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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Gaston P. Gibson

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

July 19, 2018

Fayetteville, Arkansas

Pryor Center - Draft Transcript

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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 and video files, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at https://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.

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

Citation Information

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Scott Lunsford interviewed Gaston P. Gibson on July 19, 2018, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Gaston Gibson, we're here at the Pryor Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas. The day's date is July the nineteenth, 2018. I'm Scott Lunsford, and it's just gonna be you and me in this—uh—vault that was built by—uh—John Lewis here at the old Bank of Fayetteville building and—um—actually this is the newer Bank of Fayetteville building. Uh—the—did you notice that they just took the facade off the old First National Bank?

Gaston Gibson: I—I did. On the . . .

SL: On the corner.

GG: . . . northwest corner.

SL: Yeah, I have not gone out to look at that yet 'cause I just got back into town, but . . .

GG: Yeah.

SL: . . . I saw it in the newspaper.

GG: Yeah.

SL: I'm pretty excited about that. I think it—I hope it works out well. Anyway—um—we're here today. You've agreed to donate

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your interview to the Pryor Center, which is a very gracious donation. I really thank you for that. And we're just gonna talk—um—about your life. I'm gonna start you with your earliest memories and take you up to the front of today. Um—if there's anything that you don't want to talk about, you just tell me. If I—Hayden McIlroy would say maybe I'm go off the reservation a little bit, but you can keep me in line. I'll try to keep you in a chronological order. It's okay to jump ahead. It's okay to go back. But I'll try and keep us in a relative, organized way. I'll try not to talk too much. This is the most I'll talk here at the front. So if you're comfortable with all that, then you just gotta tell me it's great that we're recording this and that you're donating it to the Pryor Center, and we'll keep goin'.

[00:01:45] GG: That's good. As far as anything that I do not want to talk about, that's not an issue. You can take your compass in any direction . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GG: . . . that you want to, and I would be more than privileged to answer if I have the answer.

SL: Okay.

GG: But I—my earliest years—uh—even though I was actually born in Little Rock, it was a journey to Little Rock from a small

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community in Southeast Arkansas named Boydell. Uh—Boydell was a combination of names from two wealthy families there named the Boyds and the Waddells, and they combined it to Boydell. Boydell basically was nothing but Gibsons because my father was the last of ten children, and he was born in 1902.

SL: Wow.

[00:02:45] GG: And my grandfather, who I never got to know, was born ten years before Lincoln was assassinated. And it has been an interesting journey to have so many things that were written down prior to the Civil War, during the Civil War, and after the Civil War. My mother was from Union Church, Mississippi. Her father and mother were agricultural cotton farmers in Jefferson County, Mississippi. They moved to Lake Village in—little—little after 1907 from Union Church because the United States government had made a deal with the Italian government to import Italians in from Italy to alleviate the feeding problem. There was a real problem in Italy with having enough food and opportunity for many, many of the Italians. So in the late 1890s, about 700 moved into the area and were taught to farm on two plantations. One was Lake Port Plantation, and the other was Sunnyside. They needed people to teach and administer to them. They encouraged my grandfather to come from Union

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Church, Mississippi, to take one of those management jobs at Sunnyside plantation. And so my mother and her family moved to Lake Village. That was a very, very interesting era, and it ties in even to Northwest Arkansas because 70 percent of those—those Italians were successful. Thirty percent couldn't deal with the mosquitoes or the malaria, and they ventured off to a little community in Northwest Arkansas called Tonitown.

SL: How bout that.

GG: And that's where the inhabitants of Tonitown came from was in that original migration into Chicot County to be agricultural people.

[00:05:17] SL: Okay. Now I've got a couple of details. First off, when were you born? What was your birthday?

GG: I was born in May 28 of 1941.

SL Okay, and your father's name?

GG: Gaston Pelham Gibson.

SL: Okay, and then—um—your mother's . . .

GG: My mother's . . .

SL: . . . maiden name?

GG: . . . maiden name was Nettie Winters McCallum.

SL: McCallum.

GG: And she was born in [19]05. And they married in 1939, even

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though they were supposed to have been married in 1928. But my father—my grandfather that was administering and teaching the Italians how to farm, took his turn as a night marshal in Lake Village. As a result, one of his friends was drunk. He was tryin' to get him home, and he shot him and killed him. Sh—killed my grandfather.

SL: Ouch.

[00:06:18] GG: My mother was the oldest of all the—and as a result, those were hard times. She was tryin' to find a job because the youngest was five years old, and she was twenty-three years old. She got on a [*clears throat*]—she got on a train in Memphis with fifty dollars and winds up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with no money and no job. And her last opportunity was with a retail company named Gimbels Department Stores. They hired her in 1928. She and dad put the marriage off. He was working in Memphis as an actuary for an insurance company. She actually was able to become the head buyer in Pittsburgh and in Philadelphia for this company, this little, Southern-talking girl from Arkansas. She spent twelve years in Pennsylvania. But she clothed and she took care and raised those children from a distance with what she was able to make and what she was able to send them in clothes. And as a result my father said, "Twelve

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years is enough to wait. I'm going to reserve Calvary Episcopal Church on Christmas morning [*SL laughs*], 1939. I'm going to have my best man there, and his name is St. Elmo Newton." And he said, "I'm counting on you being on the train. If you're not, we're done."

SL: Whoa. [*Laughs*]

GG: "Twelve years is long enough." He did not know that she was going to be on the train, so he did not buy a wedding ring.

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh my gosh.

GG: The wedding ring came from a box of Cracker Jacks [*SL laughs*] but they got married at ten o'clock Christmas morning at Calvary Episcopal Church in Memphis, Tennessee . . .

SL: Now . . .

GG: . . . 1939.

[00:08:40] SL: That's a great story. Now what was the best man's name?

GG: St. Elmo Newton.

SL: St. Elmo Newton.

GG: It is a old, old family. And as a matter of fact, I was visiting—we have a—an annual deal of past presidents of the Little Rock country club, and we do it every year so that the current administration or the current board of directors and president

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can challenge us on our memories and on our history of business and our history of being in the club and running the club. [00:09:16] A guy that I've known most of my life was sitting across to me—across from me at the dinner talking about carrier pigeons, and his dad was involved in carrier pigeons, and I said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, I know a little about carrier pigeons. My dad had a friend in Memphis who was into carrier pigeons that they would fly back and forth to St. Louis with messages." And I said, "His name was St. Elmo Newton." He stands up. He jumps up out of his chair [*SL laughs*], he said, "I went to Vanderbilt. I graduated from Vanderbilt. He was in my class. That guy's son was St. Elmo Newton Jr. He was in my class!" This happened this year, this May. [*SL laughs*] C—all these years. But—but St. Elmo Newton was a historical Southern family in Memphis. And my father met him in military school in 1914 in Ashville, North Carolina because after the Civil War, it was a Southern tradition that the last-born son went to a military school. And this military school was Bingham Military academy in Ashville, North Carolina. It was founded right after—uh—George Washington was elected president.

SL: Small world.

GG: Yes. Yes, it is. But—but . . .

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[00:10:45] SL: All right, so let's go back to—um—your earliest memories. Um—so do you recall the first time that you—um—remember something about your mom or your dad in the house or anything about the house that you were raised in or . . .

GG: Um—I—I do. I remember that the house was actually the—the old Gibson home. And we moved—we—Mother and Dad actually moved there from Memphis because Dad never expected to be a farmer.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GG: He was living in Memphis enjoying an actuarial position with Columbia Mutual Insurance Company. My grandmother and grandfather got sick, and dad took a sabbatical and kept 'em and took care of 'em for the last six months of their lives. They left him everything. They left him the farm, they left him the store, and all the other brothers that were there—there were nine brothers and a girl. They all wanted it. Dad didn't want it, but he felt obligated to come back, so that's how we got back to Arkansas. And my earliest memory was how big that old house was. [00:12:08] I was an only child, and I was in a house that handled twelve people. It was enormous. And sometimes I could play hide and go seek by myself in the house. There was one occasion I even brought my pony into the house [*SL laughs*]

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and hid him one of the rooms.

SL: No.

GG: Yes, in the winter. Because every—every room had a fireplace.

SL: How'd that go over?

[00:12:33] GG: Not very well. Not well. [*SL laughs*] But that was an early memory. Uh—and the other memory was my mother's brother and my cousin across the street went to war. And I remember the crying and—and everyone so upset about the exit of the family. Excuse me. [*Coughs*] And—uh—I don't remember anything about the war but going to the radio at night, and they were broadcasting the best list they had of the people that had died either in the Pacific . . .

SL: Hmm.

GG: . . . or in Europe or in North Africa. And it was very sparse, and 99 percent of the time, Mother said that they never mentioned anyone from Arkansas. But everybody went to the radio. [00:13:41] The other thing that I remember more than anything as a child is the fear of the Japanese camp that was a mile and a half from my house.

SL: Rohwer?

GG: Rohwer. It was a mile and—it was there at Jerome.

SL: Mh-hmm.

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GG: Mile and a half from my house. And we would go to the railroad station, and I was so fearful because I did not understand anything. I have very, very dim memories of it, but they were fearful memories, of seeing these massive amount of people getting off of these trains.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GG: And it was—it was—uh—I—I would have to say I did not like them because I thought they were the enemy of my uncle and my cousin.

SL: Right.

[00:14:41] GG: And those were—and—and then I have the memory of everybody, if you can believe it, made it back home from the war. Uh—my cousin Jack had just enrolled as a freshman at the univer—at Mississippi State because of agriculture. He left after Pearl Harbor, joined the navy. He became a combat pilot on the USS aircraft carrier *San Jacinto*. Jack shot down the last two Zeros in the Bungo Straits in World War II. And in 2000, in the year 2000, a Japanese historian wrote him a letter saying that he had looked at the *San Jacinto*'s records of his conversation, if you can believe this, from his airplane as a squadron leader, and they had it verbatim. And he said, "You said something in there that I think—you took down my uncle." He said, "You had i—you

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said, 'The Zero the *Rising Sun* had a white slash across it.'" He said, "Could you help me identify that?" He and Jack began to have this lengthy letter-writing deal in 1999 and 2000, and lo and behold, he sent Jack the history of the family, pictures of the family, that he was involved in—that his uncle was involved in Pearl Harbor and that this actually happened four hours after the war was actually over.

SL: Mmm.

GG: Isn't that interesting?

[00:16:31] SL: It is interesting.

GG: And he became friends with the grandson of this guy.

SL: That's a beautiful thing.

GG: Isn't it?

SL: It is.

GG: It—it—it—it's magical, and he—he asked him to go into detail about the dogfight and about why he felt like his uncle wanted to go ahead and continue doing what he did with his squadron after the war was over. It—it was—it's a beautiful story—uh—between Jack and this Yakamura I think he—I—I can't remember his name—uh—for sure. But—and then on the other side was my mother's brother. These are my two heroes in my family.

[00:17:12] SL: Okay. And what was his name?

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GG: [*Sighs*] His name was Robert Davis McCallum. Give me a moment.

SL: That's okay, man. Um . . .

GG: I buried him two weeks ago.

SL: Oh my gosh. I'm so sorry.

GG: This is a beautiful story that involves the University of Arkansas, also.

SL: Okay.

[00:18:04] GG: Uncle Robert was a genius, but nobody knew it. When Pearl Harbor happened, he was getting ready to come to the University of Arkansas. He's joined the army air force. They made him a pilot on a P-24 Liberator, and they sent him to Hawaii to launch in the Pacific. Without going back and telling you any of the details, Uncle Robert flew 834 combat hours before he was twenty-two years old.

SL: My God.

GG: Seventy percent of the 7th Bomber Group that he was in was lost in the Pacific. On his last mission, Saipan, he told God that if he would just get him out of the air, get him on the ground, he would go make something out of himself. [*Laughter*] He said—he s—he said, "Just, Lord, get me on the ground." He—the—as a matter of fact, they moved him from pilot to navigator because

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navigators—it was very complicated to navigate. More people could fly. So they actually moved him in the process before he was twenty-two years old to navigator. He makes it home. He tells my mother—he said, "I'm—I'm putting my uniform on, I'm hitchhiking to Fayetteville, Arkansas, and I'm gonna enroll in the school of electrical engineering."

SL: There you go.

[00:19:45] GG: He hitchhiked to Fayetteville, enrolled in the school of electrical engineering, graduated a year short, put his uniform back on, and never came back to Southeast Arkansas. Got on Route 66 and hitchhiked to California because he said, 'That's where I was trained there's opportunity there." In Flagstaff, Arizona, the executive vice president of Pacific Tel picked him up with his uniform on, found out he was the—graduate of University of Arkansas in electrical engineering, hired him [*SL laughs*], and for ten years, he ran Pacific Tel before he retired. Uncle Robert was the last living member of the 7th Bomber Group. He was ninety-five years old, and he died—he never missed a homecoming to Fayetteville. He came back here for the reunions as long as he could travel. He loved the University of Arkansas.

[End of verbatim transcription]

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[00:20:48] SL: Gosh. His name is very familiar.

GG: Rob . . .

SL: I just wonder if I . . .

GG: He'll be in the rolls, in the records, but Robert, Uncle Robert may have been our Phi Beta Kappa of the family. My mother was probably second in line, and I was just a Kappa. [*Laughter*] So I have great memories as children of him comin' home and how we celebrated and how—it was a blue-ribbon event, and those are vivid memories in my childhood. [00:21:24] The next vivid memory is getting to have a pony. And I was able, in the first grade, to ride my pony to Jerome, Arkansas, to school each day. And there was a place they could take care of the ponies, and the guy would administer water, rub them down, and the school had three classes—two classes. First, second, and third grade, and then fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. So I got to spend my first year riding my pony back and forth across our cotton fields into Jerome to the farm. And then in 1948, my dad had an aneurysm, and they had to put him in the Dermott hospital. They told us he would not live. My mother packed me up and sent me to Malvern, Arkansas, to go to school and be with her sister. I spent my second-grade year in Malvern, Arkansas. My dad was in the hospital for nine months, and he lived.

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SL: Wow.

GG: He lived. Nobody knows how he lived or why, but he couldn't farm anymore, and so we moved into Lake Village, and as a result of my mother's background with the Italians and her father—there were so many Italians in Lake Village that they had their own private school system. So I was the only student at St. Mary's Catholic School that last name didn't end with a vowel. [*Laughter*] So but I—in those days, the nuns were still teaching, at times, in Italian, and I had to learn to count to a hundred in Italian, I had to learn to make change in Italian. I picked up enough Italian—and this is what I call Northern Italian. It's not Sicilian. But it's a Northern Italian—that I was able in my later life to do refresher courses and then go to Italy and slow them down and communicate with 'em. But I learned a lot in those times, and I made great friends that were friends forever. [00:23:43] And one of 'em came to the University of Arkansas, made All-Southwest Conference, played for the Giants. But I had 'em on my paper routes. I mean, I learned so much. And then in the fourth grade I went into the public schools in Lake Village because we built a house, and it was closer to the Lake High public schools. And so I graduated from Lake Village in 1959 and came to Fayetteville.

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[00:24:14] SL: I wanna go back to the Gibson house and the Gibson farm, and you mentioned a store that—did your father—grandfather own the store as well?

GG: He owned the store and it—that's another interesting that my da—my dad was so much older that he was like a grandfather to my friends. Dad was forty when I was born. Thirty-nine. And Dad had a—he was a visionary, and he was mathematical 'cause of his actuarial deal.

SL: Right.

GG: He did something with the people that were on our farm. We had twelve Black families that lived on our farms. He told 'em that the Industrial Revolution was going to wipe out farming as we knew it. Mules, picking cotton, chopping cotton would come to an end. So when the—in the nin—when Dad came back in 1939 or [19]40, he changed the way that the—that the farmers were paid. He said, "I'm not going to pay any of you anything," but he said, "but here's how we're gonna do this. I'm goin' to the Dermott state bank, and I'm gonna open each one of you an account. And I'm gonna be the trustee of that account, and my wife's gonna be the trustee of that account. You're not gonna pay for medicine, food, clothes, anything. I'm gonna take care of all that. And we're gonna let that portion of your farm, that

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one fourth interest, we're gonna let it grow over there in the bank." And he said, "'Cause there will come a day when I'm gonna have to let you all go." That was unheard of. And so the president of the Dermott state bank was a guy named Gaither Johnston who Dad had been friends with for years. My—he—my gifts at my birth in [19]41 were two ten-dollar gold pieces that have still never been touched.

SL: Right.

[00:26:30] GG: That he wrote out, gave to me in a little type deal. But anyway, with that being said, from 1955 to 1960, all the old South disappeared.

SL: Yep.

GG: Every one of those guys were shocked to find what they had in their accounts. Nine of them went to Chicago and Detroit, and lost it within two years because their families took it all. One went to Tempe, Arizona, a guy named **Will Ivy**. Bought one drugstore. By 1975, Will had seven drugstores.

SL: [*Laughs*] There you go.

GG: All right?

SL: That's great stuff.

GG: A guy named Dick McCollough, who was a Gullah. They were the—they were different Black groups, and in our area of Bayou

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Bartholomew, the Black population we had came from South Carolina. Full blooded Gullahs. Bright, sharp, family, capable, superstitious as hell, unbelievable families. And not many of the Gullahs migrated to Arkansas. None of them in the north along the Delta. We had basically all of the Gullahs in that area. [00:28:03] There was a guy named Dick McCullough that Dad helped him buy his first forty acres of farmland with the money out of that trust. Dick lived to be ninety-one, and he used to call me Little G, and I'd go by and visit him in Boydell. He winds up ownin' four hundred and—five hundred acres. His son farmed it. It's two great success stories that that nest egg that they had that they didn't let their relatives get to turned into unbelievable. And each year until I was thirty-two years old, they sent me a Christmas present.

SL: Oh.

GG: Isn't that amazing?

SL: That's amazing.

GG: Yeah. They sent me a Christmas present. Wonderful memories.

[00:28:59] SL: So the store was just a general store?

GG: General store. We sold dry goods, lard. We had an ice house. We sold candy, we sold fireworks, we sold coveralls. All—everything—all the feed came in sacks, and a lot of people

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selected their feed that wanted to make dresses out of the different color fabrics.

SL: Yep.

[00:29:30] GG: And we had a movie theater that Dad made out of a storage building. And this is another connection with Arkansas. Once a week, a guy would come to show *Tom Mix* and *Hopalong Cassidy* movies. Dad and this guy would do the popcorn, and we may have kids that were fifteen or twenty or twenty-five of us in there. Well, three years ago, I'm in San Diego, and I'm—my other best friend is a—was in the marine corps, fought in Vietnam. He lives in San Diego. And he actually married a girl teaching English in the Philippines when he was recovering from wounds in the Philippines. And I'm telling this story—they asked about—she was askin' about my early childhood, and I told her that was one of the highlights was once a week and sometimes once a month watchin' *Hopalong Cassidy* movies. Her father was the one that traveled from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, across South Arkansas into Southern Mississippi, Central Mississippi, and they left in 1952 to go to California. Can you believe that?

SL: So he—was he traveling with the film?

GG: Yes. That's the way he made his living. And he started in Fort Smith, and he worked Fort Smith down to Mena, and he went

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across from Mena to El Dorado, and then he followed Highway 82 all the way into Mississippi.

SL: So—I can't believe that.

GG: I was stunned. I was tota—and so was she.

[00:31:27] SL: Well, that was a great venture for your father to do to put a movie house. I mean, how big was the town? How many people lived in the town?

GG: There were twenty-seven Gibsons that lived in that town. [*SL laughs*] And everybody—it was big family except for me.

SL: Yeah. Right.

GG: And Mother and Dad got married so late that I was the on—I was an only child.

[00:31:56] SL: So the house, the Gibson house, you said it was a really big house. Did they have—I'm—was there running water in the house?

GG: Yes, there was running water in the house. There was a porch that was columned that surrounded the house except at the back, and we called that—the reason that they didn't do that is my grandmother and my mother had a place for the hobos that were going along the railroad track. Or the railroad track, the Missouri-Pacific lines, was probably two hundred yards behind the back of the house. It ran along the state highway, 165.

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And rarely was Mother not preparing some meal for hobos to stop and eat during the day some time.

SL: Yeah, they'd—I—they would come to the house looking for work . . .

GG: Yes.

SL: . . . in order to get fed.

GG: That's right. And she just fed 'em.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And so it was a sort of a—they called it hobo headquarters. [*Laughter*]

[00:33:12] SL: Well, now did you have—was there hired help that also lived on site?

GG: Yes, the Gulllahs. We—they were—the my—the lady that raised me was name—her tribal name was Bua. And Bua lived not at the house, but she would walk every morning if she would live—she lived across Bayou Bartholomew, and she would come to work each day, and her husband and her children would come to work each day at the house. And [*laughs*] she didn't know what bluing water was, and I got really dirty one day in a mud hole. So she filled up the iron pot where we boil sheets in the back. And we usually did it with firewood. But she decided to put running water, pump water in that and clean me with bluing

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water, and it blistered me and they had to bring me to Little Rock.

[00:34:20] SL: Now what's bluing water?

GG: Bluing water was something that would get sheets white. It had, for lack of a better word, Clorox in it.

SL: Okay.

GG: And so it—that was . . .

SL: So you [*laughs*] took a bath in bleach.

GG: She bleached me. [*Laughter*] And but—it was a wonderful experience. The dialects that we have as Southerners, according to my grandfather, who I never knew, was because of the Gullahs. Their French, their slow dialect, in the combination with our early English, turned into a Southern dialect. And the Gullahs were—you can't believe how bright and how smart and how family-oriented they were. And superstitious. My dad was so superstitious, and so were all my family because of the Gullahs. [*SL laughs*] [00:35:22] The—you ever heard the word goober for peanut?

SL: Yeah.

GG: That's a Gullah word. A goober is what the Gullahs call peanuts. It really, really was a wonderful, wonderful experience growing up. The only playmates I had—I didn't have any white

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playmates. Till we moved to Lake Village, I didn't know there was a difference.

SL: There you go.

