sideways to him, and when he reached back to get his other gun, my daddy shot him with an L. C. Smith shotgun—that's what they carried then. They had double-barreled L. C. Smith shotgun. That's what they—the marshals carry. He shot him.

SL: Yeah.

[00:27:53] RF: But before he died—him and this other fella was good friends—he told him where he was.

SL: So he went and got him, too.

RF: Yeah, and he went on and got him. But that did somethin' to him.

SL: To kill a man?

RF: Killin' that man just don't—it—he didn't know—you know, thinkin' he was somebody else.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And that's when he left the service.

SL: It's a hard thing to do.

RF: Mh-hmm.

[00:28:25] SL: But sounds like he didn't have much choice.

RF: No.

SL: A man pops six shots off at you—why . . .

RF: And fixin' to shoot some more. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah. And wasn't done.

RF: Yeah.

[00:28:36] SL: It was time to make a difference. Well, [*clears throat*] what other stories did your daddy talk about? Did he—
did you get to spend much time with him?

RF: Yes.

SL: Well, let's hear some stories.

RF: Well, he was a deputy sheriff in Hempstead County at one time
after he left the marshal service.

[00:29:03] SL: Okay. Did he have some deputy stories out of that
county, too, or . . .

RF: Say, did he have what?

SL: Did he have stories about that?

RF: Well, I don't remem—I can't remember nothin' hardly about that

that he told us about. But anyway, he—I don't think he had too much—he was there when the outlaws came to Washington and blew the safe and took all the money.

SL: Is that right?

RF: And the sheriff then was ridin' a horse, and they came down [*laughs*] in a T Model Ford with a [*laughter*]*—*and so the horse didn't have no way to catch it then.

[00:29:46] SL: That's somethin' else. Well, did he have any—did he ever talk about his bar and his tavern in Texarkana to you? Did he ever tell you any stories about it?

RF: I remember it had a ground—he said it had a ground floor. And like I say, he had a bartender named Alex Richardson. He lived on—organized the Richardson Funeral Home, and he's still standin' today over there—Texarkana.

[00:30:26] SL: Well, let's talk about your mom for a little while. What are some of the memories you have about your mom?

RF: Well, she was a good mother. She'd take care of all of us. She would get up and cook our breakfast in the mornin'. We'd all get around the table and eat, and then we'd go out and do our chores.

[00:30:48] SL: What would y'all have for breakfast?

RF: Well, different things. Eggs. We'd—she—we raised practically

everything we ate. And we'd have eggs and ham or eggs and bacon and what they used to call—what they call grits now, we used to—they used to call it mush—[laughter] [SL coughs] and rice and just different things—a variety.

[00:31:19] SL: So do you remember the hog killin'?

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: Did you ever learn how to, you know, work a hog and . . .

RF: Oh yeah. You take 'em, knock 'em in the head, and then stick 'em in the heart and let him bleed. And then you have your hot water there ready and put him in that barrel and let him go in and pull him out and then run him back again. Then take him out and that hair'd just slide off of him. I know one year we killed twenty-five hogs.

SL: My gosh!

RF: We had a great big smokehouse, and we just put it in salt—let it stay in salt for four weeks and then take it out and wash it and paint it with liquid smoke and hang it up in that smokehouse. And we kept a smoke in there day and night.

[00:32:08] SL: What'd y'all do with twenty-five hogs worth of meat? I mean, that's . . .

RF: Well, a lot of it, they gave it to people, you know, that needed it. It always—you'd see somebody's house'd burn down, and they'd

lose everything they had. Everybody in the community would go in, you know, together.

[00:32:38] SL: [Coughs] Well, now I've heard that, you know, the hog-killin' stuff—it would be—sometimes it'd be, like, at your-all's house one weekend, and then the next weekend, it'd be at some . . .

RF: Yeah, at somebody else's.

SL: And it was kind of a community gathering.

RF: That's right.

SL: And they kinda helped and . . .

RF: Everybody would pitch in, and then the next folks, they would kill. Then we'd go to them and help them.

[00:33:12] SL: So what was it like, as far as the race relations, when you were growin' up? Did you . . .

RF: Race relations was a lot better then than they was later on.

SL: Do you think it was 'cause everyone just was—they didn't really—I mean, everyone got along without really thinkin' about it—is that . . .

RF: Well, that was—everybody knowed their place, you know what I mean? And they . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . they didn't—wasn't no—lot of rabble-rousers then, and it—

everybody got along fine. And we . . .

SL: Did you ever . . .

RF: At that time, if we killed a hog, everybody in the community had some. Take it around and divide it up with everybody. If we killed a beef—so we—at that time, you'd have fresh meat all the time 'cause somebody was always—if we killed this week, somebody else killed the next week.

[00:34:08] SL: And so you just gave back and forth . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . 'cause you . . .

RF: White and black. It didn't make no difference.

SL: Because you didn't want to waste anything.

RF: That's right 'cause you didn't have no deep freezers then, you know, to keep nothin'. So . . .

[00:34:26] SL: Well, now, where y'all were, did the—did you have any ice? Did anyone bring around any ice for you or didn't have . . .

RF: Later on, we had iceboxes, but at that time, we—I remember at first, we didn't.

SL: Uh-huh. So you really had to—you had to salt stuff then . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: You had to smoke stuff. And . . .

[00:34:47] RF: And I remember we used to put the butter and milk
down in the well—keep it cool.

SL: I've heard that.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Well, I lived through that. I saw it. [*Laughs*]

[00:34:58] SL: Well, how deep was y'all's well?

RF: Well, we had a . . .

SL: Do you have any idea? [*Coughs*]

RF: It was around seventy-five feet deep.

[00:35:10] SL: That's pretty deep. So the girls would basically help
around the house and . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . and the kitchen and . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and would they always do the dishes after . . .

RF: Washin'. Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: Uh-huh. And they'd set the table.

RF: Washin' and ironin' and stuff like that.

[00:35:34] SL: Uh-huh. So how far out of town were y'all?

RF: About six miles.

SL: That's a pretty good piece. And when you went to town, did you

go in a wagon?

RF: Yes.

SL: A team—mule team and wagon?

RF: That's right.

SL: And you'd get your supplies for the salt and the . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . coffee. And what about anything else? I guess there'd be so many people in town on the weekends that it was kind of a big gatherin' as well.

RF: That's right.

[00:36:16] SL: You'd get caught up on the news with everybody and—when you were in school, did you all—was there—did y'all do anything sportswise? Was there any kind of—I guess back then, football was—was there any football?

RF: Yeah. After I started Yerger High—well, they had a football team and basketball team. But I—when I first started, I—I'd ride—I rode a horse six miles, and I left him at a cousin of my daddy's, and they called him Doctor Red. He had a stable there. And then, I'd walk on to school. And then, in the evenin', I'd ride back home.

[00:37:08] SL: How long did it take you to make that ride?

RF: Oh, about thirty minutes.

SL: Yeah. [*Coughs and sniffs*] Did you ever have any trouble goin' and comin' from . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . from school? I guess you'd pack your lunch.

RF: Yes.

[00:37:33] SL: Your mom would pack you a lunch. How were your mom and dad about your studyin'?

RF: Bout what?

SL: Studyin' and doin' your homework and . . .

RF: Well, they—they'd see that I'd—they would see that I'd do my homework and everything. And, see, we didn't have electricity, and we had lamps—run coal oil.

[00:37:53] SL: Mh-hmm. Do you remember when you got electricity? Or did y'all ever get electricity?

RF: Yeah, we finally got it.

SL: Yeah. [*Coughs*] That made a big difference, didn't it?

RF: That's right.

[00:38:11] SL: What about radio? Did you have a battery-powered radio for a while?

RF: Yeah, had Atwater Kent radio. Our aunt sent it to us in Chicago—my mother's sister.

SL: Uh-huh. What'd y'all listen to on the radio?

RF: I remember listenin' to *Amos 'n' Andy* and the news.

SL: What about boxin'? Did y'all ever . . .

RF: Yeah. Mh-hmm. Yeah, when Joe Louis was champion, we used to listen to him.

SL: So let's see. What year was it that you were born?

RF: Nineteen nineteen.

SL: Nineteen nineteen. So you . . .

[00:39:06] RF: I went through the Great Depression.

SL: Well, let's talk about that. What was that like?



RF: Oh, it was—we had plenty to eat, but we didn't have no money. See, we raised our own—we had chickens. We had our own eggs. We had—we raised our hogs. [*SL coughs*] We had our own meat and that meat then—you cook one of my—cut one of them hams and fry it, you could smell that for a quarter of a mile. [*Laughter*]

[00:39:34] SL: Yeah. Well you know, I've heard that, that the families that were kinda self sufficient weathered the Depression much better than those that weren't.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: So y'all didn't lose anything . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . durin' the Depression. That's good. That was good that

you—y'all were blessed to be able to get through that—a lot of folks didn't. So let's see. The—I guess you got through the Depression. [00:40:16] When did you start goin' to the—did you ever get out of one- or two-room schools? Is that . . .



RF: Yes, I went to high school. I went—I finished the tenth grade in high school, and my daddy died in [19]37. I was just finishin' the tenth grade. And so I had [*clock chimes*] five brothers and sisters under me—three brothers and two sisters. And so I—I'd left—I quit school then and joined the CC camp in order to see after the—to, you know, take care of them. And I went to—when I got to CC camp, we was gettin' thirty dollars a month. They sent twenty-two home, and they paid—give you eight.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, that was big back then.

RF: Yeah.

[00:41:11] SL: Where did you work in the CCCs?

RF: Well, [*SL coughs*] they—when I first joined, they had—the main camp was over at Ross, and they had a side camp down at Bradley, Arkansas. And the supervisor down there—they called him Hoss Davis—and so first day I went out, he told me—he said, "School"—he called me Schoolboy. He said, "I'm goin' give you a easy job—make you the water boy." [*Laughs*] And that job ain't easy. [*Laughter*] I worked as water boy there for a

while, and one day, it was hot, and time I'd get down there with two bags of water and empty 'em, they'd holler water boy again. So I done give out. I just sit down. So Mr. Davis came up wantin' to know—said, "Schoolboy," said, "how come you ain't carryin' them fellas some water?" I said, "I done give out. I been runnin' down there all day." He said, "Well, now I'm a—I tried to give you a easy job." [*SL laughs*] And he said, "Now, tomorrow, I'm goin' put you out here on somethin' hard." So it was me and another fellow was a water boy—named ?Tow Fryson?, and he didn't go, but he just quit, too. So he said, "There's a great big ol' pine stump there bout like that." [Gestures chest high and spread-arms-width wide] He said, "Now, dig it up with a shovel." [00:42:42] He said, "When you get this stump out, you done made your day." He thought we'd be there all day on it, but, see, I knowed what to do. We just started diggin' around there and cut them little feed roots off. I told ol' ?Fryson?—I tried to do it, and we went around there and dug it on down, and they say the most it's got is a taproot—runs way down in the ground. And we dug it all down in there, and then I'd take the ax and chopped it off, and then we got there and rolled it out. And we was through before ten o'clock. [*SL laughs*] So when he come back, we was sittin' up there, and he

say, "How come y'all ain't workin'?" I said, "Well, you told us when we got that stump out, we've—that made our day." He looked, and he saw the stump rolled out there. He—boy named the truck driver—he asked him—he say, "Who helped them do that?" He said, "Nobody"—say, "Did it theyself." He said, "Well, when the truck come in to bring lunch, y'all go on in. I'm goin—took—I'm goin' stand by my word." So he told—we had the first sergeant there named Robert Hudson, and he told Robert—he said, "Look," he said, "can you find somethin' here for Schoolboy to do here in the camp?" He say, "I just—I'm—I—he done outdid me [*laughter*] on anything I put him on." So he said, "Yeah," he said, "I can put him on KP. I need a KP up here now." So I started workin' the kitchen. And the rest of the KPs—when they'd finish cleanin' up and everything, they'd go on back to the barrack and lay down. I'd stay up there and work with the cooks—peel potatoes and do anything, you know—help out there in the kitchen. I learned how to make corn bread, so they just give me that job—makin' corn bread. And I finally—one of the second cooks, he left, and they made me second cook, so I was makin' thirty-six dollars a month then. I was gettin' fourteen instead of eight.

SL: Ah! [*RF laughs*] Well, that's good. You loved that.

[00:44:42] RF: Yeah, and I stayed there until they finally—we moved to—up to Sage, and we moved up to Sage. We had a baker named Robert Hudson, and he—I got to be his assistant baker. And I learned how to make pies, cakes, and decorate cakes and all that. Then when he left, I got to be head baker. I was makin' forty-five dollars a month. I was gettin' twenty-three, and they're sending twenty-two home, so I was gettin' more than goin' home. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, that's great.

[00:45:13] RF: And I stayed there, and we stayed up there at Sage until the mess hall burnt.

SL: Until when?

RF: Our mess hall burnt down one night. And our commander sent me [*SL coughs*] and thirty men down to Smackover, Arkansas, where we was goin' build a camp down there. And we got down there and set up a fly tent and put up a mess hall. This wasn't no buildin'—you know, you just bolt together. You know, it was already prefabricated house.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:45:48] RF: And after we got the mess hall built, then the rest of the company came down. And I stayed there as baker until they was buildin' this tree nursery. And the forestry man that was

over the forest named J. D. Librand, so—see, I was in the army over here, and he borrowed me to work in their forestry over here to go down there and set up a mess hall for 'em to build their tree nursery. And they went down to Louisiana and picked those pine buds and take the seeds out and planted the first trees up there. And I saw some of 'em grow into logs.

SL: Is that right? [*Tapping sound*] That takes awhile.

[00:46:39] RF: Yeah. And then I went back to our company clerk.

Durin' that time, World War II started, and they called him in the army. And the mess sergeant there at Smackover—he got to be company clerk, and after, he brought me back there to be mess sergeant. And I was mess sergeant there until I left.

[00:47:07] SL: Now so, okay—we're startin' in the CCCs, and now, you're mess sergeant. Are you in the armed forces? Did you . . .

RF: No, that was the CC.

SL: It was CCC.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Okay. All right.

RF: We had company clerks, the mess sergeants, and all that—cooks.

SL: Okay. So they used the military terminology.

RF: That's right.

[00:47:32] SL: Rank and stuff. Yeah. That kinda makes sense. My dad was in the CCC, too, up in Cass. So I got the feelin' you were probably a good student when you were in school.

RF: Yes.

SL: And you liked math. Was there any other subject that you were fond of?

RF: Well, I'm fond of history.

[00:47:58] SL: Uh-huh. Was there a particular time in history that you liked to look at? Is there—or did you just like all of it? Is there . . .

RF: I liked all of it. [00:48:12] SL: You did? [*Sniffs*] Well, so you didn't really have any—there wasn't any really racial tension when you were in school at all. Is that—or did that kinda change once you went to the public schools and the bigger school? Did you run across any of the . . .

RF: Well, they was still—they still had segregated schools then.

SL: Yeah.

RF: See, they never did integrate the school. Randall was the one—my oldest son, Randall, was in the first integrated school.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I was always in segregated school.

[00:48:54] SL: Well, did you sense that racial tensions were increasing as you got older—I mean, when you were growin' up?

RF: Yes.

SL: I mean, by the time you were in seventh or eighth grade, was it startin' to accelerate just a little bit?

RF: Yes.

[00:49:10] SL: Did you ever yourself run across any big problems—racial-oriented problems?

RF: No.

SL: And I guess you saw the signs where, you know, there was "colored" drinkin' fountain . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . and you . . .

RF: "Colored" restroom.

SL: Yeah. And you couldn't eat out in front. There—they'd have someplace in back . . .

RF: That's right. If you went to a white restaurant, they had a place there in the back behind the kitchen. You'd go in there and sit down and eat.

[00:49:40] SL: And did that ever bother you at all or—it was just the way it was.

RF: That's just the way it was. That's the way times were then, and

you just accepted 'em.

[00:49:59] SL: [Sniffs] What about athletics? Did you play much athletics?

RF: I played baseball. Because see [SL coughs] when I was in high school, I didn't have time to participate in that because I'd leave—I'd have to go home and work instead of . . .

SL: Work. Yeah. Yeah. And you were six miles out.

RF: Mh-hmm.

[00:50:19] SL: So that's to be reckoned with. [Voices in the background] Well, did your family ever get a car while you were out there?

RF: Yes, yes, we had a [19]27 Ford. Well, first we had a [19]25 Ford truck. That was the first vehicle we had. And my daddy—my oldest brother drove it, and he had a contract with IP in [19]27, and he was haulin' billets to a—where they had cars out there, and they'd load 'em on them cars and ship 'em into the mill at Camden.

[00:51:02] SL: So he was loadin' what now?

RF: Billets.

SL: Billets.

RF: Yeah.

SL: And tell me what a billet is.

RF: It's a round pine log—four-foot long. And about eight or ten inches in diameter.

SL: And [*yawns*] that's what they make paper out of?

RF: Yes.

SL: Well, I'm just tryin' to . . .

[00:51:36] RF: And they cut 'em with a crosscut saw—didn't have no . . .

SL: Band saw or . . .

RF: They didn't have none of that then. They cut 'em with a—and he had a fella with one arm. They called him "One Gone."

SL: One Gone.

RF: And he could out saw anybody with that one arm. And they'd asked him what the—"One Gone," say, "where you from?" He say, "Well, I'm comin' from nowhere and goin' to nothin'."

[*Laughter*]

[00:52:06] SL: Oh brother. Well, what was your favorite thing to do at home? What was it you liked doin' the most?

RF: Well, I was—wasn't no—just practically anything, you know what I mean? I know what I had to do, and I'd just get up—like, I had to get up in the mornin' and go milk them cows. I had to get up and go meet—milk them, and so it just—I enjoyed doin', you know, what I had to do.

[00:52:40] SL: Mh-hmm. Did your mom and daddy help you with your homework or was it mostly your mom that helped you or . . .

RF: Well, both of 'em. If I found I had somethin' that I didn't understand, I'd go to 'em. And if she couldn't explain it to me—if she couldn't do it, she'd send me to my dad, and he would do it.

SL: Yeah. So they were very supportive of . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . of gettin' the schoolin' . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . in.

BP: Girlfriend. Dances. Socials.

[00:53:11] SL: How—what was the social life like goin' to school in town?

RF: Well, it was good.

SL: What kinda social events did you—I mean, six miles is a pretty big trip to go into town just to, you know, be social.

RF: Well—but later on, I started—my brother—my oldest brother—he was an insurance agent . . .

SL: Okay.

RF: . . . for Universal Life.

SL: Okay.

RF: And later on, I had started stayin' with him, so I was stayin' right there in Camden then.

SL: Now this is when you were in school?

RF: Yes.

[00:53:59] SL: So you wouldn't necessarily—you—would you just go back out to the farm on the weekends?

RF: On the weekend, yeah.

SL: And so your younger brothers and sisters kinda . . .

RF: Takin' care everything.

SL: . . . stepped up. Well, you-all certainly had enough kids to do that.

RF: Yes.

SL: So now how old were you when your daddy died?

RF: When my dad—I was eighteen.

SL: Eighteen. Well, that's—you got to know him pretty good then.

RF: Yeah.

[00:54:32] SL: What's the—what was it about your dad that you remember the most?

RF: Well, he was kind, but he was strict, you know. He—we had to do—you know, he kept us in line. And [*SL laughs*] he was just—he was a good dad though. He loved us all, and he cared for us.

[00:54:58] SL: Mh-hmm. Let me think now. What about music in the house? Did y'all have a piano or anything or . . .

RF: No, we had . . .

SL: . . . guitars or . . .

RF: We had one of those phonographs. You wind it up and put the records on there and then . . .

SL: What kinda—do you remember the records that you listened to?

RF: Hmm—well, they had some church songs, and they had some blues and . . .

SL: Now that's pretty early.

RF: Yeah.

SL: First of all, there probably weren't that many blues recordings . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . to be listened to. I guess maybe . . .

RF: Muddy Water.

[00:56:13] SL: Yeah. Did you see many traveling minstrel shows?

RF: Yes, they'd come through . . .

SL: Well . . .

RF: . . . sometime—every—once a year.

SL: Once a year.

RF: Yeah.

SL: And would they play on a flatbed truck or . . .

RF: Yes.

[00:56:35] SL: Uh-huh. Well, tell me about goin' to a minstrel show. Do you remember the first minstrel show that you went to?

RF: Oh, not really. I'm just [*SL coughs*—it's been a long time ago.

[00:56:55] SL: Mh-hmm. Do you remember who you got to see at these minstrel shows? Do you remember any of the names—any of the players? [*Coughs*]

RF: Well, I remember Muddy Water and [*unclear words*]. I can't call their name right now. [*Makes popping sound with mouth*]

[00:57:26] SL: What about—you ever hear of Slidell Davis [*SL Edit: CeDell Davis*] or . . .

RF: No, I don't remember him.

SL: Okay. Now the—I'm talkin' bout when you were young . . .

RF: Yeah.

[00:57:44] SL: . . . when you were still in school or thereabouts.

What time would—what time of day or night would the minstrel show start?

RF: Oh, it'd start along about eight o'clock at night.

SL: Mh-hmm. And would they do more than one show?

RF: Well, they'd do a late show, but we'd all be gone then. [*Laughs*]

We had to go home.

SL: 'Cause the late show—they got a little bit racier . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . and wasn't really a children's show.

RF: No.

SL: That early show was for the whole family.

RF: That's right.

SL: And then the—you [*laughs*] remember havin' to leave, but others were stayin' . . .

RF: That's right.

[00:58:32] SL: . . . 'cause there was gonna be another show. Was it mostly blues stuff, or were there—was there ever any bands with horns and any . . .

RF: No, just guitars or somethin' like that.

SL: Mh-hmm. Maybe some drums.

RF: Yeah.

SL: And an upright bass, maybe? Well, so you'd go with your mom and dad. Your mom and dad would take all the kids . . .

RF: Yes.

[00:59:09] SL: . . . and go. That's big doin's—take that whole family up there like that. Would your dad stay for the late show and your mom take all the kids home?

RF: Sometime. [*SL laughs*]

BP: Four minutes left on the tape.

SL: Let me see about—so music in the home was mostly guitars.

RF: Yeah.

SL: And what kinda music was played in home—at home?

RF: Well, like I say, we had one of them gramophone that you'd wind up and put the records on there and play 'em.

[00:59:53] SL: What about—I tell you what, let's—we'll go ahead and stop tape now and . . .

BP: [*Unclear words*].

SL: . . . take a little break.

[Tape stopped]

[01:00:03] SL: Well, we—you know, we've talked—we've touched a lot of things so far in our first hour together. [*Unidentified voices in background*] But I don't feel like—that we've really—I just have this feeling that you've got some stories that you could tell us about. Let's kinda—let's start with your grandmother. Do—I know that you told me that she helped around the house when she was livin' with y'all and was—would cook and look after the kids and probably pretty good at spoilin' y'all in some way. That was kinda—you know, grandparents—that's kinda their job is to make sure those grandkids get a little spoilin' goin'

on. Is there any favorite time that you had with her that you can think of?

RF: Well, I remember when she used to just sit down and talk to us, you know, and tell us about, you know, her life when she was a slave and what she had to do and all of that. And she just talked about a little of everything, you know. She was a—she was very kind and lovin' to us. We—she just protected us. And my mother'd want to whoop us about somethin' [*laughs*]*—we'd run to her, and she wouldn't let her whoop us. And she just—she was just a nice ol' lady. She'd just do anything for us, and she—I can remember when she would sit down and just talk to us about what we need to do, and she would tell us, "Now you-all can do anything you want to do as long as you do it right."* And she was just a—she just was very interesting to listen to when she would tell us about the things she had to go through with in slavery, you know, and all of that. And I remember when she would bake us special things, and I used to like her apple pies she'd make. And she'd make gingerbread, and you know, she was a real good cook. She could cook anything. And she would always tell us about what we could do, you know, if we tried. She was just a lovely ol' lady.

[01:02:55] SL: Well . . .

RF: She . . .

SL: . . . did she ever talk about her mom and dad at all?

RF: No, I never did know her to talk about her mother and dad.

SL: Did she have—what about any of her other relatives?

RF: She was part Indian and Spanish. And my [*SL coughs*] mother—her father and—was Ned Hawkins, and they—she had a bunch of brothers and sisters. She had—no, she had a bunch of sisters. She had one brother, Arlie Hawkins. He served in World War I and came back, and they lived in Chicago. [01:03:55] No, he lived in Oklahoma. He had a big farm out there in Oklahoma. And my father—after he [*clears throat*] left the . . .

SL: The postal service?

RF: No, the marshal service.

SL: Yes, sir.

RF: After he left the marshal service, then he bought—he had a farm, and we raised everything out there on that farm. And we just—it was good life for us. We had everything we needed. Didn't—just didn't have no money, but [*laughs*] that was durin' the Depression days.

[01:04:52] SL: Was your—do you remember when your grandmother came to live with you, or was she—has she always been there by . . .

RF: She has always been there . . .

SL: She had always been there.

RF: . . . first that I could remember.

SL: And you say that she used to tell y'all about bein' a slave . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . and what she had to go through.

RF: Yeah.

[01:05:12] SL: Do you remember any of those stories at all about
some of the things that she had to go through or . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . what it was like for . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . her bein' a slave?

RF: Well, it was—see, she cooked for the man that—my grandfather.
She did all the cookin', and she had to—you know, she'd get up
and cooked breakfast and then fixed dinner and what they called
supper. And she did all of that. And when—my grandfather
gave her land—he deeded her some—a lot of land, and she had
that and—which my father inherited. So she was pretty well-off.
He left her with some land and some money.

[01:06:16] SL: He musta cared for her.