GG: I went to school—my mother and dad would come to Little Rock on business or Pine Bluff. I stayed with Bua. I go to church with 'em. As a matter of fact, they baptized me in Bayou Bartholomew, and went—and I thought it was cool. They'd dress up in white, and they'd take you, they'd drop you, and they were, you know—they sang. Great voices. And when I—when—got back home, mother—my dad got back home, she said, "Miss Little G," she said, "We didn't know if the little one was faith proof, so we faith proofed him." [*Laughter*]

SL: That's good. I love that.

GG: But I stayed there—I mean, I lived in their houses. I—and it—and I didn't know there was a difference till I got to Lake Village, which I th—Lake Village was 2,000, 3,000 people. My god, I thought it was New York.

[00:37:04] SL: So around the house, did you—were you given any chores?

GG: Wood.

SL: To do around . . .

GG: The moving wood into the—for the winter. In the summer we

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cut wood for the fireplaces. And my job was to take the wood off the wagons and stack it inside. And then my job in the winter was to take the wood and bring it inside and put it at every fireplace.

SL: So how many fireplaces were there?

GG: Seven.

SL: Wow. That is a big house.

GG: Yeah. Seven fireplaces.

SL: And were they all—they were upstairs and downstairs?

GG: We had all—there was the one upstairs. All the rest were downstairs.

SL: That's a lot of wood.

[00:37:59] GG: I thought there was enough room—wood to build two, three thousand homes. [*Laugher*] It was a very interesting—and the other thing that I—that was my chore was I got to feed the chickens. I loved to feed the chickens, and I loved to feed the guineas. We had our own—you know, we'd do our own eggs. And I did not like the garden at all. I didn't like it at all. And I don't know why, but I just didn't like the garden. But I loved to go to the—and now my job at the farm was, when it was cotton-chopping time, to—my pony and I would take deals of water, and we would go up and down the end of the rows, and

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I would go to the pumps, the wells, pump the water into the containers. And then my other job in the fall was to make sure that there was a sort of a cream that they gave the people picking cotton that kept their hands more moist because they would dry out so much, and they would get—until they'd get tough, their nails would bleed.

SL: Oh!

GG: You know, pullin' the cotton out of the bolls.

SL: Yeah. Ugh.

[00:39:26] GG: And so I had all—some of them used it, some didn't. And the thing that I remember about my mother and my dad that I think had a bearing on all of the things that I've done since then is Mom and Dad chopped and picked with the people. They got right out there with 'em.

SL: I love that. So they knew what they were goin' through. They knew how hard the work was. Wow. [00:40:05] So what about meals? Now if your mom and dad are out pickin', then someone else is cookin'.

GG: Bua.

SL: Is that—were you—was the family expected to be at a table at a certain hour each day?

GG: Three times a day. I have a vivid memory. This—I had

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forgotten about this. My father's best friend was from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, but he also happened to be the longest-tenured baseball coach at the University of Alabama. Name was Happy Campbell.

SL: Kay.

GG: And Happy Campbell came by in 1946, [19]47. I don't remember when it was. And oh, Mother did a big deal for him. And he had a guest with him. And I noticed that that guy didn't say anything the whole time he was there. He didn't participate in the conversation or anything. So I went over there at the end of the main meal. Mother would not let me get up out of the chair till between the main meal and dessert. And I could get up and I could do—but you sit there through that whole deal. And you didn't open your mouth. [*SL laughs*] Well, I walked over this guy, and I looked up at him—he was a big guy, and I said, "Why aren't you talkin'?" And he looked at me, and he said, "Well, it's because I hadn't got anything important to say." [*SL laughter*] It was Bear Bryant. [*Laughter*] Is that not crazy?

SL: That's a great story. That's another great Bryant, Bear Bryant story we've got now.

GG: "Have anything important to say."

SL: Wow.

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GG: But dad was crazy about Happy Campbell. And I guess they became friends younger. But he took a look at me for a baseball scholarship at Alabama. And [*laughs*] he said, "I'm glad you made good grades at Lakeside." He said, "I don't think you're gonna be a baseball player." [*SL laughs*] And . . .

SL: Well, that's good.

[00:42:43] GG: I d—the other thing that I—that makes me think of Broyles. I thought I was gonna get a football scholarship to the University of Arkansas. We had an undefeated team in 1957. We had a great team. Jerry Mazzanti was on that team. He had been recruited by Broyles. A guy named David Alpe had been recruited by Broyles. He was one of our runnin' backs. He was scared to come to university. Thought it was too big. He took a scholarship at Southern State. He makes All American every year he's there. And I'm sitting there waiting for Doug Dickey and for Frank Broyles to offer me a scholarship. And I told Broyles this about—years later when we were at the Hall of Fame in New York. I said, "Coach, do you ever remember when you came to lake Village and you and Doug Dickey looked at me, and you said, 'Gaston, you're not good enough to play for the Razorbacks.'"

SL: Ooh.

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[00:43:44] GG: I said, "Do you have any idea how devastating that was for a kid that grew up in a town had no tennis courts, had no golf courses. Football was it."

SL: Yeah.

GG: "And baseball. And I'd already been told I couldn't play baseball. But I thought I'd play football." I said, "Coach, I went over to my dad's office, and I was—I had tears in my eyes. And Dad's typical dress was khakis, white shirt, Stetson hat. Granddaddy glasses. He looked at me, and he said, 'What is wrong with you?' I said, 'Dad, my whole world just come to an end.' I said, 'Everything I worked for all my life just went up in flames.' He said, 'What's wrong?' And I said, 'Coach Frank Broyles and Coach Doug Dickey just told me I wasn't good enough to play for the Razorbacks.' Dad didn't say a word to me. He took his glasses off, and he laid 'em down on his desk. He walked by me and cut the fan off 'cause we didn't have air conditioning—cut the fan off, walked out of the front door, took his hat off, that Stetson, and sailed it in the air and said, 'Hallelujah, Jesus.' I walked out there, and I said, "Dad, what [*laughs*] what's the deal?" I said, "Are you happy?" He said, "Son," he said, "You're not good enough to play for the Razorbacks." He said, "But God did give you a good mind. You go up there, and you cheer for

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'em, you make friends with 'em, you tell Jerry Mazzanti you will do anything you can to help his career up there, and you study your butt off." He said, "Because when you're fifty, if you ever learn to play golf, you'll be able to play golf, and those boys'll be limpin' around." [*Laughter*]

SL: He saw the bigger picture.

[00:45:50] GG: But I did. I came to the university, and it took me about two months to get over it. But it was the best thing that ever happened to me, and I told Broyles that when we were in 2005 when we were at the Hall of Fame in New York when Wayne Harris was bein' inducted. And he said, "I don't even remember that, Gaston." I said, "I know you don't, Coach, but I do." [*Laughter*]

SL: Yeah, I wonder how many boys he had to say that to.

GG: Well . . .

SL: Over his career.

GG: But you know, he was honest. You know, he was honest about it.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And when—after I married my wife Gloria. Her father was a huge, huge Razorback supporter, and he had one of the few airplanes. And when Broyles would do his Sunday shows in Little

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Rock—'cause you couldn't . . .

SL: Right.

GG: . . . do it like, you know, like we do now.

SL: Yeah.

[00:46:59] GG: Well, my father-in-law would fly up here and get him, fly him back. Well, my job was to pick up the coach 'cause—my senior year. 'Cause Gloria and I were married, and I spent my senior year in Fayetteville being married. And I would take him home, and we'd have some great conversations. And so one time we were comin' home after—we'd been—he'd gone out to play Texas Tech. And I asked him—I said, "Coach, I may be wrong about this, but I don't think so. I been here four years. This is my last year. You been here five. Not one time in November in those four years did you ever lose a game in November. Is that right?" He said, "Yeah," and he said, "I didn't lose one the year before you got here, either." And I said, "Why is that?" And he thought for a second. He said, "Well, I'm gonna tell you something that I learned from Bobby Dodd." He said, "Bobby Dodd taught me that you need to spend the early part of the season finding out what tendencies are, who's good, why they do things, and why they do 'em in certain situations. Because there's only three or four guys on the team that when

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the chips are down they're gonna go to." He said, "What I spent my first six games doin' is finding out who could do what on my team, and who could stop somebody else on somebody else's team so we could concentrate on not stopping the whole team but stopping the guys that could make a difference on that team." He said, "When November rolled around," he said, "we knew who they were." And he said, "That's why we didn't lose any games." And then he stopped for a second. He says, "Stop the car just a minute." [*Laughs*] He said, "I di—I shouldn't've told you that." He said, "I didn't really mean to tell you that." He said, "I got carried away with myself." He said, "You gotta promise me that as long as I'm alive, you'll never tell that to anybody."

SL: Mm.

[00:49:05] GG: I said—I stuck my hand out to shake his hand. He said, "I don't need a handshake from you, Son, I need a promise." [*Laughter*] He's—I said, "Coach, I promise." I never told it until he died, and then my next-door neighbor played on his first All-Southwest Conference team. Name's Bill Tranum. Bill Tranum retired—is a great oncologist in Little Rock. I went over, and I told Tranum that story. He said, "Gaston, that makes so much sense." He said, "You can't—I understand so

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much now about Broyles' theory about—when we got into our November run, it seemed like the coaches had everybody figured out so we could take less talent and take on better talent and stop 'em." He said, "That makes all the sense in the world." He said, "Broyles always played the percentages." I said, "Well, I promised him that I'd never tell it till he passed away."

[00:50:12] SL: Yeah, you know, in our interview with Jerry Jones, he was saying that that [19]64 team were not the best players, that they had run off the best players . . .

GG: That's right.

SL: . . . and they didn't have the attitude they were looking for.

GG: That's exactly right. That's exactly r—well, the other thing that a lot of people don't know—here's Chuck Dicus.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Okay. I guarantee you're not gonna know what I'm gettin' ready to tell you.

SL: [*Laughs*] Kay.

GG: Huh?

SL: Okay.

[00:50:44] GG: Bill Montgomery was a top recruit for Broyles out of Carrollton, Texas. Dicus was playing at Plano. Bill Montgomery told Broyles that he had played against Dicus. Dicus was offered

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a scholarship nowhere. He said, "That guy is the hardest guy in the world to beat." He said, "He can run. He can catch a ball." He said, "Coach, you gotta give him a scholarship." And he didn't. Montgomery went to him right at the end of the recruiting season. Chuck Dicus got the last scholarship offer in 1967. He makes All-American two years in a row and is inducted into the college hall of fame, at that time one of only eight in Arkansas. He was the last scholarship offer thanks to Bill Montgomery.

SL: There you go.

GG: Isn't that somethin'?

[00:51:45] SL: That is somethin'. That's good stuff. You know, of course, your house, your Gibson house, had radios in it, at least one radio. And so part of the Razorback thing was everybody listened to the games . . .

GG: That's correct.

SL: . . . on the radio.

GG: That is correct.

SL: If you didn't have TV, you at least had radio. I remember my dad and I would actually map each play of the game. We had a ruler and different-colored pencils, and we sat in front of the radio and mapped every play that happened. It was that

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intense. And . . .

GG: That is correct. And it was the only time that we ever were allowed to come into the sitting room and eat and listen to the game.

SL: There you go. Yeah.

GG: And they were always in the days—'cause there were no lights in Fayetteville . . .

SL: That's right.

GG: . . . so it was always an afternoon game. Mother would prepare the meal at one o'clock rather than at noon, and we'd listen to the ball games. [00:52:53] And that was my introduction to the Razorbacks, too, was getting to come—dad bringing me to Little Rock to watch Lamar McCann play from Lake Village. And I got attached at that point because I was so much closer to Ole Miss and, actually, to LSU because of living on the border.

SL: Right.

GG: I never thought I would come to Fayetteville. But that's—but that—Lamar McCann turned that around, and that's the reason I put Arkansas on the map is because I loved him. He was such a great man. And I really think those early days of listening with everybody around—there was a joy and an excitement and a purity about it. Even though we weren't part of it, we were a

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part of it. [00:53:56] And my father-in-law told me this about War Memorial Stadium. He said, "John Barnhill's the reason we have War Memorial Stadium." He said, "He came to me one day, and he said, 'Worth, I'm gonna play the University of Texas in Crump Stadium in Memphis.' He said, 'You guys need to get on the stick there in Little Rock and build the Razorbacks a stadium.'" So he goes to Crump Stadium and plays University of Texas in Memphis, Tennessee. [00:54:30] A guy who became governor had just gotten back from the war, Sid McMath.

SL: Sure.

GG: Sid was a marine, silver star. He came over to my father-in-law's office, and he said, "Here's the deal, Worth." He said, "I'm gonna head up a fund-raiser sellin' bonds to build this War Memorial Stadium. Will you participate?" And he said, "I'll do it." And so a number of the businessmen around there bought the bonds to build that stadium that Sid McMath led the charge on. Well, the bonds came due, I think, in the [19]70s. I believe they were twenty-five year bonds. And I was sitting there in the office with my father-in-law at the construction company, and we were talkin' about it. And I said, "Well, I guess you're tickled you're gonna finally get your money back on those bonds." And he said, "Well, yes," and he said, "The original twenty-five of us

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that did that, we've all had a little private meeting." He said, "We're gonna give the bonds back." [*SL laughs*] I said, "You're kidding me." 'Cause I—you know, I was—I wanted to use my old business background to tell him, you know, what a good deal—and he said, "We're gonna give those bonds back to the stadium commission."

[00:56:03] SL: I love that, too. Now I don't—I'd heard that part of the impetus to build that stadium had to do with Clyde Scott.

GG: Well . . .

SL: Giving . . .

GG: It did in a way, but see, dar—Clyde Scott was on the second team that. . .

SL: Played.

GG: . . . that played with—for John Barnhill.

SL: Right.

GG: Yeah. But Barnhill got mad at Little Rock.

SL: Hmm!

GG: He got mad at Little Rock. He got mad because he wanted a place—he said, "I can't recruit up here in the middle of nowhere. I got to be in the capital to reach out to Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. You guys need to build me a stadium in the capital." That's where that came from. And Clyde Scott was his

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poster boy.

SL: Yeah.

GG: He was the poster boy that led it. And also another guy that was on that same team, Frank Lambright, was my coach at Lake Village, junior high coach. He played for Barnhill on that championship team. And he said, "When Coach Barnhill got here," he said "everything changed." He said, "We couldn't win a ball game." And he said, "In one year, Coach Barnhill's coaching philosophy, his approach to our physical fitness, our approach to the game"—he said, "Nobody would've ever believed we'd've won Southwest Conference after winnin' only one conference game the previous year."

SL: That's dramatic.

GG: Yeah.

SL: What a turnaround.

GG: It is.

[00:57:51] SL: All right, so let's get back to your childhood again at the Gibson house. Now so you talked about the wood chores and what you did around the house. Did you make your own bed, too, or did the . . .

GG: You know, I don't remember.

SL: Okay.

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GG: I don't remember if I did or I didn't.

SL: At the table, at the dinner table, was grace always said?

GG: Every time.

SL: And was it always your father that . . .

GG: No. Mother'd do it, Dad would do it, and Bua would do it. If Bua was there for lunch . . .

SL: Yeah.

GG: Bua did lunch. Dad did breakfast, Mother did supper.

[00:58:40] SL: After the meal, did the—did you help with the dishes and everything?

GG: Oh, yeah. Oh, lo—to this day, to this day, I'm on—my first wife, Gloria, died after we were married for thirty-eight years. She died in 2000 suddenly of pneumonia. She always was pushin' at me. she said, "Why don't you let me clean the kitchen up?" And I said, "No, I—s—my mother taught me how to do this. I can do it better than you." [*Laughter*] And that was not a generous statement from me. But I loved to do that. The lady that I married after she passed away, that by the way my mother introduced me to at my mom's ninety-fifth birthday party [*SL laughs*], cannot understand why I like to clean the kitchen after we eat. I do it to this day all because of being able—Mother made it a big deal because if I passed inspection, I got to

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go to the grocery store, to our mercantile store, and pick any two bars of candy I wanted.

SL: Oh, that's big incentive right there.

GG: Tellin' you. And so you know, it—I upped the ante when I got a little older and I felt like I was doin' a better job, I asked her if I couldn't have more things and—like firecrackers and [*laughs*] you know, things like that, and oh, goodness. It was a really, really fun time. But Mother challenged me, and it turned into something I like to do. And I swear to—I do it to this day.

[01:00:24] SL: Yeah, some of my earliest memories are Mom at the sink. And you know, I grew up family of—there were—started out with three boys, then my older brother, Porter, came home from the air force, but four guys—Barbara had already left the house. But we always had to choose whether to wash or dry, and we would call it before every meal. You know, who's washin', who's dryin'? So we always took part in cleaning up afterwards, and to this day I'm like you. I like doin' it.

GG: Isn't that someth . . .

SL: I'm in the kitchen. Yeah.

GG: You can't explain to anybody, it . . .

SL: No, hm-mm.

GG: . . . just—it just—it's kinda like your DNA. It's just you.

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SL: Even with a dishwasher, I still wash stuff in the sink and put it out to dry. It's—I don't know why, but I do.

GG: Well, my wife says we don't need dishwashers 'cause by the time it hits the dishwasher it's clean.

SL: [*Laughs*] There you go.

GG: Okay.

SL: You—whatever I do put in the dishwasher, I've rinsed off.

GG: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Yeah.

SL: I don't know.

[01:01:23] GG: Well, I—and I saw my dad do it with Mother, too. Dad would help Mother, and it was a team deal. They did everything together. Rode horses together. They worked at the mercantile store together. They picked cotton together. Mother never learned how to drive.

SL: How bout that.

GG: And so Dick McCullough drove Mother everywhere. But mu—[*laughs*] my mother was a sorry driver. Eve—but she just—she could walk everywhere or ride a horse.

SL: Right.

GG: So it was really—I hadn't even thought about that till you

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mentioned it. And we're talking about those childhood memories in that home. [01:02:19] Oh, the other thing I remember is Mother wanted a beautiful flowered yard. The hydrangeas in our yard, the crepe myrtles in our yard—the hydrangeas circled the house, and they always did better on certain sides of the house than they did the others, but our whole yard was a inv—it was sort of like a Broadway play, for lack of a better word. It was the entrance and exit of flower characters comin' and goin'.

SL: Yep. Good.

[01:03:04] GG: And she took great pride in to get out there in her bare feet, and she and Bua would get after it. And I just—I grew up loving—and I do it today at my home. I don't have a gardener. I do all my own flowers. I do all my own planning and my own yardwork. I t—it keeps me busy, but I like to do everything. And every once in a while, I'll let the lady off that takes care of our house, and I'll clean it just to do it.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Just 'cause I want to.

SL: Yeah that got instilled in you before you knew what was happening.

GG: That rural, agricultural watching my mother and dad work together like they did and—and I didn't know all that was taking.

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[*Laughs*] I didn't have a clue.

SL: I think . . .

[01:04:02] GG: When I was at the fr—this is another thing I had just forgotten. There was a lady that used to own the R and S Grill named Ruth. I can't remember Ruth's last name. She cooked at the fraternity house. I was the only one in there helping her do bacon and sausage and deals 'cause she was in there at fi—when I got to Fayetteville, bein' up at five o'clock—I took all 7:30 classes 'cause I thought the day was half over by 7:30. [*Laughter*] Nobody was in 7:30 classes, I'll tell you. But Ruth and I would get in there, and we'd do pancakes, we'd do bacon, I would help her ge—she said, "Boy, what's wrong with you?' And I said, "Hell, this just gets me goin', Ruth. I smell all this, I get hungry, I eat, by the time I get to class, I'm wired."

[01:04:50] SL: Yeah. [*GG laughs*] That's good. That's real good. Hmm. Let's see, there was something else. I wanna talk about your schoolhouse. Now you were talkin' about two classes, first second, third, and then fourth, fifth, and six. Are you saying that there were two rooms in the schoolhouse that was the . . .

GG: Yeah, there were.

SL: And so were there two teachers?

GG: There were two teachers.

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SL: Okay.

GG: There were two teachers there, and one of the teachers was a postmaster there, too, at the little post office in Jerome. And Jerome, Arkansas, back in the [19]20s, had a population of three to five thousand people.

SL: Okay.

GG: And the reason it did, where—when I grew up, it had a population of less than 100. There was a guy from the north, from Michigan, that came south and bought up a lot of the timber land and established a hardwood flooring business there. And my fathers and his brothers built dry kilns so they could dry the lumber in it. His youngest son was named Jerome. So he renamed Jerome Jerome in memory of him. The thing that took that family out was the 1927 flood. It wiped out that hardwood business, and they retreated back to Michigan because they lost everything in the [19]27 flood.

[01:06:46] SL: Lot of folks left after that [19]27 flood.

GG: Yep.

SL: Both sides of the river.

GG: Yep.

SL: Large African American migration to the North.

GG: It sure was.

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SL: Yeah.

GG: Lake Village where I grew up—they marked the buildings. The old courthouse was marked where the water levels were. And if you were—they would probably be three foot deep. Ah—that was a very unusual time when the water actually broke at the—at Pendleton, I think, and m . . .

[01:07:21] SL: Now what's the name of that book that's so great about that flood? Was it . . .

GG: Oh, I . . .

SL: Is it *The River* or . . .

GG: Yeah, it's—oh, I know the book you're talkin' about.

SL: Yeah.

GG: But I can't . . .

SL: Anyway.

GG: I can't remember the name of it but . . .

SL; Yeah, you forget about that.

[01:07:39] GG: But that was a great experience growing up at Lake Village. I mean, I felt like I got a great education—that's something else that's changed, the quality of the teachers in those small communities. When females didn't have a choice—their husbands had jobs, and my English teacher, whose husband was the editor of the *Chicot Spectator*. She had a Ph.D.

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in English. Hell, when I got to Fayetteville, English was a piece of cake. And then I took my junior English exam when you go in—I'd done all that in high school.

SL: There you go.

GG: She tra—there were only fourteen in her class. The science—I mean, the math teacher. She had a Ph.D. in math. Her husband was the CPA there in Lake Village. That's what got 'em together was their mathematical deals. I had a—my science teacher had a master's in science. I mean, I—when I got to Fayetteville, I was ready. I mean, it was—most of all English. I got one of the best English backgrounds in my—and I didn't know this at the time, but Miss Mansour, who was our English teacher, she said, "Now just to help you children out," she said, "I want you to take X English when you get to Fayetteville." He said, "It won't hurt a thing, it'll just refresh and refuel you for the future." I didn't know the damn thing didn't count on your credits. And I didn't know it till I was a junior and [*laughter*] then I . . .