RF: Yeah. And he's buried in Washington. We found his gravesite

up there about two years—three years ago.

SL: In old Washington?

RF: Washington Cemetery. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: We went up there and looked for it once, but it [*SL coughs*] was all growed up, and now they've cleaned it out and got it all—they keeps it up now, and we found it's—where he's buried—that big tomb there. Elijah Ferguson.

[01:06:52] SL: Well now, what about where your grandma is buried?

Is she buried up there, too?

RF: No, she's buried in Washington—that cemetery right cross from the white cemetery in the colored cemetery. She—my mother, father, and—I got a brother and a sister buried there. My sister Luella—she died with pneumonia in [19]31. She's buried there, and my grandmother's buried there. My father and my mother's buried there—and my sister Luella.

[01:07:21] SL: So they're—up in Washington, there's a white cemetery where your grandfather's buried . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and then cross the street is the colored cemetery.

RF: That's right cross the fence. It—it's . . .

SL: Across the fence.

RF: . . . they're joined together. They join together there.

[01:07:36] SL: Well, so did the—I guess the Ferguson family—he must've had quite a bit of property . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . and—now I'm not sure where all that—is Hope and Washington—are they pretty close together? I—I'm not sure—how do they end up in the Washington Cemetery? I—I'm not . . .

RF: Well, we lived in Washington at one time.

SL: Okay.

RF: I went to school there. I went to—that's where—when I first started to school, I started school there in Washington.

SL: Okay.

RF: What they call—I was goin' to what they call free school. I was just four years old, and my teacher used to come by the house—Miss Samuels—and rest of my brother and sister would walk on to school with her, and I would cry to go. And my aunt in [*SL coughs*] Chicago—my aunt had sent me a book satchel with five pencils in it [*laughs*], and I wanted to go to school. So Miss [*unclear words*—my mother said, "Just let him." "Come on with me, I'll take care of him." And I started to school when I was four years old.

[01:08:45] SL: I wonder if she knew your grandma—if there was a—
I mean, it sounds like to me that . . .

RF: Well, she knew my mother and . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . father real well.

SL: I see. I see.

RF: And my daddy and her daddy was good friend—"Ol' Man" Rob
Samuels.

SL: Okay.

[01:09:08] RF: And my daddy once—him and a group—they started
Hempstead County Crop Growers Association where they raised
the stuff, and they'd take it to railhead there and ship it.

SL: That sounds good . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: Sounds like smart business.

RF: Mh-hmm. That's how they got rid of it because they couldn't
make no money sellin' it here because everybody else had it
[laughter]—the same thing.

SL: Makes sense.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Makes good sense.

RF: So they'd ship it different places and sell it.

[01:09:46] SL: Well, do you remember much about Washington?

RF: Yes.

SL: Tell me about Washington.

RF: Well, that used to be the [*SL coughs*] state capital at one time.

And it used to be the county seat of Hempstead County, but they moved it to Hope. And it—it's got a lot of history there. That ol' blacksmith shop—the ol' Bowie knife was made there.

[01:10:14] SL: Did you-all know the Westbrook family up there—Parker Westbrook and . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . his sister, and so you—those families knew your . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . your family and . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . got along? Hi!

Lizzie Ferguson: I made it here.

SL: Umm . . .

LF: Can I come through?

SL: Uh—sure.

LF: Oh, I don't have to.

SL: You . . .

LF: I can go around the other way.

SL: Yeah, goin' out the front door would probably be easier for you.

LF: Okay.

[01:10:45] SL: Well, do you remember much about the Westbrooks yourself?

RF: No, I just barely remember.

SL: You—but you know that name?

RF: Mh-hmm.

[01:10:58] SL: So there's big houses there—old houses. It's an old town, isn't it?

RF: Yes.

SL: Washington.

RF: Yeah, we lived in a big, two-story buildin' there. It was once an old school buildin'. Haygood Seminary.

SL: Haygood Seminary. So were the kids' rooms upstairs, or how'd the—what . . .

RF: No, the upstairs was just a big place—just a big room up there. We'd go up there and play.

SL: Oh, I see. Okay, okay.

RF: The rooms was all downstairs.

[01:11:36] SL: Okay. Well, what else do you remember about that house? Do you . . .

RF: Well, I—the old schoolhouse—it was brick, and Professor Tyus—

he lived in it. And he had a daughter name Miss Georgia Tyus, and I went to school under her. And we had another—one—another friend of mine [*SL coughs*] named Coop Pryor—well, she thought a whole lot of us, because we would get our lessons out, and we were smart, you know. We'd—we could—anything that come up, we could explain it to 'em—you know, to the class—that they wouldn't know.

SL: So you were helpin'.

RF: That's right. We were. We were good students, and she, you know, always called on us to explain things to the rest of the class.

[01:12:42] SL: So when you were goin' to school, there'd be several classes in the same room. Is that the way it worked?

RF: No, that—not when we were goin' to Washington. That was goin' to that. It was just separate rooms.

SL: Oh, well, that's good. That's good. But it was still segregated. It was still . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Yeah.

[01:13:08] SL: And were the teachers African American as well or were they . . .

RF: Yes. Yes, they were all African American.

[01:13:15] SL: Mh-hmm. Well—and so how long were y'all in Washington?

RF: Well, we was in—we would—we had a farm out there on number 4 Highway, and we'd go there in the fall of the year and go to school. And then in the spring, we'd go back to the farm and raise a crop. So we had two places we stayed—one in winter and one in the summer.

[01:13:47] SL: So you'd be back at the farm in the summer?

RF: That's right.

SL: Is that right?

RF: That's right.

SL: And then . . .

RF: And . . .

SL: And . . .

RF: . . . back in Washington durin' the school season—durin' the winter.

[01:14:01] SL: So we're talkin' bout two different houses then.

RF: That's right.

[01:14:06] SL: Okay. Now did you have all your brothers and sisters when you were in Washington, too? I mean—or did the family keep growin'? I mean, when—you were kind of in the

middle . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . weren't you?

RF: Yeah, I was the seventh child. And then when we moved—later on, we moved back to the farm and that's where we stayed there until my father died. And then I went in the CC camp.

[01:14:42] SL: So how—you were—what—seventeen, eighteen when . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . your daddy died?

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: Do you remember what he died from?

RF: I think prostate cancer.

SL: Boy.

RF: We didn't have nothin'—they didn't have nothin', you know, for it then.

[01:14:58] SL: What about doctorin'? What about doctors and health and medicines and . . .

RF: Well, we had one doctor there—Dr. Carrigan. Dr. "Pink" Carrigan. And you'd go to him [*SL coughs*] for everything. He lived there in Hope.

[01:15:16] SL: Now was he a white doctor?

RF: Yes, he was white doctor. We didn't have no black doctors then.

[01:15:25] SL: Did you all have to wait in—did he see all the white folks first and then . . .

RF: Yes, and they had two separate rooms there, one for white and one for colored.

SL: But he was good.

RF: Unless you went in there with an emergency. You know, if you went in there and you was in pain, he would stop and give you somethin' for that and then go ahead on.

[01:15:50] SL: Well, do you remember any of the remedies for any of the ail—ills that y'all had?

RF: Yes.

SL: Well, let's talk about how—what health care was back then.



RF: Yeah. Well, we had a—used to—why, we'd get out and chiggers'd get on you, you know. And you'd break out in sores. And they had a salve that Dr. Carrigan used to give us. It's called the Pink Carrigan salve [*SL laughs*], and you'd put that on them sores, you know.

SL: And it worked.

RF: Yeah, it worked.

[01:16:26] SL: Did you ever know what it was made of or . . .

RF: No, we never know. He made it up hisself. And they didn't—

durin' that time, they didn't put the ingredients on medicine, you know.

SL: Yeah. Huh.

RF: Because if they did, they'd make it theirself. They wouldn't have to buy it from him. [*Laughs*]

SL: Boy, I kinda wish I had that now.

RF: Yeah.

[01:16:49] SL: That woulda been handy for me when I was growin' up 'cause I—I'd get in a nest of 'em. What about remedies around the home? Do you remember what they . . .

RF: Well, mother used to—she used to make practically all our medic—she made a cough syrup, and it was really good. You—she'd get—we'd get the inner bark off a red oak tree and off a cherry tree, and I don't know what else she'd put in there. But anyway, it tasted good, and it was good. She made a lot of home remedies.

[01:17:27] SL: Now I wonder where she learned to do that.

RF: Well, she had a book—what they called then a doctor's book—and all those remedies was in there—you know, the ingredients and everything you use for it.

[01:17:43] SL: [*Coughs*] Well now, how much schoolin' did your mom and dad have?

RF: I don't remember about my mother, but my daddy—he was goin' to law school when his daddy die. He and Scipio A. Jones—I don't know whether you remember him—he was a lawyer in Little Rock. They were classmates. But when my daddy died, then he had to drop out.

[01:18:11] SL: So where were they goin' to law school at?

RF: I really don't know. See, I don't remember them days. I imagine—Little Rock, I imagine.

SL: That's interesting. You know, for a long time, you didn't have to go to law school. You could just study and take the . . .

RF: Test.

SL: . . . exam.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: You didn't have to have any degree from . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . any schools. If you could pass the Bar Exam, you could be a lawyer.

RF: Yeah.

SL: I wonder if that's kinda what they were doin'. Maybe they had some folk that . . .

RF: Mighta been.

SL: . . . were helpin' 'em . . .

RF: Mighta been.

SL: . . . study for it.

RF: Mighta been, but I don't remember. I wasn't here then.

[01:18:51] SL: Yeah, yeah. And what about your mom? Do you know how far she got in school or . . .

RF: No, I don't.

SL: No?

RF: I hadn't heard her talk about it.

[01:19:13] SL: Do you remember any of the other potions and salves and stuff that your mom would make—do you—what about if you had a . . .

RF: Well, she had—she made some horehound candy for colds, and it was bitter and sweet. That horehound was bitter. That's what you made quinine out of. And she used to take quinine, you know, and it was in a powder, and it was very bitter—and take it and put it in capsules—in a plastic capsule and fill 'em up and then take 'em like that.

SL: Hmm. And they worked?

RF: Yes, it worked. And the main [*SL coughs*] medicine that they had then was honey, garlic, and vinegar and bakin' soda. [*SL sniffs*] Had ARM & HAMMER Bakin' Soda. [*Laughs*]

[01:20:20] SL: Yeah. Yeah. Well, what about—I've always heard—

course, castor oil and . . .

RF: Yeah, castor oil . . .

SL: . . . and . . .

RF: . . . and black draw. That was purgatives. That black draw was a kind of a powdered stuff. But you'd take it. It would gripe your stomach. Ooh! [*Laughter*]

SL: You didn't wanna take that unless . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . you just had to.

RF: That castor oil—it was—I didn't like the scent of it, you know, but if I could—I'd take my nose—close my nose and then drink it, then I was all right. [*Laughter*] And later on, you started takin'—put it in orange juice, you know, and that would cut it down.

[01:21:08] SL: Now what about—see, was turpentine somethin' or . . .

RF: Yeah, turpentine. That was a—you used it [*dog barks*] mostly on your—externally.

SL: Mh-hmm. Yeah.

RF: Now you could take a few drops of it and put it in sugar and take it for different things. I don't remember now what we used to take it for, but I know my grandmother used to take it, and you

had a medicine dropper, you know. Get some in it—drink it down there, and they'd mash the thing, and it'd come up in it. And then she'd drop so many drops in a teaspoon with some sugar in it, and you'd take it.

SL: Spoonful of sugar.

RF: Yeah.

[01:21:53] SL: Well, now that's good stuff here. Did anyone in your family—did you ever see anyone get really sick . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . in your family?

RF: Yes, my . . .

SL: What was that like?

RF: . . . my sister—it was bad. She had pneumonia. She had what they call the eighth-day pneumonia. If you lived eight days, you'd get well, but you mostly died before that eighth day get there. She was my next oldest [*SL coughs*] sister. [01:22:27] And I had a sister named Mabeline. She was two years older than me. And right after I was born—I just can remember her—she passed with typhoid fever.

SL: Ooh. Hmm.

RF: And after my dad died, it was thirty-seven—forty-seven years before we had a death in our immediate family, and that was my

baby brother. He was in the air force, and they used to—he used to—they had a—he was flyin' with 'em when they had those B-29s. And he was old enough to retire and was fixin' to retire when they got the B-52.

SL: Yeah.

RF: When they got the B-52, his crew—they'd been flyin' together all that time—twenty-some years—so they persuaded him to reenlist and go to Korea. And he was in that first B-52 that got shot down over Hanoi in [19]72. And I remember it just as well. I was layin' in the bed—my wife and I—when the news come on about it. And I told my wife—I said, "Walker Lee's in that plane." He was the gunner. And sure enough, he was. And the next day—I was workin' for sheriff department then—next day when this officer walked in there—major walked in there—he said, "I'm lookin' for Randall Ferguson." I said, "Yeah, I know what you come to tell me. You come to tell me bout my brother." He said, "How did you know?" I said, "Well, when I—when that—when the news came on about that B-52 bein' shot out, I knowed he was on that plane." He say, "You're right." [SL coughs] And he was—they had missin' in action then. And then later on, they turned it to killed in action. It was five of 'em on that plane—three of 'em ejected. He and the copilot went

down with the plane. And I talk with some of those fellas. They came to his memorial service, and they told me that they tried to rouse him, but he—they—he got a direct hit, and also, the copilot got a direct hit. And he was just slumped over. [*SL sighs*] So they bailed out, and they went down with the plane. And they later discovered his body and brought him back.

SL: Oh, that's good.

RF: He's buried in Arlington Cemetery in Virginia.

[01:25:16] SL: Mh-hmm. So how long had he been in the—was that the air force?

RF: Yes.

SL: How long had he been in there?

RF: Oh, he's—twenty-some years. He was old enough to retire, but they talked him in those—goin' back with a [*SL coughs*]—because they just got those B-52s.

SL: Yeah. Well, those were . . .

RF: And they were supposed to be unhittable, you know. They could fly so high. But they come up with that SAM missile. That's what hit 'em. They're what they call those heat-seekin' missiles.

[01:25:51] SL: Boy! What about—were there any other family members in the services—in the armed services?

RF: Yes. I had a—my brother, Henry. He was in the air force. And

my brother, Harold—he's with the Seabees—part of the navy. He was—they was in construction, you know. And they all gone except me. I'm the only boy left. I got two sisters left, and they younger than me.

[01:26:23] SL: But they made it—were they in the armed services during wartime?

RF: Yes. Mh-hmm.

SL: And they all survived that.

RF: They all survived and came back home.

SL: And were healthy and . . .

RF: Yeah.

[01:26:36] SL: . . . not maimed. So do you remember what life—what World War II did to life back here at home?



RF: It brought—it made things better. It made things better.

SL: How did it do that?

RF: Well, it made the relationship between the white and the black better because they had to change—you see, [*clears throat*] over there, I was in the Fifth Army 92nd Division with the—connected to the Fifth Army overseas, and I stayed nearly eighteen months. And we all went to the same mess hall to eat. We all go to the same place to take a shower and change clothes. And we got to know each other better. That's when I was in Italy.

SL: So you served. You were in the army.

RF: Oh yeah. Eight—three years, nine month, twenty-seven days, and nine and a half hours. [*Laughs*]

[01:27:47] SL: So you were in Italy? Did you see much action?
Did—were you in fights in Italy?

RF: No.

SL: No?

RF: I was division mess sergeant. I was general's mess. I worked in the general's mess. When I first went over there—well, when I—I was—see, I was with [*clears throat*—I joined the 92nd Division when they was in Louisiana on maneuvers in [19]43, and I was workin' in the—I was the second cook in the kitchen. And we were gettin' ready to move. You know, we'd move from one place to another. We had them big six-by-six truckers, and we had those field ranges and put the burners in 'em. And we's gettin' ready to move one day, and I was up in the truck, and I'd picked up one of them burners to put up in the field range and somebody got in the truck that wasn't familiar with drivin'—goin' move the truck to let the mess officer out. And when he went to move it, he'd checked it, and it throwed me back on my back and that burner hit me right in the pit of my stomach.

SL: Oh!

[01:28:58] RF: And that was some pain, and I stayed in the 606 Field Hospital down there for over a week fore I could make water. They rolled me out there in a wheelchair like ?that little ol' brinks that? was runnin' and nothin' happened. [*Slaps something*] They'd have to draw my water with a catheter. But after I was there a little over a week, I got to the place—they'd sit me out there every mornin' when that little ol' ?brinks?—hear that water runnin' [*coughs*], and they'd—and finally, I got to a place I could make my water. I went back to my outfit, and then we went on—we moved in—first time the 92nd Division were ever together—went to Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

SL: Okay.

[01:29:46] RF: And I was a—I workin' in the officers' mess at three-six-five, and some of the doctors came in. They killed a deer out there and dressed it and brought him in there—asked us, "Would we cook it for him." We told him, "Yeah, we'd cook it for him." So we fixed it for him, and they was sittin' there eatin'. The mess officer comes in, and he say, "Why—what are these folks eatin' here?" [*SL laughs*] Say, "Everybody's supposed to eat the same thing." So we told him what happened, you know. He said, "Well, I don't want this to happen no more." Say, "Everybody supposed to eat the same thing here." So those

were the medics—those doctors. They the one that come around and inspect the mess hall. So we said, "Well, we'll fix him." We'd been gettin' spotless report—mess hall—every time they'd come by, they'd just give us a clean deal. [01:30:40] He come in there that Saturday mornin' with little white gloves on [*laughs*], and they condemned everything. So the mess sergeant—I mean, the mess officer—he come down there, and, "Oh," he said, "what—what's happenin' here?" He said, "Well, can't nobody leave here until this place pass inspection." It wasn't the idea that it wasn't—we couldn't pass inspection—it was him they was after. So I was just attached to the officers' mess, so I was in three-six-five ?cabinet? company, so I went on down there and got me a pass and went to Mexico. [*Laughter*]

RF: [*SL coughs*] Well, that's too bad. It kinda came down on you-all instead of him.

RF: Yeah, so when I came back off of that weekend pass, the mess sergeant down there at the general's mess had been tryin' to get me to come down there. They needed a baker down there. So I went on up there and told 'em—I said, "Okay, I'm ready to come to officers' mess." He said, "Okay." So the general sent a order down there havin' me transferred from three-six-five to the officers' mess. The mess officer down at three-six-five sent the

order in to have me busted. So you knew what all [*unclear words*] the general's order held up 'cause he said for me to be transferred there in grade. So I was with the 92nd Division headquarters from then on till they—little fore they got ready to go oversea, I had an—I had one of those bad allergy attacks. See, I started with that allergy when I was in Fort McClellan, Alabama, and I had to go to a clinic there and take a shot every week for it. [01:32:31] I did that for almost a year.

SL: Oh, my gosh.

RF: And when I went back out to Arizona, I started that same thing again. So I was in the hospital when the 92nd Division headquarters left goin' overseas to Italy. And a certain general came in over there [*laughs*] at the hospital one day—I was layin' up there—he say, "Ferguson, how you feel?" I say, "I'm not feelin' too good today. I'm feelin' better than I have been though." He said, "Well, you're still breathin', ain't you?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I got orders from General Almond to bring every man that is breathin'." [*Laughs*] So the troop train was already down there waitin' on us. I left there in a white suit—ward boy suit—and caught that train. That's all I had. But that was a blessin' for me 'cause I could get off the train 'cause they thought I was civilian.

SL: Oh!

[01:33:32] RF: So the fellows'd make up [*SL clears throat*] a pot, give it to me to go out and buy their stuff, and I'd go out and get it and bring it back. I'd bring 'em liquor, beer, and all that stuff. They thought I was . . .

SL: Cigarettes.

RF: . . . civilian, see, and they—the MPs—they guardin' the train. They saw a soldier with a white suit on. [*Laughter*] So—and I rode that train—we rode that train all the way to [*unclear word*] Virginia, and that's where we debark—go—embark—go oversea.

[01:34:02] SL: How'd your allergies do while you were on the train? I mean you were still . . .

RF: I was still havin' a little problem with 'em, but that liquor was knockin' it out. [*Laughter*]

SL: Didn't matter much.

RF: Yeah. So [*SL clears throat*] we left there, and we was on the water twenty-nine days goin' to Italy on a ship. It was a cargo ship called the *William O. Hallem*. And I got on the ship with a dozen deck of cards and ten dollars in silver and twenty dollars in bills. And when I got on the ship, we played poker all the time. That was all we had to do. And everybody else's cards wore out, and I had dozen new decks. So I started to runnin'

the game, and I got on there with thirty dollars, and I got off with twenty-nine hundred.

SL: Whoa! [*Laughs*]

[01:35:05] RF: And when I got over there, I had to go to get my mess out—to get the officer to sign the thing, so I could send that money home 'cause they wouldn't allow you to send no more than what your base pay was 'cause they know you's in black market or somethin' [*laughs*] if you had any more.

SL: Well, that's good though. That's great.

RF: So . . .

SL: That made a difference back home.

RF: That's right. So I got to see the Leanin' Tower of Pisa while I was over there. Oh, Italy was a—it was a great country. It had been destroyed though—been bombed down to the ground—most of it. [01:35:42] And when I got there [*SL coughs*] and got off the ship, I saw the mail boy come in from headquarters. So I asked him—I said, "Where's division headquarters?" He said, "In Viareggio." That was a kinda town like Hot Springs—a summer resort. So I called him and went on—joined my division there and stayed with them until we left—come back home.

[01:36:08] SL: [*Sighs*] So you weren't close to any of the front line stuff or . . .

RF: No, no. I—oh, my friend . . .

SL: You were in . . .

RF: The only time I ever got any experience with that—Jim Lawman, which he organized a mobile CP where he could operate the division from while he's in his jeep or wherever he be.

[01:36:30] And he wanted me to go along and have coffee for 'em. [*Laughs*] And I remember a couple of time, we got pinned down with artillery fire. And that's as close to the fronts as I'd ever been.

SL: Well, that's a blessing.

RF: And when we got ready to leave, we'd move back in the station there and were fixin' to come home. No, moved back to the station, and we's goin' to Japan. They was sending us to Japan. And Truman dropped that bomb and ended that. So they pulled us back out of the station area and moved us—the ski troopers in there—to find ski troopers because they'd been over there longer. [01:37:22] So they moved us back and moved them in. And they shipped them out, and then they moved us back in the station area, and then we came home. We came home in five days. We came home on a transport, but when we's goin' over there, it took us twenty-nine days.

[01:37:38] SL: That's—so you mean, a [*someone clears throat*]*—an*

airplane transport or a ship?

RF: No, no, ship.

SL: It was just faster.

RF: Yeah. Yeah, faster than—you see, we went over in a convoy, too, see, and we couldn't go no faster than the convoy moved.

SL: I see. But comin' back . . .

RF: Yeah, we had about thirty-five ships in that convoy goin' over there. But just comin' back, we just one ship.

[01:38:04] SL: Well, did the convoy see any action on the way over?

RF: Yeah. German submarine came up and hit one of the ships, but it didn't sink it. But they dropped them bells and stuff down there [*laughs*] when we got him, 'cause they say they saw the oil comin' up, so they know they got him.

SL: Yeah. Boy!

[01:38:32] RF: But when we got off the ship, General Mark Clark—he was Fifth Army commander. He met us—had us all out there, and he told us—he said, "Look," he said, "I want you to forget about that Sunday school lesson you had about do unto others you have them do unto you." He said, "You—fact about it," he said, "you're over here to either kill or be killed." He say, "So if they do unto you [*SL coughs*] first, you ain't goin' be able to do unto them." [*Laughter*]

SL: Do unto them.

RF: "So you forget about that Sunday school lesson." But it was educational. I wouldn't've take nothin' for it—the eighteen months I was over there. I got to see—got to—after the war was over, where—it—you could take a tour. I went to Switzerland. And that country is the cleanest country in the world. I'm tellin' you—I really enjoyed Switzerland. [01:39:29] It was really good. And one of my friends with me—he was very—he was real dark, and some of them people over there had never seen, you know, a black . . .

SL: A black man.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RF: So they wanted to rub they hand on to see if it'd come off.

[*Laughter*]

SL: Oh, that's funny.

RF: He said, "You don't mind it, do you?" He said, "No!" They just rubbed us. [*Laughter*]

SL: Oh, that's good.

RF: Yeah, and it was—they was—the Swiss people are really nice though. They were really good. But they just never had seen, you know, a black person before.

[01:40:12] SL: That's interesting. So did you get to go through France or . . .

RF: No, I didn't go to France.

SL: Just Switzerland and back to Italy?

RF: Yeah.

SL: So comin' back home—the homecomin' was probably a good thing, wasn't it?

RF: Oh yeah. We came back home and disbanded the division, and I came from Virginia to Missouri barracks in St. Louis. That's where I were discharge. [01:40:46] And then I came on home to Camden. And when I came [*SL coughs*] back home—I was married then to my first wife. And when I got back to Camden, we—I left—my mother was livin' in Chicago, so I went and visited her, and then I came back to Camden and went in business—opened up Ferguson's Lounge. [*SL laughs*] And I was in—I had that twenty-three years.

SL: At Ferguson's Lounge?

RF: Yeah. And then I had this heart attack in [19]64, and the doctor told me I didn't need to—I needed to get out of that business, so that's when I started workin' in security.

SL: [*Sniffs*] Yeah.

[01:41:29] RF: And I worked through that—and while I was workin'

in security, Jerry McMahan was elected sheriff, and I—he picked me to be his first black deputy sheriff. And I served as deputy sheriff there for four years. And then I went back to Highland and started off in security, and then I operated a water plant for five years as a water plant operator. [01:42:04] And then he started havin' trouble again. Folks—we was—they were shippin' tires in there, and they was breakin' in 'em before—when they put 'em out there on the sidetrack before they even pull 'em into Highland to unload 'em. So Mr. Ledbetter said, "How in the world—they don't break in nothin' but the tire trucks—the cars?" I said, "Well, come on out here, and I'll show you." I carried him out there. I said, "What do you smell?" He said, "Rubber." I said, "All right. That's how you know what's in there."

SL: There you go.

[01:42:37] RF: So he said, "Well, what can we do about it?" I said, "Well, we'll just have to put a guard out here when them cars come in until they pull 'em in to, you know, unload 'em." So we started doin' that, and we stopped losin' 'em.

SL: Well, that's practical, pragmatic advice.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Um [*clears throat*] . . .

[01:42:56] RF: So when—after—let's see now—after that, I [*clears*

throat] got me—he made me security supervisor. And then he wanted me to—and move up there in a big office. He was goin' fix a office. I said, "No," I say, "I'd rather stay at the water plant where I've been." I had office there when I was workin' and operatin' a plant. [01:43:35] I said, "Then we—if somethin' happen to the water plant, I'll be there and I can take care of it." He said, "Well, that makes sense." He said, "Well, if you wanna stay there, it's all right." So I had my water—I had my office set up in there. And I stayed there—I was retired there after twenty-two and a half years.

SL: That's a long time.

[01:44:01] RF: Yeah, and I [*SL coughs*—I retired one day before my seventy-ninth birthday.

SL: Boy.

RF: I worked seventy-nine years.

SL: I hope I can work that long. That's a blessing there . . .

RF: And then . . .

SL: . . . to have that full life.

RF: . . . I moved here, and I had a full-time job out there in my garden.

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah, yeah.

[01:44:28] RF: And then in nineteen and forty-seven, they

appointed me coroner of Ouachita County, and I was the coroner for two years.

SL: Now that's interesting. So the—how—I mean did you have to do autopsies and that kinda stuff, or did you just have to pick up folks after they've passed and . . .

RF: Pronounce 'em dead.

SL: . . . pronounce 'em dead and . . .

RF: Well, most of the time, I had a—my chief deputy coroner—he was a embalmer. And so he was a lot younger than me, so I—whenever I got a call, I'd send him out.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Very few calls I had to make.

[01:45:13] SL: Mh-hmm. You mostly did the business end of it.
You . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: You did the paperwork. How are we on tape?

BP: Forty-seven minutes in. [*Clears throat*]

[01:45:26] SL: Let's go back to when you got home from the—servin' in Italy, and you'd been married. When was it that you got married the first time?

RF: I got married in [19]42. Before I went in the service.

SL: While you were in the service.

RF: No, before . . .

SL: Oh.

RF: . . . I went in the service.

SL: Oh, just before.

RF: Yeah.

[01:45:47] SL: And do you mind—I mean, what was her name?

RF: Alma.

SL: Alma.

RF: Alma Fairchild.

SL: Alma Fairchild.

RF: Alma Frances Fairchild.

SL: How did y'all hook up? How did you meet her?

RF: When we first moved to Smackover, we had a fly tent set up out there, and she and bout three more of her friends came by there.

SL: Met her then.

RF: And I met her there.

[01:46:18] SL: Now—okay, I—I'm a little bit confused now—the sequence of places that you lived. You got—did you start out in Hope? Is that—you were born in Hope?

RF: Yes.

SL: Is that—that's right?

RF: Well, not Hope. It was out from Hope, but Hope was the mailin' address.

SL: Oh, I see.

RF: It was out there on the farm out from Hope.

[01:46:40] SL: Yeah. And then you ended up—how long were you out there—let's see. It was on—was that on Bois d' Arc Creek?

RF: That's right.

SL: Outside of Hope. And how long were you there before you moved—and the next place you lived was in Washington?

RF: Yes.

SL: Is that right?

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: How long were you in Hope before you moved to Washington? Or were you movin' back . . .

RF: We were goin' back and forward.

SL: You were goin' back and forth . . .

RF: Back and forward. Yeah.

SL: . . . there between Hope and Washington.

RF: That's right.

SL: Okay. So—but eventually you just ended up back on the farm.

RF: That's right.

[01:47:13] SL: And from there, did y'all go to Smackover then from

the farm or were you just set . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . kinda doin' businesses . . .

RF: No, when I went to Smackover, I was in the CC camp.

SL: Oh, okay.

RF: I was in the CC camp when I went to Smackover.

SL: I see. Okay.

RF: And after our mess hall went down up at Sage, Lieutenant Buck Hamlin had sent me and thirty men down there to get things—to put up a mess hall.

SL: I see. Okay.

RF: And that's how I got to Smackover.

SL: I see.

RF: And I—after we got set up there—well, I stayed there until I left the CC camp. I left CC camp and went to Chicago.

[01:47:53] SL: And you were in Chicago because that's where your . . .

RF: My aunt was.

SL: Your aunt.

RF: I went there, and I went there, and I think I stayed with her about two nights, and then I got a job up—what they called the Pink Poodle Farm out there in north Illinois. And I had—I lived

right there on the place where I worked. And I made—did the bakin'. I make—made rolls and pies and everything.

[01:48:22] It was called the Pink Poodle Farm. [*SL coughs*]

The big aristocrat [*unclear words*]. That's where the big doctors and lawyers carried their secretaries out. [*Slaps hand on leg*]

[*Laughter*]

[01:48:33] SL: Oh, that's good. Well, so in—let's talk a little bit—just a little bit about the CCCs.

RF: Okay.

SL: Now did you make some lifelong friends when you were in the CCCs?

RF: Oh yes.

SL: 'Cause I know my dad did . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . when he was in.

RF: Yeah, and they all gone.

SL: They're all gone?

RF: All gone. The last one died about two years ago—boy named—
from El Dorado, Arkansas—named Edward Haywood.

SL: Mh-hmm. Haywood.

RF: He passed. He was about three years older than me. Than I was.

[01:49:11] SL: That was a great program.

RF: Yes, it was. It helped a lot of people.

SL: It helped pull us out of the Depression . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . and got the economy goin'.

RF: And you—they wasn't just givin' you nothin'; you worked for it.

SL: Yeah.

[01:49:23] RF: I remember one time, we were down there at Smackover. I volunteered, you know, to go out—fight fires at night. I thought that was a—I thought it would be a lot of fun, you know. And the way we fought fires—we had a fire rake, and you line up here [motions to indicate a straight line] cuttin' a trail—one man right behind me. I'm doin'—goin' right in front of him. One in front of me and you—I pull it so far, and he come back, and he pull it further, and that way we cut a big trench out there that the fire couldn't—and then they'd back—go back and backfire it. And them was the first fire plows they had. That was fore they come up with the fire plow.

SL: The firefly?

RF: They had that fire rake. Yeah. The fire plow—they come up with that later on where they could plow around it. [01:50:10]
'Cause before they had that, we had them fire rakes.

SL: Yeah. Yeah, I know a little bit about that. I . . .

RF: Yeah. I . . .

SL: Yeah, I got that kind of trainin'.

RF: See, I was workin' in the kitchen, but I'd have to—when they'd have to go out like that, I'd have to go in there and make 'em some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . to take with 'em.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So I just volunteered to go on. I just wanted to see what it was like, and that's how I learned about it.

SL: It's hard work.

RF: I volunteered one night to go out with it.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I didn't volunteer no more. [*Laughs*]

SL: Oh, [*laughs*] you'd had—you got enough of that.

RF: That smoke . . .

SL: One time.

RF: . . . and the heat.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RF: Yeah, that was—it was pretty rough.

[01:50:50] SL: Well, that's a good story. What about—do you mind

talkin' about some of your friends . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . that have passed that you were friends with in CCC and what they were like? I mean—well, first of all, were they all black folks or . . .

RF: Yeah, yeah.

SL: All—and it's a . . .

RF: All we had was white officers.

SL: I see. Uh-huh.

RF: Lieutenant Buck Hamlin from Prescott was our commander. He was the post commander.

[01:51:27] SL: And so CCCs were segregated, too.

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: Now would there be both white and black dorms or places that y'all . . .

RF: No, they wasn't together. They were different camps.

SL: Different camps altogether.

RF: Yeah. See, I was in 3790. That was the camp, and the rest of 'em all had numbers like that.

[01:51:47] SL: And what was your-all's primary job? What was it that y'all did every day or . . .

RF: Well, we built roads through the fire, so they could—so the—they

could get in there to fight a fire. And we built 'em trails and on
[*SL coughs*]*—and get a creek there—we had to build a bridge*
across it, and they made it out of timbers.

[01:52:12] SL: And I tell you, it's—that CCC work—craftsmanship
and engineering and the way those things look and the way they
were built, those are magnificent.

RF: Some of 'em ol' bridges still standin'.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

RF: But they're on the Adams Chapel ?courier?—we built that. And
then we had the fire towers.

SL: Yep.

RF: We built those fire towers, and then we'd put a man—would stay
up in 'em all the time and spot those fires and call in.

SL: And it was . . .

RF: And they was manned twenty-four hours a day.

SL: That . . .

[01:52:48] RF: So the CC camp—they did a lot of good things
[*unidentified voices in background*], and it helped a lot of people.
You know, it was—educated 'em to some things that could get
out and use in civilian life.

SL: Yeah, you know, you'd think they'd do somethin' like that now.

RF: Yeah.

SL: 'Cause there's—you—if you're just handin' out money, there's not much pride in that.

RF: Hm-mm.

SL: You give 'em a job for a man to do, and he earns his wage . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . that's somethin' to be proud of.

[01:53:19] RF: Yeah. And when I moved to Chicago, I say I stayed with my aunt, oh, about two days. But anyway, I notified the draft board—gave 'em my address there at my aunt's house. But I went to work up there in northern Illinois, and I forgot to [SL coughs] change my address.

SL: Address. Yeah.

[01:53:40] RF: I left there and went to work in a bowlin' lane in Evansville, Indiana. And . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . I worked there for a while. And then I left there, and I started to work at the Fireside Restaurant. It was a doctor owned it. And he had a son bout my age, and he had a farm out there. So he got us exempted because we were farmhands.

SL: Oh.

RF: But the fella—but I was workin' there in the restaurant, and he forgot to tell the fella out there—there's a old—that lived on the

farm that's operatin' it—about us. So the draft board—they went out there to see us—see what we were doin'. And nobody was there. And the man didn't even know us. Didn't know nothin' bout us.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And next day, they drafted his son. And I said, "Well" . . .

SL: Did they give you any trouble about that?

RF: No.

SL: No?

[01:54:48] RF: See, when—after they drafted his son, he told me—he said, "You goin' be next." He say, "Where's your home?" And I told him. I say, "Hope, Arkansas." He said, "Listen." He said, "Now I'm goin' give you some advice, and I think it's the best advice." He say, "You pack up and go back there and go ahead on and volunteer." He said, "'Cause the FBI is lookin' for you."

SL: Ooh!

RF: He say, "And when they find you, you'll be already in service [*SL laughs*], and that'll end it." So sure enough, I was at Fort McClellan, Alabama, and I went there to—they takin' basic training for every two week—every two months, and then you got shipped out. [01:55:38] My first weeks there, I made T/5

cookin'. I never did take no drain—basic trainin'—went right to the mess hall. And I was on my—I was in there about [*SL coughs*] four months, and the FBI came in. "You Randall Ferguson?" "Yes." "Well, I been lookin' for you, and I finally found you." He said, "But I can see you're doin' good here. I've already checked your record here, and you're doin' good, so we just goin' end this case right here."

SL: Boy, that was great advice you got, wasn't it?

RF: Yeah. [*Tapping sounds*]

[01:56:24] SL: Well, so it sounds like—now I may be wrong on this, but you met your first wife when you were in CCC.

RF: That's right.

SL: In—out . . .

RF: When we got out of service, we divorced.

SL: Okay. Okay.

RF: We divorce. [01:56:40] And then I moved to Camden and opened up this restaurant, and I hired Liz, my wife, and she was sixteen years old.

SL: Okay, now wait a . . .

RF: And she . . .

SL: . . . minute. Now when did you—you didn't open up the restaurant or the—we're talkin' about the lounge, too, right?

RF: Yeah.

SL: The—you didn't open up that until you were done with the armed services, and you'd come back.

RF: That's right.

SL: Okay. All right.

RF: Yeah. Yeah, I was out . . .

SL: Okay.

RF: . . . of service then.

[01:57:11] SL: Okay, okay. But now I wanna talk a lot about this restaurant . . .

RF: See, my . . .

SL: . . . and this lounge.

RF: . . . brother-in-law and my sister—they had a liquor store there in Camden. And they had this restaurant that they'd had before we got the liquor store. So they wanted me to come back and take it. So I came back and operated it there. And then they built [*SL coughs*] this new buildin' with a big dance hall in the back—big auditorium. And that's when I opened up Ferguson's Lounge. I had my place out in the front of it. And I sold beer and food—all kind of food—pies, cakes, and all that.

SL: I wish it was still there.

[01:57:55] RF: And when we opened that dance hall up, we had

"Count" Basie. Count Basie opened it up.

SL: Okay, now wait a minute. Before we get goin' down on this thing, we're about out of tape.

BP: Five.

SL: Five minutes? I wanna spend a whole tape talkin' about this, so [UC laughs] I'm thinkin' that before we go any further on that, why don't we take a break now—see if our food is here?

BP: Mh-hmm.

SL: And then we're gonna come back, and we're gonna talk a lot about that lounge.

RF: Okay.

SL: Okay? 'Cause that's somethin' else to have . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . Count Basie . . .

BP: Geez, Count Basie.

SL: . . . show up.

[Tape stopped]

[01:58:30] SL: Okay, here we go. All right. It's after lunch. We're comin' back. We had some good—I had—I ended up havin' chicken from—but where was it that we went? Woods. It was Woods . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . carryout, wasn't it? You had the catfish. It was good.

RF: It was real good.

[01:58:44] SL: All right. [*Laughs*] Well, we were kinda rollin' around to Ferguson's Lounge.

RF: Yes.

SL: Now tell me again how—you okay?

BP: I'm—wait a minute. Okay, that's just—okay, sorry. I saw somethin' there that's not actually there.

SL: Okay.

BP: Okay.

[01:59:07] SL: Tell me again how you got into workin' Ferguson's Lounge. How'd that come about?



RF: Well, my sister and them had a place there, and they also had a liquor store. So they wanted me to come there and take over the place, so I came there. [*SL coughs*] And we had an old buildin'. Then they built a new buildin', and that's where Ferguson's Lounge started. I was right on the front and then back—in the back was a big auditorium—dance hall and everything. And when we opened that place up, Count Basie was the first band. He came there and opened it up. And after that, we had most of the big—practically bout all the big band. T-Bone Walker and Bull Moose Jackson and his Bearcats and, oh,

we had all of 'em there—B.B. King and Percy Mayfield and—oh,
the blind one.

SL: Oh . . .

BP: Blind Lemon.

SL: Blind—what now?

BP: Lemon. Blind . . .

RF: No.

BP: No?

RF: The one that played the piano.

BP: Oh yeah.

RF: Sure, he died here back . . .

SL: Oh, I wish . . .

BP: Yeah.

[02:00:27] SL: . . . Cochran was here. He'd be able to tell us. Well,
we'll talk a little bit about each one of these. But I wanna know
how you got Count Basie to come down for the open? How'd
that happen?

RF: Well, [*clears throat*] we had a fella that was a-bookin' bands. He
lived in Pine Bluff, and he was able to get him.

SL: Now . . .

RF: See, when they'd book 'em down here, they'd have to have
three or four different—maybe three or four or five different

engagements—different place—he wasn't comin' down just to play for one.

SL: And it just lined up.

[02:01:01] RF: Yeah. But he came there and played there first.

And it was a overflow crowd. And we had a balcony there. The white people wanted to come, so they had a balcony there, and they was up in the balcony.

SL: [*Laughs*] That was kind of a reversal of roles.

RF: Reverse. Yeah—oh—and they saw those fellas down there jitterbug and then goin' home. They came down there and got down on the floor and then went to dancin' with 'em. And then they said my brother-in-law was tryin' to integrate the place.

[*Laughter*] To integrate [*unclear words*]. [*SL coughs*]

[02:01:41] SL: That's a good—that's really, really good 'cause, you know, usually the African Americans would have to sit up in the balcony at the theaters . . .

RF: Yeah, and the white folks'd be down on the floor. Yeah.

SL: . . . or wherever, you know, and they were restricted up there. That was fitting.

[02:01:59] RF: Yeah, and we had a fella down there named Eggs

Bradford. He could ji—he could dance. He could really bug.

And so, some of the white women wanted to dance with him, so

he told 'em—said, "You got—if—your husband hafta tell me it's all right fore I'm goin' dance with you." [*Laughs*]

[02:02:13] SL: Now is this in 1947, or when is this?

RF: This was in—yeah. [Nineteen] forty-seven.

SL: So the front part of the place—you were cookin' and . . .

RF: Sellin' beer.

SL: . . . sellin' beer and—what time of day would y'all open up?

RF: I'd open up in the mornin' around six o'clock.

SL: So you'd do breakfast.

RF: I served breakfast. Yeah, I served breakfast.

SL: Lunch and dinner.

RF: And I served dinner. Yeah. I cooked that soul food. I had turnip greens, collards, sweet potatoes—you name it, I had it.

[*Laughs*]

[02:02:53] SL: Well, so did you also attract the white clientele, too, to the restaurant side of it?

RF: Yes, I had some. They had a stockyard over across the street in front of me where they had sales every Saturday. And they would come over and eat with me. People over there would come and eat with me. "Can I come in here and eat?" "Yeah." So they'd come in and sit down at a table and eat.

[02:03:17] SL: So now—okay, Ferguson's Lounge—I've got to

assume, was probably in the predominant colored section of town.

RF: That's right.

SL: And so now . . .

RF: Right on Adams Avenue.

SL: And so now you've got white folk comin' through your door . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . for your food, and then some comin' for the entertainment in the auditorium in back.

RF: That's right.

SL: That's kind of a reversal of fortune, isn't it?

RF: That's right.

SL: Business was good.

RF: Yes.

SL: It was good.

RF: Right there in the back, I'd—I sold setups.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I sold beer and setups. A setup consisted of four cups and a drink and a bowl of ice for the people, you know, that done bought 'em a bottle and want to sit at a table and drink. And they'd sit there and drink—no—have no problem.

[02:04:19] SL: That's great. And so now were you—this is before

you started doin' any of your security work or . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . any . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . any of the deputy sheriff work or any of that.

RF: That's right.

SL: So how did the local law enforcement like this? Were they comfortable with it?

RF: Oh, I didn't have no problem with 'em. We got along fine. We had a fella named J. T. Vaughns—was a policeman there, and he was great. A lot of 'em—police come down there—they were scared to come by theyselves, but he come by there by hisself. But everybody respected him. He'd come down there, and some of 'em, he'd see 'em gettin' high. He'd tell 'em—say, "Look," he said, "go home." He said, "Now I'm goin' let you go home now. I know you done drink too much." He said, "If I come back down and catch you down again, I'm goin' carry you to jail." And he would.

[02:05:13] SL: [*Laughs*] Well, and you know what? You probably appreciated that as much as anything.

RF: That's right. But I never had no problem with the local police force. We always got along good, because if I needed 'em, I

called 'em.

[02:05:31] SL: Well, now since you were the proprietor of this place, did you get to meet Count Basie when he . . .

RF: Oh yes.

SL: . . . came in?

RF: Yes.

SL: And . . .

RF: I met all the bands 'cause they ate with me.

SL: I was just gonna say . . .

RF: Yeah, they eat with me.

SL: . . . you—not only did they perform in your . . .

RF: See, we had a hotel upstairs. They stayed in the hotel, and they came down in my cafe and eat.

[02:05:54] SL: And I'll bet you they had as much good time—as much fun and enjoyed your facility as anyplace else they played.

RF: Yeah.

SL: 'Cause they got the good food, and the place was always packed, wasn't it . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . whenever those big bands'd come through?

RF: You couldn't—we couldn't squeeze nobody else in. [*Laughs*]

[02:06:16] SL: Were they—did you ever try to do two shows in one

night or anything?

RF: No, no.

SL: An early or a late?

RF: No. See, they'd play, and they'd have intermission for about thirty minutes, and then they'd start back again.

[02:06:29] SL: So typically, when would they start playing and when would they quit playin'?

RF: Well, it's—generally, they'd start around nine o'clock. And then play a couple hours and then have intermission and then go on then till one or two to—just whatever—how they felt. Sometime, they just keep on playin'. The people was enjoyin' it, and they was enjoyin' doin' it.

[02:06:55] SL: That was a—that may have been Camden in its heyday, huh?

RF: That's right.

SL: How big a town was Camden back then?

RF: Oh, it was about fifteen thousand.

[02:07:12] SL: Is that right? And—okay, so let's talk about some of the other musicians that came through. Did you have a favorite musician that you liked to see come and play?

RF: B.B. King. He was always a favorite. He was there—we had him in there at least two or three different times.

SL: Uh-huh. Well, tell me . . .

RF: He would always draw a crowd.

SL: Well, tell . . .

RF: He was—he played the guitar and sung the blues hisself.

SL: Just him?

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: He'd have a band with him?

RF: No, he had a band.

[02:07:44] SL: Yeah, yeah. Was he carrying Lucille with him back then? Was . . .

RF: Yeah, he had Lucille.

SL: He had Lucille already.

RF: That's what he called his guitar—Lucille.

[02:07:54] SL: And—well, tell me about B.B. King. Did you ever have a good conversation with . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: And I bet with Count Basie, too. You . . .

RF: Oh yeah, all of 'em.

SL: What . . .

RF: I'd meet with 'em and—'cause I fed 'em, see? They'd always eat with me.

SL: Yeah.

RF: We had a hotel upstairs where they slept, and next mornin', I fixed the breakfast. And they'd eat dinner, and then they'd leave—goin' to another engagement.

[02:08:21] SL: They'd [*laughs*] stick around for dinner before they'd move on down . . .

RF: Oh yeah, they'd eat dinner [*SL laughs*], and then they'd take off.
[*Laughter*]

SL: That tells you somethin' right there.

RF: Yeah.

[02:08:30] SL: You know, they know they're gonna have a good meal when they come to Ferguson's. Well, that—you had to be proud of what you were doin' for the community . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . back then. I mean that's big doin's. Those are—were—now, you know, B.B. King probably wasn't as big a star then.

RF: No.

SL: And—now Count Basie . . .

RF: Count Basie was . . .

SL: Was . . .

RF: . . . already established.

SL: Yeah, he was already.

RF: B.B. King was just gettin' started.

[02:09:06] SL: Uh-huh. Mh-hmm. So how many cars did it take to have Count Basie come in? I mean, did they have a bus or . . .

RF: They had a bus.

SL: Had a bus full of musicians, and did they . . .

RF: Mh-hmm. They had to carry they—all their instruments and everything with 'em.

SL: In that bus.

RF: Mh-hmm.

[02:09:34] SL: That's somethin' else. Well, do you remember anything with your conversations with any of these guys? Is there . . .

RF: Oh yeah, they'd—they talked about how they got started and how they built up, and they enjoyed tourin' better than they did playin' in one place. Most of the time—you see, when they get through tourin', then they have a place that they play every night in one of them big clubs. But they say they enjoyed when they was out tourin' better than they did when they was just stationed in one place 'cause they'd get a chance to meet a lot of people.

SL: Yeah. And hopefully . . .

RF: And a lot of people wanted their autographs, you know, and it was just—it was a lot of fun when we'd have one of those big

bands there.

[02:10:19] SL: Well, let's talk—do you—I'm tryin' to think of some of the history that I know about B.B. King, and I—I'm having a little bit of—now he was from Mississippi, wasn't he?

RF: Yes.

SL: Indianola. That's right.

RF: That's right.

SL: It was Indianola. Did he say anything about his upbringing and how he got into doin' what he was doin'?

RF: Well, the way those big bands got started—some of those Jews, you know, would take 'em. See, he was just playin' by hisself once. But they [*SL coughs*] got him a band together. Course, they got their part of the money out of it, but he got his.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And all the musicians got theirs.

SL: Yeah. Yeah, it worked for everybody.

RF: So . . .

[02:11:17] SL: Well, let's talk about some of the other acts you had in there. What was another big band you had in there?

RF: Oh, we had 'em all.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

RF: We had 'em all. [*SL laughs*] All of the big bands. We'd have

one of 'em there every month.

SL: Just a overflow crowd every time.

RF: That's right.

BP: White bands? White [*unclear word*] . . .

RF: But most of 'em, the tickets sold out in advance. See, I would take tickets down to El Dorado, Fordyce, and different places. I had people there sellin' 'em [*someone coughs*], and they could come in free.

SL: The folks from out of town.

RF: Yeah, were sellin' tickets . . .

SL: Oh, I see . . .

RF: . . . for us.

SL: . . . that were sellin' the tickets . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . and so they want—[*laughs*] yeah, of course.

RF: They didn't have to pay to come in . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . so . . .

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RF: . . . everybody wanted to sell some tickets.

[02:12:05] SL: Well, how much did a ticket cost back then?

RF: Oh, from dollar and a half to two dollars.

SL: Hmm. [*Laughs*] Well, of course, that was . . .

RF: And that was . . .

SL: . . . that was pretty good . . .

RF: . . . that was big money at that time.

SL: Yeah, that was pretty good money. Mh-hmm. So you'd hold—about how many people would get—you could put in there and still have a good time? How many people would . . .

RF: Five- to six-hundred people.

SL: Golly! That's a big crowd.

RF: See, we had tables in there and chairs around 'em—down each side and cross the bandstand and back in the back. And out in the center was where they'd dance. But there's two rows of tables. See, we'd sell the tables. And they'd buy a ticket and so many tickets and a table.