SL: You were gettin' ready to graduate.

GG: . . . then I had to go to summer school the year—the summer I got married to make up . . .

SL: For the three hours.

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GG: Thre—and I got word, maybe, there were three more somewhere, so I took six hours just to protect myself. But it was a great refueler for English, and I loved English. I enjoyed it immensely. And then when I walked in for my junior English, I'm—you had to write a five-hundred-word theme on something. It was—you know, I didn't have to take English any more. And I even tried. Because I liked it. And the business—my advisor in business school—he said, "You've chosen your major now, you need to rock and roll." [*Laughs*] So I did.

SL: Right.

[01:10:15] GG: And I switched to another course. Harold Dulan was the . . .

SL: I remember that name.

GG: Harold Dulan was a Ph.D., and Dr. Kennedy were the two teachers. And Dr. Dulan was—he was really, really an interesting fellow. I think someone had given him a seat on the exchange. And he took the book *Investments*. And he said, "Everybody have your *Investment* book?" People all raised their hand. He said, "You won't need it anymore." He said, "I'm givin' you the Consolidated balance sheet, income statement, Standard Oil of New Jersey, Bethlehem Steel, U.S. Steel, and"—oh, I'm trying—I can't remember—Procter & Gamble. He said,

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"We're gonna take those things, and we're gonna dissect 'em, and you're gonna learn how to run ratios, you're gonna learn how to read balance sheets, you're gonna learn how to do all those things. I'm not interested in you knowing terms, I'm interested in you knowing if somebody's got it all up right with you." It was the most fun experience I had. And to this day in a little wooden box, I still use those current ratios on balance sheets from Dr. Dulan's class.

[01:11:40] SL: [*Laughs*] That's interesting that he was able to get all that stuff from those companies. Bethlehem Steel. That's Allentown, Pennsylvania.

GG: That's correct. But he had the Consolidated balance sheets, and he had the co—and their brochures. And I guess they all gave it 'em to him. And he passed 'em out. And he said, "This is our subject for the semester." And he said, "Then at the end of the year, you're gonna write me—you're gonna have a fictitious thousand dollars, and you're gonna tell me which companies you would invest in and why."

SL: Wow. That's real world stuff.

GG: That was real world. And I . . .

SL: Kinda like a scrimmage.

GG: Huh?

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SL: [*Laughs*] That's kinda like a scrimmage.

GG: Yeah.

SL: Before the big game.

GG: That's correct.

SL: Yeah.

GG: That's right, Scott. [*SL laughs*] But it's a—you know, I didn't think I would have these many retracing of memories. I just thought of something else that I think would be interesting to share with you about my father.

SL: Okay.

[01:12:42] GG: In his time at Memphis, Dad had really, really close friends there, and he played horse polo. He was a great horseman, and so he was on the university club's horse polo team. And as a result, that led to entertainment deals, and the Peabody Hotel was a center of entertainment, and Dad was the ultimate dresser. He was one of these guys that, you know, he was ready for the Easter parade. But you wouldn't think so 'cause next time you'd see him, he'd look like a mud ball. [*SL laughs*] But boy, when he dressed up, he dressed up. Mother asked me, when I was in the television business, she said, "If you ever come across George Hamilton III, George Hamilton Jr.," said, "I want you to walk up to him and tell him you know

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his mother's name." And I said—Dad died in [19]76 in a car wreck. Kid ran into him.

SL: Oh.

GG: On the first stoplight we put up in Lake Village, a kid ran through the stoplight and hit Dad broadside and killed him when he—just after he was seventy-six. And but anyway, she said, "I told your dad that there may come a chance some day that we could do this. Now you're in television. You may see him in California or wherever." Well, lo and behold, I'm registering at the Las Vegas Hilton for a NATPE show, which is where your National Association of Producers and Television bring your new shows to sell to the television stations, where the program managers, the news directors, the general managers, or somebody's there from the television station. I'm there registering. And I look over to my right, and there's George Hamilton. And [*laughs*] I said, "I'm not tryin' to get an autograph from you, but I wanna tell you something you don't think I know." And he s—he looked up, and he said, "Well, you're about my age." And we were the same age, I think. He said, "Go ahead and shoot." I said, "Your mother's name is Ann Stevens. She's blue eyed, blonde headed, born and raised in Blytheville, Arkansas." He said, "Nobody knows that." He said, "How'd you know that?" I said, "My

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father introduced your mother to your father." He said, "What's your father's—what's your name? What's your name?" [*SL laughs*] And I said, "It's Gaston." He said, "Oh my God." He says, "Is your father alive?" And I said, "No, he's not." I said, "Is your mother?" He said, "She is, and I'm goin' home, and I'm gonna, when I get home, I'm gonna call Mom and tell her I met Gaston Gibson's son." Isn't that wild?

SL: That's great. It's really amazing.

[01:16:05] GG: Oh. And he went to the first and second grades in Blytheville. [*Laughter*] His father was a band leader. And that's just—hell, Dad met another guy there in 1925, and they called him Willie the Cat. William Turner Catledge from a little farming community in eastern Mississippi, and he and Dad hit it off 'cause they were both farm boys, country boys. He was workin' for the *Commercial Appeal*.

SL: Okay.

GG: Okay?

SL: Yeah.

GG: Nineteen sixty-five, he's editor of the *New York Times*.

SL: You know, there's something hardscrabble about Arkansas pioneer stock. It . . .

GG: They're . . .

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SL: They just . . .

GG: I'm tellin' you.

SL: I don't know what it is. It's in the bones or something, but there's some kind of gumption reservoir that . . .

GG: You know what the Gullahs called it?

SL: Hm-mm.

GG: Said that we had the rhythm.

SL: The rhythm. I love that. [*Laughs*]

GG: We had the rhythm.

SL: There you go. Yeah.

GG: He said, boy used to tell my father, say, "Mr. G, you can dance to any tune. You got the rhythm, man. [*SL laughs*] You got the rhythm."

SL; You get that in Memphis, too.

[01:17:39] GG: Well, You do, but . . .

SL: But you bring it to Memphis.

GG: . . . but Dad—well, one day you would see him, and you would think that he maybe had never been close to a shower. And the next day you think that he could be at **Phil Halley's modeling** in Memphis. He was so widespread in his ability to go from one—he had a deal in his billfold when he died, I never knew he had it. He never shared it with me. And when I went down to

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take his possessions after—at it—from him at the hospital when they pronounced him dead. It had a deal named "Bag of Tools." It says, "Isn't it strange that princes and kings and folks like me and you are really builders for God to see. When we're born, even though we don't know it, he gives us our very own bag of tools. And then later, when we get older, he follows it with his book of rules. And then he watches us to see if we turn out to builders of stepping stones or stumbling blocks."

SL: That's really good. Whe—I wonder where he got that.

[01:19:11] GG: I don't either, and I been trying to find out—it had no signature on it. It was in his handwriting, but he had to have gotten that somewhere. And I thought, "Boy, that is powerful." And I had never seen it before, but I—once I read it, I try—it took me a second to get it back in my head, but he always kept telling me—he said, "Son, you got something"—that's—he told me that when Broyles turn—he said, "There's something in you that's growing. And I'm not sure what it is. Your Mom's not sure what it is. But you're on your journey somewhere, and it started long before we know." And he said, "There will come a time when you figure it out." But he said, "There are plans for you. I don't know what it—what they're gonna be." And he said, "Don't worry about being famous." He said, "Just for the

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record, there weren't many famous people I ever knew that I liked very much." [*Laughter*]

SL: There you go. Yeah.

[01:20:23] GG: He said, "But if you can figure out the rhythm of life, if you can just figure out your rhythm," he said, "the deed is in how well you do it." He reminded me of one time about jumping on another farmer at the Saturday haircut. In those days, when I was a kid, everybody came in Saturday to get their hair cut.

SL: Okay.

GG: Barbers are in there, and the fans are blowing, and [*SL laughs*] they're, you know, they're clean. And all these farmers are in there in their coveralls and everything. Well, one guy named Ernest started makin' a deal about a guy named Curt Beavers. He said, "Kurt, I'm tellin' you man, I wish I had a job like this." He said, "I'm out there in this old hot sun, the dust is everywhere, and I'm filthy, and I'm nasty, and I can't wait to get a drink of water, and here you are. You're sittin in here, and you got that clean, white shirt on, you got those good-lookin' polished shoes on. The wind's blowing through here with these fans." He said, "Man, I'd say you got it made." My dad jumped up out of his chair, and he said, "Ernest," he said, "man," he said, "I wanna tell you something." He said, "He gets here at

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7:00 in the mornin', he leaves at 7:00 at night. Takes thirty minutes off for lunch. This is marble floors in here in this barber shop. He holds his elbows above his shoulders nine or ten hours a day, and he's workin' his fingers all the time." He said, "If you don't think that's hard work, you give it a try." He said, "you'd be shocked at what you'd find out." And he said, "Get up, Son." Said, "We're not gettin' a haircut today." That was that. When we got in the car, I said, "Dad." He said, "Get in the car." He turned to me, and he said, "Boy, I want you to understand one thing. I don't care what a man or woman or a child does for a living. Don't you ever make a comment about it till you've taken a turn at the switch. Ever."

SL: Man. I miss that guy. [*Laughs*] What—he's got some gems.

GG: Whew.

[01:22:51] SL: You know, we hadn't talked about the church or religion in the house that you grew up in. What—so I'm assuming that you got—so at one point, you were in a Catholic school, is that right?

GG: Mh-hmm.

SL: Is that right?

GG: But we were always Episcopalians.

SL; Always Episcopalians.

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GG: I grew up in the Episcopal church. Dad was an Episcopalian. Mother was a Presbyterian because all of her family from Union Church, Mississippi was a long line of Scottish ministers. And I have a photo in there of the church built in 1854 in Union Church, Mississippi, and that's where all the family, McCallums, are buried. But the church was the center of our life, and we went to church every Sunday. We had morning prayer and evening prayer. Dad liked to go to morning prayer. And that was at noon. I mean, eleven o'clock. Had Sunday school, and we had Bible school, and we had camp. We had an Episcopal camp on Petit Jean Mountain called Camp Mitchell, which was named after the Episcopal bishop that confirmed me in 1951. [01:24:10] And it was always the center of the things that we did. Dad never exposed his faith to others, and Mother didn't, either. They didn't talk it. They just lived it. And they convinced me that there was only one thing—this is what Dad—another one of Dad's saying. He said, "Boy, you know, there's only one thing in life better than a good deal." And I say, "What's that, Dad?" and he said, "Knowing it. Knowing that you have a good deal." And he said, "You see that cross up there?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "That's a good deal. That is a good deal." He said, "What that cross says, the price for loving comes

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real high."

SL: Yeah. Wow. Hm. You know, it's—when you were talking about how your mom and dad waited a dozen years, you know, and he kind of laid down the law, and I'm gonna do this, this in Memphis, don't know if you'll be there or not. It takes some rare qualities in a couple that can maintain a relationship for a dozen years, you know, especially back in those days.

GG: Yes.

[01:26:07] SL: Well, let's hear some things about your mom.

GG: Well, I'll do that.

SL: [*Coughs*] Excuse me.

GG: I will share this other deal with you about Mom and Dad. When I got ready to get married, I was twenty-one years old. And I was planning to go to law school, and had no interest in being a contactor or anything like that. But anyway, Mother went to great lengths to explain to me how this is gonna be such a new and shocking adventure. She said, "At first, you know, everyone's in heat." [*Laughter*] Said, "And then there's"—she said, "you've got to understand so many things that you're gonna be upset about things or she's gonna be upset about thing"—she said, "You've got to keep your eye focused on the target, and the target is long term." And she went on and she

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went on and on and on and on and on. And it got to a point that I didn't wanna know any more [*SL laughs*] about the marriage. Dad had never said a word. But his personality was "I'm gonna get an opening if you give it to me, Son. And once I give it to—you give me that opening, I'm gonna hit you with both fists, quick, and I'm gonna get out." And that's the way I always remember the things he said. [01:27:37] So two days before the wedding, I said, "Dad, we hadn't had a talk about this marriage." I said, "I need—I think I need—Mother has pretty much convinced me this gonna be complicated." [*SL laughs*] And he said, "It is not complicated, Son." And I said, "Well, you gotta help me here a minute." He said, "All you need to know"—he said, "Do you know why God created man first?" And I said, "Uh, no, sir, I don't think I know the answer to that." He said, "'Cause even God had to practice." [*Laughter*] He said, "Don't you ever forget that—number that—number one. And the second thing don't you ever forget: there're only two of you in that marriage, and you're the second most important thing in that marriage." [*Laughter*]

SL: Good advice.

GG: It worked for thirty-eight years.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

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GG: But I'm tellin' you that that was the way Dad—you know, he sends me a—he and Mom send me a letter, and they say, "We miss you"—I'm a freshman. "We miss you, Son. We have really missed you. You—we—being the only child—you're gone. We can just tell the void here." He said, "We—but you haven't written us. You haven't called us on a pay phone or anything, and we just wanna know how you are. And we wanted to put this picture of Andrew Jackson in here that you would enjoy." That was a twenty-dollar bill.

SL: Ah.

GG: And man, twenty bucks. And I looked all over that letter. Wasn't a—I couldn't find the twenty. So I go to the pay telephone [*SL laughs*] down at the Palace Drug Store.

SL: Yeah.

[01:29:30] GG: I call dad. And I, "Oh, I got your letter Dad, you know, you and m"—he, "Wait a minute son, let's get Mother on the phone." And so they said, "We wanna both hear your voice. So go ahe—it's so good to hear from you. We thought you'd forgotten." "Oh, no, sir, you know, no, no ma'am." And he said, "Well, tell us how classes are," and I went through that whole how I loved it. I said, "It is so beautiful up here. It's beyond beautiful." I said, "The trees"—I said, "Golly, it's just"—I said,

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"Dad, I'm not sure that this is God's country. I believe this may be where God vacations." [*SL laughs*] And so anyway, he said, "Well, tell me about"—I said, "Well, let me help you with something here a second, Dad." I said, "I read your letter." And I said, "I loved it, and I appreciated it. It is so good to get a letter from home." I said, "But I couldn't find the twenty-dollar bill." He said, "You called, didn't you, Son?" [*Laughter*] Never was a twenty in the damn . . .

SL: Yeah. Get—pick up the phone.

[01:30:44] GG: Pick up the phone. He said, "Now d"—he—Mother said, "Your Dad has a way of weaving things that is very hard to untie, Gaston Jr." I knew she was upset with me when she called me Gaston Jr.

SL: Oh.

GG: That was her key to let me know, this ain't good. And . . .

SL: You gotta keep in better touch.

GG: Yeah. So . . .

SL: And . . .

GG: . . . I wrote regularly from that point on.

SL: That's good.

GG: But that twenty dollar bill was quite a lesson. [*Laughter*]

SL: "You called, didn't you?"

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GG: "You called, didn't you?"

SL: That's good.

[01:31:18] GG: But Mom was the—she was always there for me because there were times in my life when I felt like the world wasn't fair. And Mother helped convince me that it never would be.

SL: And learn to live with it.

GG: She said, "Nothing's fair." And she went back to her faith. She said, "If everything had been fair," she said, "Christ wouldn't have died on the cross." Said, "Nothin's' fair." She said, "Just get used to it." And she had another thing that she said with it. She said, "You know, as you grow older, you're gonna learn that there's nothing like good times. Oh, they're wonderful. You're either makin' a lot of money, or everybody likes you, you think, and there's nothing you can do that's wrong. And then there're other times, you don't feel like anybody likes you, you don't feel like your job's going the way you want it, you feel like a friend's talking about you around your back, you feel like that you're not as good as you thought you'd be in life."

SL: Yeah.

[01:32:29] GG: She said, "But let me give you the good news. Good times nor bad times never come to stay, Son. Just to visit."

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SL: That's a good one, too.

GG: Isn't it?

SL: Yeah.

GG: And I've never forgotten that.

SL: Okay, I'm gonna keep workin' around the Gibson home, here.

GG: Okay.

[01:32:55] SL: Was the street paved out front?

GG: What's that?

SL: Was the street paved . . .

GG: No, it was . . .

SL; . . . out front?

GG: . . . dirt. It was dirt, and we were not allowed to drive the vehicles. Only the horses and the mules. You couldn't drive a car up to the house because Mother would have a hissy fit to mess with the dust.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And Bua would be after anybody with a broom that was in her tribe comin' up there in anything but a wagon. Because we had cars, but you left those cars about 200 and 300 feet back. [*Laughter*] You d . . .

SL: Well, the dirt road.

GG: It's a dirt road.

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SL: I understand that.

GG: Yeah.

SL: One car goin' fast down a dirt road . . .

GG: You can't see anything.

SL: . . . lotta havoc. That's right.

GG: Can't see anything. And the road went straight into the cotton farm. So that sandy loam soil, when it got summertime and dry, it could get this deep.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And you could turn it into a dust storm. So they just didn't allow the vehicles to come up to the house.

[01:33:56] SL: Well, what'd you do—what—so your nearest neighbor was how far away?

GG: Well, actually we had someone next door to us that was a brother of dad's, and that next door was probably three or four hundred feet away.

SL: So you had an uncle down the road.

GG: Yeah, an uncle and an aunt.

SL: And they had kids?

GG: No, they did not have children.

[01:34:20] SL: So who did you play with?

GG: Black kids.

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SL: And . . .

GG: And my other—the reason I didn't have any—like Giant Gibson, who was my first cousin, he was twenty years older than me.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And all the family, all the Gibsons, the children were grown. There were no white children to play with down there.

SL: So you were the baby.

GG: I was the baby. And so the ones that I grew up with were the Gullah children. And man, we did everything together, and that was my playmates till—and when I went to Malvern, I wasn't—I was so shocked of havin' to leave my pony, my dog, my mom, and my dad, I stayed in a period of remorse, so I wasn't conscious of anybody around me. It was a horrible experience to go from that farm to Malvern, Arkansas.

[01:35:15] SL: Okay, so now, tell me again why that happened?

GG: My dad had an aneurysm.

SL: Right, and he wasn't going to live.

GG: He wasn't going to live, so Mother—they had to put her—put him in the hospital in Dermott. She stayed with him pretty much most of every day except in the early mornings she would get the store going, and Dick McCullough would driver her to the hospital, pick her up in the afternoon. And so with the f—with

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the cotton farm and with the mercantile store and tryin' to take care of Dad, it was impossible for her to deal with—take care of me.

SL: Right.

GG: And so she sent me to her sister's in Malvern. And the experience there is sort of a blur because there were two—they had two brothers. I mean, she had two sons and then had a baby. And but I was in a bad mental state at that point. As a matter of fact, when I got to Lake Village in that Catholic school, I was a loner because I didn't—I was having a real hard time adjusting to this dramatic change from my horse and my cows and my pigs and my chickens and having the rhythm of life for this—Mother would say—in the atmosphere I was in, I just lost it all of a sudden. And it's all I knew.

[01:36:54] SL: Well, you didn't have your father and your mother with you.

GG: No. And everything—I did not learn how to write cursive till I was in the fourth grade. Because I couldn't get—and I flunked everything. I couldn't do anything in school. I was just not coherent. And they—the Catholic nuns did a lot tryin' to help me, and I think they got ahold of my problem. And one of the nuns, Sister Xavier, worked with me really closely. And I was

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crazy about her, and she pulled things out of me that helped me get to where the—by the fourth grade, I was becoming a part of the class rather than just sitting in the class. Boy, it—those were tough four or five years.

[01:37:49] SL: So you were there for that long.

GG: Hmm?

SL; You were there that long, even though your—after nine months, your dad . . .

GG: Well, I was there at nine, but I was only there for a year in Malvern.

SL: Oh, okay.

GG: And then we came—but when I came back, we didn't get to go to ma—we didn't go back to my home. We had to move to Lake Village because dad was in recuperation.

SL; Right.

GG: And that took him a year or so to get himself back together, and nobody knew if that would really happen or not.

SL: Right.

[01:38:20] GG: So we lived in a little apartment there, in a one-room apartment in Lake Village for a year, and then we lived with a relative of Mother's for a year, and then when Dad recovered, they built a home in Lake Village. But I went from having the

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ponderosa to hardly havin' a pot.

SL; Yeah.

GG: And it took a toll on me that I may have never gotten over.

[01:38:56] SL: Well, so what happened to the farm?

GG: Well, Dad leased the farm out to a guy from Stuttgart that wanted to bring rice to Southeast Arkansas.

SL: Kay.

GG: So we quit growin' cotton, started growin' rice. And then he had a large family, so dad let him have the house to bring his family from Stuttgart. And he worked the farm for about ten years, and he died. But that's—and we closed the store, and that's the other thing. [01:39:33] In the Second World War, when things were hard to come by and people had no money, this is another story I'm gettin' ready to tell you about my dad that I just surfaced. People couldn't pay him. And so Swift and Company and Procter & Gamble people and—there were a number of folks that dad owed—I think when we had to close the store, he owed $83,000. That was a lot of money.

SL: Lot of money.

GG: Lot of money. And so the—right before Dad had his stroke, he said, "I want you to ride over to the lumber camps in Crockett." He said, "There's a good man over there that owes me ten

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dollars." And he said, "I need to collect it." So I rode over there with him. And he looked—we went to lumber camp after lumber camp. Course, nobody knew where this guy was. But finally, the guy that owned the Rose Hotel there said, "I know where that guy is, Gaston." He said, "I'll take you over there." So we run into him. We—at the camp. They have fires, and Dad walks up there, and this guy's really embarrassed to see Dad. [01:41:06] And he comes over, and he said, "Mr. Gibson." He said, "I'm really sorry." He said, "I know I owe you the money." He said, "I just can't make end—I don't know what I'm gonna do for my family from one day to the next." He said, "The war's over," he said, "but the war's not over in my life." And Dad told him, he said, "Look," he said, "can you pay me twenty-five cents a week?" He said, "Yes, sir, I think I can do that." He reached his hand out, he shook hands with this guy. Guy said, "If it's okay, Mr. Gibson, I'll come back with you." Said, "You bring your family, you come back, you start trade with us again." As we're riding back home, I said, "Dad, I don't understand what happened there. I don't understand it." And he said, "Well, Gaston," he said, "here's the deal." He said, "I went over there for two reasons." He said, "I went over there to get a customer back." And he said, "I can't get the customer back unless I can

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give him his dignity back. Twenty-five cents? Do it."