[02:12:55] SL: Did you-all ever think to take any pictures or did . . .

RF: We—I had some pictures, but my house burnt . . .

SL: Oh!

RF: . . . and I lost everything there. I lost a lot of history when that—at that fire. I was puttin' down some carpets—some inlaid linoleum, and I was usin' some stuff that was flammable—highly flammable. And I was spreadin' it down like this. [*Gestures to*

show troweling] Hot water tank was back over there [points away from him], and it came on—[motions upward to demonstrate explosion] blew.

SL: Whoo. You lucky to get out of that alive.

RF: Lucky to get out of there. When I know anything I's covered with—had blazes all around, and I just jumped out through an openin' there. I got out on the outside, and that fire just went right through it.

SL: Oh!

RF: And we lost everything.

[02:13:56] SL: Now this was at your home.

RF: Yes. The only thing I saved was my guns, and they was in an old case. And I had a safe in there, and the firemens—when they came and started, I asked 'em to train their water hose in there on that—where I had them guns in that safe, and that's the only thing that saved them guns.

[02:14:23] SL: Hmm. Well, now when was that fire?

RF: In [19]83.

SL: Oh my gosh. So you'd already had your kids, and was anyone else in the house at the time? Was it . . .

RF: Nobody but me and the fellows that's workin'. My wife was at work.

SL: Kids were in school.

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: I tell you what, you're rackin' up the blessin's. I mean, as bad as that was . . .

RF: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and as much as you lost, it could've been much worse.

RF: That's right. And my service revolver that I carried was in there up on top of the thing. When that fire hit, it started shootin'.
[*SL laughs and coughs*] I had a box of ammunition in there, and it started to goin' off. It was something. It was a sight there for a while. Firemen was duckin' and runnin'.

[02:15:23] SL: Boy! Well, did you ever have any white bands come play at your place?

RF: Any what?

SL: Any white bands? Any white . . .

RF: No, no.

SL: . . . musicians?

RF: No.

SL: It was always black?

RF: No, always black.

[02:15:41] SL: [*Sniffs*] Well, I bet you started to get to know some of the white community through Ferguson's Lounge.

RF: Yes.

SL: It sounded like you had a very good relationship with the sheriff.

RF: Oh yeah, and all the police officers. I never had no problem with 'em. The only thing, now—Ouachita County went dry.

SL: Uh-oh.

RF: In [19]61, I believe.

SL: [*Coughs*] Mh-hmm.

RF: Yeah. And they dried it up. And then we had another election and went back wet again. [*SL laughs*] And we had Beer and Liquor Dealers Association set up to fight the dries, and the way we funded it—every case of beer I sold, I had to pay so much on it that went in the treasure.

SL: Yeah.

[02:16:37] RF: And the liquor stores the same way. So we accumulated quite a bit of money. And so they had a party out to Bragg Lake—Woodard Lake. We didn't know nothin' about it. And we're—there's a little Italian there—he was a beer distributor out of El Dorado, and he was Italian. And I'd just come from Italy, and he was askin'—he talked to me about the country, you know, and I was tellin' him everything about it, you know. And we got to be good friends, you know, and he'd always wanna know and—that I know—I knew some of his

people over there. [*Someone coughs and clears throat*] And when he came in that Monday mornin', he says, "You know," say, "I was out to the party at Woodard Lake last night, but I didn't see those blacks out there." He said, "I didn't see you out there." I said, "Well, I was tied up." I said, "I couldn't go." I played like I knowed what was goin' on. But I didn't.

[02:17:39] So he told me all about it. So that Monday mornin' when the Budweiser man—the president of it was the Budweiser man, Charlie Paul.

SL: Okay.

RF: So when the Budweiser man come in, he said, "What you need?" I said, "I need twenty quarts. I need twenty king-size and twenty flats." I said, "But I'm not goin' pay no dues on it." He said, "Well, I'll pay 'em." So he did, and he went on back, and he told Charlie—he said, "Somethin's goin' on wrong." He said, "Randall bought sixty cases of beer this mornin', but he say he wasn't goin' pay no tax on it." He said, "Well, why'd he say?" He say, "I didn't ask him." He say, "I just paid it and went on." He said, "But you need to go out there and talk to him." So Charlie came out there. He says, "Why you refuse to pay your taxes on the beer you got this mornin'?" I said, "Well, Charlie, I want you to tell me." I said, "'Cause you know." "No, I don't

know." I say, "Yeah, you know." I say, "You know why." He hum-hawed around—he say, "Is it bout that party we had at Woodard Lake?" I say, "I told you you knew." [SL laughs] So he said, "Well, look," he say, "how many other black accounts know bout this?" I said, "None of 'em as I know of but me." He said, "You ain't told none of 'em bout it?" I said, "No." He said, "Look," he said, "we need somebody to work." He bribin' me now to keep me from talkin'. [02:19:14] Said, "We need somebody to register blacks to vote. You see, we registered 'em in the"—they would pay the—at that time, you had a poll tax. You had to pay a dollar to vote.

SL: Yes.

RF: And we paid it out of our association fee. But somebody had to register 'em. So they said, "We'll give you so much salary and your expense, and you go out and register 'em." Well, I was runnin' the place there, so I registered more—everybody come in there on Friday and Saturday. And Friday—now I registered 'em right there in the place. [02:19:51] See, and I'd turn 'em in, they'd pay the tax, and they could vote. So I collect the expense, and I didn't [laughs] have to go nowhere [SL laughs] because I had registered 'em from Stephens, Bearden—just everywhere—all over Ouachita County. So they figured I was

goin' out there and doin' it, but I wasn't. I registered 'em right there in my place.

SL: Comin' to you. [*RF laughs*] That's somethin' else.

RF: But I got expense for it. So . . .

[02:20:20] SL: So when did you and "Dooley" Womack get together?

RF: Oh, when I first came to Camden. [*SL coughs*]

RF: I went to him—I said—we got to be friends, you know. He run for the—he was runnin' for representative.

SL: Yeah.

RF: State rep—and he come to me—he said, "Look," he say, "I need somebody to drive and haul people to the polls for me." I said, "Well, I got just the man you need—a fellow named Henry Nails." So I got him, and he hired him, and he got out and hauled folks to the poll, and that's how we first met. And, later on—my wife's a beautician. She'd finished beauty college. And they had some beauty equipment on sale. Somebody wanted to sell it. [02:21:10] And I had to have the money right away. So I went to Dooley. I said, "Dooley," I said, "I need a hundred and fifty dollars." I said, "And I'll give it back to you in a few days." He said, "Come on." He carried me over there to the bank. It was the Citizens Bank. Then they called Citizens Bank.

He said, "Let him have what he want." He was on the board over there at the bank. He said, "Let this man have what he want." So I got the money. And bout three or four days after, I went up there and paid him. He said, "No," he said, "just take it back to the bank." He said, "Bank let you have it." Said, "That set you up a record over there." Said, "Next time you get ready to borrow somethin', you can go over there and get it without askin' me." And that's the way we hit it off as friends. And we would have different opinions on election, but we never fell out. We's always friends.

SL: That . . .

[02:22:07] RF: And he—now he's was the first man that ever lend blacks money to buy a home with. But he—that was a lucrative market out there, and he knowed the blacks would pay.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And he made some good money, but he helped blacks get homes. A lot of people got homes now because of Dooley Womack.

SL: So . . .

[02:22:35] RF: And that set him up. And he ran for the senate—state senate. And he stayed there a long time.

SL: That's right.

RF: Well, the white people fell out with him. And he told me—he said, "Look," he said, "you go to a lot of these meetin's round here." He say, "What is—why is they against me now?" I said, "Well, Dooley, they say you done got too big for your britches." [Laughter] [SL coughs] And they said, "We've always said that we'd never let nobody in Camden have as much power as "Mike" Berg. Because he said, "When you got that much power, you can do—you can get away with murder." And I said, "Now what you need to do—you sell that Lincoln Continental and buy you a Chevrolet. Get back in the people's class."

SL: Yeah.

[02:23:37] RF: And he did, and the people . . .

SL: Responded.

RF: . . . responded to him. And he stay there until—now he help the sheriff that hired me get beat, and the fella he put in there fell out with him. And they was back-and-forth in the papers—somethin' bout each other everyday. And I went to him—I said, "Dooley," I said, "look." I said, "Y'all ain't doin' nothin' but killin' yourself." I said, "The people's gettin' sick of that." I say, "You goin' fool around," I say, "and you goin' get beat—you and Robert Earl both." Robert Earl Garner was the sheriff, and he was a senator. I said, "Both of you goin' get beat." He say,

"Oh, nobody can't beat me." I say, "You right." I say, "You goin' beat youself." And sure enough, he did. He let a nobody beat him. And he come to me—he's, "Well, I wished I'd've listened to you." Say, "You was right. I did beat myself." But he did a lot for Ouachita County. He did a lot. He brought a lot into Ouachita County. He helped it out tremendously. And he decided he's goin' run again. [02:25:06] And he woulda won, but a doctor told him he didn't need to run.

SL: His health gave out on him.

RF: Yeah. Mh-hmm. He said, "You don't need to get out there on no campaign."

SL: I used to love to hear him talk.

RF: He was—he—and he was good. He was really good. And he just organized his realty state—his real—and he did good in it [*SL sighs*] because he's responsible for a lot of black people havin' homes that wouldn't had 'em. He had a—he knew that a lucrative market out there, and he made him some money out of it. But he helped a lot of people.

SL: People remember that, too.

[02:25:52] RF: Yeah. Oh, it—there's nobody that don't know Dooley Womack here in Camden.

SL: Yeah.

RF: 'Cause he touched 'em one way or the other. [*Someone whistles*] And he made a wonderful senator, and he coulda been governor. When Frank White beat Bill Clinton, I went to Dooley. I said, "Dooley, this is your time to run for governor." "Oh, what are you talkin' bout? Can't nobody beat Bill Clinton." I said, "All right, you goin' see." I said, "The people's down on him." See, he's—he changed that registration fee.

SL: Mh-hmm. That's right.

RF: He raised that.

SL: Raised the car tag thing.

RF: And it hurt the poor folks. And there is—there's more poor folks than there is rich folks. And those little people and those big people—and their vote count just as well. And that killed him, 'cause Frank White had no business beatin' him, but he beat hisself. And I told him—I said, "You had a chance to be governor, but you wouldn't take it. You were too scared that I didn't know what I was talkin' bout."

[02:27:04] SL: Well, he shoulda known better than that.

RF: But he just didn't think nobody could beat Bill Clinton. And he was easily beat. In the primary, that ol' turkey farmer over there at Hot Springs, he got—carried 36 percent of the vote [*laughter*] against him, so what would Dooley have carried?

SL: Yeah.

RF: Well-known as he was. And he coulda walked in, but he just [*SL coughs*] wouldn't do it. See, I was out there with the people. I know what they was—what the people are sayin'. "We don't want Bill Clinton. He done raise them taxes on us. We don't want him." And that killed him.

SL: [*Sighs*] What about other politicians? I mean, I know that . . .

RF: Well, there was Orval Faubus.

[02:27:53] SL: Well, let's talk about Orval Faubus.

RF: Well, Orval Faubus—and everybody thought that he and Daisy Bates was against each other, but he said Daisy Bates was one of his best friends. He was the publisher of a paper there in Little Rock . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . and she's the one that led the Nine . . .

SL: *Arkansas Press*.

RF: . . . you know, to Central High when they integrated it. And Orval Faubus called out the National Guard to keep them from goin'. And Eisenhower federalized the National Guard to go down [*laughs*] there and protect 'em to go. So that's the way it ended up.

SL: Yeah.

RF: When he federalized the National Guard, he took 'em out of Faubus's hands. [*Laughs*]

[02:28:35] SL: That's right. That's right. Well, how did Orval Faubus just keep gettin' elected over and over again?

RF: Well, he was tellin' people what they want to hear. He was—he talked integration, but he didn't do it. [*Laughs*] He just talked about it.

SL: Yeah.

RF: That was keepin' them people on his side—the segregationists. And because he wasn't doin' nothin', it kept the black people on his side too. So Orval Faubus—now, at that [*SL coughs*] time, we had a fella here named Mike Berg.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Rich Jew.

SL: Yeah. Yes.

[02:29:25] RF: Now he told me—he said, "Look," he said, "I want you to stay out of politics." He said, "You'll make more enemies than you do friends." He say, "Anything you need, I'll take care of it for you." He was the chairman of the state police. He was state police commissioner.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And so he say—Election Day, he said, "That's a good day for you

to go fishin'." And I would. I'd close up and go fishin' Election Day 'cause I couldn't sell nothin'—couldn't sell no alcohol on Election Day. [02:29:57] So I'd close up and go fishin'. So when Orval Faubus—oh, Ed House was revenue commissioner here at the time. And during the election, I didn't do nothin'. I just went fishin'. And they'd come down to my place that night—Ed Livingston and Ed House and Dooley Womack—say, "Out of twenty-three beer taverns in the third ward," he said, "didn't but one support the governor." I said, "What you mean?" I said, "Now I know who you're talkin' about that supported him." I say, "He got about fifteen people workin' for him." That was James Grimm out there at Keystone.

[02:30:55] I said, "The man didn't get but three votes."

[*Laughter*] He say, "You know what?" He say, "I hadn't thought of that." First, they're talkin' bout takin' my license, and I said, "Well," I said, "I ain't got—there it is up there. If y'all want 'em," I say, "I can do more than one thing. I can do more than sell beer." I say, "I make a livin' somehow." But they didn't bother. And so they had a meetin' out to James Grimm out there, and we all went out there. I went out there. And they asked me—he say, "Now look," say, "you got to support the governor." I said, "I ain't got support nobody." I said, "I ain't

foolin' with no politics no more." "Well, why you ain't?" I said, "Mike told me—Mike Berg told me to stay out of politics, and I am." He say, "Well, Mike Berg is just over the police commission"—said, "that's all he's over." I said, "Well, I'm like that ol' farmer was. Cyclone come, and they had a storm shelter, and all of 'em went down in the storm shelter except Grandpa." [02:32:06] "He was out there in the pea patch pickin' peas." [*SL laughs*] And they asked him after the storm blew over—said, "How come wouldn't come down in the storm cellar with us? You just stayed out there. You coulda got blowed away." He said, "The pea patch been takin' care of me for the last fifty years, and I ain't fittin' to give it up now." [*SL laughs*] I say, "So that's the way I am." I said, "Mike Berg been takin' care of me, and I ain't goin' give him up now." So he's [*SL coughs*]—I think Mike told me—he say, "I don't care who's governor." He say, "I'm goin' have him in my pocket."

[*Laughter*] 'Cause he contributed to the both of 'em. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, that's not uncommon.

RF: No, he contributed to both of 'em, so he had 'em—he had . . .

SL: He had both of 'em.

RF: . . . he owed him favors—either one of 'em that got in there—it didn't make him no different.

[02:32:58] SL: Yeah. Well, now what all did he have in Camden?

RF: Who, Mike?

SL: Yeah.

RF: He had practically everything. He had more money than all of Camden. [*Laughs*] He had rent houses. He had a lot of forestry. [*SL coughs*] He had his own bank.

[02:33:23] SL: Is that the same [*someone clears throat*] bank that Dooley took you to—was his bank?

RF: No, no.

SL: No?

RF: His own—he had bank in his office—a safe in there. He had a . . .

SL: Oh. [*Laughs*]

RF: He didn't have nothin' but new money.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And he used to—he would go to the barbershop and get his hair cut, and he'd get up, and they'd pick his hat up and hand it to him. If they touch it, he'd say, "You can have it." He wouldn't wear that hat no more.

SL: That's interesting.

RF: He always wore gloves.

[02:33:57] SL: That's interesting. Hmm. Well, so what was it about

him that endeared you to him so much? Why were you so loyal to him?

RF: Well, because he's [*SL coughs*] takin' care of me. He wouldn't let nothin' happen. He told me—he say, "You just stick with me, and I'll take care of you." When they'd have an election, he'd come down there in my place—he'd sit down—bring a couple of cases of whiskey—said, "Give these out to your customers. Tell 'em who responsible for 'em gettin' it." [02:34:47] And they all voted for him.

SL: Yeah.

RF: He'd come down there with a couple of case of liquor—tell me—sayin, "You know who to give it to."

SL: Boy, those were the days, weren't they?

RF: That's right. Those were the days.

[02:35:04] SL: Well, how did David Pryor fit in with all of y'all? I mean, I know that you supported him . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . every time and his son as well.

RF: Yeah.

SL: So was it just that David was from Camden, and you knew him and knew his . . .

RF: Knew his father and the . . .

SL: . . . his father was . . .

RF: . . . his brother.

SL: . . . a Chevrolet dealer, and I think he—what—was it his grandfather that was the sheriff at one point or—it seems like . . .

RF: No, his father was a sheriff.

SL: Father was the sheriff . . .

RF: Edgar Pryor.

SL: Yeah. And so . . .

RF: He had two sons. One was a preacher.

SL: That's right, Bill.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And they had a fella that worked for 'em name—they called him Jesse Bowlegs.

SL: [*Laughs*] Bowlegs.

RF: Yeah. And he was—tell Jesse to take his son out in the woods and teach him how to cuss. But he never could get him to cuss.

[*Laughter*]

[02:36:12] SL: I love that. Well, and wasn't—"Susie" Pryor was pretty respected . . .

RF: Yeah. Mh-hmm. Yeah she was.

SL: . . . in the community, wasn't she?

RF: Everybody liked her. She campaigned for David, and she was the best he ever had. I used to go to all the things she would have for him. [02:36:35] Now Edgar Pryor—he was somethin' else.

SL: Who now?

RF: Huh?

SL: Edgar?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Well, talk to me about Edgar.

RF: After I came out of service, we had a young, black dentist here name Molette—Willie Molette. And he had a salesman there—they called him "Cowboy." And [SL coughs] Willie was up there—went up there lookin' for a car. And he was out there showin' him them new cars. And so Edgar called him—said, "Cowboy," said, "come here." He said, "What you doin' showin' that nigger these new cars?" He say, "He's a doctor." He say, "I don't give a damn. [Laughs] He's still a nigger. Ain't no nigger goin' buy one of these new cars." [Laughter] Now that actually happened.

SL: That's somethin' else

RF: And he went right on to Pine Bluff and bought one.

SL: Mh-hmm. That's somethin' else.

RF: Yeah. And that's the—things like that happened then.

SL: Yeah.

RF: He sold me my first car—a [19]36 Master Chevrolet.

[02:37:42] SL: Sounds like a good one. What—so how much did a car cost back then?

RF: Well, it was a secondhand.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I think I—it was three hundred and fifty dollars.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's a lot . . .

RF: I paid fifty dollars down on it and was payin' fifty dollars a month. I's in the CC camp, and I wasn't supposed to have a car. But a friend of mine lived right up the street up there—I'd leave it up there all the time. And I would haul the fellas to El Dorado every night—fifty cents apiece—fifty cents a head.

[02:38:18] SL: So why would y'all go over to El Dorado?

RF: Well, 'cause there wasn't nothin' in Smackover. All the clubs and everything was in El Dorado. So we'd—I'd make two or three trips down there every night.

SL: [*Laughs*] Golly!

RF: Take 'em down there and then bring 'em back.

SL: That's somethin' else.

RF: And the cleaners here go—where Best Cleaners is now—what's his name? Hmm—checkin'.

SL: I can't . . .

[02:38:57] RF: Was it Graves? Anyway, he was doin' the cleanin' for the CC camp. He would come there and pick up his clothes—take 'em in and clean 'em and bring 'em back.

SL: That's a big account.

RF: And I collected his money for him on payday. On payday once a month, see, they paid, and I was sittin' there with that list and collect his money for him. So he cleaned all my clothes free.

SL: There you go.

RF: And every once in a while, he'd tip me a li'l money. [*SL sighs*] But he was—he didn't forget me, you know, for things that I did for—after I got out of CC camp and came here to Camden, he was still in business. And I used to carry my clothes—they's—"Nah, ain't charge you nothin'."

SL: Aw.

RF: He wouldn't charge me nothin'. He say, "You was too good to me." But he didn't lose a dime. I collected all of his money.

[02:40:02] SL: Well, he should—you know, sounds like he valued—you know, it sounds like to me that a lot of people valued your opinion and valued your judgment . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . your sensibility about what was really goin' on—that—and so, you got this restaurant lounge that's . . .

RF: Everything in it was new. When I went in there, everything I had in there was new—new stools—everything. And it was—my jukebox—I had a—places on the counter you could just drop your money in there and play it. You didn't have to get up and go to the jukebox.

SL: Yeah. Yeah, that . . .

RF: And . . .

SL: . . . was good stuff.

[02:40:47] RF: . . . I remember one Election Day, it was on that remote control—you know, like in a—something else could trip it without you puttin' money it.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I come back from fishing—there were the police all sittin' there in front of the place. They say, "I thought you was in there." I say, "No." I say, "I been fishin'." He said, "Well, somebody's in there." I said, "Wait a minute. Y'all better come in and go in there with me." Say, "How you know?" [SL *coughs*] "Well, that jukebox in there been playin'. It ain't goin' play by itself." So I say, "Oh, I know what happen." When the

drink box would come on, it would trip it. [*Laughter*] So . . .

SL: It just started playin' . . .

RF: So . . .

SL: . . . all . . .

RF: . . . I went on, and we went on in there. And by that time, that drink box come on and it tripped. He say, "You was tellin' the truth." I say, "Well, wasn't right to lie. I know what's happenin' to it." It just tripped and come on and started playin'. But it was [*laughs*] a mystery, and they just knowed somebody had to be in there. He say, "Somebody in there." I say, "Well, if somebody in there, y'all better come on and go in with me," 'cause I wasn't goin' in there by myself if somebody was in there.

[02:42:05] SL: That's good that they were out there looking at it and worrying about it . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . when they knew that you weren't there and—or . . .

RF: Well, they thought I'd . . .

SL: . . . you ordinarily . . .

RF: No, they thought I was in there.

SL: I know, but they knew that ordinarily you wouldn't be there . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . 'cause it was Election Day, right?

RF: Mh-hmm. But they [*unclear words*]*—*they thought I was in there and just wouldn't come to the door.

SL: Uh-oh. Yeah. Hmm.

[02:42:30] RF: And when I was runnin' the place down there—now Randall Jr. used to come down and help me mop and clean up.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And he was a real good kid, but he was mischievous. [*SL laughs*] When he was little, he would go up in the cabinets and hide from his mama. And she'd be callin'*—*he wouldn't say nothin'. And she'd be just lookin' for him. And finally, he'd come crawlin' out. [*Laughter*] And my wife would help me down there at the place at night, so we had a babysitter over there with him. And he went in the bathroom and locked himself up in there.

SL: Uh-oh.

RF: And she had to break the door down [*laughs*] to get him out.

[02:43:13] SL: Now, there's another thing about Ferguson's Lounge that we hadn't really talked about on tape and that's also where you met your wife.



RF: Yeah. Well, she's—I hired her as a waitress when she was sixteen years old.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And during that time, they didn't have no age limit on who could sell beer.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Later on, you had to be twenty-one to sell it. And twenty-one to buy it or consume it.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RF: But it—the law changed after that. But after she got seventeen, we started courting, and she fell—we fell in love with each other, and we married. And when I married—we married right there in the place.

SL: A-ha!

[02:44:01] RF: A friend of mine named Robert Molette—I done went and got the license. I bought her a [*unclear word*]. I carried her down to Stinson. I said, "Joe John," I said, "give her whatever she wants." And so he brought all kind of expensive rings out there, and she picked a little ol' set there, but that was what she liked.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So I got them. I went and got the license, and when I went up there, the county clerk told me—say, "You generally have to—you have to wait three days. You've got a waitin' period of three

days when you ask for it before you can come back and get 'em." I said, "Look," I say, "I'm not changin' my mind in three days." I say, "I want them license today." She say, "Well, there's one way you can get 'em." Said, "Go to the county judge and see if they can find a waiver, and we can sell 'em to you." I went in there at the county judge, and he say, "Oh yeah, I'll sign it." I went on back and got the license. And I told Robert Molette, a friend of mine—I said, "I got my license—wanna get married." I said, "But I ain't got no preacher." He said, "I'll go get my preacher." So he did. He preacher come in. He said, "You want the long sermon or the short one?" [*SL laughs*]

Some people had just come in and ordered four hamburgers, and I had 'em on the grill. [*Laughter*] I say, "You better make it short 'cause them hamburgers burn, you ain't goin' get paid." So he gave us a short one. And after he married us, he said, "Now, look, I'm takin' these license and have 'em recorded because a lot of people—when you—they may get married, and they don't take 'em and record 'em—you ain't been married." He said, "These license gotta be recorded." He said, "I'm takin' to have 'em record 'em, and I'll bring 'em back to you—either or have 'em mail 'em to you."

SL: That's good.

RF: So we was married. [*Laughter*] No if or ands about it.

[02:45:49] SL: Well, that's funny. Well, did she wait the table then?

RF: Huh?

SL: Did she wait the table with the burgers after y'all got married and—you know, you were cookin' for a couple.

RF: Oh yeah, yeah.

SL: He—yeah.

RF: Yeah, we went on and fixed those burgers up and sold 'em to those folks and gave 'em to 'em [*laughter*] and went on. And we been together ever since—sixty-one years. Soon we'll be sixty-two.

[02:46:11] SL: Did you—did y'all get to go on a honeymoon at all?

RF: No, we . . .

SL: No?

RF: . . . had our honeymoon right there in the place. We got married right there and had our honeymoon. And I was livin' up over the place. I had a room right up over my place.

SL: Oh, I didn't know that.

RF: Yeah, I had a room up there, so nobody knowed we was married.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So we spent the first night together. And her mom and dad and

them wantin' to know what happen.

SL: Uh-oh.

RF: So she carried the license over there and showed 'em to him—
say, "I'm married now."

[02:46:48] SL: Did you get along okay with her folks?

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: Yeah?

RF: I didn't have no problem with 'em. And when I—when we—
when I first asked Liz, "Will you marry me?" she said, "well, you
have to ask Mama and Daddy." So I went and asked her mama.
She said, "Well, you have to ask Les, and I know what he goin'
say." I say, "Well, maybe there's no need me goin' to him."
[*Laughter*] So when I went on to him [*SL coughs*], I asked
him—he said, "Well, y'all done made up your mind what you
goin' do anyway," and so I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, you
have my blessin' now. I have no objection." So—but at first,
her people didn't want me to marry her, and my people didn't
want me to marry her.

[02:47:32] SL: Well, there was a big age difference—for one thing.

RF: Yeah. So we didn't even invite nobody to—we just had our
weddin'—just us and one friend and the preacher. [*Laughs*] I
say, "Ain't no need of bringin' them folks in here. They don't

appreciate—they don't approve of what we doin' no way." So we didn't invite nobody.

[02:47:49] SL: Well, there was ten years difference between you, wasn't there?

RF: Yeah.

SL: So that—that's hard to make that work.

RF: Well, it worked.

SL: Or—I mean, the conventional wisdom . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . would say, "That's hard to make that work."

RF: But it worked for us.

[02:48:03] SL: Yeah. It worked great. Boy, that lounge—it was a center of activity, wasn't it?

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: I mean, all kinds of activity.

RF: Yeah.

SL: All kinds of decisions were made around that.

RF: A lot of politicians—that's—was made right there.

[02:48:29] SL: Well, so do you wanna talk at all about David Pryor and . . .

RF: Yeah, David Pryor. He was a—I remember when he first ran for representative. One of the bigger dealers, Paul—Charlie Paul. I

went down there and was talkin' to him about him. He said, "I'll support him just to [*laughs*] get him out of Camden."

[*Laughter*]

[02:48:57] SL: Why'd he feel that way?

RF: Oh, I don't know. He just [*laughter*]*—*just somethin' between 'em, I guess.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But anyway, he say, "I'll support him just to get him out of Camden." [*Laughter*]

[02:49:09] SL: [*Coughs*] I'm gonna tell him that.

RF: And he supported him. He supported him.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And Dooley was always one of his big supporters.

SL: Oh yeah. Yeah, they loved Dooley.

RF: And Harry Barnes.

SL: Yeah.

RF: He and Harry Barnes finished school together and opened up a law office here together.

[02:49:25] SL: Yeah. Now you know about what their law professor told 'em up there when he—I don't know if you'd ever heard of Robert Leflar, but he's a—he was one of the most respected lawyers in the country up there at Fayetteville teaching law. And

David and Harry went to him after they graduated and said, "We're thinking about opening up a law practice down in Camden—just the two of us." And he looked at him and said—shook his head and said, "That's gonna be like the blind leading the blind." [*Laughter*]

RF: But they did good.

[02:50:01] SL: Well, they did pretty good.

RF: Yeah, they did good . . .

SL: They did pretty . . .

RF: . . . and then one went on to be a politician; the other went on to be . . .

SL: A judge.

RF: . . . judge.

SL: Over in El Dorado.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I supported Harry when he was—when he ran for [*pats leg*] municipal judge . . .

SL: Oh, he did?

RF: . . . here in Camden.

SL: Harry Barnes did?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: He was runnin' for municipal judge. And his son had just been in an accident.

SL: I kinda remember that.

RF: He got hit with one of them discs in his head.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I got out there and worked like everything for him and got him elected.

[02:50:40] SL: Good. Good. Well, I kinda get the impression that you were a good man to have in your camp.

RF: Well, I . . .

SL: If you were gonna be in office . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: If you were tryin' to get in office . . .

RF: I never did seek no office myself—other than committeeman.

SL: Well, did . . .

RF: I ran for committeeman, and I beat a fella so bad. [*SL laughs*]

I didn't have no opposition no more. That's the only office I ever run for.

[02:51:13] SL: Well now, what was the population difference between black and white in Camden back then?

RF: Bout fifty-fifty.

SL: So it was that strong.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: I did not know it was that even.

RF: Yeah.

SL: So . . .

RF: But we—our votin' population was down until I registered all them people.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And that really brought it up. I registered some folks. And I have—I had a book there that I kept all of 'em—their name, address, and telephone number. And every politician wanted to run—he wanted to get the list.

SL: Yeah. Sure.

RF: He wanted to know 'em.

[02:51:47] SL: Well, sure. Sure they would. Why wouldn't they?

Well, now, you know, you were talking about the poll tax.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: Now the poll tax—that was a interesting setup, wasn't it?

RF: Yeah.

SL: I mean, you could pay the poll tax for folks and . . .

RF: They was eligible to vote.

SL: Yeah. So . . .

RF: But that was a requirement to vote. You had to pay that dollar sales—poll tax.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Course, there'd been a—they abolished that later on.

SL: Yeah.

[02:52:27] RF: But during that time, that's what you had to have.

And we paid [*SL coughs*] it out of our treasure. I signed 'em up and paid for their poll tax receipt.

SL: Well . . .

RF: And then they was eligible to vote.

SL: Yeah. But it seemed like there was some abuse in that, too, right? I mean . . .

RF: Say what?

SL: Abuse.

RF: Oh yeah.

[02:52:49] SL: It opened itself up for abuse. First, you could pay the poll tax on people that weren't even alive—for one thing.

RF: Yeah. And . . .

SL: And . . .

RF: Well, one fella went out there and voted a whole lot of dead folks. Went out in the cemetery and just gathered up names . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . off the tombstone . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . and used it. But they caught him.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Yeah, there was a lot of abuse in it, but . . .

[02:53:15] SL: Yeah, I—it seems like I remember readin' stories about—especially over in the Delta . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . on the plantations and stuff that were . . .

RF: Well, they did it right here in Camden. It happened right here.

SL: It—yeah. Well, so that was the day.

RF: Yeah.

SL: That's the way . . .

[02:53:33] RF: And when Pryor ran for the Senate against McClellan . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: McClellan told him—he said, "Now, look, six years from now, I'll give it to you."

SL: Yeah, I know.

RF: But he wouldn't listen. He had to run. Well, I supported him, but I told him—I said, "You ain't got a chance." [*SL laughs*] But

sure enough, in the primary, he was way ahead of him.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But when he come down to the runoff, McClellan had did so many people favor, and he called 'em in.

[02:54:04] SL: Well yeah, of course he did and—but you know, I wasn't here. I was out in California getting married right then, and I didn't—I did not get to see the debate. Did you get to see the debate . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . on TV? And it's my understanding that McClellan beat him . . .

RF: Huh?

SL: . . . in that debate.

RF: Yeah.

SL: And that was one factor.

RF: Yes sir.

SL: And . . .

[02:54:30] RF: Well, he was older, and he had more experience, and he knowed where to hit.

SL: What buttons to push . . .

RF: To hit the right people. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: David didn't. He was young and didn't know.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And that what beat him.

SL: Yeah.

RF: In the runoff, he tore him up.

[02:54:48] SL: Well, it is—it still ended up bein' a real close election.

RF: Yeah.

SL: What was it? It was half a point or a quarter point or some . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: I mean, it was close.

RF: But he beat him . . .

SL: That . . .

RF: . . . and that was it. Then the next time, McClellan died, and he walked in almost . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . 'cause he didn't—his opposition was weak.

[02:55:08] SL: He never really had a serious opponent . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . after that. In fact, I think there was one season where he didn't even have an opponent.

RF: Yeah.

SL: No one just—no one ran against him.

[02:55:23] RF: And his son's doin' a wonderful job.

SL: He—and you know, he . . .

RF: 'Cause he's actually got—he's got somebody to guide him.

[*Laughter*]

SL: Well, you know, [*clears throat*] Mark is not David.

RF: I know.

SL: Different . . .

RF: Never goin'—ain't goin' be another David. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, that's true. That's true.

RF: But when things get serious and he need to find some advice, he always got somebody he can go to.

[02:55:45] SL: That's right. That's right. Well, I know that David knows all the work that you did for him on his behalf and how you've supported him all those years. He's told me that two or three times now 'cause he knows that you and I are talking today.

RF: Yeah. When he brought his book to Camden, I was the first one to buy one.

SL: Is that right?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Well . . .

RF: I walked in, and he said, "Well, looky here!" [*SL laughs*] And I

got it in there now—he wrote in there, "To my friend."

SL: Yeah. Yeah. He—yeah, he's a good friend.

[02:56:28] RF: And he never forgot where he come from.

SL: You know, that's right.

RF: He never forgot.

SL: Well, he was a great—he—he's a great listener.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: You kinda got the feeling whenever he was talkin', he was talkin' because he had been listening.

RF: Mh-hmm. When he came here and brought his book, he came to the Democrat—we—every two years, we would have a Democrat—we'd open up Democrat headquarters . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . here in Camden. And he came over there and spoke.

SL: Well, you know, we were gonna—we were actually with him the day that he went to El Dorado and, I believe, Arkadelphia, and we were gonna end the day in Camden on a boat—there's some big boat out here on the . . .

RF: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . on the river.

RF: Dredge boat.

SL: But the river was almost out . . .

RF: Too high.

SL: . . . of its banks.

RF: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: And they called it off. Couldn't do it.

[02:57:25] RF: Yeah, every year—every two years, I believe, we has a barge come here, and people'd get on it, and they'd take a cruise down the river and back.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Ticket cost twenty dollars, and you eat and everything.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I been on it once . . .

SL: Is it . . .

RF: . . . my wife and I.

SL: . . . is it good?

RF: Yeah, we enjoyed.

SL: It was good. Yeah.

BP: Three minutes. [*Clears throat*]

[02:57:43] SL: What about—that kinda makes me—at some point—well, maybe not. Maybe we don't need to talk about it. But the Ouachita River kinda was somethin'. I mean, it—early, early on, it was a big waterway.

RF: Yeah.

SL: I mean, commerce and stuff.

RF: Yeah, they'd ship stuff up . . .

SL: I know . . .

RF: . . . and down the river.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Well, they're tryin' to get that goin' again.

SL: Yeah. Yeah. Now . . .

RF: They opened up the Port of Camden there, and they tryin' to get—this new plant that's comin' in out there is gonna use it to ship those pellets—wood pellets . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . down to Louisiana.

[02:58:23] SL: Mh-hmm. Camden has been—it's been losin' business and losin' population, hasn't it?

RF: That's right.

SL: You need to open up Ferguson's again.

RF: Too old now. [*SL laughs*] I'm ninety plus.

SL: I tell you . . .

RF: That's too old.

SL: . . . that magic is gone, isn't it?

RF: And [*SL clears throat*] things had changed so then.

SL: Yeah.

[02:58:45] RF: When I was operatin' the place, we didn't have that
dope.

SL: Yeah.

RF: We drank liquor, but we didn't have that dope.

SL: Yeah.

RF: These youngsters come here with that dope, and they started
killin' folks, shootin' up, and all that stuff and just—you wasn't
safe nowhere.

SL: Yeah. Oh yeah. And that's all the way—that's all across the
country.

RF: Yeah.

[02:59:06] SL: I know that when I was growing up, we never locked
our doors. We left the windows down in our car.

RF: No, 'cause you didn't have nothin' in there that they didn't have.

[Laughs]

SL: Yeah.

RF: We didn't have no locks on our doors.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Left 'em open. Now you gotta lock up everything.

SL: Yeah. And you know, you could just walk into your friends home
and . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . it was not a—no offense taken.

RF: No.

SL: And "Welcome in. Welcome home."

RF: Yeah, when I was workin' for the sheriff's department, all we had here then was a little marijuana.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But now they got everything.

SL: Yeah.

BP: Two minutes.

[02:59:44] SL: Well, we—we've had a pretty good time talkin' about the lounge, and I'm not sure that we're done with it.

RF: Yeah.

SL: I mean, you were—you had that for twenty-seven years. Is that right?

RF: Twenty-three years.

SL: Twenty-three years?

RF: Yes.

SL: That's a long time.

RF: Yeah, Ed House and them—they had a—and Ed lives—they had a place up there on White Oak Lake—big lake and everything. House they built up there. And they had all the black businessmen up there workin' on it. But they never did ask me.

SL: Well, I wonder what that was about?

RF: I don't know, but they was workin' for free, you know, and so they figured I wasn't goin' nowhere, so they never did ask me to go up there.

[03:00:27] SL: Huh. So now what was it that he was buildin' up there?

RF: Buildin' a house up there.

SL: Uh-huh. And . . .

RF: Right on White Oak Lake.

SL: Uh-huh. And when was this?

RF: That was in—let me see—sixty—in the [19]60s.

SL: And so . . .



[03:00:48] RF: That was in the [19]60s. So we had a revenue man over at Hope named Frank—named Booth. He was one of [*SL coughs*] the toughest revenue men. They sent him into Camden to get me, and he came down—he introduced hisself to me. He say, "I wanna inspect your place." I told him, "Okay, no problem." So he looked and looked and looked. The only thing he found was a top off a beer—of a wine bottle in the ladies' restroom. [*SL laughs*] And so when it was all over with, he said, "Now I'm goin' be frank with you. I know your daddy. I know Walter Ferguson. I know your sister. She taught school

there, and I know your brother." Said, "He had a garage there in Hope." He said, "Now they—I come here to get you." He said, "I found everybody else violatin' except you." [*Laughter*] He said, "Now why are they so dead on you?" I said, "Well, I don't know. Just somethin'—maybe they just don't like me."

[03:02:07] SL: You were successful. And you think arguably you had the best lounge—best dance hall in this part of the country.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Wasn't just Camden. Wasn't just Ouachita County.

RF: People would come there from everywhere when we have those dances. Fordyce . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . El Dorado, Smackover, Hope. They were there from everywhere, and that place would be full.

SL: Little Rock. I bet you . . .

RF: Yeah . . .

SL: . . . had folks come there from Little Rock.

RF: . . . we had some come from Little Rock.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And Pine Bluff.

SL: Pine Bluff.

RF: Yeah. So it was a center of attraction there for a long time.

[Tape stopped]

[03:02:49] SL: [*Sighs*] Well, we've had a pretty good tour of Ferguson's Lounge and the restaurant in front. Is there anything—let—before we leave that place, is there anything else—do you remember any—I mean, it brought you the town's politicians. It earned you the respect of the law enforcement community, which I suspect you had already, but—and you became a respected businessman out of that. You had the—probably the most popular . . .

RF: Place in Camden at the time.

SL: Well, not only Camden, but I'm thinkin'—I mean, you probably had to go all the way to El Dorado . . .

RF: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . to even approach . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . some kind of facility like you had, you know, which is on the way to Texas. So it kinda made sense, you know, to come through your place—if nothin' else, to have somethin' to eat . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . it sounds like to me. Well, you know, I have to say of the events that I've heard so far and all the big name bands and bluesmen that came through your place . . .

[03:04:07] RF: Yeah, we had Cab Calloway there, too.

SL: Cab Calloway!

RF: Yeah.

SL: Now how was he?

RF: He was good.

SL: How—now how big was his band?

RF: He had—he didn't have no real big band, but he had a band.

SL: Yeah. He had a horn section with him?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Drummer. Saxophone players.

[03:04:25] SL: Yeah. How—what was he like?

RF: Oh, he was somethin' else.

SL: [*Laughs*] Was he a cutup?

RF: Oh yeah, he'd get up there and singin' "Hi-de-hi-de-hi-de-ho!"

[*Laughter*]

SL: Everyone loved that, didn't they?

RF: Yeah.

[03:04:40] SL: What a showman he was. What about Louis
Armstrong?

RF: We had Louis Armstrong there.

SL: What was he—I mean . . .

RF: No, we didn't.

SL: You didn't . . .

RF: Louis Armstrong.

SL: You didn't have Louis Armstrong?

RF: No, we didn't have Louis Armstrong.

SL: You didn't?

RF: No, we didn't have him. We had a Armstrong there, but it wasn't Louis Armstrong.

[03:05:03] SL: Still even including Cab Calloway—of all the events that I've heard so far that have taken place at Ferguson's Lounge and Restaurant, it's you gettin' married to Lizzie.

RF: Yeah.

SL: I have to say, in a historical way for your family and for all the folks that your family has had influence and an effect on; that was your event. As simple as it was . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . and as practical and pragmatic as it was, little did you know that sixty-almost-seven years later—is that right?

RF: Huh?

[03:05:46] SL: How many years have y'all been married?

RF: Sixty-one, goin' on sixty-two.

SL: Sixty-two. Sixty . . .

RF: Be sixty-two in December the twenty-seventh.

SL: Y'all weren't even thinkin' about what things were gonna be sixty-two years later.

RF: No.

SL: Hmm. That's somethin' else.

[03:06:05] RF: And durin' that time, I made a lot of money, but it just went just like I made it. Easy come; easy go. But on every Friday night when I left place, I go home, and I—that was—I give her her money. See, her money come off the top. Every Friday night, I went there and gave her mother money for her to operate the house and the kids. And course, I paid the—all the utility bills, bought the groceries, and all that. That was for her and the kids. She could buy the kids clothes and stuff like that. And—but a lot of money I made, and it come easy, go easy. I wasn't goin' to church. After I started workin' for Highland, I started goin' to church. I started payin' tithes, and my money built up.

SL: Yeah.

[03:07:14] RF: Not braggin', but we in good financial shape now.

[*SL sighs*] So religion plays a good part in your life.

SL: Well now, let's talk about that for a little bit. We—you know, we didn't talk about that much at all when . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . when we were talkin' about when you were growin' up . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . and what you knew about your mom and your dad and your grandparents. But back when you were a child, how much influence did church have in your-all's daily life back then?

RF: A lot.

SL: Tell me about it.

[03:07:48] RF: We'd go to church every Sunday. We'd go to church every Sunday. We'd hitch up the mules to the wagon, and we'd all load up in the wagon and go to church.

SL: Was this a Baptist church?

RF: Yes. No, this was a Methodist church.

SL: Methodist church.

RF: Methodist church.

SL: Okay.

RF: Methodist church.

SL: M'kay.

RF: We'd all go to church on—we'd go to Sunday school and church on Sunday. Now our school was about three miles from the house, and we walked to school—walked that three miles to school [*SL coughs*] every day and back. [03:08:27] When it—

well, it—we was close to goin'—what they called through the bottom, until it would rain and the water would get up, and then we'd have to go around the road.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And that was about three miles. It was about a mile and half or maybe a mile and three-quarter through the bottom. It was nearer that way than it was goin' around the road. But when the water got up on Bois d' Arc Creek, we'd have to go around the road and—to go to school.

SL: Now . . .

[03:08:56] RF: And my sister was my teacher—my oldest sister.

SL: At school?

RF: Mh-hmm. And she was makin' thirty dollars a month. And when I went into CC camp, I was makin' as much as she was—in fact, more because everything I had was free. They furnished my food, clothes, and everything. We didn't buy nothin'.

[03:09:23] SL: When you would—I'm assumin' that you had some Sunday clothes . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . when you went to church.

RF: Yes.

SL: And did you always wear the same set of clothes?

RF: Just about it.

SL: And y'all could—knew how to keep 'em nice . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . through the week.

RF: We didn't wear 'em through the week.

SL: Right.

RF: We just wore them on Sunday. And shoes [*SL coughs*]*—we went barefooted all the summer. The only time you wear shoes is goin' to church.*

[03:09:57] SL: Where—did you—were you barefoot when you'd go into town on Saturdays?

RF: Oh no, you'd wear shoes in town . . .

SL: Then . . .

RF: . . . on Saturday.

[03:10:02] SL: . . . shoes then. Yeah. Well, how—tell me how big the church was.

RF: Oh, it was—wasn't too large. But later on, my oldest sister married a doctor, Dr. Eave. He was a dentist. And he was a Catholic. And he introduced us to the Catholic priest there who was named Strassner—Father George F. Strassner. And we became Catholics. He'd come out to our house and say Mass every Saturday mornin'. And the only way we could go to the

church was go there at night. He would take us there at night—
after nine or ten o'clock—to take us through that church.

SL: Now that's a priest . . .

RF: And show us all the things in there.

SL: That's beautiful that he would do that.

RF: Yeah.

SL: To go that extra mile and come to your house on Saturdays.

[03:11:18] RF: Yeah. And say Mass. And some of the neighbors out
there joined.

SL: Mh-hmm. So . . .

RF: And one of 'em went on to be a priest that started out under
him.

SL: But he was a white priest.

RF: Yeah, he was German.

SL: German.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: And it—his—the congregation just—it just—you just didn't have
a mixed congregation.

RF: No.

SL: But . . .

RF: We didn't have no mixed congregation—just blacks.

SL: That's why you guys came in at night.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: But the . . .

[03:12:01] RF: See, 'cause he couldn't've carried us in that church
in the daytime.

SL: Yeah.

RF: He'd take us there about ten o'clock at night after everybody's
goin' to bed.

SL: That late. Well, was that against—that wasn't against the church
as it was the community, right?

RF: It was the community, yes. Wasn't the church.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Now in El Dorado, they had some people that's goin' to the white
church. But we couldn't go to the white church there in Hope.

SL: There you go.

[03:12:35] RF: But in El Dorado, it was different.

SL: Yeah. Now this was in the [19]30s.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: So El Dorado was goin' through their oil boom back then . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . too. They were—lots of money was . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . goin' on there.

[03:12:53] RF: And my sister—when she finished [*SL coughs*]
school, she went to Little Rock to Catholic High. That's where
she finished. My sister, Joeanna—she's passed away now.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And some Catholic people there, she stayed with . . .

SL: So . . .

RF: . . . until she graduated.

SL: So as long as you were in Hope and—your family stayed
Catholic.

RF: Mh-hmm.

[03:13:33] SL: And what about your first wife? Was she Catholic?

RF: No.

SL: I see. Okay. And when you—now the Catholics were not real
big on reading the Bible through the week and having Bible
study and . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . and all the things that the Protestant churches believed in
and practiced. For y'all, it was the church . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . that . . .

RF: And they believed in the Rosary—sayin' the Rosary and all that.

[03:14:18] SL: Uh-huh. Mh-hmm. And so [*coughs*] would he—

would the priest also—how did y'all work in confession and all
the . . .

RF: Yeah, well, he'd come out there, and we had a room setup to
hear the confession. And then after Mass, he'd give us our
[gestures to demonstrate taking Communion] . . .

SL: I've never heard of such a thing as a priest comin' to a home . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . and service a black . . .

RF: He was a great priest. A good man.

[03:14:50] SL: Mh-hmm. And so did that stay with you for a while?

RF: Yes.

SL: Did that sustain you through the war?

RF: Well, through the war is when I got away from the Catholic
church. We didn't have no priests . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . there, and so I kinda got away from the Catholic church.

SL: Mh-hmm. Well, when you . . .

[03:15:14] RF: And then when I came back to Camden and married
Liz, she was a Baptist. The Baptist church was about two block
from our house. She'd carry the kids up there to church. Well, I
went to the Catholic church—I could go to the Catholic church
here. But—I mean, in—yeah, I could go to the Catholic church

here, but my wife wasn't a Catholic, and she had all the kids to join St. Paul Baptist Church, so finally, I joined up there and still a member.

[03:15:52] SL: [Coughs] Well, what kind of role did the religion play in your household with Lizzie and the kids growin' up? I mean, did y'all—did the kids go to—did y'all go to church on Wednesday nights? Or was this more of Lizzie's domain and the kids?

RF: That's right.

SL: 'Cause you were probably pretty booked.

RF: I was tied up . . .

SL: You were tied up.

RF: . . . workin' all the time. Eighteen and twenty hours a day down there at that place. I don't see how I made it.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But I was down there eighteen and twenty hours. Come home to get a little sleep and go back.

SL: Do you ever wish that—you know, I'm gonna push this—Rand, I'm gonna move this shotgun just a little bit. [SL stands and moves the shotgun]

RF: Okay.

[03:16:46] SL: Do you ever regret not bein' at home more . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . with the kids and the family?

RF: I do. I shoulda been there for 'em more often, but I wasn't.

I was always workin'.

SL: Well, that's a common theme . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . with the fathers in your-all's generation that they wish they had—if they had somethin' to do over . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . it'd be spend more time with the family.

RF: But Liz was there with 'em all the time. She's just, you know . . .

[03:17:15] SL: Mh-hmm. So you were aware that faith and church and that commitment was going on in your household, even though you weren't present for it because of your work. Were there—was there anybody in your-all's household—and I forgot to ask this about you growin' up, was there music in your household growing up?

RF: Was what?

SL: Was there music—was there a piano or a guitar . . .

RF: No, no.

SL: . . . or any musical instruments . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . when you were a child?

RF: No, no.

SL: And—but—and then, when you were raising your own family, did the—did any of the kids or any of your relatives play piano or . . .

RF: Yes, I bought my daughter a piano.

SL: You did?

RF: A Baldwin piano.

SL: Baldwin. Okay.

[03:18:12] RF: I bought her a piano. She had—she started taking music lessons, and I bought her a piano.

SL: And . . .

RF: And we kept it here till about two years ago.

SL: Uh-huh. Well, did she play it?

RF: Yes.

SL: And did the family ever join round the piano . . .

RF: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . and enjoy it . . .

RF: Yeah.

[03:18:30] SL: . . . and sing along? And were the—was it usually hymns that y'all sang?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Or was it . . .

RF: Well, just anything . . .

SL: . . . all—everything?

RF: . . . she'd play. She was very smart and very good girl like Randall. They was the best two kids I had. Randall Jr. was always protective of his brothers and sisters. He's always—try to take care of them.