[01:42:48] When Dad died in 1976, that same guy came to my mother, and said, "Ms. Gibson, can I start payin' you five dollars a week that I owe your husband?" And she said, "No, no, you can't do that," she says, "The debts are off." Harold came to me, and he said, "Gaston," he said, "your dad has helped me along the way," and he said, "I've always paid him back." He said, "Your mother will not let me pay him. Pay her." He said, "I still owe your dad $45." He said, "I wanna pay him," and I said, "Okay, Harold. Why?" He said, "In 1948, your father gave me my dignity back. I don't wanna sell it for $45 now."

SL: There you go.

GG: Isn't that somethin'? And I said, "That's a deal." And I took the money. He sent it to me in Little Rock. I took the money, and then I gave it to Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Lake Village, which Mom and Dad went to church.

SL: There you go.

GG: Mother didn't know it. [*Laughter*]

SL: That's good stuff, man.

GG: I mean . . .

[01:44:32] SL: Wonder how many other folks your dad affected like that.

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GG: Oh. Let me tell you, Dad helped a lot of people. When I looked at his book of the things that he had let people have that they were payin' him back, I went to all that I knew and told 'em that the deal was everything was over, debt's paid in full. Everybody accepted it except Harold. Harold said, "I gotta—[*laughter*] I gotta finish it. I can't sell that dignity back for $45." And I said, "Dad—you think Dad'll know?" [*SL laughs*] You know what his comment was? He said, "Mr. Gibson, I would know."

[01:45:29] SL: There you go. That's good. Hmm. So how old are you when you move into the apartment?

GG: Eight.

SL: Eight. Boy, your world is just . . .

GG: It just left me. I didn't like kids. I didn't trust anybody. I wouldn't accept any invitation to go to anybody's birthday party. They didn't know what they were gonna do with me for a while. And Dad said, "I'll tell you what we're gonna do. We're gonna throw a big birthday party for you, and we're gonna do it on the Catholic school grounds. And I'm gonna get a horse trailer over there, and we're gonna bring Billy, your pony, and we're gonna bring Babe Ruth, my horse, and we're gonna bring Gladys, your mother's horse. We're gonna have a big birthday party." And he said, "We get our house built, we'll have something big

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enough that you can keep your horse here." And that, having my pony, little horse—and then he got me a dog because after my—after I left—I had a shepherd, and the dog got killed, and I don't know how it got killed. But I was able to transition from country to the community in about eighteen months with havin' that closest of my animals. Hell, I talked to my animals like they were human. You know, 'cause I could tell them things I couldn't tell anybody.

SL; They're good listeners.

GG: And I got through it, and once I got through that, I went to Dad one day, and I said, "I know this has been tough on you and Mother, but you can take the horse back to the farm." I said, "I'm okay." And I was.

[01:47:51] SL: So you grew up playin' with Black kids. Was there ever any racial awareness, any . . .

GG: No.

SL: . . . strife in the town? Were there folks that were not respectful of the African American community?

GG: No, it—there were two schools in Lake Village. There was the Black school, and then there was the public school. The only thing that I remember about the Black schools is that we'd sometimes compete with 'em in spelling. And they always beat

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us. [*SL laughs*]

SL: Well, they may have felt like they had more at stake.

[01:48:43] GG: I'll tell you one thing, though, that I found out. We used to run races on the turn rows.

SL: Okay.

GG: Okay?

SL: Yep.

GG: And I was always last. Never could be—I think there was one little Gullah kid I could beat and—but he was heavy. I couldn't—and so I never knew I was fast until I got to Lake Village. And so they timed me in the fifth grade on the 100 yard dash or something. I don't know what it was. It was a May Day deal. And I ran off and left all these other kids. And the teacher, named Mr. Jagger, came in, he said, "Son," he said, "I'm gonna tell Coach Cleary about you." He said, "You oughta go out for track in the seventh grade." He said, "I think"—I said, "No, no, no, no, sir. I don't wanna go out for track." He said, "Why not?" and I said, "I hadn't been able to outrun anybody since I can remember." I said, "I got four friends over in Boydell," and I said, "I can't outrun any of 'em." He said, "Well, I don't know who your friends are, but," he said, "I'll tell you what, Son, you can outrun these people." And I could. [*SL laughs*] But I didn't

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know I was fast till I got to Lake Village with all the white boys. [*Laughter*]

SL: There you go.

[01:50:05] GG: I had no clue. And but I never thought about—I never—and Mother and Dad never talked about it. You know, none of the Gibsons talked about it. It we—I didn't realize it till I got to Lake Village. And more people looked down at me for goin'—I mean, if there was anybody that was talked about at first, it was the Italians.

SL: Yeah.

GG: They talked about—I mean, I got kidded for goin' to that Roman Catholic school like you can't believe. And then when the Roman Catholic school shut out the senior high and they all started going into the Lake Village program, and these football te—hell, our football teams turned around when the Italians started interjecting into the program and—but I got all kinda grief and had fun made of me about going' to that Roman Catholic school. [01:51:11] First it was a Catholic school, Roman Catholic school, and then it was the Italians. And that went away after the Korean War. Boy, just about every single Italian in that community went to fight in that war. That whole community. They came back, I never heard another word.

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SL: That's funny, isn't it, how . . .

GG: It . . .

SL; . . . that works out.

GG: I'm telling you. Dad had a guy named Podgy Parini, Frank Casali, Gino Reginelli, Santo Pambianchi, and Pesaresi working for him. They all went to the war. They came back. Most of 'em were in the marines. I never heard another slang thing again about anybody.

[01:52:05] SL: There was someone else—Massanelli. We were interviewing Massanelli, the former v—oh, what do they call it? Parliamentarian for the legislature from Little Rock. And he grew up with African American neighbors, share cropping situation with the farm. And so there was this African American-Italian mix where he was living, too. And It may have been in the same sort of area. I can't remember exactly where the Massanellis came from, but it was rural.

GG: I don't know that name. I don't know that name. And I went to school with about all in my generation.

SL: Right.

GG: But Massanelli is not a name.

SL: Yeah. Well, he may have been north.

GG: Yeah. Could've been.

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[01:52:56] SL: Yeah. But I guess what I was saying that those groups found themselves together early on, probably from that migration time . . .

GG: Yeah.

SL: . . . when they had the influx. So how you doin'? You holdin' up okay?

GG: I'm good. I'm good.

SL: We're probably approaching lunch time then.

Sarah Moore: Yeah, we're gettin' close, guys. It's al—you've almost been going for two hours.

SL: So has—is the food here yet?

SM: Not—I don't think it's here yet, but I think Randy already went to get it.

SL: Okay. Well, let us know when he gets back with it, and we'll just push on just a little bit longer here.

SM: Okay, sounds good.

[01:53:37] SL: Okay, thanks, Sarah. So what kind of games? What'd you do with the kids growing up?

GG: We used to have this game with the Black kids over there called one hand.

SL: Kay.

GG: One hand was a game that you drew a line. And everybody

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jumped, flat footed, forward, and whoever jumped the shortest distance had to go down. In other words, you had to put your knee, your back up, and you had to put your elbows on your knees. And you started out at seven or eight feet. And you had to hit with both feet on this line, fly in the air, your hands hit on the person back, and you go over. You call that a flyin' over. And you had two times to do it. Well, I always was the one down because I couldn't fly like my buddies. And there were rare occasions when we—when you got past the flying over. You had two times. And if you missed the line, they called it a pee leg. If you—you had to be in dirt to where you could see both feet hit on the line. If your heels hit on the line, you go down. [*SL laughs*] Okay. So then they called it a one hand. You would run, take one step, and jump and fly over. We played that game all the time. And the other game that they loved to play, and I loved to play, was—oh, you would take a stick and you would have a inner tube. And you would—you'd have to keep the inner tube rollin'.

SL: Rollin'.

[01:55:36] GG: And you'd have to go on the sand and that—let me tell you what, that's a chore. And if you eh—if the inner tube ever got wobbly, you were out. And then you'd measure how far

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each person went, and it was always competition. And Mother would give the—whoever—you 'member Royal Crown cola?

SL: Absolutely.

GG: Okay.

SL: Moon pies.

GG: Yeah, whoever did it the furthest in front of the store, Mother would give Royal Crown Cola. [*SL laughs*] And I finally told Mother one day—I said, "Mother, why don't you just not give anybody anything?" I said, "I—do you know I don't ever win a Royal Crown Cola?" [*SL laughs*] And she said, "But we own the Royal Crown Cola." She said, "This is good competition for you, boy." And I didn't know what she meant.

SL: She was supporting the kids, the playtime.

GG: That's right.

SL: Saw the value.

GG: That's right.

SL: Yeah.

[01:56:41] GG: And you know, I learned to lose early. But I also learned not to be disappointed.

SL: So that started to change, though, when you moved to . . .

GG: Yeah.

SL: . . . Lake Village.

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GG: It did. I—after I got to the sixth grade, I had made the transition. And I was very successful in my athletics, and I was very successful in my school work, and I was president of the student body at Lake Village High School, which is something I couldn't even—I mean, I couldn't imagine doin' that. When I got to the university, I became president of the interfraternity council, the interfraternity pledge council, the interfraternity council, Blue Key. I was on the original Cardinal Twenty group that they selected freshmen based on your grades, your academics, and I mean—but I think all that early stuff helped me. Because I never took any of that for granted. [01:58:07] And the other thing that I told my wife. She was—Gloria was the most graceful, beautiful—she was an earth angel. She had talent. She had—she was so patient with me while she let me mature as a young man. And I was very, very blessed to have crossed paths with her, and we came out of this thing together. I was lucky because she gave me time to make a fool out of myself. She knew me, the strength and the weakness of me, and she accepted 'em all. And I wasn't a, you know, I wasn't a drinker, and I never smoked or anything like that. But there were times that I felt like that she put more on me than I could handle. And I'd work, for example, on pipeline, sixty, seventy

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hours a week, come home filthy and dirty, and she'd meet me out there and hug me and all that. She said, "I'd sure like you to mow the yard." And I thought, "Jesus Christ, mow the yard? Are you kiddin' me? I been workin' myself to death all week." So I called my dad on—I went to the pay telephone. [*SL laughs*] This is one of those moments.

SL; Yeah.

[01:59:44] GG: And I said, "Dad, I got a real problem with Gloria." I said, "She doesn't understand how hard I'm workin'," I said, "I am just—you can't believe what it's like on that pipeline all day and hot, nasty." And I said, "I just wanna come home and take a shower and relax." And he said, "How many hours a week you work?" And I said, "Dad, I work about sixty to seventy hours a week." He said, "Well, how many hours she work?" I said, "She ain't got a job." He said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa." He said, "You got two children." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Who feeds 'em?" I said, "She does." "Who cleans the house up?" "She does." "Who takes 'em to the doctor?" I said, "She does." "Who gets up with 'em in the night when you're out on these construction jobs?" Said, "She does." "Who pays the bills?" I said, "She does." [*SL laughs*] He said, "How many hours in a week, Son?" I said, "I don't know, Dad." He said,

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"Well, multiply 24 hours times seven days." He said, "That's 168 hours." He said, "I tell you what you do. I hear what you're sayin', but don't call me back till you're workin' 120 hours a week in the field. Then I'll listen to you." [*Laughter*] And he hung the damn phone up on me. [*SL laughs*] I went back with my tail between my legs, cranked that damn lawn mower up, mowed the yard . . .

SL: And was happy to get it done.

GG: . . . and got it. I got it. But you know, I had—like Dad would always do, I had to come to him, and then he hit me right between the eyes. And . . .

SL: In and out.

GG: In and out. Boom! [*SL laughs*] I never forgot that. I really, to this day, I think—I am embarrassed by even tellin' that because I thought I was a pretty cool, roughneck, tough guy, and my wife was sittin' in that air conditioning like I had been taught that that barber was, member?

SL: Yeah.

GG: And I forgot. [*Laughs*]

[Recording stopped]

[02:02:01] SL: Okay, Gaston, we're—we've had our lunch, and we're gettin' ready to start our second segment. We went a

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couple of hours without even stopping this morning. We didn't really get that far. [*Laughs*] We scattered around the timeline a little bit, but as far as your schooling goes, your early schooling, I think we've really just described your elementary school grades and how those early years really prepared you, educationally, for each stage thereafter. So you went to elementary school in—which town was it?

GG: First it was in Jerome, then it was in Malvern, then it was at the Roman Catholic school, and then it was the Lake Village public schools. So before I was in the sixth grade, I was in four different schools.

SL: Did you have a favorite?

[02:03:11] GG: I think I loved the Catholic school. I—even though I was by myself there, and one of—and the thing that probably meant most to me was on Valentine's, everybody, up above blackboard, had a huge Valentine that the other children in the class could put something in. And mine was noticeable because everybody else's looked pregnant, and mine did not. And it had one single Valentine in it, and it was from a girl named Sylvia Rankin, *R-A-N-K-I-N*. And I never forgot that and f—we went through high school together, she graduated. And Sylvia was a gift from God so—she was a wonderful artist, she could play the

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piano, she was brilliant. And she had compassion and wisdom and understanding and patience that were beyond belief. And I lost track of her because her husband went to San Francisco. She graduated, I think, from the university. And the next time i heard about Sylvia, she was being honored in Candlestick Park as the most outstanding teacher in San Francisco.

SL: How beautiful is that?

[02:04:48] GG: But I never forgot how special that one card made me feel. And but I got a good education there. I made some really good friends there. And they even added an *E* to my name, the kids did, so I could blend in. They put an *E* on the back of Gibson so I'd have a vowel. [*SL laughs*] Just playin' with me.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And but I made lifelong friends there, and I loved the structure of the nuns. And because I could predict what was comin'. And my life was so unpredictable up to that point. That time in school, it was predictable. And I think looking back, probably that particular rhythm that I was in in that last—third grade was unbelievable.

[02:05:56] SL: You know, one thing I didn't ask you about in your home growing up were musical instruments. Were there any

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musical instruments in the Gibson house?

GG: Me. I played the—I joined the band in the fifth grade. And I really enjoyed it, and I played the coronet. And I continued to play it. I was not gifted. But I was pretty good, but not gifted. And they had first chair, second chair, third chair, fourth chair, and fifth chair. I was always fourth. And so I wanted to play the drums. That was what I really wanted to play. But I couldn't manage to do one thing with one hand and something with the other, and so my dream job didn't happen. But I st—I played in the band for five years, and then I moved on to football. And because they allowed you, in junior high, to play in the band and play football, too. But you couldn't do it in the tenth grade.

SL: Right.

[02:07:15] GG: So I talked to my band instructor about it, and he said, "Gaston," he said, "You're a great marcher," he said, "You do everything right." He said, "But you're an average trumpet pl—coronet player." He said, "It wouldn't hurt my feelings if you played football."

SL: Oh my gosh! [*Laughter*]

GG: So . . .

SL: Kind of a pre-Broyles . . .

GG: Yeah.

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SL: . . . set up for you.

GG: And then he smiled at me, and I said—his name was Bonner Ruff. I said, "Okay, Mr. Ruff," I said, "If I ever wanted to come back and play, could I do it?" And he said, "You know you can, Son." So I always liked him. But that was the only access to musical instruments. But I loved my time in the band, and I enjoyed it immensely and I—hell, I learned to read music, I learned notes, and I still carry that with me today.

[02:08:17] SL: Well, there is also a team element.

GG: It is.

SL: About it. Being in a band, marching band or . . .

GG: That's right.

SL: . . . performance band or whatever. Rock and roll band. They're—you have to . . .

GG: It's a team . . .

SL: . . . play with the other guys are playin', you know.

GG: That's right.

SL: You have to be a part of it.

GG: Yeah. And you can make talent sound terrible if you're not in rhythm.

SL: That's right.

GG: [*Laughs*] So it was a really good time. I enjoyed that.

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[02:08:49] SL: So your parents didn't play any instruments or . . .

GG: No, no. my dad—Mom and Dad were dancers that came up through the, you know, [19]20s and things like that. They loved to go dance. They loved music. We had probably the first record player that—it was 33 1/3. Anytime I would go anywhere, I would buy music for them. They loved Nat King Cole. They loved Guy Lombardo, and I would go to the music stores—if we'd go to a deal in Pine Bluff with the band . . .

SL: Yeah.

GG: . . . I'd go to the music store and spend my money in the music store on my mom and dad 'cause I knew what they liked. "Lazy River" and "Swanee River" and "Small Hotel" and all these songs that were popular back in their day, I would chase 'em down and buy 'em for 'em.

[02:09:47] SL: So before the record player, would they dance to the radio?

GG: Yes.

SL: So you got to watch them dance.

GG: I watched them dance in our living room. And they would—there was a music show on on Saturday and Friday nights at eight o'clock. And it was from eight to ten because I never got to go through the whole thing. My bedtime was nine something. But

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they—I loved watching Mother and Dad dance. They were good. They were really good together.

SL: Did they ever have other people over and move the furniture . . .

GG: Yeah.

SL: . . . so the . . .

GG: Yeah, they did that. Some of the family and friends would come from Eudora, Lake Village, and Dermott, and man, they would have—and then course, the Gibson around—Gibsons love to have a good time and enjoyed it. And it was always a fun occasion for me because it was one of the few times that we weren't either eating, cleaning, or workin'. Doin' something. And it was nice to see Mom and Dad, you know, in a different mode.

SL: Yeah.

[02:11:02] GG: It was almost like, "That's my mom and dad?" You know. [*Laughs*] That's . . .

SL: They're good. [*Laughs*]

GG: Yeah, it was a—oh, it was—and they loved to go to the movies, but we didn't get to go much because we had to go to McGehee to see a movie, and it was usually on a Sunday afternoon.

SL: Matinee.

GG: After church. Matinee, yeah. But that was a big event to go to a

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movie. And then we'd go to Greenwood, Mississippi, when we moved into Lake Village, and that was really a big deal because Greenville was about 40,000 people. So when you went to a theater in Greenville, it was, you know, it was daylight and dark from the theaters around Dermott, McGehee, and Lake Village.

[02:11:57] SL: So at Lake Village or even maybe in Greenville, did you see any of the racial segregation stuff? Do you remember those . . .

GG: Yeah, you did in Mississippi.

SL: Yeah.

GG: It was bi—it was pronounced in Mississippi. And when you cross the Mississippi River, it was a different world. I grew up in a different world. They looked upon us in Arkansas as second rate. Didn't make any difference if we were Black or white. You have an Arkansas license plate on, they would get your attention, and they would let you know that you were not as good as they were. I hate it.

SL: My dad—my dad and mom took a train for an Ole Miss game in Mississippi, and I member my mom . . .

GG: I bet that was an interesting exper . . .

SL: My mom said that [*laughs*] Dad got in a fight in the end zone after the end of the game.

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GG: Oh.

SL: You know, especially if Arkansas won, you know, there was all this fisticuffs after a game.

[02:12:57] GG: And I grew up when Ole Miss had their fantastic teams with Johnny Vaught.

SL: Right.

GG: And I had to swallow that stuff, and they had the Miss Americas. They had two Miss Americas in a row in the [19]50s, and Mary Ann Mobley and Lynda Mead, and I mean, everything that they did was—they had the best football teams, they had the prettiest girls, and they had the raunchiest attitudes. Now Louisiana was like us. They treated people from Louisiana—you go to Louisiana, they were just like we were.

SL: Yeah.

GG: But you go to Lake Providence, Bastrop, you go to any of those—Monroe, it was like you were still in Arkansas. Boy, you cross that Mississippi River, and that was a different world. [*Laughs*]

[02:13:49] SL: Yeah. So when did you—let's see. I'm tryin' to think. When did you graduate from the university?

GG: I graduated from university or high school?

SL: Well, high school. When did you gra . . .

GG: Okay. I graduated in 1959, in May of [19]59. I graduated from

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high school and entered the university in the fall of [19]59. And that's where I met my wife. She—her name was Gloria James, she was from Little Rock, and Sarah has hair just like my wife did.

SL: Ah.

GG: That soft red hair.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

[02:14:39] GG: I knew immediately that I was attracted to her, and I f—I think the thing that was so impressive about her is she had such a kind and generous and loving personality to everyone. She was thoughtful. She was talented. She was just a graceful lady even in everything she did, even in her young days. She always thought about others before herself, she put others before herself, and she just—all the things that I had missed out on as a child that I felt alienated from, she brought me into. Does that make sense?

SL: Y—ge—ah—I can understand that, but can you like give an example?

GG: For example, when we f—when we had our first date, I saw so much strutting and people trying to be cool at the university f—everybody wanted to have their—say the right line, have the right shirt, or hold a cigarette exact—it was a whole thing about

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image.

SL: Right.

GG: And so on our first date, I said, "I really need you to understand somethin' that you may not know about me, but I need to tell you this." I said, "I'm not cool. I'm not gonna say the cool things. I'm not going to strut. I'm not gonna wear what everybody else wears. I'm just me, Gloria. I'm just me." [*Laughter*]

SL: So what did she say to that?

GG: She said, "That's my dad."

SL: Ah. That's high praise.

GG: I didn't know her dad.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And she said, "Thanks for bein' honest with me." She said, "I'm not interested in cool." I said, "Then I think we're gonna be friends. "

SL: There you go. [*Laughter*] Not bad for the first date.

GG: No, it wasn't. And I—but I needed to get that out of the way because I still had those thoughts of my days when people separated themselves from me, and I wanted to give her a chance to do it so I wouldn't get hurt later.

SL: Yeah.

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GG: Because I'd been hurt [*rubs hands together*] . . .

[02:18:14] SL: So you think that the—did the alienation just begin when your father fell ill?

GG: Yeah.

SL: And you're out there by yourself and . . .

GG: That was it.

SL: . . . your mom had to . . .

GG: The change . . .

SL: . . . turn away from you . . .

GG: Yeah. Change . . .

SL: . . . and concentrate . . .

GG: . . . changed my life.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And I never saw my Dad ride a horse with me again.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Never threw a ball, never played baseball with me again. Never went hunting with me or fishing with me again.

SL: And you were eight years old?

GG: Yeah.

SL: That's like a critical moment.

GG: Yeah.

SL: And then I guess you're in the Catholic school in your early

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teens?

GG: Mh-hmm.

SL: So and there's another pivotal time. So you're looking for cues . . .

GG: Yes.

SL: . . . as to how to be.

GG: Yeah. And I—and it was rejection or separation had made me so gun-shy.

SL: Yeah.

GG: That I had gotten old enough to know—and I had—I never had a girlfriend, a steady girlfriend, in high school or junior high. And the reason was I was afraid. I was so afraid that I would be rejected.

SL: Yep.

GG: After they got to know me, that I really wasn't much, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[02:19:34] GG: Whew. But after I—being pledged to a fraternity gave me a sense of confidence. And then I got in there, and I saw all these guys tryin' to—they were tryin' to be something that I didn't wanna be.

SL: Yeah, I understand that.

GG: Huh?

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SL: I understand that.

GG: And then it was a big deal—this—you—if you're in this fraternity and you're in this sorority, and my wife was a Chi Omega. And I liked her right at first, and I knew that it wasn't gonna work out, and I had to not get hurt again by explaining to her that I just—I wasn't cool. And you know, I s—and then that's the story I told you. And I—and she didn't care about any of that. She didn't care about any of that, and our relationship grew, and it grew, and it grew. And we were on the same page in life. She was a lot more glamorous that I was. She was a lot more patient than I was, trusting than I was. I didn't trust anybody. And when I finally figured out I could trust her, it was as though somebody gave me a Xanax and I got rid of a headache.

SL: Burden gone.

[02:21:20] GG: It had gone. And it—she was the first person that I felt like I could really, really trust besides my mother and dad. And that's why I was so painful when I lost her. She was fifty-eight years old. Died of pneumonia on January the twentieth. The thing that compounded that is she got rheumatoid when she was thirty-four, so she was on tremendous medication, prednisone gold, naproxen. Oh, you just can't imagine. And I watched her, this beautiful lady, deteriorate right in front of my

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eyes.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And her—she gave me a confidence and a strength that allowed me to do things I thought I never could do. And she was my fuel.

[02:22:36] SL: So how long did y'all date before you married?

GG: Well, we married—we started dating as freshman, and we married the summer of our junior year. And she was the first relationship that I ever was willing to let go with. And I know that I wasn't young enough at the time—old enough to know if I'd gotten a good deal or if I had married the right person. I don't think anybody knows that, really, but I know she took the edge off of me. She let me—when we went out with others, I felt more confident because she . . .

SL: She was by your side. Yeah. Well, that's what partners do. Strengthen each other. I'm sure that you strengthened her, too.

[02:23:43] GG: Well, I tell you, there is something else that is really, really important in a life, and because of our relationship and because I never thought that I'd be—she'd be the first one to go—my father didn't tell me about this, my mother didn't tell me about it, no priest ever told me about it. But when you lose a wife that you've been married to for thirty-eight years, when she

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exits this earth and in her spirit, she knows everything about you.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And I knew that she knew that I never broke a commandment to her.

SL: That's a good thing.

[02:24:54] GG: [*Inhales*] She was somethin' else. That's the reason I got involved P. Allen Smith. We didn't do that 'cause we thought he was gonna be successful. She came to me for two years sayin', "I wanna help this boy." Said, "He worked for the Rockefellers. They didn't pay any attention to him. Worked for the Callaways down in Georgia at Callaway Gardens. They didn't pay any attention to him." She said, "I wanna help him." And I said, "How can I help him? I—we runnin' a ranch, a cotton farm, a construction business, and a sanitary landfill. What do we need to be in the gardening business for and the television business?" Well, about two weeks after that conversation, Dr. Steven Boyd called me. That was her rheumatologist. And I went over to his office, and he said, "You're gonna have to help me with your wife," and I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "She has the ability to withstand pain that's beyond belief." He said, "I've got seventy-five patients that are not nearly as worse

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off—bad off as your wife is. And she comes in as though the whole world's just right." He said, "We gotta find something to get her mind off of her rheumatoid, and the reason is I've gotta take her off of gold because it's ruining her kidneys. We've gotta get her into something lighter." He said, "Do you know anything that we could get her involved in that would give her a reason to get up in the morning without thinkin' about her pain?" I said, "As a matter of fact, I do." That's how P. Allen was born. As I walked back there—I got back home, and I said, "You go call Allen. Tell him to come to dinner tonight. We're gonna find out more about gardening than you and I ever wanted to know." [*Laughter*]

SL: And happy to do it.

GG: And happy to do it, and by gosh, I put five million bucks into something for her. I didn't do it for Allen.

SL: Yeah.

GG: I did it for Gloria.

SL: Yeah.

[02:27:09] GG: And as it turned out [*laughs*], she had him pegged right from the beginning. He was good, he was capable. He was a natural. And he was everything she saw in him, and I didn't look at that that way or trust it. I felt like I had all the

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responsibility I needed, and it led me to buy—it was too hot to shoot in Arkansas in the summertime. So Gloria and I went out to Carmel 'cause that weather out there is great for rheumatoid, it's great for shooting, it's the vegetable capital of the world. Bought a home in Carmel, and we moved our production deal out there, and we shot there for five years in the summer. [02:27:52] And it was—we had wonderful experiences out there, and I'll te—I'll have to tell you this story on Clint Eastwood. His wife Dina Ruiz introduced Allen's show in the local news every night in Monterey on the NBC Affiliate. And so Budweiser was honoring Clint by naming a beer after one of his movies, and they called it Pale Rider beer.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Okay. He owned the Hog Breath cafe there in Carmel, and he was the mayor at the time.

SL: Yeah. I member that.

GG: Okay. And so Deena invited us to come to this closed deal. Just a few people were attending. Because all the money from this was going to Clint Eastwood's favorite charity, which was the Boys & Girls Clubs of Monterey County.

SL: Okay.

[02:28:48] GG: Well, there were two or three things. At first he said

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he thought he oughta taste the b—he said, "I'm not really a drinker, but I oughta taste the beer to see if I like the beer." You know, he made a joke about that. And then he came over to where we were standing, and Allen had prepared what he was gonna say to Clint Eastwood. I had prepared, and my wife had prepared. Before we can say anything, he reaches, get ahold of Allen by the shoulder and shakes his hand, and he said, "Son," he said, "I cannot wait to tell my mother I met you."

SL: [*Laughs*] How bout that?

GG: He said, "She watches you and your show every night." He said, "We talk about you all the time." [*SL laughs*] And I forgot what I wanted to say. Allen forgot what he want [*laughs*]—we're all standing there with our mouths opened.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And he said, "Here, get something to eat." We never even got to just tell him how much we appreciated bein' there.

SL: Yeah.

[02:29:51] GG: I mean, he shocked us that bad. [*Laughter*] And it . . .

SL: He—make my day.

GG: Yeah. And so those kind—it—those kind of experiences that we went through and Gloria being in Carmel—the barometer was

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always constant. She would go out and spend months there, and she had less pain. And we shot everywhere. We got to know all the producers, people up and down the entire country. And I can't tell you how many segments we shot out there. And because we had that all in our pocket and we had been successful—we shot all over the United States. That's another thing I did. Nobody was doing that, not even Martha Stewart. So I would send the videographer, the editor, and the grip, and Gloria, and Allen, and two helpers. We went all over the country. We shot in twenty-eight states. We shot in the Netherlands. We shot in France. We shot in England. We shot in Scotland. We shot in Italy. And we put all this together. [02:31:08] And we were on these stations. We were, eventually, were on a hundred stations with our news segments. And we were building these thirty-minute shows, but when we were doing all this, the perception of Allen having this rare ability was still not obvious to me. But we built up an inventory of 2,280 ninety-second segments. And so we were planning before Gloria died to go to the Weather Channel. Because I knew the guy that was runnin' the Weather Channel. He had been the head of ABC in Washington, DC. [02:32:00] So I went to the—I went—we had a meeting at the Weather Channel, and the

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director—he said—"Well, yes," and he said, "you're too late." He said, "I've got a contract from the Home and Garden channel. They're gonna be our exclusive gardening expert." And I said, "Well, I got a better deal than they do." I said, "How much are you gonna pay 'em a year?" He said, "We're gonna pay a million two a year." And I said, "Why don't I give it to you for free?" He said, "You gonna give me all those segments and all those different stations for free?" I said, "Well, they're not gonna really be free, but you don't have to write me a check." He said, "What do you want?" I said, "I wanna do books. I want Allen to do books, and in order to do that I have to have a billion impressions so that the Simon Schuster, Random House, HarperCollins will all be after us." And I said, "In order to do that, I need you." I said, "Here's the deal. I want him to be on fifty tens—fifty-seven times a week all over the country. I want those ninety-second commercials to run three times a week." I said, "Your commercial value for a thirty second is $3,000." I said, "If we do this for four years, I think it's worth $27 million worth of advertising to me." I said, "I won't charge you for anything if you'll swap that out for the advertising."

SL: No brainer.

[02:33:41] GG: And he did it. And Allen became the executi—the

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expert for—the spokesman for the Weather Channel in 2000 to 2004. After they we—after the Harper Collins people, Phillip Hockey, which is an Italian company, Random House—Irwin Applebaum, the director of app—of Random House flew to Little Rock to try to cut a deal with us. And Simon Schuster flew to Little Rock. Because we had done all their work. The advertisement was already out there. They all offered us a million to two million dollars to sign with 'em. We decided not to take it because the people that did Martha Stewart's books, Crown Publishing, they were owned by a German company. But they had the expertise of gardening. These people were writers about different things, okay. So we went for less money with Crown Publishing. [02:34:51] And another thing we did is the guy who was at—was the editor, was the Applebaum of Crown Publishing, name was Samuel Clemons Gibson. Turns out we're related. [*SL laughs*] He was born and raised in South Carolina. And Mother—my mother chased back our lineage. His name was Chip Gibson. They flew to Little Rock with his senior editor. We cut the deal. We had a four-year deal, five books. And I got a guy outta Chicago who was probably the most well-known intellectual property guy anywhere, and he came on board, and he negotiated the deal for us.

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SL: Smart business.

[02:35:42] GG: Well, I knew the value—I'd learned from my news directors. I wasn't that smart. Those guys that shepherded our project through—a guy named Al Tompkins, who was the news director at the NBC affiliate in Nashville, Bob Henry in Los Angeles, and a guy named Steve Sabato in Hartford, Connecticut at the CBS affiliate. Those guys carried this project, went through it. They got me into broadcasting and cable, and a guy named Bob Carroll, who is the Bible of the media industry and television. I walked in there, and they said, "We hear you've got the best product in the world," and I said, "No, sir, I don't know that. I don't know enough about television to know I've got the best one. I wanna know if you think I do." And he said, "Well, let's try it out." He looked at it. And he said, "If you'll be at NATPE next to our booth, if you'll buy a booth next to our booth, we'll introduce you to our 217 stations."

SL: [*Laughs*] We—not a problem.

[02:36:55] GG: And through broadcasting and cable, Bob Carroll in New York, we ended up on 125 television stations in the United States. And when my wife died, I died with it. And I told Allen, I said, "You know, we got a guy on board named Bill Rushdine, who is a guy with J. Walter Thompson Advertising that made Bob

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Vila and I Like Mike and Nike famous." I said, "Between the two of you, you can do this." I said, "I'm gone. I'm out. She was the only reason I was here." And we separated. And he went on, and he's done fantastic.

[02:37:46] SL: So I've missed how you got into the television business or how you got into the broadcast business. What . . .

GG: Well, the—when we first started, Randy's station—I went to Jim Pitcock and . . .

SL: Dale Nicholson.

GG: . . . talked to him about what I wanted to try to see if this guy had anything. And I said, "Can we do a test on your—on Channel 7?" And they said, "Sure. What are you gonna charge us?" I said, "Nothin'." I said, "I wanna just see what the response is." Well, they put his segments on, and within seven days we got 10,000 letters, Channel 7 got 10,000 letters, and that gave me the idea that maybe we oughta do something. Well, I was using PBS's people, AETN's people. Well, they were not always available when we wanted to shoot.

SL; Right.

[02:38:52] GG: So I decided that, after talking to Bob Doubleday, who was—who had retired with Channel 7. Dale Nicholson had taken over. We probably oughta do our own deal. So I hired a

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videographer, I went to ESPN, I got an editor. I got grips. I turned our construction office into a TV studio, and I sent a lady that was our executive producer, I sent her to Washington so we could uplink our programs in DC at a much cheaper cost than we could send 'em outta Little Rock.

SL: Okay.

[02:39:32] GG: And so we started shooting and producing segments, and we didn't have a contract with anybody. And while we were doin' it, I started flying around the country talkin' to the television stations and the directors. News directors were hard to get to, and they were short with you, they didn't give a damn about what you had. They had more than they could look after now.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And general managers were the more of the marketing people. They were very kind, but no. And so I'm not sure how I really got these people to start payin' attention to us, but I think they thought, "This stupid-talking Southern guy doesn't even know what he has and says he doesn't, and they're willing to give it to me free to find out if he's got something. What have I got to lose?" And so we had eleven stations that put it on. Well, once that started working, I bought the best Sony cameras, the best

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editing equipment. I bought the best of everything that you could buy. And we put the professionals around it, and I worked 'em twenty-four hours a day if they'd work. And that's how we got into the television side of it. And then I s—these guys that I hired on my—I convinced to come to Little Rock four times a year to advise us on our P. Allen Smith television advisory board, they told me how to shepherd and how to build this product. So it wasn't me, it was the experts that I was able to—and they all laugh about it years later. One of the guy, Al Tompkins, is head of the Brookings Institute in Florida. And he said, "I'll never forget when you came in the office, and you looked at me and said you wanted to do this, and I said, 'I got fifty tapes in there. I can't even see why I wanna work with you.'" I said, "Because they all think they have the greatest thing in the world, and I don't know if I do." [*Laughter*] He said, "That's what made me give your boy a try."

SL: Yeah.

[02:41:49] GG: And he said, "I guess I just kinda liked you." He said, "And then I didn't want you to fail 'cause I felt sorry for you." [*SL laughs*] And I said, "Well, Al, I was tryin' to fail. And the reason that I need to try to figure out how to fail is because I found out all the years in business, compliments are expensive.

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They're extremely expensive. If people will tell you the truth, they will save you a lot of money, and they will give you a good compass heading. And I figured that you guys in the b—in the local news had enough master gardeners, people that knew the truth—if Allen came on, and they squashed him, then we're done." Nobody ever did. So that's how we got into the television side of it, and it was a really, really beautiful journey, thanks to my wife, who saw in him what nobody else saw.

[02:42:45] SL: Well, what were you guys doing before P. Allen Smith?

GG: Pipeline contractor.

SL: Okay.

GG: I built pipelines. Our company built pipelines. Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas. We worked a lot for Arkansas Western—matter of fact, that's the first time I went to work for the company was building a pipeline from Fayetteville to Elkins. I had my classes in the morning my senior year, and I'd leave at twelve o'clock, get there at one o'clock, work till dark. Come home and study. I did that all my senior year. And I wanted to get my grades up so I could get in law school.

[02:43:21] SL: So you were in the engineering school.

GG: No, I was in . . .

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SL: You were in the business.

GG: . . . business.

SL: Yeah. Okay.

GG: Yeah, I was in business school. And so I was getting ready to go to law school the fall of [19]63. My father-in-law says, "You know what? We got a pretty good si—I'm workin' about 500 people here," and he said, "I got two brothers, and my wife has two brothers. Nobody wants the responsibility of this business." He said, "I'm older like your dad," because Gloria's parents and my parents were very similar. They were working the pipeline sixteen years before she was born. So they all wound up the same age, and Gloria and I both are only children. "Why don't you come here just long enough, Gaston, to find out if—who my bankers are, my bonding company is, my insurance companies are, and the people that we buy from. That way if I die here at sixty years old or sixty-one, some reason, you can help everybody liquidate it. You'll know a little something about the people." And I said, "Sure. I'll do that." So I took off—I go in and work that fall. And so when spring came, I walked in there to him, and I said, "I've got a little problem here." I said, "I found out something that I didn't know." I—he—I said, "I was gonna be a coat-and-tie person 'cause I been trying to get away

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from that cotton farm all my life.

[02:44:51] SL: Right.

GG: And I said, "But I have actually found out that I love the people, I love being close to the earth, and I love the challenge, and I'd like to give it a try." I said, "I can always go to—I got my degree. I can b—I like to take a whirl at it." And he said, "Well, let me explain something to you. You've been doin' the coat-and-tie part of this thing. If you're really interested in comin' here and tryin' this thing on, see if it fits? You're gonna be in the field for ten years. You're gonna learn how to run equipment. You're gonna learn how to deal with engineers and architects, you're gonna learn how to do things and take care of problems when you can't call anyone on the telephone and get 'em to come nurse you. If you can survive all that and get the respect of the people, then you got a 50/50 chance you may make it." [*Laughter*]

SL: He's puttin' that bar pretty high.

GG: He—it pissed me off. And I said, "I could do"—I said, "I could do this"—I said, "I can do this in three years." I said, "I can do it. I know how to work." He said, "You wanna try it?" And I said, "Yes, sir." It actually took me ten and half.

SL: He knew what he was talkin' about.

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GG: He did. But I loved it, Scott, I loved that culture. Those people are straight-up honest. They work hard. Most of 'em fought in World War II or the Korean War. Very patriotic people. Very loyal people, to their families and their country. And don't have the image out there that—they're very Christian people. All of 'em went to church. We di—never worked on Sunday. They were always in church with their families. We built this pipeline for Arkansas Western from Fayetteville to Mountain Home. And this guy named L. L. Baxter took a big risk because he was countin' on North Arkansas bein' the future of this state. And he said, "We're gonna build it before it's gonna cost us much to build it." We built that in the [19]60s and took it to Mountain Home. That's a lot of tough country . . .

SL: Yeah.

GG: . . . across there. And those—that outdoor, that culture and that competition of gettin' it done against the elements. I loved it, and I didn't realize it. I still had no farmin' in me. And I stayed there forty-two years. [02:47:26] He died in 1982, and we moved forward from there, and I finally ga—we were all into this P. Allen Smith thing till Gloria died in 2000. My last project was Har-Ber Meadows up here. Miss Jones had her man call me and ask me to come up here and build that infrastructure, that whole

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deal. I didn't know what it was. And he calls me, and he said, "Miss Jones wants you to come up here and build this thing for her because you work with the engineers up here in Fayetteville, McGoodwin William Yates. And," he said, "and a guy named Jerry Van Hoose was running this project for them." I had no idea how big that thing was.

[02:48:25] SL: Okay, now what was it?

GG: Har-Ber Meadows. That's . . .

SL: Harbor mea . . .

GG: . . .on the road to Tonitown.

SL: Yeah.

GG: That hare—that Harvey Jones' wife built.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And when I met with her, she was—and I said, "When do you want this thing built?" She said, "Fast as you can, sonny boy." She said, 'I'm ninety-two years old. I wanna see it." We got it built. And that was our, basically, our last project. But I love that type of work. And I fell into it totally by accident.

[02:49:04] SL: Well, we never really know what's going to happen until it happens, you know it?

GG: That bag of tools, remember? [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

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GG: I didn't know that was in my tool chest.

SL: Right. Right.

GG: I didn't know. But anyway, that's—and we—and that led us to the cattle ranching. We had a cattle ranch out here at Waldron, north of Waldron, Mansfield and—as a matter of fact, I sold that in 2000, after my wife died, and that is thirty-eight—I think it's thirty-eight or forty-two nautical miles north of Rich Mount. And I don't know if you've seen the movie *American Made* about Barry Seal?

SL: Don't thi . . .

GG: It's about those guys flyin' all those drugs in here from Nicaragua.

SL: Oh. Yeah.

[02:50:04] GG: Okay. They got confused . . .

SL: Tho—at—in Hot Springs and Mena?

GG: Yeah, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Yeah, Mena.

SL: Yeah.

GG: They got confused in two or three times. Those folks, those Nicaraguans would up at our airport.

SL: [*Laughs*] God.

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GG: With all kind of drugs and money in those planes. And we'd call the feds, and the feds wouldn't do anything.

SL: Really.

[02:50:24] GG: And the first guy that I ran into there was in a Bonanza. Was—all the seats were out, and he could speak very little English. He was—he thought he was at Rich Mountain, but he was—you could immediately tell what was goin' on after about three or four minutes. He had the N taken off of his identification. All private aircraft and commercial aircraft have the number N in front of their letters.

SL: Right.

GG: It separates you from military. He had—that had been marked off of his airplane with just some numbers on it.

SL: You would think that'd raise even more . . .

GG: Well . . .

SL: . . . eyebrows.

GG: But when he—what they did, I found out later, they were flyin' up the river. They would fly up the river, and then they would get on the Red River and fly the Red River as far—they were flyin' three, four hundred feet off the ground. But anyway, we ran—we sold the cattle ranch. And we got rid of that.

[02:51:35] And we were in the sanitary landfill business

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because the mafia came in to Little Rock in 1975 and tried to buy the 250 acres my father-in-law owned to build a landfill. And he saw—he said, "Okay, let me go see where your landfills are." Well, we flew to Kentucky, Elizabethtown, New Jersey, Trenton, and New York. Man. We didn't do that. And we came back and started our own landfill thinking that anybody could do better than that, and we decided we would make a model landfill. And we asked the department of pollution control, a guy named Mathis. Randall Mathis was the head of the department of pollution control. We said, "We want you to put an inspector's office right out here where we are. We wanna be checked every day. We wanna prove to this country that you can do things"—and that 250 acres was inside the city limits of Little Rock. "We wanna prove to you that you can do it right and not do what we've seen." Well, it was a tremendous success. We had the endorsement of the Environmental Protection Agency, everybody that came to look at our place. They brought the police juries in from Louisiana, they brought people from the different states to see how we were doin' this thing that nobody'd ever seen before. [02:53:03] Well, this is where David Pryor comes in. All of sudden, Subtitle D, which was a big change in the environmental deal that affected landfills. It's this thick. We couldn't figure out

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what our deal was. So I called David Pryor. And—in Washington. And I said, "David, I need your help. I don't wanna favor. I don't want you to change somethin'. I want something explained." [*Laughs*] I said, "There's a big difference." And I said, "Here's my problem," and I told him. I said, "The EPA—it's just so confusing. We are a one-horse operation here. We got one sanitary landfill, and the best way I can figure it, it's gonna cost me $25 million to comply because I'm in a rainfall area—not has anything to do with my landfill. They based all the—of it by rainfall, annual rainfall." And I said, "I don't know if that's true or not." He said, "You come on up here," and he said, "Let me see who I can get together." So he called John Paul Hammerschmidt. That's . . .