[03:18:57] SL: He had great faith early, didn't he?

RF: Yes. Yeah, he believed in prayers. And he was superintendent of the Sunday school when he was just young.

[03:19:14] SL: Is that right? I'm gonna guess that they went to Sunday school.

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: Would they go to church on Wednesday nights?

RF: Sometime.

SL: Sometimes.

RF: See, on Wednesday nights sometime, they had nights for kids.

SL: Mh-hmm. And those nights, they'd go.

RF: They'd go.

SL: They'd go.

RF: Mh-hmm.

[03:19:54] SL: Well, were—I mean, surely you and the Baptist minister got along okay.

RF: Oh yes.

SL: I mean, the two of you.

RF: Yes.

SL: And he probably understood what you had to do . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

[03:20:08] SL: . . . and all that. Did you ever get to have—while you had the restaurant, did you ever get to come home and have meals at home or were you . . .

RF: Sometime.

SL: Sometimes?

RF: Yeah, occasionally . . .

SL: Do you remember—was grace always said at meals?

RF: Oh yes. Always say grace. Bless the food before you eat it.

[03:20:46] SL: Well, it sounds like to me that the activities here at the house while you were at the—runnin' your business—your own business—that that's probably Lizzie's domain.

RF: That's right.

SL: And I can talk to her at length about that . . .

RF: Yeah, she . . .

SL: . . . about it tomorrow.

RF: She's the one takin' care of all of the kids and . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . she bought all of 'em clothes, shoes—I never bought nothin' for 'em.

SL: You were just the provider.

RF: I just furnished the money. She—Watts Department Store—she bought all their clothes and shoes and stuff there.

[03:21:19] SL: Uh-huh. Okay, well, let's talk—let's get back to the lounge then. And if you—what do you think the best thing about Ferguson's Lounge was and your time there? I mean, do you feel like [*BP clears throat*] that's where you had the greatest effect on the community?

RF: Yes. Everybody I ever—a lot of customers on Friday—I always barbecued on Friday. And they was there waitin' [*SL laughs*] for the meat to get ready. I'd barbecue a whole hog at a time.

SL: In the pit.

RF: Yeah. Had a great big pit. I remember there's a little field out there in front of the house—in front of my place where the carnivals used to come. [*SL coughs*] [03:22:16] And the fish man run on—every Wednesday, the fish man'd run. And he had a seventy-pound buffalo.

SL: Oh! [*Laughs*]

RF: And he say, "I'll let you have him at a bargain," 'cause nobody else wanted him. I take him and split him in two and put him on the pit and barbecued him—smoked him. And them people over there at the carnival came over there and bought it all. [*SL laughs*] First time they'd—that they'd ever heard of a barbecued fish, but they just went crazy over it.

SL: Well, that's a big steak. That's a big fish steak.

RF: Mh-hmm.

[03:22:58] SL: Seventy pounds. And you knew how to cook it.

RF: Oh yeah, I just split him open, seasoned him, and put him on the pit, and that—it just—you could smell it all around. [*SL laughs*]

SL: That's somethin'. That's somethin'.

RF: Yeah, when that carnival'd come to town, that's where they would set up—right across in front of my place. And so, a fellow—he told me—he said, "Look, I want you to just come over here. See, I'm goin' give you some money to go around and start playin' these games." And he would watch me when I'd win, and then they'd come in and start playin', and I'd go to another one. And I was buildin' their business up for 'em.

SL: Well, and . . .

[03:23:51] RF: But they would let me win, so the people would see

it, see? [*Laughter*] And then they—and I'd leave—they'd get on that machine.

BP: Hmm.

RF: They'd take everything they had. [*Laughter*]

[03:24:04] SL: Well, but—and then they came back, and they'd give you business.

RF: Oh yeah. Yeah, they bought all their food from me and [*SL laughs*] drinks, and they'd—they spent a lot of money with me.

SL: Yeah.

RF: All of 'em. And I treated 'em right, you know.

[03:24:29] SL: You know, you've talked about some of the folks that helped you and how Dooley helped a lot of black folks get their first home. And you know that once you get your first home and you make your payments, why, that opens other doors to you.

RF: That's right.

SL: Helps you and your family forever once you get that started and get that credit goin' and those assets and that equity. That changes lives. And you're probably not one to talk about it, but I bet that you also helped your community, too. I . . .

RF: Oh yes, I helped a lot of people.

[03:25:12] SL: Were there any—was there any public charity that you got involved with or was it all personal? Was it all people

that you knew that . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . you would help individually . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . and . . .



[03:25:24] RF: That's right, it was. And when I was workin' for the sheriff department, I helped a lot of people. [*SL sniffs*] The law say if you catch somebody out there drunk drivin'—say get him off the street. They didn't tell you how.

SL: Yeah.

RF: A lot of people—lot 'em I know had families—wasn't able to pay a fine.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I carried 'em home. Instead of carryin' 'em to jail, I carried 'em home.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Tell 'em—said, "Don't let me catch you out there no more now." I say, "'Cause if I take you down there, the fine they put on you's goin' take shoes off of these kids' feet and food off their table." And I never had nobody that come back the second time.

SL: That's amazing how that works, isn't it?

[03:26:07] RF: I run up on a fella out there once. He was drunk as he could be, and oh, he cussed me. I carried him on home. When we got to his house, he say, "Where are we? I thought you was carryin' me to jail." I said, "You at home." I said, "Get out." And he got to be my best friend.

SL: Never—he would never forget that.

[03:26:34] RF: Hm-mm. And when my daughter-in-law was runnin' for treasurer, she was the first black treasurer Ouachita County ever had—my son, Robert's wife, Linda. She was the first treasurer Ouachita County ever had—black. [SL coughs] And when I—she was runnin', I went by his house one day—I done forgot about him—asked him, "Would I put up a sign out there in front of his house." He say, "I don't think you know me, but I know you." He said, "Didn't you used to work for the sheriff department?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "You arrested me and brought me home one night, and I couldn't believe it." He say, "Put up anything you want out there." [Laughter] He said, "I'm goin' get out and campaign for her."

SL: Well, you know, what goes around, comes around, doesn't it?

RF: Yeah.

[03:27:22] SL: The—okay, now I—so you had—you develop a heart condition or your health kind of fails you, and your doctor says,

"You can't do this anymore." So you—what happened to Ferguson's Lounge after you left it?

RF: My sister's son takin' it over.

SL: Yeah. And did it go on . . .

RF: Yeah, he . . .

SL: . . . for a while?

RF: Yeah, he—they have a private club down there.

SL: So the building is still standin'.

RF: Yeah, the buildin's still standin'. It's a well-built buildin'. Built out of concrete blocks and brick front.

SL: But the inside's all changed up now and . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . it's not the same.

RF: No, it's—it . . .

SL: Not nearly the same as it was.

RF: No, it's a lot better shape now. A lady rented it, and she spent about eighty thousand dollars fixin' it up. She's got a private club there now.

[03:28:21] SL: And is it—do well? Is it still doin' well?

RF: And she just startin'. She just opened it up.

SL: Huh.

RF: See, I didn't own the buildin'. My brother-in-law and my sister

owned the buildin'.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I just had the business.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But she's—she spent a lot of money, and she got it fixed up.

And she say she goin' operate it clean. If she operate it right and keep that dope and stuff out of it, she'll do good.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But if she start fool with that dope, she goin' down . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . 'cause she goin' get busted and that'll be it.

SL: Well—and there's that element that is scary. I mean . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know, people lose their minds, and you just don't know what's gonna happen.

[03:29:05] RF: Well, they start—they get their mind on that money.

SL: Yeah.

RF: They wanna make fast money and then end up—they end up gettin' busted, and they lose everything.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

[03:29:20] RF: And right now, we losin' our black population—votin' population in Camden—'cause our young boys are—every time

you pick that paper, you see where three or four of 'em been picked up for sellin' dope. They plead guilty. They send 'em over there to the pen. They ain't got no room for 'em. They stay over there two or three month and send 'em back. Then all they can do is sell dope.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But they can't vote.

[03:29:45] SL: And this isn't just the pot—this is other stuff, isn't it?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Hmm.

RF: See, they got a whole lot of stuff out there now that they didn't have when I was operatin' the place.

[03:30:05] SL: [*Sighs*] All right, so you get out of the—you get of Ferguson's Lounge. That business was gone . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . pretty much. And now we were just talking about your work as a sheriff's deputy for the county, right?

RF: Mh-hmm.

[03:30:24] SL: Now—but is that what you did—the very next thing? Was that—how did you end up being a sheriff's deputy?

RF: Well, when I left Ferguson's Lounge, I went to work in security out there for Camden Manufacturing Company—Aerojet.

SL: Mh-hmm. And so you were just, like, one of the security guys for that company or . . .

RF: That's right. And then I got—I [*clears throat*] worked myself up to sergeant, and then I made captain. I was security supervisor.

[03:30:56] SL: And—but this isn't a county position. This is a . . .

RF: Plant.

SL: . . . a private company.

RF: Yeah, I was workin' for Aerojet.

SL: Yeah. Okay.

RF: And Pacific Plant Protection was the one that was furnishin' the service—the guard service for 'em.

[03:31:10] SL: Uh-huh. And you enjoyed that.

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: Big difference.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: Didn't have the stress. Didn't have all the . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . didn't have to have the hours that you were puttin' in there. It kinda brought you back home?

RF: That's right. I could stay at home at night then.

[03:31:25] SL: And how—were the kids out of the house by then or . . .

RF: No, they were still there.

SL: They were still there. And this must've been when?

RF: See, Randall finished high school in [19]70—I believe it was.

SL: I think that's right.

RF: Yeah, [19]70. I was workin' as deputy sheriff then.

SL: Okay, so this is . . .

RF: After then. After he finished out of—and went to college.

[03:31:52] SL: Uh-huh. So you left the lounge then—in the mid-[19]60s. Is that right?

RF: That's right.

SL: Okay. So how long were you doing security work out at your first venue there—the first company you were working with? How . . .

RF: I was there about four years.

SL: Okay. [*Coughs*] And you . . .

RF: And then . . .

SL: . . . worked your way up in that . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . in that . . .

RF: Yeah . . .

SL: . . . organization and . . .

RF: I got to be the head of security out there. [03:32:19] And then

when they closed, I started work for Roy Ledbetter at Highland Resources. And I was there about six months, and then I went to the sheriff department.

SL: Okay, now how did you get—did the—did you just decide you wanted to apply to work . . .

RF: No, I didn't apply. He picked me.

SL: He picked you?

RF: He picked me to be the first black.

[03:32:49] SL: Now is that for all of Ouachita County or . . .

RF: Yes, all of Ouachita County.

SL: How did the—I mean, were there any other black deputy sheriffs in any of the surrounding counties?

RF: Yes, a few.

SL: A few.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Okay.

[03:33:06] RF: And then later on, after I was there about three months, he hired Rudy Galbert.

SL: Okay.

RF: Another black.

[03:33:13] SL: Okay. Well, and so the force—the sheriff's force—how many deputies were there?

RF: Four.

SL: Four? So it was kind of a fifty-fifty . . .

RF: Yeah, two blacks, two whites.

SL: . . . deal and that . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . kinda was representative of the population.

RF: And then we had some part-times that worked on the weekend.

[Unidentified voices in background]

[03:33:36] SL: Uh-huh. So your life is—or at least up to that point,

had gotten simplified, and you were now back in the home and

[hearing aid feedback] more engaged.

RF: That's right.

SL: And so now when you're—start workin' for the sheriff—was that
in the late [19]60s?

RF: In [19]70. I started in [19]70 . . .

SL: In—right at [19]70s. So . . .

RF: And . . .

SL: I'm gonna diverge just a little bit off the deputy sheriff thing.

And I wanna talk about your son, Randall . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . Junior. And here—he's your firstborn. Is that right?

RF: No, we lost the first one.

SL: That's right.

RF: Childbirth.

SL: That's right.

RF: He was the second one.

[03:34:26] SL: Yes, Lizzie was tellin' me about that. But he was the first one that you got to raise.

RF: That's right.

SL: And by all accounts, he understood responsibility early in his childhood and . . .

RF: He was . . .

SL: . . . loved his . . .

RF: He was smart, and he just believed in takin' care of his brothers and sisters.

[03:34:49] SL: Yeah. And so he's makin' good grades.

RF: Yeah.

SL: He's an athlete, right? He has athletic ability.

RF: Yeah. I remember when he first—when he brought his first card home, he had one B on there, and I told him—I said, "Look," I say, "it's a pretty good card." I said, "I want you to move that B." And sure enough, he did.

SL: Okay, now he had one what on it?

RF: B.

SL: B. Uh-huh.

RF: And he moved it.

SL: Huh. He moved it up to an A.

RF: Yeah. And he was smart, and he loved everybody. You know, he's just—he could get along with anybody. He's just . . .

[03:35:36] SL: Well, when he was growin' up, did he ever come down to the lounge?

RF: Yes, he'd come down and help me.

SL: How did he help you?

RF: Well, he can—he'd do anything. He'd ring the cash register. He was sellin' beer, servin' beer. But I told him—I said, "Now if anyone come in here," I said, "you don't sell 'em no—don't sell no beer unless you know, you know." 'Cause he was too young.

[03:36:05] But he just loved to—he loved to sell that beer and ring that cash register. [*SL laughs*] I remember when he first started, [*SL coughs*] I had to put a Coca-Cola case up in front of it to make him tall enough to hit the register.

SL: And I bet everybody loved him.

RF: Oh yeah, he just—they wanted him to wait on 'em.

[03:36:31] SL: Well, now let me ask you this. You've got this young son of yours down there, and I understand you probably didn't have him down there on the—in the nights and . . .

RF: No, no.

SL: . . . Friday nights . . .

RF: No, no.

SL: . . . and all that.

RF: No, no.

[03:36:43] SL: But one thing about the lounge that we didn't ever talk about was any trouble that you may have ever had in that lounge—anybody gettin' out of hand and—or . . .

RF: Oh yes, we'd always . . .

SL: . . . or smartin' off or . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . or, you know, mixing it up or just . . .



RF: Yeah, I had one fella there one night—he was way larger than I was. And I told him—I say, "If you don't stop this racket over here," I say, "I'm goin' throw you out of here." He said, "That'll be the day." [SL laughs] I say, "All right." I say, "Just keep on." So I went back there, and I put me some black pepper and salt and cayenne pepper in my pocket and mixed it up. And he was over there—he just kept on. I went over there—I put my hand in my pocket and just [gestures in a flicking motion] dumped it right in front of him. He went, "Hawshau. Hawshau." I said, "Come on out of here," and carried him right on out the

door. [*Laughter*]

SL: That's smart. That's smart.

[03:37:38] RF: Then everybody ask him—say, "How did you let that little man throw you out?" He said, " I don't know, but he did."

[*Laughter*] [*SL coughs*] And from then on, I kept it—kept me some in my pocket. Somebody started ragin'—sayin'—I'd go over there. He wouldn't know what I was doin', you know. I'd put a little on—it hit they nostril, and they start sneezin'.

[03:37:58] SL: And I bet it didn't feel too good to get it in their eyes either.

RF: Huh?

SL: I bet it—if it got in their eyes . . .

RF: Oh yeah, it got in their eyes and it start—they'd start cryin'.

[*Laughs*]

SL: That's smart.

RF: There—that salt would carry it 'cause the pepper was light.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But you mix it together—that salt . . .

SL: Would carry . . .

RF: . . . would carry it.

SL: . . . that pep—mh-hmm.

RF: And it hit your nostrils and your eyes, and that's it. [*Laughs*]

[03:38:21] SL: Did you just think of that yourself or . . .

RF: Yeah. [*UC laughs*] I know what it'd do for me. [*BP laughs*]

SL: Yeah, [*laughs*] yeah. I wonder if that—some of that's from your grandma and the concoctions that she'd make and mix up and know how to use.

RF: Nah, I just brought that on . . .

SL: Yeah.

[03:38:39] RF: . . . figured that out myself. Seasonin' my meat . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . gave me that idea.

SL: Okay.

RF: See, I'd be rubbin' my meat with that pepper and salt.

SL: Yeah, and you'd get a whiff of it . . .

RF: Seasoning. Yeah.

SL: . . . and—yeah. [*Sniffs*]

RF: Big whiff of it, and I know what it'd do for you.

[03:38:50] SL: Yeah. Do for you. Well, what I'm tryin' to roll around to is I know that Randall—I've talked—in my talk with Randall years ago, he remembers a time, and I—you may have forgotten this . . .

Audio Engineer: I'm sorry. I just noticed all of a sudden I started pickin' up some random voices, and I checked out there, and

they weren't talkin'. I didn't know if maybe your wife might be on the phone in the back or . . .

BP: Hmm.

SL: TV?

AE: . . . TV or—yeah, it was just . . .

SL: You might just walk down the hall.

RF: Yeah, she got a TV . . .

AE: Oh.

RF: . . . on up there.

AE: Okay. I'm gonna check . . .

SL: You might just close the door or . . .

RF: I'll tell her to cut it off.

SL: See, he's wearin' headphones, and he's listening to every breath we take. What time is it?

BP: Five-five.

RF: Five after five.

SL: Okay.

AE: Okay.

SL: Well, was that it?

AE: Yeah, we're good. I—I mean, it's—it was very, very inaudible when I turned up the headphones. I was just lettin' you know . . .

SL: Okay.

AE: . . . so we could . . .

SL: All right.

AE: . . . take care . . .

SL: Are we still rollin'?

AE: Yes, we're still rollin'.

[03:40:01] SL: Okay, this is what I'm rollin' around to, and this is somethin' I remember from my first talk with Randall. He would also come down and help cleanup.

RF: Yes.

SL: And I guess, at one point, there was somebody down there that was smartin' off or using foul language. And you were there and you heard it. And Randall was a little guy.

RF: Mh-hmm.

[03:40:27] SL: Do you remember what took place?

RF: Hmm . . .

SL: 'Cause he—this was a big—this impressed him in some way.

RF: I can't remember that . . .

SL: Well . . .

RF: . . . particular incident, but I know if that happen, I put him out of there.

SL: I—in quick order.

RF: That's right.

SL: You laid the law down. And I believe that—I'm not sure there wasn't a pistol involved with it. I . . .

RF: Mighta been 'cause I had one. And I told him, "Don't never come back to my place no more till they learn how to act."

SL: There you go.

[03:41:15] RF: And he didn't have nowhere else to go, so he'd come back—he came back and apologize.

SL: There you go.

RF: He say, "I wanna come back to your place again, and I guarantee you won't have no more trouble." And I never did.

[03:41:25] SL: So that's the way the story went.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Yeah, I remember now what you's talkin' bout. I remember they . . .

SL: Well, that . . .

RF: Yeah, I put him out and told him, "Don't never come back to my place no more."

SL: "That kinda language around my son."

RF: Yeah.

SL: Well, I can tell you that impressed your son.

RF: Yeah.

[03:41:44] SL: It did. It meant somethin' to him. So did you ever have to pull that pistol out?

RF: Sometime.

SL: Sometimes? Did you ever worry about your health—your . . .

RF: No, I didn't . . .

SL: . . . your safety?

RF: . . . think about it. I didn't think about it.

SL: Well, those—that's some of the dangers when you . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . get a bunch of people in there that—you can't know everybody.

RF: No.

SL: No, you can't tell . . .

RF: It was—but durin' those times, you know, we didn't have that dope, and all that people drank then was alcohol.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And most of 'em, you could talk to 'em.

[03:42:26] SL: And you could kind of read alcohol.

RF: That's right.

SL: You could kinda see where it was goin'.

RF: That's right.

SL: So you could keep an eye on that fella or that . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . girl that . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . was a little bit over—a little bit too excited about what they were doin'. Yeah.

RF: Yeah, it's different from now. I wouldn't operate a place here in Camden now for nothin'. [*Laughter*] For love nor money.

[*Unclear words*]

[03:42:58] SL: [*Coughs*] Well, okay. I know we keep goin' back to the lounge, but that was somethin' that I—it just came up to my mind in my talk with Randall. Okay, so now what I'm getting around to—you're out of the lounge; you've got regular work hours now; you don't have all the commitment—that twenty-four seven commitment . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . of runnin' your own business and takin' care of everybody and everything. And it's given you—your family back to you.

RF: That's right.

[03:43:28] SL: And your start—and you're lovin' it. But you're also—you've been out there, and you know that there's stuff goin' on—civil rights-wise.

RF: Yes.

SL: You know that—and it's goin' across the nation, and there—there's strength now that had—there's change happenin'. And you had a really good son in Randall and a leader in his own right and a—smart and truthful and one of faith. And I suspect you had great respect for him . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . already.

RF: Because he . . .

SL: As a . . .

RF: . . . wouldn't tell you a lie. He—if—he'd . . .

SL: As a . . .

RF: . . . tell you the truth.

SL: [*Sniffs*] As a youngster, he had become a young man.

RF: That's right.

[03:44:29] SL: So how is it that Randall ended up goin' to the white high school—predominantly white high school?



RF: Well, they—he was picked to go.

SL: So who picked him?

RF: Oh, the principal and some of the—our pastor and some of the school board. They had heard about him and knew him, and if he could—he could work in without a lot of trouble 'cause he

wasn't no rabble-rouser—you know what I mean? He just—he treat everybody right. And they figured he could work in there without any problem, and he did. He didn't have no problem. And he was a good basketball player, and they loved that.

[03:45:29] SL: So do you remember the day he came home and you asked him to do this—to leave the school that he was in and . . .

RF: He didn't wanna do it, and then I sit down, and I talked to him. I said, "Now, look, this is for progress. This is a chance we've never had before." And I said, "Just think about it." [*Swallows*] I say, "You doin' something not just for you, but for generations that's goin' come on behind you. Somebody's got to open the door." So he said, "Well, all right, I'll go." But he didn't want to go. He didn't wanna leave Camden High—I mean, Lincoln High. He wanted to play basketball for Coach Webster. Then when he did go there and start playin' basketball, he played against some of his teammates at Lincoln High. And a good friend of ours—their son and Randall grew up together—he stayed there at Lincoln, but after, Randall went on over there. He was playin' against Lincoln High, and he scored the winnin' point—a three-pointer that won the game for Camden High. And this lady was named Catherine Cook. She say, "Shame on you, Randall

Ferguson."

SL: That's a little bit of a cost . . .

RF: Yeah.

[03:47:10] SL: . . . to him. Do you remember the scene when Randall walked through the door at the house the day that you asked him to . . .

RF: To go . . .

SL: . . . to go . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . to Camden? Do you remember who was in the living room with you?

RF: Yeah, our pastor and some of the school board and the principal of the school. When he walked in, he said, "What is all this about?" [*Laughter*] [*SL coughs*] I says, "It's all about you." "Well, what is it?" And then we told him. But once he was over there, everything just went smooth.

[03:47:59] SL: Well, I think there was some quiet prejudice over there.

RF: Oh yeah. Yeah, when he was left off the honor roll—Honor Society—and he had better grades than some that was on there. And Earnest Sterling, who was one of his teachers, and Miss Washington—Harriet Washington—and they did raise some sin

about it. 'Cause it was—that was just prejudice though. That's all. But his grades were there to prove for hisself. So that's the decision they made, and that's what stood.

[03:48:54] SL: Do you think he understands today that he's—because he did that and because he had that disappointment and suffered because of that, that he opened the door?

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: Do you think he really understands that?

RF: He understands that.

SL: You know . . .

[03:49:20] RF: He understand that, you know, it had to start somewhere, and he helped start it. And the kind of person he was made it successful. And one of the things—why did anyone—there's a white girl—she's just crazy about him. He wasn't—he never said nothin' to her, but she told the folks out there that she loved him. And they held that against him, and it wasn't his fault. And that was awful.

SL: Yeah. Yeah, that—that's like a—driving a stake through some of those crazy folks . . .

RF: Yeah, because it wasn't his grades that's kept him off of it, it was just prejudice.

[03:50:17] SL: Yeah. But you know, he—despite that loss, he was

on a higher plain than that.

RF: That's right.

SL: He raised the bar. He got above that. I mean, it just shot him out there.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Set him—set a bunch of things free.

RF: He opened up the door.

[03:50:46] SL: Yeah. You know, he told me that when he got over there, the first white person that kinda rallied with him over there was Lance Womack.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: Dooley's son. And I think they became very best friends.

RF: Yeah. Yeah, they played basketball together—him and L. E.

SL: And L. E. Lindsey.

RF: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] They was—they had a team.

SL: Yeah. I'm gonna look up Lance. He's living in Little Rock now. Well, that's a story that I wanted to get your take on.

RF: Yeah.

[03:51:35] SL: [*Sniffs*] And I appreciate you talkin' about it. Now, [*clears throat*] okay. So you're—you've done a couple of security jobs. You kinda climbed up the ladder in the security companies, and you kinda took that as far as you could go. And

now, the county sheriff is knockin' on your door and sayin' he wants you to be on his team and . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . and you decide to do that.

RF: Yeah.

SL: [*Sniffs*] And . . .

RF: Well, I really didn't want to.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Randall was goin' to college.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I was takin' a cut in pay 'cause the county wasn't payin' nothin', hardly.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I [*unclear words*] want to do it, but he says, "I ain't got nobody else, so you—I picked you, and you the only one I got."

SL: Yeah.

RF: Say, "You've got to help me."

SL: Yeah.

RF: Say, "Because I promised the people when I was runnin' that blacks would be represented in my department." I went on.

[03:52:42] SL: Well, so you broke some ground there.

RF: Yeah. Well, I made it possible for the ones they got up there

now, because . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . me bein' the first, I had to take a lot of stuff to leave the door open for somebody to come on behind me.

[03:52:56] SL: Well, let's talk about some of that.



RF: Well, first encounter I had was the marshal up at Bearden. He called for some help up there.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And we met him out there, and so Leslie got out of the car. He was the deputy that was ridin' with me. He was white.

[03:53:20] And he say, "Well, what you got?" He said, "Well, we got an old nigger up there named 'Crowbar.'" He say, "He'd beat you up with a crowbar in a minute." He said, "I'm scared to go out there by myself." Say, "I want you to come and go with me." So by that time, Leslie called me—he say, "Come here, Randall." So I went out there, and he saw I was black. He said, "This is one of our deputies," he say, "and we'll go up there with you and help you all we can." And he just started shakin'—beggin' me pardon, you know, and everything—say, "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry." I say, "I just ain't like that, but I just let that slip." So we went on up there, and I went in—went up there, and ol' Crowbar knew me. [*SL laughs*] And when I

walked in, he said, "Well, I'm ready to go. I know what you come for." So I just brought him on out. And when I walked out there with him unhandcuffed, [*laughs*] they was surprised. [*Laughter*] So I asked him, "What you want—you want me to drive him up there to jail?" He say, "Yeah, you can drive him up there." I say, "Okay, get in." He just got in the front seat with me. I didn't handcuff him. Carried him on up there to jail, and then he locked him up. But after that, he got to be my best friend.

[03:54:41] SL: That sheriff?

RF: Yeah. Yeah, the marshal up there at Bearden.

SL: Well, you know, he saw [*laughs*] the light for . . .

RF: And every . . .

SL: . . . one thing.

RF: Yeah, I mean, every time he had some trouble up there, he'll call for me to come up and help him. And we got all right.

[03:55:00] SL: [*Coughs*] Did you ever know Floyd Thomas over in El Dorado?

RF: Floyd Thomas?

SL: Yeah, he was an FBI agent.

RF: Oh yeah, yeah.

SL: You know, he tried—he said—he never used a weapon in any of

his arrests. He just—he knew—he figured that the moment he got that rifle out that it was askin' for trouble.

RF: Yeah.

SL: So he never drew a weapon.

[03:55:34] RF: Well, that was my policy. Never pull your gun until you intend to use it. And never aim it at nobody you didn't intend to shoot. Now I arrested more people on the phone. And Jerry asked me—he say, "How in the world you do that? You goin' call the man up and tell him to come up here and that you got a warrant for his arrest, and he come?" "Sure! 'Cause he know if he don't, I'm goin' to get him." [*Laughter*] Some women [*SL coughs*] got to fightin' once, and I called the woman—I said, "Look," I said, "I got a warrant for your arrest. Come on up here." "I ain't got no way to get up there." I say, "Yes, you have." I said, "Look, I was tryin' to be nice." I say, "I didn't want to come out there and arrest you for all your neighbors see you." "I'll be right on up there." And she came right on up.

SL: Yeah.

[03:56:25] RF: But I'd arrest 'em. I'd call 'em up and tell 'em, "Now, look, I got a warrant for your arrest." I say, "Come up here and let's get it straightened out." And they'd come. And

the sheriff—he asked me one day—he say, "You mean you call somebody up and tell 'em you got a warrant for their arrest, and they goin' come up here?" I said, "Sure, they always do."

SL: Well . . .

RF: Nine times out of ten, if he came up there . . .

SL: You could work somethin' out.

RF: I would . . .

SL: Oh.

[03:56:53] RF: . . . let him off on his own reconnaissance—gave him a court date and tell 'em to be up there at the court date, and they'd come. I had to go get one fella—just one. I called him and told him—I say—and I didn't have no confidence in him in the first place, [*SL coughs*] but I give him a chance.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And when I told him to come up there, he say, "Okay, I'll be right on up there." I knowed he's lyin'. I drove right on out there to his house, and he went to take off, and I said, "Uhn-uhn. Come on and get in the car." [*SL laughs*] He come out of the house with a suitcase goin' to court. [*Laughter*]

[03:57:35] SL: [*Coughs*] He figured he was gonna not be back for a little while.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But he didn't know that I didn't have confidence in him.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I was sittin' there waitin' on him when he come out with his suitcase. I said, "Come on." You know he wasn't goin' to court with no suitcase. "Well, I was fixin' to come up there." I say, "With a suitcase?" I said, "Come on. You goin' now, but you goin' with me." And that's the only one I ever had to do that.

[03:58:00] SL: Yeah. Well, you know, it probably has something to do with—there probably wasn't anybody in the county that didn't know you.

RF: No, everybody knew me.

SL: And didn't know who you—you know, who you were and where you were comin' from and [*someone clears throat*] didn't have the respect. [*Someone coughs*] I mean, they probably all respected you on—in a number of different ways and were grateful. And I think that was probably the best thing that county sheriff ever did—I bet—is getting you to . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . come on board. I bet he'd say the same thing.

RF: And . . .

[03:58:39] SL: Well—so how long did you do that?

RF: Four years.

SL: Four years?

RF: Mh-hmm. And I got called out a many night on blood runs.

Have to go to El Dorado to get blood. I either have to carry some blood and meet a deputy at the county line. So I was right there not far from the hospital. I'd—they'd always call me . . .

SL: To give blood . . .

RF: "Ferguson, we got a blood run." And I'm in the bed asleep. "We got a blood run to go to El Dorado. The deputy will meet you down there at the county line." I'd go to the hospital, get the blood, meet him at the county line, and then come on back. A lot of times, I have to go down there to get blood. Deputy would meet me down there at the county line. Either—a lot of time, we'd say, "Turn on your blue lights, and when I meet you, I'll know who you are, and we'll just stop and"—if he'd get to the county line first, he'd just keep on toward Camden till he meet me. And he knew who I was 'cause I'd have my lights on. So he . . .

[03:59:34] SL: So this was just a matter of transporting blood . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . from one hospital to another.

RF: That's right.

SL: And I guess the . . .

RF: But they always called us to do it.

[03:59:42] SL: Mh-hmm. So [*sighs*] what about the—what about domestic disputes and all that mess?

RF: Well, they had a boy out there at the hospital—out there—I mean, he was all just raisin' sin. So they called me at the county—we had a straitjacket. They wanted me to come out there and put him in a straitjacket. So I went out there and—oh, he was raisin' sin, but he was also drunk off somethin'—liquor or somethin' or dope or somethin'. [*Swallows*] And I got him down on the floor to put the straitjacket on. He spit right in my face. And the nurses got a towel and got some disinfectant and wiped it off and everything. And I asked him—I say, "Why did you do that?" But I put my knees in his ribs, and he groaned out. He say, "I ain't goin' do it no more." I say, "I know. 'Cause if you do, I'm goin' do this again." [*SL laughs and coughs*] And he was nice from then on. I didn't have no more trouble out of him. When he got out of the hospital, he came to see me. And he apologized and said—he told me how wrong he was. He said, "But you taught me a lesson." [*Laughs*]

SL: That's . . .

RF: Yeah, he just hawked off and spit right into . . .

SL: Yuck!

RF: See, I was down on me—at—in my face.

SL: Yuck! Hmm. Boy!

[04:01:21] RF: But all that stuff I had to go through—I didn't jump—
I didn't hit him or nothin', you know.

SL: Yeah, and that's another thing . . .

RF: And if I'd've hauled off and jumped and hit him upside the head
and take my blackjack and whooped him . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: That's what the people'd been lookin' for, see?

SL: Mh-hmm.

RF: But what I did, they couldn't see it. [*Laughs*] I put my knees
right in his ribs [*SL laughs*] and went up and down 'em.

[04:01:46] SL: Boy, that's somethin' else. So county sheriff for four
years—deputy sheriff—and what do you do after that?

RF: I went back to Highland Resources.

SL: And that was the company you came from before you . . .

RF: Fore I went to sheriff's office.

SL: And so . . .

RF: I worked for them about six months, and then I went to the

sheriff's office. [04:02:08] And, see, Jerry, the sheriff—he didn't come to me at first. He went to Roy Ledbetter. He told Roy—he say, "I'm takin' one of your men." He say, "Might be one of your best ones." He say, "Who is that—Randall?" He said, "Yes." [*Laughter*] He said, "Okay," he said, "that's good. He'll make you a good one. I know he will because I know how he's served me out here. I know he'll make you the best." And then Jerry come to me, and I said, "Lord, have mercy." But I went on.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But I had to take a lot, you know, to open the door up . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . for other's to come along.

[04:02:52] SL: Were you thinkin' a little bit about Randall when you took that job?

BP: Two minutes.

RF: Yes. It was payin' me less money than they was at Highland. And Jerry wouldn't let us take no bribes. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, what about outside work? Could you have—I guess you probably coulda kept doin' security work on the side and . . .

RF: No.

SL: No? 'Cause you're on twenty-four seven.

RF: When you're a deputy sheriff, you're on call twenty-four hours a day.

SL: There you go. Yeah.

RF: You gotta get called out anytime. Somebody gettin' lost in the woods.

SL: But over at the next town.

RF: Got to get out and go out there and look for 'em.

SL: Yeah.

RF: After you done worked all day. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

RF: We didn't have no time for ourself.

SL: Okay. We're gonna change tapes here.

[Tape stopped]

[04:03:46] RF: On my seventh—on my ninetieth birthday, I had all of 'em here—all my kids and my grandkids. And I had my oldest child—was a child that was born out of wedlock [*SL inhales*]—Claude Ferguson. He lives in Rockford, Illinois. And it's the first time he had a chance to meet all his brothers and sisters. And they all just hit it off just like he'd been in the family all the time. It was a great reunion.

SL: Well, now that's a big thing. I—and we don't have to talk about the—that out of wedlock . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . stuff, but he was from Rock—he came in from Rockford, Illinois? Is that what I . . .

RF: Yes, that's right.

SL: And how—his—how—what is he doing in his life? What . . .

RF: He's retired.

SL: He's retired.

[04:04:36] RF: He's retired. See, now I met his mother when I was in the CC camp when we's building that tree nursery up there at Bluff City.

SL: Uh-huh. Okay.

RF: And we just—right after then—after she got pregnant, they moved to Rockford, and that's where he was raised—up at Rockford, Illinois. And I met him when he was about six years old. [04:05:19] I was runnin' my place of business, and one of his uncles brought him there to see me. And right after then, that's when he moved to Rockford—I mean, he went to Rockford where his mother was, and I didn't see him anymore until he came here in 2001. I had just had surgery, and I still under that medication and painkillers I was takin'.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I just could remember him.

SL: Yeah.

[04:05:54] RF: I had a—they was givin' me a colon scope up at the
VA Hospital . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . and stuck a hole in me, and I had to have major surgery
behind it.

SL: Oh! Golly!

RF: And way it happened—when they told me they wanted to give
me a colon scope and it was gonna take about a hour, I told my
wife, "Aww, so y'all go on and eat," I say, "and then y'all be
back, and we be ready to go." Before they got back, they was
callin' in my wife to come and sign some papers, so they could
give me surgery. And I didn't know nothin' [*SL coughs*] for the
next four days. When I waked up in the recovery room, I didn't
know where I was. I remember my wife comin' in there. She
kept on buggin' 'em till they let her come in the recovery room
where I was. And I asked her—I say, "Where am I?" She say,
"You in recovery room up here in Little Rock." I said, "What am
I doin' here?" She said, "You had to have surgery." And I just
went back off again. I didn't—not know anything again, and
they had me in a room. They'd carried me to a room. But
things would just come and go, you know. I could remember

somethin' for a while, and then I'd be off again. And it was about three days before I ever got, you know, to really knowed where I was. But all the children was there.

[04:07:19] SL: Including the child that you had out of wedlock.

RF: No, not him because . . .

SL: Oh, not him?

RF: No, no, he wasn't there. [04:07:27] We didn't unite together until it—on my ninetieth birthday, and then we—since he was—well, got to be grown. And we just had a great time together. And he'll be back here for my wife birthday the twelfth of November. They givin' her a birthday party. And they'll all be here again.

SL: That's a beautiful story.

RF: Yeah.

SL: That's somethin' to be—boy, you got it. You got the blessings, don't you?

RF: Yeah, I've been blessed.

SL: You guys—you can't see 'em to—so—you can't see the forest for the trees . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . on this deal.

[04:08:10] RF: When I first had surgery for cancer, I was in the

operation—five hours. But that's been sixteen years ago this past August. And the day they operated on me was Friday the thirteenth. [*Laughs*]

SL: Oh boy, [*laughs*] my father—he wouldn't have let that happen under any circumstances.

RF: Friday the thirteenth is when they operated on me, and I was in surgery for—oh, they split me open from here [points to sternum] all the way down.

[04:08:41] SL: Yeah. So how many surgeries have you had? You told me that earlier.

RF: Eight.

SL: Eight.

RF: Come back from all of 'em.

SL: [*Laughs*] You're just not done yet.

RF: It was amazin', though, that I've—the Lord have blessed me to come through 'em. And I didn't think I'd ever be able to work my garden after that first surgery.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But I came back. I—when I left the hospital, the doctor told me—say, "You can do anything you ever done." He say, "I want you to stay off of work thirty days and go back to work." I went to work one day before the thirty days was up. I's workin' for

Highland then. I went back and worked till I was seventy-nine. I retired when I was seventy-nine—one day before I was seventy-nine years old.

SL: They were glad to have you, weren't they?

RF: Yeah. [*SL coughs*] And they gave me a party out there at Highland. They had a big cake for me and everything and . . .

[04:09:47] SL: Now what was it that that company did? What'd they manufacture or process? They . . .

RF: Highland?

SL: Yeah.

RF: No, they just owned the place out there, and they leased it out to these plants that's come in there.

SL: I see.

RF: It was—the navy built it. It's a munition plant.

SL: Okay.

RF: They had warehouses and igloos out there where they could store explosives.

SL: I see.

[04:10:14] RF: And those big companies out there—Lockheed Martin and all—they leased plants out there for 'em. General—GD—General Dynamics—they got a big plant out there. [*SL sniffs*] And when I was security supervisor, I was over all of the

sixty-five thousand acres that they had. I had to . . .

SL: Golly!

RF: Whenever somethin' happened, they called me. I had a badge and keys that'd let me in anything out there.

[04:10:48] SL: Now let me ask you this, and I—it's just kinda by chance that I knew something about this. And I think you and I talked about this, but I don't know that it was on tape. I was tellin' you about one of the first things I did when I started workin' the University was a training video for making the smoke grenades at—down here. And we came down here, and we noticed when we got back to Fayetteville and we started unloading all of our gear, all of our gear was covered in green stuff . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . 'cause they were doin' green smoke grenades.

RF: Yeah, just whatever the color they was usin', that's what you would—what would happened.

[04:11:23] SL: And I told David Pryor this story, and he says, "You know, those folks came up and—to Washington, DC, and they were having digestive problems. Their water was the same—was green."

RF: That's right. And when they would use—makin' them red smoke

bombs, it was red just like blood.

[04:11:46] SL: So what ever became of that—what—did they ever . . .

RF: Well, they soon phased it out. We—they couldn't keep nobody. You see, they would hire fifty people a day and fifty people would leave, and that was just puttin' work on me. I had to fingerprint 'em all—make badges. I had to make a badge and luminate 'em—lamine 'em. And fifty people would be hired, and they'd leave there that night and their shirts red as blood. They wouldn't come back.

[04:12:13] SL: So did—do you think any of your medical problems was related to that—to the arsenal work?

RF: It could've been.

SL: Mh-hmm. Was there ever any kinda lawsuit or . . .

RF: No, no, I . . .

SL: . . . anything . . .

RF: . . . never filed a lawsuit or nothin'.

SL: They just quit the program.

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: I mean, the program was cut off.

RF: Yeah. Yeah, they was makin' them bombs, and they'd—ever—what color they was usin', that's what color their clothes would

be when they'd leave there that evenin'. And that just put a lot of work on me.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Kept me goin'. [*Laughs*] Yeah, it was something.

[04:12:50] SL: Well, that's a bit—sixty-five thousand acres—security on that—and you're talkin' ordnances and explosives and bunkers—pillbox-kind of things.

RF: Yeah, we had to check all of them.

SL: That's somethin' else.

RF: Lot of time, they'd leave 'em open.

SL: Is that right?

RF: We had to check 'em to see if they was locked.

SL: Boy, and in today's climate—world—the way the world is today, that—that's a big job now—for sure.

RF: Yeah.

[04:13:22] SL: But you got out of it in [19]70—in what year?

RF: [Nineteen] seventy-nine.

SL: [Nineteen] seventy-nine. So you . . .

RF: No, [19]97.

SL: [Nineteen] ninety-seven.

RF: [Nineteen] ninety-seven.

SL: So you got out of it before it really got bad.

RF: Yeah, before that—this attack was.

SL: Before there was a Homeland Security.

RF: That's right.

[04:13:40] SL: Yeah. Well, so [*sighs*] what's been the best thing about your life since you've retired?

RF: Well, the best thing I had before I retired was a thrift plan that Highland had set up.

SL: Okay.

RF: Now you could put 6 percent of your salary in it, and they would match it.

SL: Okay.

RF: And sometime they would match it a dollar for a dollar—fifty cents on the dollar—just accordin' to how the company run.

SL: Yeah.

RF: What their financial state was in. And you could put six more percent in there, but it would just be a savin'. You couldn't match it. So I had 'em both.

SL: Okay.

[04:14:36] RF: And when I retired, I had a hundred thousand dollars in that thrift plan.

SL: Stock market and all the . . .

RF: Twenty thousand dollars—I got cash that I already paid tax on.

The other eighty, I rolled it over into IRA. And I'm still drawin' on that. They send me the minimum every year—five thousand seven hundred dollars. And it's down now to about fifty-five thousand.

SL: Yeah.

RF: They set it up by how long they thought I would live.

SL: [*Laughs and coughs*] And you got out of it before everything crashed.

RF: Yeah.

SL: So you didn't lose a bunch. Yeah, that's a good thing. Smart.

[04:15:21] RF: But then when I retired, I found this place over here, and my wife liked the house, and I liked the garden—the land I had out there. I had to clean it up. It was bushes and everything growin' out there.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I got out there and worked all day cleanin' it up before I could ever plant anything. And then it had acid in it. I had to lime it. First year I planted out there, nothin' grewed, and I had to lime it. I had to send in some samples to the University of Arkansas.

SL: Yeah.

[04:15:52] RF: Have it tested, and they told me what I had to do to it, and I did. And it's been thrivin' ever since. So I enjoy out

there in my garden. That's my hog heaven out there.

SL: Well . . .

RF: And when I—and then I go to the farmers market, and I enjoy that. We have to—I take pride in presentin' my vegetables—you know, my squash and everything—corn. I wash it and have it lookin' presentable. And I enjoy meetin' the people out there that I wouldn't ordinarily see that I've known for years. And I really enjoy that.

[04:16:33] SL: That's almost like gettin' back to the farm.

RF: That's right. See, I . . .

SL: Circle . . .

RF: . . . was raised on a farm, and now, it's right back. Out there, I used mules [*SL laughs*], and now I use a tiller [*laughter*] and a Wheel Horse. That Wheel Horse is a—you can make anything out of it. Just change the plows on it. Middle buster, turnin' plow, Georgia stock—just anything you wanna put on there. And I got everything out there.

SL: Well, I want you to show me that tomorrow . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . when we're takin' a break. And I want us to get some photographs of that . . .

BP: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . stuff out there.

BP: Mh-hmm.

[04:17:12] SL: Don't let me forget to make that happen. Anyway—
well, so you're home most all the time except when you're at the
farmers market.

RF: That's right.

SL: And you and your better half are still speakin' . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . after all these years and . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . and she hasn't . . .

RF: Well, that ain't goin' change. [*Laughter*] That can't change now
after . . .

SL: Well, you know, you were . . .

RF: . . . after sixty-one years—it's permanent.

[04:17:41] SL: Well, but you were gone for so long when you had
that lounge, and now you're home almost all the time.

RF: Yeah.

SL: It's probably almost like havin' a new boyfriend.

RF: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] Yeah, it's nice to be home . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . after all them years I was away. You see, when I was [*SL*

coughs]—when I first went to—when I went back to Highland after the—I left the sheriff's office . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . and when I went back to Highland, I was workin' at the water plant, and I had the swing shift. I worked two days, two nights, and two graveyards. Three different shifts in a week.

[04:18:20] SL: [*Laughs*] How did you ever sleep? I mean, how could you get—and there was no room.

RF: I don't know. I just did it. I did it for five years. And I had a supervisor out there.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I was makin' more money than he was. And he regretted it because, see, that sixth day I worked, I got holiday pay—I got time and a half. And if it was a holiday, I got double time and a half.

SL: That's golden time. [*SL tapping on arm of chair*]

[04:18:53] RF: And a lot of times them holidays come on a weekend . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I get that double time and a half with all that overtime I put in.

SL: Well . . .

RF: And he just regretted it, and he did everything he could to get me fired.

[04:19:13] SL: Well, I mean, who approved that schedule to let you do that? I mean, I don't understand . . .

RF: That's just the—if you workin' slave shift—if you're workin' swing shift, that's the way it was. And that—nobody wanted it. See, they wanted days or evenin'.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Now graveyard—see—and so I had to work three different shifts—'cause they called it a swing shift. Two nights, two days and two evenin's. And I did that for five years.

[04:19:44] SL: [*Laughs*] That's funny that he did everything he could to try to get you fired.

RF: Yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, now . . .

RF: He didn't like the relationship between Roy and I.

SL: Yeah.

RF: See, Roy know—Roy been knowin' me [*SL coughs*] since . . .

SL: Mh-hmm. So he was threatened by that.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Hmm.

[04:20:06] RF: He tried to get me fired. We had a ice storm out

there. And we had a new man comin' on to work graveyard. I was workin' evenin's. We had a new man comin' on, and Roy came up there—he said, "Look, all the power was out." And he said, "I want you to stay here with this new man until they get the power back on." [04:20:27] I said, "Okay." So after he left, I thought about somethin' out there. I called him. I said, "Mr. Ledbetter," I said, "now we have called the power company," I said, "but I just got one meter, so they ain't goin' listen to me." I say, "Why don't you call 'em?" I said, "You got meters all over this place out here that you payin' [*laughter*] electric bills on." And he called 'em. They come right on out there and turned 'em on.

SL: There you go. Smart move. Good call.

RF: So—but I stayed out there five hours overtime, so I put that on my—I kept my own rec—you know, turned my—I turned in my own time. [04:21:05] So I turned in them five hours overtime. And the fella's name was—my supervisor's name was James Ferguson. He was a Ferguson, too, but he was white. So he went up there, and he told Bill Gibbs—he says, "Randall say he's—he get—tryin' to get over on the company." Say, "He done turned in five hours of overtime. I don't know nothin' bout it, and I didn't approve it." [04:21:30] So he said, "Well, we

better go to Roy and talk to Roy about him." So we went to Roy. Roy say, "Hell, I approved it myself." Said, "I told him to stay out here during that ice storm, and I told him to stay out here till they got the power on." Say, "He didn't turn in but five hours?" He say, "That's all." He said, "Give him eight."

[*Laughter*] "Man stayed out there long—in all that bad weather, so give him eight hours." That sure enough got him.

SL: Oh brother!

[04:21:57] RF: But that's the kinda—well, Roy Ledbetter—well, you know him, don't you?

SL: No.

RF: You didn't know Roy?

SL: Uhn-uhn.

RF: Him and David is good friends. They live in the same neighborhood up there.

SL: What's the last name?

RF: Ledbetter.

SL: Ledbetter. I'll ask him bout him.

RF: Yeah.

SL: I don't think I ever met him, but . . .

RF: Well, David knows him . . .

SL: Okay.

RF: . . . 'cause David—when he was runnin' for governor, he was always out there at the guesthouse.

SL: Okay. [*Someone clears throat*] Okay.

[04:22:23] RF: You know, after he run for the Senate and missed it, then he come back and run for governor and got to be elected governor.

SL: Yeah. And . . .

RF: And then he went from governor to the Senate.

SL: And so Roy used to stay in the guesthouse out there at the Governor's Mansion? Is that the guesthouse you're talkin' about?

RF: No, no, David used to stay out there at the guesthouse—at Highland's . . .

SL: Oh.

RF: . . . guesthouse out there.

SL: Oh, okay. Okay. Okay. I'll ask him about it.

RF: Yeah. Yeah, you ask him about Roy Ledbetter. He knows him.

SL: I've—I'm sure he'll . . .

[04:22:53] RF: He's the one put Bill Clinton back in there when he got beat—when White beat him.

SL: Yeah. Bill Clinton learned his lesson there, didn't he?

RF: Oh yeah, he learned his lesson. See, Roy went to Highland

Resource, and he got a [*stomach grumbles*] bale of money for Bill Clinton to run. And he was out there at the guesthouse. They was havin' a fund-raiser out there for him. And I came through there to check, and one [*laughs*] of his bodyguards stopped me out there 'cause I had a rifle and a pistol in the truck. [*Laughter*] So Roy came out there. He say, "That's my man." Said, "Don't bother him." Say, "He knows what he doin'." Say, "He's here to protect me, not to harm me." He say, "He knows Bill Clinton. He's not out here to hurt Bill. You don't have to worry bout that."

[04:23:51] SL: What do you—did you know Bill Clinton?

RF: Sure! I met Bill Clinton when he was runnin' for secretary of state.

SL: You mean attorney general?

RF: Yeah, attorney general.

SL: Attorney general? Yeah.

RF: Yeah, when he was runnin' for attorney general, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[04:24:04] RF: He came to Camden—him and—and Bruce Streett—I mean, Julian Streett.

SL: Okay.

RF: You know Julian?

SL: Uhn-uhn.

RF: Yeah. Well, he was a lawyer here.

SL: Okay.