SL: Great guy.

[02:54:08] GG: He's a great guy. But there were no Republicans and Democrats that were tryin' to—I mean, everybody was honorable, we just had different way of doing things.

SL; Yeah.

GG: I mean, it was a great checks and balances in our political arena. Well, here's—John Paul comes in, David comes in, and Pryor said—he said, "Gaston," he said, "I called over at the EPA office. Their head attorney's gonna come over here and explain this

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thing to all of us so we'll know in case somebody else has this question." Well, lo and behold, here comes the head of the Environmental Protection Agency. Here he is with his two assistants, here John Paul with his assistant and his—David with his and explained it to us. We totally understood it. We went back and knew we had to sell because it was a rainfall deal and not a quality of operation. So we sold it to Browning-Ferris Industries. David Pryor made all that happen. He made it happen in one day. And the way he handled that meeting and the way that James—John Paul Hammerschmidt and David—I'll never forget what David—he said, "We Arkansans are a little bit different." He said, "If we don't understand things, we're not too proud to ask." He said, "So nobody in this room has the answer. We brought you guys in here for the answer. We don't care what the answer is. We just want the answer."

SL: Want the answer.

[02:55:44] GG: One of the best meetings I ever been in in my life. And it changed our life because it gave us a heads up about how we needed to go forward in the future. And because our landfill was clean—Browning-Ferris brought people out of CH2M Hill outta Colorado came in here and did a subterranean check on it, did everything in the world. Said, "You're right, all the

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Environmental Protection Agency reports, all the Department of Pollution Control check out, we'll buy it." They bought it from us. And I owe David Pryor that success in our life because without him that day, you can not imagine what we would have all been into tryin' to figure out the rules and regulations. But he brought the horse's mouth to us.

SL: [*Laughs*] He's a good one. He's a keeper.

GG: Yeah, he is. They don't make 'em like they used to. The—I don't care which side of the political arena you're on, the real people, the real people that made a difference in this world have not found their way to DC. They got lost somewhere in maybe Louisville or [*laughs*] . . .

[02:56:55] SL: Yeah, you know, I think David saw all that coming.

GG: I think he did, too.

SL: I think he got out right at the right time. I know everyone was disappointed that he didn't run again, but I think he saw it comin'.

GG: It's—it just—it's just—good times and bad times, they don't come to stay . . .

SL: Yeah.

GG: . . . they come to visit.

[02:57:18] SL: Well, now, did you know David at all before that?

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GG: Yeah, I knew him. I knew him when he—David—I got David—the first time I met him, he was actually, I think, in the house of representatives in Arkansas when I was the head of Blue Key. And we got him to speak at a Blue Key meeting, and I introduced him. That was the first time I'd ever really met David.

SL: Hmm. I wonder—he must've been in law school.

GG: It was nineteen—I'll tell you when. It was 1962.

SL: Kay, let me input my math to that. Yeah. I'm think I'm nine or eight years older than his oldest son, so that's about right. They were in Fayetteville.

GG: Okay. 'Cause I asked him if he would come speak to us. He said, "Do you think I'd have anything important [*SL laughs*] enough to say to get a free meal?" And I said, "David, I don't have the answer to that, but I'll tell you after you speak."

SL: [*Laughter*] He loved that.

GG: He did. He did.

SL: That hooked him in.

GG: It did, and he said, "Okay, so I have to earn my meal." I said, "You have to earn your meal." And that's when I met David.

SL: That's good.

[02:58:36] GG: And I've always thought the world of him ever since.

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But he—and by the way he gave a great talk about his roots in Camden and his background, and he said, "It all boils down to how hard you work, how much you want it, what you're willing to do to achieve it." And he said something I never heard him say again. He said, "You know, I've found in whether I'm in high school on an athletic field, or in law school, the smartest people usually know they're the smartest, and they only give you about 60 to 70 percent." He said, "If I'm down in that 50 or 60, I'm givin' 100, I'm competin' with 'em."

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

GG: That was the hit of the entire session. I never forgot that. He probably forgot it, but I never did. When you give 100, if you've only got the 60, you're right there with 'em.

SL: That's right. [*GG laughs*] I believe that.

GG: I do, too.

SL: Yeah.

GG: But he did a great talk. I enjoyed it.

[02:59:44] SL: Well, you know, you mentioned a Newton family earlier?

GG: Newton.

SL: Newton, yeah.

GG: Yeah, I'm gonna say this—in Memphis.

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SL: In Memphis.

GG: Yeah.

SL: Well, his mom's maiden name is Newton, but that's South Arkansas. That wouldn't've been up in Memphis.

GG: Yeah. Well. I know we've gotten off track, here.

SL: Not really. There is no—there are no rules here. We talk about whatever you want to talk about and for as long as you wanna talk about it.

GG: Well, the thing that I would like—the next thing I'd like to talk about is my time here at the university. I . . .

SL: Kay.

[03:00:24] GG: I feel like that the greatest benefit I had here at the university, which I carry with me every day, is I learned of the tremendous diversity of people and how they think and how they approach their rhythm of life. And it help—being an only child, you don't get to observe that. But I was able to observe so many different personalities and learned the strength and weakness of those personalities, just like my strength and weaknesses. That it made it very easy for me to connect with them professionally, work with them professionally when I did throughout—our company built 900 projects in Arkansas, and all for municipalities or pipeline companies. And there rarely was a

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town that I didn't go into that I didn't go to school with somebody. And I knew them, and they knew me. They didn't do me any favors because we knew each other. We trusted each other.

SL: Big difference.

GG: So—huge difference.

SL: Yeah.

[03:01:44] GG: They knew they could trust me, and I knew they could—and that they knew they could trust me. It helped me be successful in business. It—there were so many things that happened along the way. When you get—when you have to be paid by a city council or a water department or a utility department, and there's somebody in there for some reason that figures out a way not to pay you, that you've got to do this or they want you to do this little extra or this, that, or something else—there was always somebody there that said, "He really shouldn't be doing that. That's our job." Or, "Hey, Gaston, they got a point. You know, you probably oughta do that." It was a great balance of justice just because of this institution here. It was great to have that asset that when I went into that community, I knew that I was not rejected. I had gotten that confidence here at the university that I never really had all

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through my high school, junior high, elementary days. I got it here at the University of Arkansas, and it stuck. Because I believed people trusted me and accepted me exactly for who I was, and they didn't expect any more or any less out of me. So when I went out to put my product on the line and do my work, I knew that I was gonna be okay because I knew somebody in that town. You pre—I don't know if you understand what I'm talking a . . .

[03:03:36] SL: I do, I do. I keep thinkin' about your wife, though, too.

GG: She was the one that put it there.

SL: Yeah.

GG: She was the one . . .

SL: And you carried to it to each town . . .

GG: . . . that gave me that confidence and took me out of "I don't trust anybody" and turned a light on that's still burning today.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Still burnin'. Because of her. Without her in my life, I would've been more—much more of an introvert. Much more untrusting and never, probably, very successful. Because you gotta trust people. You gotta show people you trust 'em. And you can't be quick to judge. You got to let things happen sometimes and let

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'em play out, and then reflect on 'em rather than get wound up in the emotion of the moment. I got all that through her.

[03:04:33] SL: Well, you got it from her, but you were able to spread it out to those around you. So . . .

GG: Right.

SL: So she was with you in all your interactions. Even though she may not have been physically there, there's that confidence that . . .

GG: Yeah.

SL: . . . allowed you to give that confidence to whoever you were having to deal with in whatever town, and it reflected back and forth. Tapped.

GG: It became so refreshing that there were several contracts that we did with people that we shook hands, started the job, and the contract showed up four weeks later.

SL: There you go.

GG: It doesn't get any better than that.

SL: Yeah.

[03:05:19] GG: And I learned from my father-in-law—this was a really good lesson. As a young guy building a job, I was up here working at Winrock when Rockefeller was . . .

SL: Governor?

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GG: Yeah, and he was always improving something up there. And I found that the engineer had made a horrible mistake that had caused us to mess up, and we were having to redo it. So I went to my father-in-law, and I said, "Look, it—we didn't do this. The engineer did it. We need to make Rockefeller's manager aware of what's goin' on up here, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera." And I said, "And we could've gotten through a lot quicker if we hadn't had this problem." I said, "It's up—it's their problem." He s—[*laughs*] he said, "Son, they didn't hire us to arbitrate whose problem it was. Our job is to finish the job." He said, "Mr. Rockefeller don't care if it's our problem or the engineer's problem." He said, "All he wants is a finished job. That's all our contract calls for. We don't decide whose fault anything is." He said, "The second thing is next time we're on a job, we may have this same engineer, may be our fault." He said, "What we're gonna do is we're gonna finish this job, we're gonna make the engineer happy, and we're gonna make the owner happy, and we're gonna get the hell outta here."

SL: Get out.

GG: He said, "Don't you ever forget that."

[03:06:54] SL: Okay now, you've mentioned your father-in-law several times. And so now, tell me again what his name was?

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GG: Worth James.

SL: Worth James. And he was from . . .

GG: He was from Lucas, Arkansas. He was . . .

SL: And so now what's his story? What . . .

GG: Well, it's very interesting. He was born into a family, the James family. He had brothers. Cliff. Cliff was a mathematician. He became a teacher, then he became superintendent of schools in Mansfield, in Fort Smith. He had a young—he had a broth—older brother named H. B. James, Ben James. Brin—Ben James could do decimals to the fourteenth decimal point in his head.

SL: [*Laughs*] God.

[03:07:44] GG: He could turn things down on a lathe figuring the decimals on the mics. He already had it figured out in his head. His other brother was a—an engineer in the manufacture of airplanes. His other brother was a superintendent for us whose daughter, today, is one of the top Ph.D.s in infectious diseases that travels all over the world for the United States out of Atlanta. And Worth James was like me. He was a C student or B student, maybe an A student on occasion, but there's three things that he had. He had a work ethic, and he knew people, and he knew that his word was his bond and to see it through. He had a way of making people like him and finishing the job

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and not arguing about it, who was right and wrong. He said, "The owner always wants a finished job." He said, "It's not important we win arguments. We wanna win the job." And all those things he taught me were pro—it's like the thing I told you about the guy dad ran into. [03:09:00] We had priced out all of Rockefeller's work when they—in Little Rock, they took an old Riverdale Country Club, swapped it for a new Pleasant Valley Club, and bought 1,200 to 2,000 acres to develop a subdivision. Well, he had us do it all. He gave the job to us. Well, I'm estimating by this time.

SL: Right.

GG: Okay. He said, "Now I want you to give Rockefeller the best price that you can possibly give. I mean, I want it way cheaper than we'd bid anything." So the estimator and I come back in there, and we lay all these prices out to him. He takes—he said, "These are the best we got, fellas?" He said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Okay, I want you to take another 1.75 percent off of it." And I jumped up outta my chair, and I said, "My God, Mr. James. We've got this thing cut to the bone now." I said, "If we do it right here," I said, "Hell, Rockefeller never know about it. Why are we doin' this?" He said, "Son, 'cause I'll know about it. That's what this is about. Me. Ain't about Rockefeller. I want to

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know what I did. I ain't worried about what Rockefeller's gonna do. He's gonna pay us. I'm worried about me right now." Isn't that somethin'?

[03:10:21] SL: Yeah.

GG: So we cut the 1.7—Rockefeller never knew it. By God, Worth James knew it.

SL: But you got the job. My dad was an estimator.

GG: Was he?

SL: For Tune Construction.

GG: Really.

SL: Worked for Carl Tune.

GG: Well, you know all about what I'm talkin' about.

SL: I do. I went to a couple of bids with him. And I was fascinated by how nervous everyone was before those envelopes were opened and you know, last-minute cuts.

GG: Well, it'd be like waitin' for a baby to be born to see if it's gonna be okay.

SL: Yeah. [*GG laughs*] Yeah, but . . .

GG: It's scary.

SL: . . . you know, it'a all these—mostly all men.

GG: Yeah, and just comin' at you, and they got prices, they're givin' you prices at the last minute. Everything's changing.

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SL: Everybody's talkin' like this.

GG: Yeah. It . . .

SL: Yeah.

GG: It is.

SL: And then there's got the three guys up at the table at the front of the room.

GG: Yeah.

SL: Openin' 'em up.

GG: That's right.

SL: Readn' the numbers.

GG: Boy, you know exactly what . . .

SL: I do.

GG: . . . I'm talkin' about.

SL: I do.

[03:11:19] GG: And he said that the honor of bein' asked to do something is above any price I could give them. He said, "He's my friend, he's given us all the work here. Now he's given me a chance to screw him."" And he said, "That ain't my equation."

SL: There you go.

GG: And I learned so many of those things from him that it's not always being right that is important as being okay with you know you're right, but let's go ahead and look at it from 40,000 feet

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rather than five feet in the air. And it was always about gettin' the job finished. It was never about who was right.

SL: Well, and I like the point that you may be workin' with that guy again.

GG: Tellin' you. You know, it's—that engineer could come out here and find it—he said, "You don't think that engineer knows this?" Said, "Sure he does. And he's waitin' us—waitin' on us to drop the shoe on him. We not gonna do it."

SL: That's good stuff.

[03:12:40] GG: Well, there one other—when I got in the office, I had a responsibility. This was my first real business responsibility. I was in charge, and they were n—they were in Italy, in Rome. And it—and I had a million or a million and a half dollars worth of government bonds comin' due. And so we kept a lot of cash at that time at Worthen. And I needed to—what I wanted to do was just take those—take that cash, take those bonds, and put it back in more. And so this was in 1978 or [197]9. And the guy at Worthen in the investment department, he said, "Yes, Gibson, I gotta tell you something here that it may change your mind." He said, "The dollar on the world market is goin' to hell." He said, "I can't give you any US Treasury bonds that are backed by the United States of America anymore." He said, "If you buy

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these bonds from us," he said, "they're backed by Swiss francs." He said, "Our dollar is goin' to hell all over the world." He said, "I'm expecting the International Monetary Fund, any minute, to step in here and issue the SDRs because they're—the foreign investors are no longer have any confidence in the United States dollar." And I'm sittin' here—this is my first deal. [*SL laughs*] I [*laugh*]—and I—he's tellin' me all this, and I—and my father-in-law is in Rome. Well, I get a Western Union wire from him. "Go to Worthen Bank. They will not accept our dollars to get out of the hotel." He said, "They will only accept lira or gold." It hit that fast.

SL; Wow.

[03:14:42] GG: The Federal Reserve Index fell to ninety-four. That's where it was in 2008, okay.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Gives you an example of where that thing was. And I couldn't communicate with him, really. I—and so I called another guy that I knew that was sort of the godfather of the Jewish community and been our bonding company for a long time, and I asked him what to do, and he said, "You go ahead and do the Swiss francs." He said, "We just did that." He said, "The American dollar is in deep trouble." And nobody knew that.

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Nobody had a clue what was goin' on worldwide. And lo and behold, the thing that changed it all was Paul Volcker told Reagan—he said, "We gotta get this inflation—I gotta get the interest of the American investment back up." He said, "You cut taxes. I'm gonna raise interest rates. We're gonna get the foreign money back in this country." And it took to 1985 from the time that that happened, to get the foreign investors comin' back to the United states. But can you imagine bein' in Little Rock, Arkansas, and havin' a banker tell you, "We can't back—the US Treasury is not bein' backed with the faith of [*SL laughs*] United States government dollar. We're gonna do it with Swiss francs."

SL; Yeah. I wouldn't have known what to do.

[03:16:15] GG: I was petrified. But that's just one of the little journeys in faith . . .

SL: [*Laughter*] There you go.

GG: . . . that you went through, and that was my first experience . . .

SL: Out of the chute.

GG: . . . of bein' in charge when somebody was gone. And it really almost just gave me an ulcer.

SL: Well, you got ahold of a good guy that told you the right thing to do.

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GG: Yeah, I did. He did.

SL: Yeah.

GG: He was a—it's one of those things. I've always been pretty lucky because of people that I ha—that been around me that I could use as resources have always been great counselors to the immediate situation. That's luck, man, that's not skill. [*Laughs*] That's luck.

SL: Well, it's skill to hold onto those relationships, though.

GG: Well.

SL: The—it takes work . . .

GG: Yeah.

SL: . . . to do that.

GG: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. You gotta have that.

GG: Well . . .

[03:17:09] SL: So I'm tryin' to think. You didn't know any of your grandparents.

GG: No, they were all gone before I was born.

SL: Mom and Dad side both.

GG: Mom and Dad—my Grandfather Gibson died in [19]35, and my grandmother died in [19]38, and my other two died in [19]35 or [19]28 and [19]38. So I never knew any of 'em.

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[03:17:38] SL: So I never asked you about did you ever do any fishing or hunting growing up?

GG: Oh, li—I did it all the time.

SL: You did.

GG: Oh yeah. See, we had rice, and my dad's brothers had rice, and woods, and I grew up hunting. And we lived on Lake Chicot. I turned that into my—as a matter of fact, Dad's business clients would come to Lake Village, and I would take 'em to the best bass and crappie fishin' you can imagine. I was the guy . . .

SL: Be—you'd be guiding. [*Laughs*]

GG: I was the guide. And to this day I've never let it pass. I have a—three fellows and I have a 160-acre fishing reservoir between Stuttgart and Pine Bluff that we have a biologist, and the Game and Fish designed it for me, and have a cabin there, and I love it.

SL: So you do fishin' and duck hunting, too?

GG: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

GG: I don't kill anything that doesn't fly. I've lost that desire in my life that if it's got fur on it, I'm gonna let it go.

SL; Yeah.

GG: And but fish—and I—and there's a lot of catch and release in my

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fishing, too.

SL: Yeah, I don't keep anything I catch.

GG: Nuh-uh. No. But I, till my friend died, I used to go up on the Little Red and fish with him every October. That seemed to be the best time to really get a—if they weren't pumpin'—and get a good run at it. I love that. [03:19:13] And I've got a good friend in Idaho, Picabo, Idaho, that's got a huge cattle ranch there named Purdy. As a matter of fact, they were on the *Nimitz*. They were the business people from—they were pilots from there when we were all on the Nimitz together. And we became friends and were friends ever since. And they've got Silver Creek that runs through their place for five miles. And Mr. Purdy's best friend that fished there forever was Ernest Hemmingway.

SL: Really.

[03:19:48] GG: And as a matter of fact, Hemmingway bought the shotgun from his store the day he killed himself.

SL: Oh, no.

GG: Yeah. And it—and Bud Purdy's never gotten over that. But that whole store—if you went into their store in Picabo, Idaho, you would think that you walked into a 1940 general mercantile store.

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SL: Perfect.

GG: They still have the little brass mailboxes. They have this big old safe in there. All the cowboys that—they've got about a hundred cowboys that work for them. Four o'clock, breakfast starts. And then they got this trout fishing deal that runs Silver Creek all the way through their place. And his children and grandchildren started squabblin' over . . .

SL: Who gets what.

GG: . . . who gets what because it joins Sun Valley.

SL: Ah.

GG: Their land joins Sun Valley 'cause you can imagine the value.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Well, he—Nick is the only son that works—that'd worked with him, and he's my age, and he and I are good friends, and he runs that whole thing, and the rest of the jo—of the sisters and everything have worked it out, but the way he stopped all the squabbling—he called the Nature Conservancy, and he and Nick decided to donate five miles to the Nature Conservancy on both sides of Silver Creek. So nobody will ever come in there and build anything to invade the natural habitat of Silver Creek.

SL: That's perfect.

[03:21:26] GG: Isn't that wonderful?

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SL; Yeah. That's big.

GG: And so . . .

SL: Generous.

GG: As a matter of fact, the gifts that—I've got a cousin in Haley, which is right next to Ketchum, and that's at—in Sun Valley. Got married last summer. Well, my gift to she and her husband was two trout trips guided by the Picabo Trout Company because they control all that five miles. And so they've got a big fly-fishing deal there. And the guy that runs it for 'em was a golf pro in Boston. And he went out there one time accidentally just to fish, loved it so much he wanted a job. So Nick gives him the job. He just runs the whole operation out there now. [*Laughter*]

SL: I can understand that.

GG: He loves it. He said . . .

SL: Yeah, well, it is a great—it is a great thing.

GG: It is.

SL: It's a great career.

GG: It is. And Picabo's about the size of Jerome. And nobody in there that—I mean, it may be 100 people.

SL: That's good news.

GG: Isn't it wonderful?

SL: Yeah.

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GG: And I love to go out there and visit him, and the weather's usually really, really nice, but he raises alfalfa and cattle and horses. And all the buildings that were there a hundred years ago—he invests a whole lot in their preservation and makes sure that they are standing and they're in good shape. Mows around 'em, does all the things that you want people to do.

SL: That sounds like a good job.

GG: I've had a great diversity of journey in my life. And I met him in [19]97 when we were invited to go on the Nimitz. And his dad was on there, Bud Purdy, who died a few yeas ago at ninety-six, ninety-seven. And Nick and I and a guy from Seattle, Washington, and a friend of mine from San Diego. We spent two days and two nights out there, and it was just spectacular. And the war games and takin off and landing and watchin' all the efficiency of how they can c—make a night attack with no lights on and it just blows your mind.

[03:23:39] SL: So let's talk about the Nimitz deal. How—tell me how all that came about and . . .

GG: It was at a time when the secretary of the navy was extremely worried about Clinton's position on eliminating aircraft carriers for the future. And so what he tried to do is everybody in business that had a private airplane and a license that

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understood aviation—they started this program that they would encourage you to come be their guest for two days to see and visit with the crews, to go through the training and landing on the carriers, to see the efficiency of how they operated with 6.000 people. There were 6,011 people on the *Nimitz*. Their hospitals, their newspapers, their ho—the whole deal about how they get the airplanes up, and everybody wears a different-color vest. The ammunition is red, fuel is green, safety is white, caution is yellow. You know, everything. And these kids are out there runnin' this thing. And when I interviewed 'em on my deal that you'll see, not one of them, whether they're workin' on the engines or explaining the nuclear energy of the ship or anything ever said uh or ah or maybe. These are enlisted guys. It was impressive. And to know how much they knew and how they could tell you in good terms. And then to get to meet the actual pilots that fly and visit with them and hear their stories and where they came from and why they wanted to fly and what it meant to them. And then they had three hundred marines on there that are—marine detachments that every carrier carries in those days. They don't do that anymore. But it was a landing on that aircraft was unbelievable. It was the most scary thing I've ever done. Takin' off wasn't scary, but boy, that landing

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scared the hell outta me. And . . .

[03:25:47] SL: So were you in a military . . .

GG: Yeah.

SL: . . . plane the . . .

GG: Oh yeah. Yeah. And I have in my file—the Captain Isaac Richardson, who's the captain of that ship, sent me the recordings of my landing that said that I went from 130 miles an hour to zero in 1.8 second or two seconds [*SL laughs*], and that I—my takeoff was similar, and now that I had done that successfully, I was an honorary aviator of the carrier, and I understood the elementary things that they have to do to move those—to move our armed forces forward. It was just an unbelievable experience.

[03:26:31] SL: And so you went ahead and did some interviews while you were . . .

GG: Oh yeah.

SL: Yeah.

GG: On this tape I interviewed the top gun. There's a kid on there that was the top gun.

SL: Yeah.

GG: I interviewed him. And I interviewed the head mechanic for the F-14 and F-18 engines in the maintenance department. And I

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inview—and I interviewed the skipper. And this is something else. I don't know if it's on that video or not, but before you can be a captain of a nuclear avi—aircraft carrier, the first thing you have to do is be a navy fighter pilot on an aircraft carrier. The second thing you have to do is either to go to MIT, Vanderbilt, Stanford, or Cal Tech to compete against four other guys in nuclear energy. And then they select four out of that, and then they go back from that four selection 'cause they consider you equal out of sixteen. And they go back to your flying record. And that's the way they select the captains. And this guy was—Isaac Richardson, had gone through his training—I mean, his education, at Vanderbilt, and he was chosen to do the Nimitz. That's pretty impressive.

SL: It is.

GG: I mean, these guys are brilliant, and they also know nobody can b.s. 'em. They've made all these day and night landings, they know everything that's coming down, they know what to expect, they know how it's gonna—they've been there, they've done that, on top of that, they're off-the-charts brilliant. And I'll tell you something else they showed us when we got there. I t—it took us two years to get clearance, security clearance. We were approved in [19]90—late [19]95. We didn't get to do this till

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late [19]97. [03:28:26] They showed us from satellite a terrorist camp in Libya and Afghanistan and in Yemen. We were lookin' at these guys from that satellite as you would be looking at your video. And we watched 'em kill three or four guys just cut their heads off or shoot 'em in the head.

SL: Oh my God.

GG: And I said, "Why wouldn't you go take these damn people out?" I said, "This is evil." He said, "It's all political, Mr. Gibson." He said, "We just take orders."

SL: Yeah.

GG: He said, "But I'll tell you this," he said, "what we know now," he said, "I would say within five years they will attack our country." That was in February of 1997. 2001 happened. We saw some things from those aerials that were beyond belief.

[03:29:35] SL: So was it—did—was it stationed over in the East?

GG: Mh-hmm. They had—they were—there were—they had all these obstacle courses built up. They had—they were shooting, they were crawling, they were climbing ropes, and they were all out in the desert. I mean, it was all open, and they all were cloaked to where you couldn't tell who they were. And every once in a while, they'd jerk somebody out, put 'em down on their knees, and shoot 'em or cut their head off.

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SL: Geez.

GG: You just couldn't believe it. And Captain Richardson, he said, "These are evil, evil people," and he said, "There is a swell building over here that we sense and we know." And he said, "But we won't be doin' anything about it until it happens." He said, "But it will happen." And that was a—that was quite interesting to sit—and you'd sit there in the captain's room and watch it just like you do on that screen you've . . .

SL; Yeah.

GG: . . . got out front.

[03:30:44] SL: So they waited till after Bush was elected.

GG: It was unbelievable. And it would almost—it was almost more than you could stomach sitting there . . .

SL: Yeah, I don't know that I . . .

GG: . . . watching that.

SL: . . . I could.

GG: You just—he sensed that in a few minutes that we, you know, we weren't military. [*Laughs*] We were—and he shut it down. But . . .

SL: But it's what they have to deal with. It's what they have to live with.

GG: They—that's right. That's right. But it was quite an eye opener

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to see these different camps in these different countries.

[03:31:25] SL: Okay so, I'm tryin' to think where we are on the timeline. We got you—we didn't really say much about high school or college. You did athletics in high school.

GG: I did 'em, but I didn't do—I did not do athletics in college.

SL: Right.

GG: I . . .

SL: Did you end up running track?

GG: In high school?

SL: Yeah.

GG: Oh yeah.

SL: And you . . .

GG: Yeah, we . . .

SL: . . . kicked ass?

GG: I did it well. [*SL laughs*] We had—there were four of us that were all could run the 110 something.

SL: So you had that 440 team.

GG: We had that 440 team, and also I ran the quarter. I—Jerry Mazzanti and I were on the mile relay team. And he's another example. Jerry, way up here, played football. I never saw him make anything less than an A in chemistry that we took or calculus or geometry or trigonometry or anything. Hell, he's

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brilliant. And he fi—after he played five years with the Giants, he told 'em he was done. He got his retirement. He went to law school, became a lawyer, and he's retired as a federal judge in Southeast Arkansas. Jerry was a big guy. He's just about six three or four and weighed about 240 or 250. But I met Jerry at the Catholic school.

SL: Right.

GG: See. And hell, he wa—I thought he was six years older when I met him [*SL laughs*] 'cause he was always so big.

SL: Big, yeah.

GG: Yeah.

SL: Big guy.

GG: And his mother and father both always talked in Italian.

[03:33:02] SL: How 'bout this question? Do you member how you proposed to your first wife?

G: Oh, I do.

SL: Well, what was the scene?

GG: We were in Fayetteville in our—in my apartment. It was February 8, 1962, and it was snowing outside. And I had the ring in my pocket. And I was tryin' to remember what I had written down [*SL laughs*] to say to her.

SL: Yeah.

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GG: And I really couldn't get it out. I couldn't remember the dang thing. So I said, "I got something really, really important I need to tell you." She said, "What's that?" And I said, "I know that I wanna live the rest of my life with you. I don't know if you do with me or not." And I said, "And I wouldn't blame you if you didn't." And she stopped, and she said, "Wait a minute." [*SL laughs*] She said, "Wait a minute. I know, you're not cool." [*Laughs*] She said, "I"—she said, "What do you want?" And I dropped down on my knees, and I looked up at her, and I said, "I've always wanted to marry an angel. It's as close as I'm ever gonna get to one. Would you hurry up and say yes so" [*laughter*]—and she said—I love this—she said, "If I could have just a moment playing Miss Angel," she said, "then I'll do it." [*Laughter*] And she said yes.

[03:34:56] SL: That's good. That's good.

GG: But I forgot I—hell, I'd written all down, you know, had it memorized, and I couldn't—and then when she said, "Hey, okay, you're not cool, that's right, you're not cool.' [*Laughter*]

SL: She had heard that before.

GG: She'd heard it. [*SL laughs*] But that was a g—that was a—you know, when she said yes, that went back to the time that I was fearful of ever putting myself at risk.

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SL: Yeah, I know. Yeah.

[03:35:30] GG: And I had to go to St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And I had to meet with the priest to get the nerve to do this. Because he said, "Do you want to do it?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Why are you afraid to do it?" And I said, "It's too long a story. It's too long a story," but I said, "I don't have any confidence in myself." And she said, "Well, the worst thing she can say is no. She ain't gonna shoot you." He said, "Her—do you not have any more faith in God than that?" I said, "No, I don't think this is about God." I said, "God's worried about the faith he's got in me." [*SL laughs*] I said, "God's faith is not in question here." I said, "It's my faith." And he said, "I promise you there will be no bad answer to that question." So he didn't tell me not to be afraid. He just told me there would be no bad answer. And so—and I decided I was gonna do it. And I put it off till ten o'clock that night. I picked her up at seven to go have something to eat, and it took me three hours . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] To muster the courage.

GG: . . . to get the courage up. I was—but yeah, I think she really did, Scott, she changed my internal compass and confidence of

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all I was about in the future.

[03:37:02] SL: So did you all end up havin' some kids?

GG: We did. We had—our first child was born in October the fourteenth of 1963, a little girl. And then we had our second child, and her name was Gloria Gaye Gibson because Gloria's best friend was a girl named Gaye Godsey that she met in Atlanta. When the schools closed in Little Rock, she was a senior, and so she had—was one of those girls and guys . . .

SL: Got misplaced.

GG: . . . that had to go somewhere to graduate.

SL: Yeah.

GG: So her parents had friends in Atlanta. She graduated in Atlanta. Gaye Godsey was her friend, and so she named—we called her Gigi, Gloria Gaye Gibson. And my grandson—my son was born in August 24 of 1966. His name is Worth. Worth James Gibson. And he is—and he grew up doin' all the things, the sports, the whole thing. My daughter did, too. She was—and she went to St. Mary's school. She went to Anthony's school. But she wound up going to finishing school in Pottersville, New Jersey, is where she graduated from.

SL: Yeah.

[03:38:27] GG: Okay. It was a place called Purnell. And then she

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started to college in—on the North Shore in Massachusetts called Endicott, and the first year she was there, she started bleeding, and it turns out that she had a premature ulcerative colitis problem.

SL: Oh my God.

GG: That she still deals with today. I mean, it took a toll on her life, but it—I got her home from school, flew up to get her, and th—she took three pints of blood by the time we got her back to Little Rock.

SL: That's serious.

GG: That's real serious, and she's had to deal with that all her life. She never married. And my son married, and have two children. He named his son Worth James Gibson Jr., and the daughter is Haven. My grandson just graduated last semester from UA agri business. And my granddaughter is in school here, and she went into her junior year. So we have a long legacy of—Worth was here in Fayetteville, as was my wife and four of my cousins. So we've—we have a long legacy of experience and love for the university. [03:39:54] But Worth today is a investment banker. He and another fellow have a company called Forest Hill Capital, and they're located in Little Rock, but he travels a lot to Boston, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and their specialty are

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regional banks. That's what they do. They invest in regional banks that are—and they've really been successful at it. Of the 4,000 regional banks, they picked out thirty-three of 'em and formed a group and a fund. And he has really enjoyed this. He worked for Stephens the first ten years. Witt Stephens in Little Rock.

SL: Yeah.

[03:40:38] GG: And the thing that really got him launched is nobody wanted to cover Italy, Israel, Switzerland, Austria. And I said, "Go for it, Son. You'll meet—this is gonna be a global world. You go out there and meet all these people, and you find out what it's like to deal with people who's got a totally different background than you do." So he winds up in Australia, he wi—anyway, he got fantastic experience and made unbelievable contacts all over the world because he didn't have any competition. Nobody else wanted to get on a airplane and fly.

SL; That's strange.

GG: Isn't it?

SL: It is strange.

GG: They wanted to stay at home.

SL: I would think that'd be a golden opportunity for anybody . . .

GG: So . . .

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SL: . . . got offered that.

[03:41:30] GG: He got—he spent a majority of his time in Austria and Italy and Switzerland, Israel, and Australia.

SL: That all sounds beautiful to me.

GG: Aw, hell, I thought it was, too.

SL: Yeah.

GG: But he made contacts that he's dealin' with today. And course, they go off to different companies. And you know, it's—and he's got a network of people now. He goes to New York about once a month or at least once every two months into Boston. And that's where they're mainly focused now. And they also deal with universities. They do a lot of foundation work with universities and endowments for the product that they have. So he meets with Duke, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Northwestern, all these different places. And he's sort of the guy that makes sure that management and everybody is following what they call the right recipe of growth and serving a certain area, and making sure—it's all about the management, it's not about the name of the company. [*Laughs*] And he makes sure that they follow the management. That's where they go once they figure out who the management is.

[03:42:56] SL: So you were saying that they work mostly with

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regional banks?

GG: Yeah. They don't do any of the big banks. In other words, they don't do Citibank, Chase. What they're do—what they do is like a Bank of the Ozarks?

SL: Yeah.

GG: That's a regional bank. Bancorp South is a regional bank. Bank of California. These different banks that are located in certain strategic, growing, prosperous areas that have good management. And there are a lot of banks in those areas that have bad management, but they're in good areas. And what they do is try to sort out who the magic is. And that's sort of Worth's job is goin' in there and assessing the management all the time and making sure that they're all on the same page about what their mission is, what they're tryin' to accomplish and that they're tryin' to grow a bank that grows for the community and not grows for—it's not as much for the shareholder as it is for the overall community 'cause if it's for the overall community, the shareholders are in good shape.

SL: Yeah.

[03:44:11] GG: Some people get it backwards.

SL: Right.

GG: Some people tryin' to buy and sell. And they try to make sure

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that that's not in their portfolio. And if they find that there one is, they just short that stock.

SL: Yeah.

GG: So he's been pretty successful doin' that. He had no interest—that's another thing that changed my mission. I had nobody to pick up the farms.

SL: Yeah.

GG: The construction company, the ranch, the landfills, all the things that we did. The landfill wouldn't be included in that because we got out of that over environmental issues, but all the other things were—he had no interest in that, and he had worked with me, but he just—that wasn't his niche. Now his—my grandson? He's a different breed of cat. He's more like me. If he'd been around when I had the construction business, he would've been heir apparent. Because he likes that outside . . .

SL: Right.

GG: . . . he likes the work. But I wound up—our construction office covered eight or nine acres that joined UALR. And we wound up basically sellin' it to 'em for a song so they could develop it into expanding their university.

[03:45:32] SL: So what're you doin' now?

GG: Oh. I travel a little. Not much. I play a lot of golf now that I

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never got to play 'cause I never had time for it until I retired.

SL: Right.

GG: And there're four guys, basically, that play. We all live—three of us live within three houses of each other on the same street. We all went to university here. We all graduated. And one of the guys was on the golf team. One of the guys was on the baseball team. And I was just in school. [*SL laughs*] But we just—it's been a lot of fun to have that where we can do—you know, we have eight or ten guys in the group, so we always have a foursome, but our core foursome is these three guys that live next door to each other plus the one other guy. And we play golf a lot. I traveled out to California. I played in ten Buick Invitational Pro-Ams with my good friend in California who was the head of the charitable Century Club. And they have a great event out there. They call it the Farmers now, but I'd go out there every year for ten years. And it was quite expensive to play in, but all the money went to a Monarch School there that picked kids up off the street that were usually Mexican children, took 'em into this home. They had a one-through-twelve grade for 'em. They have teachers and counselors on campus where they can all stay. And they graduate 'em. And that money from that Buick invitational raises them from about $2 million to

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$3 million a year. And . . .

SL: Makes a difference.

[03:47:41] GG: Oh, it's powerful. It is so powerful. And then they have auctions here at the deal in addition to that. So I participated in that in ten years and played with some really, really neat guys. One of 'em that's on the golf channel now, a guy named Brandel Chamblee. He's a big commentator. And then when Padraig Harrington won the British Open twice and the PGA—we played with him the first tournament the following year. He was delightful. He was funny as heck [*SL laughs*], and he said, "Can you imagine an Irishman that doesn't drink?" [*Laughter*] And he doesn't. He doesn't. And but it was a great experience. And also, you have military appreciation day. A portion of the money goes to fallen military people. But they honor the military, and they have a big deal for them, and they have a big deal for the families of the participants in the golf tournament and—the wives and the children. And I did it ten straight years. Loved it. We just had a big time. Got to meet most all the pros. I volunteered in 2008 for the U.S. Open. And because I could, at the time, still hear good, they had me meeting all the players as they would come in to register at the tournament, and I would tell them where they're gonna tee off,

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where they go to register, and how we will get them or their families from one hotel to the other, et cetera. I had more fun. I met every one of those pros. And my name at first was Hey. [*SL laughs*] And when I left, you know what they called me? Arkansas.

SL: Arkansas. [*Laughter*] There you go.

GG: Called me Arkansas. Say, "We're lookin' for Arkansas." I say, "You got him."

SL: There you are. Here I am.

[03:49:46] GG: But they love the Razorbacks. Everybody that was either form Europe—Trevor Emmelman, a guy from South Africa. He said—I had my—I had a little pin on the side of my little uniform deal I was wearin', and he said, "What is that?" And I said, "That's an evil, mean, wicked Arkansas Razorback." He said, "You're a hog?" I said, "I'm a hog." [*Laughter*]

SL: Woo, pig.

GG: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And I always wore my Razorback cap when I played in the tournament, and I had a lot of "Go, Hogs" and "Woo, pig, sooies" at Sandy and Torrey Pines. It was a lot of fun.

[03:50:32] SL: You know, earlier we were talking about—you were

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talking about playing golf with John Lewis. And John, of course, built this room that we're in now. It wasn't quite like this, but we're in his vault. How did you come to know John Lewis? I mean, I'm—if you can talk about John Lewis a little bit. I don't have a lot of interviews where people talk about John.

GG: I got to know John through the fraternity. He pledged Sigma Nu.

SL: Okay.

GG: And that was my first introduction to him. And but I didn't have much personal dealings with him except casually. But I followed him along the way, and I would visit with him on occasion because I felt like he was always such an entrepreneurial person. His vibes were always comfortable to me. Okay?

SL: Yeah.

GG: So I connected with him. And I would always ask him about his bank. And I've told him many times about that I loved to go in the old bank 'cause it reminded me of years ago going into a bank.

SL: Yep.

GG: The facade on the outside, the whole deal. I said, "You know, somebody is keepin' the history alive." And so when he started that bank, I put money in it, and I decided that I would just do

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what I could do to help him. And we had conversations on occasion and a lot like we're doin' today. And we just got to know each other to the point that when Worth was in college and he was in business school, I asked him if he could work him as a teller because I said, "I think that he needs to learn what the front lines are like."

SL: Yeah.

[03:52:21] GG: And he did. Worth worked over there for two years, two different years, as a teller for John. And John not only took the time to hire him, he took the time to teach him. It was really nice. And so as far as knowing a lot of depth about John, I rarely had any social meetings with John Lewis. Our meetings were more extemporaneous. And a sudden lunch or a sudden coffee or something like that. But I always liked that guy immensely. And he was a good citizen.

[03:53:00] SL: Yeah. I think some folks referred to him as Mr. Fayetteville. He was just really Fayetteville centric.

GG: Yep. He was close to the earth in Fayetteville. Right down here.

SL: Yep.

GG: I used to call him the Square, not for the reason you think [*SL laughs*], but the Square up here.

SL: Yeah.

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GG: I said, "You are the Square, John."

SL: Yeah, you know.

GG: "You're the Square."

SL: There is that.

GG: Yes, sir.

[03:53:30] SL: 'Cause the Square has gone—it was up, then it was down, and now it's back up.

GG: Yep. But it's . . .

SL: I think he had a lot to do with lettin' it survive, making it survive.

GG: Well, he just—he was always extremely nice to me, and if I would go in—if I would be in Fayetteville, I'd stop by. Wouldn't have an appointment with him, and I'd ask his secretary if he's busy, and he's—he said, "Well, he is right now." I just said, "Well, tell him that I came by, and I'll see him the next time." And he finally got to where he'd tell his secretary, say, "If he comes by, unless I'm in a real important meeting," he said, "let me know, and I'm gonna say hi to him." So it was never big buddies.

SL; Right.

GG: It was just very congenial.

[03:54:22] SL: Well, sounds like you admired what he was doing.

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He prob . . .

GG: I did.

SL: . . . probably admired what you were doin'.

GG: I thought that he—I told him once. I said, "John, if I was in business and I had to have a partner, I wouldn't be afraid to have you." I said, "You're a good lifter." [*Laughter*]

SL; Yeah. He is. He was.

GG: He's a good lifter.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

[03:54:48] GG: Yes, he is. But I—in the autumn of my years, I have finally sold our family farm that had been in our family for a hundred years, 117. And I sold it to a wonderful family that came with me seven years ago and—Christian family, loving, honorable family. And I watched 'em, and I watched the fa—I watched the wife and the children and how everybody acted and how they took care of the farm because all we all really are is stewards.

SL: That's right.

GG: That's all we are. And it's just hard to find somebody—selling is okay, but selling to another good steward is mandatory. And I know that land will be embraced, loved for, and cared for in every way and not abused. And it gives you a good feelin'.

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[03:55:52] SL: I forget what passage it is in the Bible, but it likens the earth to a garment, to cloth or to a coat that will wear out.

GG: That's right.

SL: If you don't take care of it.

GG: Gotta take care of it.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And I felt so—his son is in business with him. He graduated with an agri degree from University of Arkansas at Monticello. His dad did the same thing there. His dad's forty-nine. And they are top-notch, state-of-the-art farmers. And when he wanted to interview me for the job he wan—he said, "I'll be—I'll come to Little Rock, and I'll visit with you," and I said, "No, I wanna come to your house. I come down to your place." He said, "Well, I'm the one that wants to go." I said, "That's all right, I—that's my home down there. I'll drive that area." What I really wanted to see is how did he take care of his home . . .

SL: That's right.

GG: . . . and his company and his business and his shop and his equipment. That's what I really wanted to see.

SL: Well, of course.

GG: It was impeccable.

SL; Ah.

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[03:57:00] GG: Impeccable. And I learned that from my father-in-law. When we were hiring lowboy truck drivers when we had a big job in Texas, we were gonna be haulin' every day for a year or two. And we had all these applications in there and all these people were with all these recommendations. You know how he hired the two drivers? He never read an application. Every time they would come in, he'd go out and look in their truck. And he finally found two of 'em that kept a neat truck. And he said, "Guys," he said, "if that guy can take care of his stuff, he'll take care of our stuff." [*Laughter*]

SL: Man, you've been surrounded by sage advice all your life, hadn't you?