RF: And he came there, and he called me to come up to the courthouse to meet him. And I went up there, and I met him. And he asked me to support him. I told him I would. I said, "Send me some literature down here. I'll put it all over Ouachita County for you." And he did.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I didn't charge him a penny.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I was workin' then. I didn't need nothin'. I just—he asked me, "What do I owe you?" "You don't owe me anything." I said, "Just don't forget me."

SL: Yeah.

RF: And then when he ran for governor, I was with him then. And president.

[04:24:53] SL: He had a way, didn't he?

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: Bill Clinton.

RF: Yeah, I had breakfast with him at the Governor's Mansion.

SL: Uh-huh. He could focus in . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . on you.

RF: He's smart.

[04:25:10] SL: He's very smart. Hmm. Well, [*sighs and sniffs*]
what about McClellan?

RF: McClellan—you know, that was—Camden was his home.

SL: I know that. Now—okay, here's a story—now you—maybe you
can help me with this. Now when he—when they—now, it's my
understanding that Edgar Pryor and one of the local bankers
here in Camden went to McClellan and said, "You should run for
the senate." And he—they convinced him to do that. At that
point in time . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . he was just a loc—he was a lawyer.

RF: That's right.

[04:26:05] SL: And did he have a—an apartment downtown or
somethin'?

RF: Yes.

SL: Upstairs?

RF: That's right.

SL: And he started runnin'—didn't—he didn't have any money of his
own and . . .

RF: Nah, and they put the money up for him to run.

SL: And they put the money up for him to run. And so this is David Pryor's father that's initiating his—encouraging him to run . . .

RF: That's right.

[04:26:30] SL: . . . with this local banker. And at one point in time, he missed a rally or somethin'. He didn't show up at a rally that he was supposed to be at . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . and they went to see him, and he said, "I can't run. I—my britches are worn out, and my shoes are worn out. I can't—I gotta quit. Can't do it." And they bought him some britches and some new shoes . . .

RF: Shoes.

SL: . . . and put him back out there.

RF: They dressed him up.

SL: Is that what . . .

RF: That's true.

SL: . . . you've heard?

RF: That's right. That's true.

SL: What . . .

RF: They put him in there, but he—once he got in there, though, he never forgot 'em. He didn't forget 'em. He'd always come back

to Camden. And the VA Hospital out there—the new one's named after him—John L. McClellan.

[04:27:18] SL: Yeah. Well now, what do you have to say about that McClellan/Pryor race when David ran against him?

RF: The first time? Yeah. Oh, well, in the primary, David came way ahead—out ahead.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And everybody thought that he would just walk in. But McClellan reached out, and a lot of people he had did favors for, he called 'em in. And he [*SL coughs*] pulled it off. And he told David—he say, "I told you to wait. If you wait six more years, I'm goin' give it to you!" [*Laughs*] So he didn't serve out his six year before he died. I don't think.

SL: No, it was like at two years or . . .

RF: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . or—and . . .

RF: They appointed somebody in his place to fill it out, and then David ran.

[04:28:19] SL: Yeah, he—well, at first, he offered it to Mrs. McClellan . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and she didn't . . .

RF: She didn't want it.

SL: . . . want it. And then he offered it to—he kinda told Kaneaster Hodges that . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . it was gonna be his. And Kaneaster hem-hawed around, and my understanding is David announced it [*laughs*] before Kaneaster really said he'd do it.

RF: Yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*] And I think Kaneaster did a good job . . .

RF: Yeah.

[04:28:50] SL: . . . on that. Well, what about the black community down here in Camden durin' that race? Did they—was it split or did . . .

RF: It was split.

SL: Yeah.

RF: It was split.

SL: Was it pretty even, or did more go for Pryor than McClellan or . . .

RF: No, McClellan carried it.

SL: He did?

RF: Mh-hmm. 'Cause he had more power, see, than David.

SL: He did. He was a very powerful man.

[04:29:18] RF: See, and he did a lot of [*SL coughs*] people favors here.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And you take our county clerk—county [*taps leg*]*—*what am I thinkin' bout? Yeah, county clerk. His name was—anyway, he got hold of some of that government money and messed it up. And they was goin' try to prosecute him.

SL: Yeah.

RF: McClellan told 'em—say, "It all government money." Said, "Let him go." And they did. They didn't even prosecute him.

SL: Took care of him. But he—was it an honest mistake? I guess it was an honest mistake.

RF: Yeah.

[04:30:05] SL: Otherwise he wouldn't have done that. Yeah. What other political races or political figures do you—do you have anything to say about—what about Rockefeller?



RF: Rockefeller? I supported Rockefeller. First Republican I ever voted for.

SL: That's pretty much across the board as far . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . as . . .

[04:30:34] RF: Because the fella that was runnin' against him was

Jim Johnson—"Justice Jim." And he said he wouldn't have the Negro vote if they brought it to him on a silver platter.

SL: That's right.

RF: And I was over the box there in Camden, and he didn't get a vote. Rockefeller got 'em all. He didn't get one vote. In the primary, he got two. [*SL laughs*] And in the runoff, he got [*SL coughs*]*—he didn't get none.* [04:31:08] Some misguided soul didn't know what they was doin'. [*Laughter*]

SL: It was a mistake.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Two mistakes.

RF: "Justice Jim."

SL: "Justice Jim" . . .

RF: . . . is what he called hisself.

[04:31:23] SL: What about—I guess Dale Bumpers was always solid and . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . popular down here.

RF: He was really—he was good.

SL: You know, there's a guy that probably coulda been president.

RF: Yeah, he could have been.

SL: He—I think he kinda just handed it to Jimmy Carter, didn't he?

RF: Mh-hmm. When I was workin'—still workin' for Highland, I was drawin' Social Security and workin'. I did that for fourteen years.

SL: Yeah, I guess you could do that.

[04:31:54] RF: After I got to seventy [*SL coughs*], I could make all the money I want and wouldn't have no penalty on it. And every year I'd work, I'd go up there and have 'em to add it to my Social Security, and bout the third year, I went up there—they told me they couldn't do it no more. So I went there and talked to Roy about it. He say, "Call Dale Bumpers. Tell him I told you to call him and tell him what they're doin' to you." And I told him, and they come out. They sent for me. [*Laughter*] They sent for me to come up there.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Said, "We made a mistake. We goin' do it. We goin' add it to it."

[04:32:35] SL: There you go. So—and then I guess we gotta talk about Huckabee.

RF: Yeah, Mike Huckabee.

SL: Yeah.

RF: The preacher.

SL: Yeah. How'd he sit down here?

RF: Well, the religious people put him in there.

SL: Yeah. Both white and black?

RF: Yeah, both white and black. But he made a good—he made a fair governor.

SL: He di—there was—there were some things that . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . I'm not gonna . . .

RF: Oh, he's had some things that he's . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . did wrong, but . . .

SL: Yeah.

[04:33:13] RF: . . . you know, in—after a whole, he was, you know, pretty fair. He hired a bunch of blacks in his administration.

[*Swallows*] And he—and right now, he's killin' hisself.

SL: You think so?

RF: He wants to run for president, but I think he's killin' hisself. He's overexposin' hisself now with this talk show he got. He's overexposin' hisself, and the people gettin' tired of it.

[04:33:39] SL: Don't—but don't you think his strategy is, is to be—portray himself as moderate . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . against all this white—right-wing . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . craziness that's goin' on and all this hatred that's goin' on?
He's tryin' to show a moderate . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . tryin' to capture the middle of what's left of the Republican
Party. I—that's what I see . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . that he's tryin' to do, and he's tryin' to stay in the . . .

RF: Limelight. Tryin' to . . .

SL: . . . tryin' to keep his name out there and . . .

RF: Yeah, but I think he's overexposin' hisself.

[04:34:09] SL: I haven't been payin' attention to him, but . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . I—just on the surface . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . that's what I imagine that he's tryin' to achieve—a choice.

RF: Yeah.

[04:34:23] SL: Well, you gotta like Mike Beebe.

RF: Oh yeah. I worked for him hard. I got a—all of his signs, I still
got 'em in my warehouse. [*SL laughs*] He had some great big
signs. I had to buy posts for—put 'em up.

SL: I . . .

RF: Fence posts.

SL: I—yeah. I've got the same deal in my shed . . .

RF: And I got . . .

SL: . . . with Mark's signs.

RF: And I got all of his big signs. I saved 'em for him, so if—when he run again, all I gotta do is go put 'em out.

SL: Yeah.

[04:34:50] RF: And it's in good shape by takin' 'em down. See, [*SL coughs*] we can put signs—me and my—got a friend of mine named Milton Cook—we can put signs where nobody else can put 'em, because they know after the election's over with, we comin' down and pick 'em up. We ain't goin' leave 'em there for eyesores.

SL: That's right.

RF: We go back and pick 'em up.

SL: You're supposed to have 'em up, what, five days after or somethin' like that?

RF: Thirty days, I think . . .

SL: Six days. Yeah.

RF: . . . after the election. Yeah. Supposed to have 'em all in.

SL: Yeah.

[04:35:14] RF: But we go back right after election and start pickin'

'em up.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And we warehouse 'em.

SL: Take care . . .

RF: I got some of Mike Ross signs that he—when he run the first year, we been putting 'em out ever since. Same signs—they just about gone now. They're the plastic, and you know, they begin to peel—dry and peel.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So he'll have to send us somethin' new down here this year.

[04:35:37] SL: What do you think about his stance on the health care stuff—Mike Ross's?

RF: I don't know. He need to go—he need to vote—he need to support it, because he's hurtin' hisself if he don't. 'Cause, like I say, there's more small people than there is big people, and the small people is the one that need it. And their votes count, and that's what they watchin'—to see what he's goin' do.

SL: I wish you'd call him.

RF: I've already called him and told him.

SL: Okay. Good.

RF: I didn't talk to him. I talked to one of his people. I told 'em to relay my message to him. He knows me personally.

SL: Well, I hope he gets it.

RF: Well, I hope he do, too, because he goin' hurt hisself if he don't.

[04:36:19] SL: Well, I—you know, it's hard for me to understand how people don't see that. That they don't see they're gonna be hurtin' themselves. They . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know, their knee-jerk reaction is to all this rantin' and ravin' that's gettin' all the airwaves and publicity that they're forgettin' that that was a big promise . . .

RF: That's right.

SL: . . . that the current president made—that it was time. It was a moral issue. It's not an economic issue.

RF: And it's—the people need it.

SL: Yeah.

[04:36:50] RF: It's the thing that the people need because, other than that, they won't have no health insurance. I was lucky to have my—still carryin' my company insurance when I left Highland. I got Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas. And I still got it—I still have it, and it's good insurance.

SL: It's made the difference.

RF: When I had my surgery—[*SL coughs*] when I had my surgery for cancer in [19]73, my hospital bill around fif—forty-some

thousand dollars. I wasn't out of a dime. See, they will—if it runs over four thousand dollars, they reach back and pay everything.

SL: There you go. That's good.

[04:37:37] RF: And in 2001, when I had that surgery, I wasn't out of a dime. But the—they've lied to the veterans. Now they told us that when we got out of service, we'd go to hospital—everything'd be free—your medicine'd be free and everything. The first time I went to the hospital in [19]49 after I got out of serve, my water stopped on me again. And they checked my prostate. It was normal. So they x-rayed me. They put me—stood me on my head and every [*SL laughs*] way and x-rayed me. And they found some scar tissues, so they operated on me. Then I came out all right. But when I came out of there, I didn't file no claim for disability. I just now filed a claim for disability [*laughs*], and they turned me down. And I had that allergy started on me when I was in Fort McClellan, Alabama.

SL: Yeah.

[04:38:53] RF: Then when that stove hit me in the pit of my stomach down there, that's what started all that trouble.

SL: Yeah, I know.

RF: And right now, I have to draw my water four times a day with a

catheter. Five o'clock in the mornin'; one o'clock in the evenin'; and nine o'clock at night. I can still make water, but my bladder is twice the size that it should be. And the only reason I could see that it's that way was that stove hittin' me in there.

SL: Yeah.

[04:39:27] RF: Now I can make water and about half of it come out, and then I got to draw the other half out with a catheter . . .

SL: Golly.

RF: . . . to empty my bladder.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I have to do that three times a day. I either wear a catheter—all the time. And I'd rather draw it than to wear one all the time 'cause it be inconvenient for me to work out there in my garden wearin' a catheter all the time.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And it keeps you drained all the time.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Makes you weak 'cause your bladder never fills up—no water stay in it at all. It keeps steady runnin' out. And it's hard to work out there with a leg bag on your leg. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah. Yeah, it is. It is. Well, is there anything that you can think of that you'd like to talk about that we hadn't talked about?

RF: I don't know. Let me see. Tryin' to think.

[04:40:36] SL: Do you wanna talk about [*someone clears throat*]
Lizzie a little more?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Let's talk about her a little bit.



RF: Well, when she [*hearing aid feedback*] first came to work for me, she just fitted right in. And fact about it, she wasn't like [*SL coughs*]*—*after she was workin' for me, she just act like part of the business—the business belonged to her. And she [*SL laughs*]*—*and that's the way she'd work. Hours didn't mean nothin' to her. And I'd go to Little Rock a lot of times to play poker.

SL: Now I'm gonna hear—I wanna hear about this a little bit later, but let's stay on Lizzie for . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . a little bit.

RF: Well, I went to Little Rock once, and we had to pay sale tax on, you know, everything—all the food and everything we'd sold. And the next day was the last day to send it in without payin' a penalty. And when I got back, she had it all figured up. And we wasn't married then. She had it all figured up, and all I had to do the next mornin' was take it up there and pay the sale tax.

Yeah, and I was goin' have to ramble through all them—she'd done got all this—things together. And she was just that kinda person. And I just fell in love with her, and we got married, and it's been a wonderful life. Everything haven't been bed of roses, but we always made it. And she's still a wonderful woman. She loves her kids and her grandkids, and they all love her. They all call her Granny. [*SL laughs*] They call me Papa and call her Granny.

SL: There you go.

RF: And . . .

SL: Well, she's Granny now.

RF: Yeah, a lot of times. [*Laughter*] And they—all of 'em, they just love her.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And they—Robert Jr.—him and his family was comin' here, and his daddy told him—say, "You better call your granny and tell her y'all are comin', and so she can prepare y'all some food." She say, "Oh, that—she—when we get there, she'll have everything ready." And he come with his four—he got four girls, and they are something else. Sure enough, when they come, they expectin' her to have—I always make rolls when they comin'.

SL: Yeah.

[04:43:17] RF: And they just enjoy theirself. They get out in that backyard and just romp and run and play with Mike. And they all good kids.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And Michael—he's—both of 'em's workin' now for Social Security disability. Both got good jobs. Michael's wife work for her doctor—her daddy. He's a doctor in Hot Springs. And he just love those kids. And Robert—he married his childhood sweetheart. They went to—they finished high school together. And they the ones that got the four girls. "Little" Michael—he's got a boy and a girl. And they just—she's a . . .

SL: You got . . .

RF: She's a registered nurse. His wife is a registered nurse. And she's white. Both of 'em married white girls. And they got a great family. And they always wanna come here. All his girls [*hearing aid feedback*] came here once, and my wife gave 'em all purses. She had a bunch of old purses back here. [*Laughs*] She gave 'em all a piece, and they was just as happy as they could be.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's fun.

RF: Yeah.

[04:44:57] SL: That's fun. Well, so you'd go to Little Rock every once in a while for a poker game?

RF: Not now.

SL: But you used to?

RF: Yeah.

SL: And what was that all about? What—how much trouble did you get into on that? Did you—some of the money flow comin' in—did you end up not doin' too well at that? I know you . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . you did well on the ship . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . goin' over to Italy.

RF: Well, I've always been a pretty good poker player.

SL: Yeah.

[04:45:25] RF: We had some—we had bout five of us here in Camden. Every Wednesday night we played poker . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . and we called it goin' to prayer meetin'.

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah, or . . .

RF: And we'd . . .

SL: . . . vespers.

RF: We'd go to each other's house. And see, our wives would fix

some kind of food for us to eat. Sometime we'd play poker all night. But we had a rule, you know, you couldn't raise over a dollar. First, they—you couldn't raise over a quarter, and then they raised it to a dollar.

SL: Well, inflation . . .

RF: Huh?

SL: Inflation.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[04:46:04] RF: And [*SL clears throat*] one night, I broke whole game up. I went to Stinson Jewelry next mornin' and bought her a three string of pearls. And if you notice my mother's picture, she's wearin' 'em . . .

SL: Is that . . .

RF: . . . in that picture.

SL: All right. I'll look at that.

RF: She used to get 'em from my wife all the time and wear 'em.

[*SL coughs and laughs*] But we had a lot of fun playin' poker.

Warren Slaughter worked for Mike Berg and Isaac Watson.

Warren worked for Miss Ellen. He drove her around, and Isaac

Watson—called him "Pygmy"—he drove Mike around. He was

Mike's chauffeur.

SL: Called him Pygmy?

RF: Yeah. And all the people that worked for him—you know, they called Mike in service. He had to go in the army.

And all his men that worked for him. When they got out of service, he called 'em all up—he say, "I'm goin' put all of y'all in business—whatever you wanna do." He put one in—he wanted a used car lot. He put him in the business. Pig wanted a liquor store. He couldn't get no license, so he bought a liquor store—moved it over there to his house. [*Laughter*]

SL: Camden.

RF: Yeah.

[04:47:28] SL: What a town. [*Sighs*] Well, is there anything you wanna say to your children or grandchildren or . . .

RF: Yes, they all are good kids. We've had some mischief in 'em, but they've all turned out to be pretty good kids. They all doin' good in life, and I'm proud of 'em. I'm proud of all of 'em. I had one son—he was working for IBM and back—he had a unlimited expense account, and he was goin' out winin' and dinin' those customers, and them ol' fellas been drinkin' all their life. And he was young and got to be an alcoholic.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And IBM put up with him, and they put up with him. He was

workin' for a fella in Little Rock. Out of Little Rock. And so finally, Randall—he was in Kansas City then—he's over that office up there over this area down—he came down here and talked to him. He said, "I woulda done fired him, but he's your brother." He says, "It'd been me, I'd've done fired him." He didn't want to fire him on account of he's Randall brother, and Randall was over him.

SL: Yeah.

[04:48:50] RF: But they fired him. And he went through that alcohol stuff, and he'd still mess up—get back on it.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And finally, the last time he—I carried him down to El Dorado, and he went through it that time, and he's been alcohol-free ever since. And he started his timing business, and he's doin' good at it.

SL: That's great.

RF: He times all these big events.

SL: That's great. And that's a big—that's a good, good story . . .

RF: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . 'cause that's a hard thing to do. It's a real hard thing.

[04:49:21] RF: And Randall—we never had no problem out of him, period. He just—when he finished school, he wasn't there till

March. IBM had done already hired him. They hired him right out of school—before he finished. Then he worked his way up to the top. Him and his first wife separated. He's got two boys.

[*SL coughs*] Him and his first wife separated, and he married to another woman that worked for IBM—was up there on the same level as he was, and both of 'em's retired now.

[04:49:51] SL: Now I've been in their house in—outside Kansas City.

I . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . that's where I interviewed him. He's got a nice, nice place there.

RF: Yeah, he built that one.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I think that's the last one he livin' in now. He built it. Yeah, we been up there and spent time with him . . .

[04:50:06] SL: Yeah. So let's see. There—that's Mike and Randall, and who are the other kids now?

RF: Claude, Randall Jr., James, Robert, Jeanette, and Don—John.

Robert—he's a shippin' manager down at IP in Mansfield. He started out workin' for IP when he's goin' to school on summer hire.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And him and his wife was goin' to college, and they quit college and married. And then he came back to—and he started work for IP regular. And he stayed there until the mill closed. And they transferred him to Texarkana, and he stayed there a year, and his old mill manager sent for him—say he need a shippin' manager down there. And he went down there, and they made him offer and . . .

SL: He took it.

RF: . . . and he took it. He's been there ever since. They got a nice home down there.

SL: Yeah.

[04:51:24] RF: And that's where I'm goin' to the VA Hospital—Overton Brooks—down there at Shreveport now.

SL: Okay.

RF: And they really did a wonderful job on me.

[04:51:33] SL: That's good news. [*Clears throat*] Now what about the daughters? Just . . .

RF: I just have one daughter.

SL: One daughter.

RF: Yeah.

SL: What about your daughter?

RF: She's in Boston. She's workin' for a insurance company now,

and her husband works for American Airlines.

SL: M'kay.

RF: Those terrorists flew out of his airport . . .

SL: Oh, is that right?

RF: . . . that ruined the Pentagon. Yeah.

[04:51:55] SL: Golly. Hmm. You know, when you were growin' up, you—when did you quit school, when you were growin' up?

RF: When I was in the tenth grade. I'd finished tenth grade.

SL: But . . .

RF: That's when my daddy died in [19]37.

SL: But you went back, didn't you? I mean, you've—did you go . . .

RF: No, when I was in the CC camp, I finished my high school education goin' to school at night.

SL: That's what I thought.

RF: That's where I finished—after—I got my diploma from. I'd go to school at night at CC camp. [04:52:32] Herbert Smith was the adviser—education adviser. And a lot of 'em didn't want to go to school, but I wanted my diploma, so . . .

SL: That . . .

RF: . . . I'd go to school. And I'd work all day and go to school at night.

SL: Well, and see, now that's another good thing about the CCC thing.

RF: Yeah, they—you had every opportunity to do something for yourself if you wanted to. Now a lot of those fellas that couldn't read and write and—they didn't want nobody know it.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And they wouldn't go to school.

SL: That—boy.

RF: But, see, I got two years there—eleventh and the twelfth.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And just by goin' to school at night.

[04:53:07] SL: Now—but—and didn't Lizzie kinda do the same thing?

RF: Yeah. Yep, she did the same thing. She went back and got hers. See, we married, and she didn't finish.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And—but she went back and got her GED.

SL: And that's strong.

RF: Yep.

[04:53:23] SL: Both of you. That's good. Congratulations. Well, now look—we're—I think that you've pretty much covered most all the bases here. Do you feel pretty good about . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . our talk today?

RF: I feel good about it.

SL: I think we've covered some good things. I think the family's gonna enjoy this. I know the state of Arkansas is gonna enjoy it.

Kris Katrosh: Hey, Scott?

SL: Yeah?

KK: Ask him if he's proud to be from Arkansas.

[04:53:51] SL: Oh, okay. [*Door closes*] We've been kinda tossin' around this idea—you know, part of our mission is we want to help kids understand Arkansas history [*hearing aid feedback*]
—the—all these things we've talked about and all these events and all these personalities and all this politics and the Depression and the war and the CCC—you know, all this stuff. We want to inspire kids to work hard and to keep the faith and to try to do good. And . . .

RF: Well, that's what I tried to teach all of my kids. There ain't no free lunch. I say, "You have to work for what you want. And you got to stick with it if you want turn out good."

[04:54:47] SL: Well, we also want to encourage the—being proud to have done that in Arkansas.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Raise up Arkansas.

RF: That's right.

SL: And so we've been thinkin' about askin' the folks that we interview to say their name and say that they're proud to be from Arkansas.

[04:55:17] RF: I'm proud to be from Arkansas. Now when I went in the service, they say, "You from Arkansas?" I say, "Yeah." Said, "Ought to be botherin' you goin' overseas. See, you already in a foreign country." [*Laughter*] [*SL coughs*] He say, "You already come to a foreign country."

SL: That's good. Well, can I get you to say your name and then say, "And I'm proud to be from Arkansas"?

[04:55:41] RF: I'm Randall C. Ferguson, and I'm proud to be from Camden, Arkansas.

SL: There we go. Okay, now I'm gonna ask—I hate to do this, but I'm gonna ask you to do that one more time. But I want you to look—not at me, but at—pretend like this is me right here.

RF: Okay.

SL: Okay. Just go ahead. Just go ahead and say it—your name and say . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . that you're proud . . .

[04:56:04] RF: I'm Randall C. Ferguson from Camden, Arkansas,
and I'm proud to be from Arkansas.

SL: Okay. Let's do it—let's try it one more time and just say your
name and then say, "And I'm proud to be from Camden,
Arkansas."

[04:56:18] RF: I'm Randall Carter Ferguson Sr. I'm from Camden,
Arkansas, and I'm proud to be a citizen of Camden, Arkansas.

SL: Okay. That's good. That'll do it. We've got enough there to do
that. That's good. Thank you for doin' that.

RF: Okay.

SL: And thank you for givin' me [*laughs*] your day here.

RF: Well, I've enjoyed it.

SL: Well, I have enjoyed it, too. And it's been an honor for me.

RF: I've enjoyed it.

SL: And I hope that your family . . .

RF: I hope . . .

SL: . . . likes . . .

RF: . . . it'll help somebody . . .

SL: It . . .

RF: . . . along the way.

SL: Well, I tell you what—if nothin' else, it's helped me.

RF: Yeah.

SL: And that—that's a start. [*Laughs*] I need as much help as I can get.

[04:56:57] RF: Well, I've worked all my life, and hard work don't hurt me. I can still work hard.

SL: And you still like to.

RF: Yeah. I enjoy it.

SL: Yeah.

RF: When I'm out there in the garden, I don't have a pain. I come back in the house and start achin'. When I'm out there in that garden, I don't have a pain. Work out there all day without—comin' in once in a while, get me a drink of water—go right back.
[*Stomach grumbles*]

SL: That garden's a great gift, isn't it?

RF: Yeah. I guess that's what keepin' me goin'. I notice a lot of my friends when they retired, they went home and sit down, and they gone. They not here anymore. All of my old friends are gone. And then all my ol' enemies is gone, too.

SL: Well, okay.

[04:57:55 End of interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]