GG: I have been lucky!

SL: You married into it as well.

GG: I did.

SL: You had a house full, and then you married into another houseful.

GG: That is well put. I mean, that's the way I feel. I just been so damn lucky. And a lot of people think that I'm a lot smarter than I really am. [*SL laughs*] And they're fooled by the success that I have, and they don't realize that my success, probably 90 percent of it, is because of somebody else, and that I had the

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deal—I had the knowledge like old—like we said, when you got a good deal, it's more important to know it. And I had a good deal, and I was blessed to be able to know it. But I'm way overrated in my brightness. And but way underrated in my luck.

[03:58:32] SL: [*Laughs*] I think you probably gotten some savvy.

GG: Oh, I have.

SL: Yeah.

GG: But boy, I tell you what, I was lucky to get it.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Lucky to get it. And then next thing you have to do, Scott, is once you hear it, you gotta let it register, record, and value it. Because it—lot of people givin' out good advice all the time. It goes into the air . . .

SL: Right.

GG: . . . like dust.

SL: Right. You don't hold it.

GG: Nobody's there to receive it. I was just blessed to be a good listener.

[Recording stopped]

[03:59:10] SL: Gaston, we're gonna do our third segment, here, and I feel like we've done a pretty good job of getting your earliest stuff and some of your career stuff, and I feel like I know your

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mom and dad, and I really appreciate your first wife, Gloria. I know a little bit about your kids and how they've got the hunger for life that you do. And I just—but there's another part, there's another chapter in your life that we haven't really even touched on, and that's your second marriage and how that came about and who this person is and what it is that you guys are doing now with your life, the present. So why don't we just kinda dive in and—first of all, what is your wife's name, and how did you guys meet?

[04:00:13] GG: My wife's name is Julia Ann Gantt.

SL: Okay.

GG: And her name—previous name, last name, was Blackshaw. She was married to a fellow in Atlanta for almost twenty years. And he had two affairs on her.

SL: Oh my gosh.

GG: And so anyway, they wind up divorced. And her mother was living in Little Rock. She is originally from Magnolia, Arkansas.

SL: Okay.

GG: She started out at Stephens as a freshman, came to the University of Arkansas, graduated from the University of Arkansas with her undergraduate degree—I believe was in psychology, and then she went to SMU and got her master's.

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And she met this guy that was workin' in Atlanta. Anyway, they had two children, and she was living in Atlanta, and they got a divorce. [04:01:20] Well, her mother and my mother lived together in a retirement village.

SL: Okay.

GG: And so the other part of that is her mother married one of my dad's best friends.

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh, it's gettin' thicker now.

GG: It's ge—I'm telln' you, it's crazy. And his wife died when I was in college here. His—I mean, let me get straight on this now. The husband of Ann's mother's wife died in a car wreck on the Pig Trail coming up here to visit her daughter, who's married to Winston Sloan here in . . .

SL: I know Winston from—used to work for Hayden McIlroy, right?

GG: Yep.

SL: Yeah.

[04:02:17] GG: Well, his da—Ann's mother married Sam Bowman from McGehee. Dad banked with Sam. They were friends forever. And when I married Gloria and came to Little Rock to get an apartment in 1963, there were no apartments. And the only thing—there were really no places to live. And the only option I had was a brand-new home that cost a whopping

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$27,000. And I had no money, and so my father-in-law and my dad said, "Oh, son, don't worry about it, we'll help you." And I said, "Aw, no, I'm gonna do this on my own." Well, I couldn't. It's impossible. And so I realized that I had misspoken to my dad and to my . . .

SL: Father-in-law.

GG: . . . father-in-law. But I said, "We're gonna have to find someplace to live because I'm not gonna make my dad put this money up. Here I am a young kid, and I'm already in debt to my mom and dad and to my in-laws and everybody. They been takin' care of me all of my life."

SL: Right.

GG: Well, dad told Sam Bowman about it. Who's Ann's stepfather. He calls me, and he said, "I understand you need a banker." And I said, "You been talkin' to Dad," and he said, "Yeah." [*SL laughs*] And he s—I said—he said, "Well, let me point something out to you." Said, "He was already explaining to me you don't have any assets." [*SL laughs*] He said, "So I cannot make you a bank loan." He said, "Why don't I just give you $5,000, and then you can pay me back when I can?" And I said, "Oh, Mr. Bowman." He said, "Son," he said, "that's okay." He said, "i can't do that to my depositors in my bank. I just—that'd be bad

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press. But I can do what I want to with my own money." He said, "I'm gonna put you a $5,000 check in the mail." And he did. And I bought that $28.000 house. And I worked my tail off extra. And I paid Mr. Bowman back in five years.

[04:04:43] SL: That's big.

GG: It was, but I paid him back. So Ann's mother—her first husband died when Ann was two years old of a heart attack.

SL: Oh!

GG: He had just gotten back from—he was in the Second World War, and he stayed on with the Philippines with MacArthur to help try to get some things straightened out, and he came back, he had malaria. Anyway, he dies of a heart attack, and Ann's two years old. So from 1952 to 1976, in comes Sam Bowman. And they get married. And so Mother and Sam are friends. And Mother and Ann's mother are friends 'cause they're all livin' there together at the retirement village. I'm having my mother's ninety-fifth birthday party at the Little Rock Country Club.

SL: Kay.

GG: And Mother had the list—they—all her friends and family. And she invited, of course, Mary Ann Bowman. And she also said, "Her daughter is gonna be with her, Gaston, because she is moving to Little Rock. Her divorce is final. She's moving to

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Little Rock, and I want her to come, so please add her to the list so they'll have food." Anyway, I did. And my mother introduced me to her, to Ann. And anyway, I never thought anything about it. I'm sitting here and all I can see is red hair, and my wife, all I can see is her face. I don't think about anything. [04:06:35] And time goes by, and time goes by, and lo and behold, I'm driving by in my neighborhood one day, and I look over there, and I see Ann standing out in front of a house on the next street over. And I stopped, and I said, "What are you doin' there?" [*SL laughs*] And she said, "I just bought this house." She said, "This—I—that's where—this is where I'm gonna live." Hell, we were almost neighbors. And so as time went by, she had a birthday party for her mother, and I went to that birthday party, and then Mom said, "Look. [*SL laughs*] I don't"—she had developed bladder cancer. She had never been sick in her life.

SL: Oh.

GG: And she said, "I've chosen not to have any treatment, Son, and I've chosen to do"—he said—she said, "I got a good draw from God. I'm ninety-six years old, I been healthy all my life. I'm gonna die, Son, with my hair and my dignity." [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

[04:07:44] GG: And she said, "So your mother needs to know on her

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exit that she can tell your father that you're in good hands down here."

SL: Hmm.

GG: She said, "It wouldn't hurt my feelin's at all if you would take care of Ann so I know she's gonna take care of you." And that's how it started. That's how the whole thing started, and then a year and a half later—Mother died in [20]01. And then in [20]02, June of [20]02, we got married. And Ann had two children, and they were both in boarding school. One was sixteen, and one was eighteen. I didn't know either one of 'em at all except just had met 'em. And Ann's husband had married this girl. And I began to realize that I was in a league way over my head 'cause I was not prepared for this kind of warfare with children that had figured out how to manipulate their father when they were there and manipulate their mother when they were at our place. And I saw this tug of war with these children goin' on with the two parents. [04:09:08] So I called everyone in one night, Ann and the two children, and I said, "Look, I'm the odd man out in this thing, but we're gonna have some rules here." I said, "I'm here to take care of your mother in sickness and in health because I made a promise to do it." And I said, "But I'm not here to take care of either one of you in sickness

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and health, but I am responsible for guiding and directing you in life in the right direction." I said, 'I'm not gonna be your friend, and I'm not gonna listen to the BS you put out when you're here, and I know what you're doin' at the other end of the arena in Atlanta." I said, "I do not wanna be your friend, but I want you to respect me when you get old enough to have children." You're gonna be disciplined here, and you're gonna live in structure." And I said, "If you can't do that, you need to go live with your father. But I'm not tryin' to win your friendship and don't intend to ever try to win it. But I wanna win your future. That's what I'm in it for." [04:10:13] They hated me. Oh, you can't imagine. And they whined to their mother. But the good news is, they were both good kids. And as they grew older and they looked at—compare—they—raised in Atlanta, now. They're Georgia Bulldogs. After I brought 'em to the university a few times, we'd come up here to ball games, we done—they both decided they wanna go to the University of Arkansas. You've got an alum—now Jordan didn't graduate here, but Darrah graduated here. She married a young man from North Little Rock that went to Catholic High School. They have a child—they have one child. She's ten years old. He graduated at the top of his class in business school. Graduated at the top of his class

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with his master's program. He took the CPA exam, took 'em—all of 'em. Scored highest of anybody on 'em to the point that Deloitte Touche hired him at their office in Tulsa. And the Tulsa legislature realized that they had a bird nest on the ground about promoting people from Oklahoma, thinking that he had graduated from either Oklahoma State, Tulsa, or . . .

[04:11:46] SL: Or the u . . .

GG: . . . or the University of Oklahoma. It was not until the legislature welcomed the parents and the child that they realized that he was a University of Arkansas [*SL laughs*] graduate. But he worked over there for nine years. Eight years. And became the manager of the Tulsa office. And then Walmart hired him away last month. And he's comin' to . . .

SL: Bentonville.

GG: . . . Walmart headquarters to run their accounting deal.

SL: That's big duel.

GG: And they both are avid Razorback fans. They're avid—they love Arkansas. And it's a beautiful story. They both have children. And they both come to me now and tell me that I was the only thing absolute in their life when everything else was relative and that they didn't like my message, but they knew what it was. [*Laughter*]

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[04:12:45] SL: They saw the deal.

GG: They saw the deal.

SL: And it was a good one.

GG: And so Ann has been tickled about their choosing to live in Little Rock. Ann's son married a girl that went to SMU that lived right behind us, and they never met in Little Rock. He's at Fayetteville and at Georgia, and then she's at Little Rock and Dallas. And they wound up meeting each other—he's working in Dallas. They get married. They have two children, and they located in Little Rock, and they live a half a mile from our house. So Ann's got two grandchildren, seven and six, Irish twins . . .

SL: Oh.

GG: . . . right behind us. And so it's been a really, really wonderful journey, and Ann is a lovely, lovely lady. She's a beautiful lady. She had no father growing up, and so she never understood some of the things that I was trying to teach her children because she had not been through that.

SL: Right.

GG: And so she—when she finally saw that what their life needed was somebody that would stand to them and not try to be their friend, she began to get it. And Darrah got so mad at me she was gonna leave the university. And she changed her mind.

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And that's when she met Eric, the guy she married. And so we've had a wonderful marriage. It's been, as any other marriage, there are ups and downs of meshing families 'cause my children are in their mid-fifties, and her children are in their mid-thirties. So it's—we're not trying to integrate the families, we just want to be sure that the families know each other, enjoy each other, and can share with each other. [04:14:46] And it's been a really, really blessing that I could find two people. They're totally—Gloria and Ann are different than daylight and dark. They're totally different people. But the good news is is that we're happy. And we have gotten all of our kinks worked out with her children stable, and they're all in Arkansas. I mean, things are just as good as they can get as far as Ann's concerned. And she said, "You know, if I hadn't married you, there's no tellin' where the children would be, where the grandchildren would be." And she said, "I wanna thank you for bein' there for us." And I said, "Well, you know what, that's always a two-way street." I said, "I learned a lot from you and your children, but I will tell you this: children never change. That's why I knew what they were gonna do before you did." [04:15:50] And the most memorable moment I had here in Fayetteville when they were both up here—I took 'em to the

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steak place here, what's that . . .

SL; Herman's?

GG: Yeah. And so there were five boys, and then there were—all boys that I—plus Darrah. And there was another table of nothing but girls. And one of the boys was tryin' every way in the world to show one of the girls that he was attracted to her. And he put his hat on backwards, and he strutted around, you know, kinda walked and look over at her and cock his shoulders. [*SL laughs*] And I watch that for about thirty minutes and I—his name's Mueller. I said, "Mueller, come over here, I wanna share something with you." I said, "I got the best line in the world that you need to learn to attract that girl to you, and she'll do it in a minute." He said, "You know how to do that?" And I said, "I'm skilled at it." [*SL laughs*] He said, "What do I do?" And I said, "Well, the first thing you do is you turn your cap around and put it on the right way. The second thing you do is you walk over there to that table right where she is, stand up, look her right in the eye, put your hand out [*laughs*], and say, 'Hello, my name's Mueller. What is your name?'" He said, "That's it?" I said, "That's it." I said, "You're showin' her respect. You hadn't tried to strut in there like a jazz band." I said, "You got every chan—and you got your hat on right. You're showing all the

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courtesy that a female's entitled to if she feels respected by you, rather than being a thing to you." He said, "I don't believe that'll work, Mr. Gibson." I said, "I tell you what. See that $20 bill right there? It's yours if that doesn't work with that girl.' [04:17:58] Boy, he jumped up from the table, he goes over there and turns that cap around. He [*laughs*]—he said—he was so into getting the twenty that he almost went—overdid it. He said, 'Hey" he said, "Hi," and puts his hat on again. He said, "My name's Mueller, Mueller Johnson. What's your name?" and she was in such shock that she couldn't even think of her own name. And finally she told him. And then he comes runnin' back over to my table. He said, "What do I do next?" I said, "Well, tell her you—it was nice to have met her and leave." [*Laughter*] He wound up dating, they wound up going together, and it was a—they—but it's just showing a common courtesy that none of these kids understand.

SL: There is that. There is a generational difference.

[04:18:58] GG: It is a total difference that—he—first thing he said, he said, "That ain't cool, Mr. Gibson. That is not cool." And I said, "You don't know the girls." I said, "Girls, I don't think are lookin' for cool. They're looking for manners. They're looking for respect. They're not lookin' for somebody to kick cans and

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look at you like a car. Treat you like a"—I said, "Just do it." And he—and you know what, I think it took with Mueller because he changed his attitude. I never saw him wear his hat backwards again. But those kind of things.

SL: It's the little stuff.

GG: It's so little.

SL: It's so little, but it makes a big difference in the path.

[04:19:43] GG: It does, and then the other thing that I had to tell the—I was sitting there at the Kappa Sigma house with all these young dads, and I began to hear these stories. "Well, yeah, I can't believe my son wrecked his brand-new Tahoe and god dang, cost me $8.000," and this other one said, "Well, hell, that's nothin'," he said, "Mine's got a BMW, and he wrapped it around a pole over here on Sequoyah," and so on so. And they're on and on and on and on. And when they got to me, said, "Well, is your grandson here?" And I said, "No, my stepson's here." He said, "Well, what's your story?" And I told this one guy—I said, "Son, I don't know if you guys realize it or not, but you are using your children as pawns to brag on your well being financially." I said, "In my eyes, that's disgraceful."

SL: Wow.

[04:20:48] GG: And it went totally quiet.

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SL: You bet it did. [*Laughs*]

GG: I said, "I never use my children to brag on my success. I always figured that my success would define itself. But your children are worth way more than braggin' on them about what you've done so you can exploit their future and their right from wrong." They all got up. Nobody said a thing to me, and walked away from the table.

SL: Good.

GG: But that's what they were doin'.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And they thought—I'm sure they thought, "That old s.o.b. is an a-hole." But they needed it. I heard that for an hour listening to them brag on each other about their wealth and their well being through their children's misfortune. Isn't that awful?

SL: Complaining about how much money they were costing them.

GG: Yeah. That's the way they were tellin' everybody how . . .

SL: Talking about themselves.

GG: . . . well off they are.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Yeah. They were toutin' their own horn at the expense of their own children. I thought, "Boy, I wouldn't be in this damn fraternity. I would"—you know, I've gotten past all that. I

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probably wouldn't even be in a fraternity if I ever came back now because it's not the same.

[04:22:06] SL: It's not the same.

GG: It's not the same. It's over. When I was raising money for Sigma Nu, I told Dave Gearhart, I said, "If you'll—Dave, if you will let me do this thing the way I want to, I'll work for Sigma Nu for free." I said, "The fund-raisers want 35 percent, minimum 25 percent of the money they raise." I said, "I'll go out here, and I'll try to raise $3.5 million for Sigma Nu." He said, 'Okay, that's a deal." And I said, "But here's what I want. I'm gonna pay for my own plane rides. I'm gonna pay for everything myself. But I want a secretary in John Tolleson's office that I can report to what I'm doin' and they'll do all my paperwork." And he said, "Okay," said, "I'll tell you how let's get started." He said, "Let's go see Don Tyson first, and we'll get a lead gift." And I said, "No, I don't wanna do that. I don't wanna get a lead gift from Don Tyson." He said, "Well, how are you gonna get started?' I said, "I'm gonna give the lead gift 'cause I'm doin' it. I'm gonna set the bar." And I said, "I want Tyson to be Hopalong Cassidy. When we get to a certain point, I want him to know that we've either got a good project or we don't. And I want him to be the clean-up hitter. I don't wanna use and abuse

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his privilege in the beginning." Well, I had he and John White to take on about that, but anyway, they finally decided that they would accept not goin' to Tyson first. So I went around this country and contacted 388 Sigma Nus. And they were everywhere from New York to Virginia, surgeons, doctors, lawyers, real estate people. And we were part of the university's 21st century deal, too.

[04:23:55] SL: Yeah.

GG: And I told 'em there was a tax deductible. I said, "We're under the auspices of the university. We got a chance this time." "Well, how much do you want from me?" I said, "The university has allowed me not to have a number on you." I said, "I don't know what your health is, I don't know what your finances are or whether you're in a divorce or not. I don't know if you got handicapped children. I don't know if you're takin' care of your mom and dad. This is all up to you. So I will never, ever ask you for a certain amount of money. But what I will ask you to do is to send your contribution in if you believe in what we're doing, and I will be glad to show you the others that have given, and I will be glad to show you what I've given if you promise not to tell anybody." And that was the deal. [04:24:43] I raised—I didn't. John Tolleson and I did. John helped me. Between John

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and I, we raised $2.6 million in about a year and a half. I called Don Tyson, and I said, "I'm ready for you." He said, "You are?" I said, "Yeah," and I said, "Here's the deal. Dave Gearhart's given me permission that if I can't raise this money that everybody can have their money back, or they can decide to donate it to the Campaign for the 21st Century. And I said, "I've got 388 names here, where they're living, what their initiation numbers were, but I ain't gonna tell you, Don, what they gave. Nobody knows. And I want you to look at it, see if you buy into it." So I go over, met him at his office. He looked through there. He said, "What'd you give?" And I said, "I'll tell you after this thing's over. I'll tell you after you tell me what I give, after what you give." He read down the names, looked at all this. He said, "Tamo Clemens." He said, "Tamo Clemens? From Pine Bluff?" I said, "Yes." He said, "He was my hero." He said, "Clemens was in the Second World War. I was in his pledge cla—after the war was over, he came back and got his degree, and I was in his pledge class at Sigma Nu." I said, "He told me that. And he told me you were gonna be tough.' [*SL laughs*] And he said, "Well, how much do you lack?" I said, "I need a million four-hundred and eighty thousand dollars." He said, "Well, why don't I just give you a million six?" And we were

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done.

[04:26:36] SL: [*Laughs*] He's generous guy. He's a lot like you.

GG: He's a—that's a high compliment.

SL: There's so much that people don't know what he's done.

GG: Oh. I—he—I took him a gift that he couldn't buy that I put together and wrote him a poem that I put together. And when Karen, his secretary—I said, "I got a gift for him today." She said, "Oh, thank you, Mr. Gibson," he said, "but in all honesty," said, "Mr. Tyson has got so many of these gifts, I can't tell you. I got a closet full of 'em over there, and I don't want it to hurt your feelin's if you come back in here and it's not up." I said, "It won't hurt my feeliin's, but I know I did it. That's what's important to me." Well, anyway, what I did was I gave him a photo of Old Main with those beautiful trees, and I wrote a poem namin' him the tall oak tree. And I can't remember how it goes, but anyway, ol' Tyson got tears in his eyes when he read it. And didn't say a thing to me. He didn't say much.

SL: Yeah.

[04:27:54] GG: He wasn't a man said much. And he said, "Who wrote this poem?" And I said, "Well, I ain't tellin' you till you tell me whether you like it or not because [*SL laughs*] if you don't like it, I'm not takin' credit for it." He said, "I like this poem."

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And I said, "Well, I'm glad you do." I said, "I wrote that, Don." I said, "I had some help, though." He said, "Who helped you?" And he laughed. And he said, "Karen, you come in here, we're gonna hang this up on the wall." And by God, he did. And we became—I knew Don. But we became what I would call three-to-five-minute friends because that's all the conversation that ever existed between us when our ties passed.

SL: Right.

[04:28:47] GG: But he called me one time on a phone that had unknown on it.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And I don't answer unknown.

SL: Right.

GG: So . . .

SL: I get those sometimes, too.

GG: And so I—I'm at the house—no, I'm driving, and this cell phone comes in and says Benton, Arkansas. And I know—and I have some people that work with me in Benton so I answered the phone. He said, "G-D," he said, "Gaston Gibson," he says, "Don Tyson. I been tryin' to get ahold of you. You don't ever answer your phone." I said, "Don, I didn't know you were callin'." I said, "I'm really sorry, man, I apologize." And he said, "I was

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tryin' to give you another $100,000 to make sure that the maintenance and ever"—and he said, "I don't know if I wanna do it or not, now." He said, "You've—you don't answer your phones." And I said, "The only thing I know, Don, is that the only one I didn't answer had unknown on it." There was this long pause. And he said, "Oh, okay, I never told you I was unknown." But I loved the guy. And he made the house work. And I called him Hopalong Cassidy for as long as he lived. But he was very generous guy, and nobody knew it. He's really behind the scenes.

SL: Yep.

[04:30:17] GG: And he said—he asked me—said, "Why'd you pick me last?" And I said, "Because the problem that I've seen with fund-raising is that, 'specially with risky fraternities, is that if you don't know that everybody else has cleared the path and done all the homework and made all these tough decisions, then why would you invest in it, Don? But if all these 388 people that are from the ages of ninety to twenty-six would invest in it, why wouldn't you?" And he said, "Yeah, you made it easy."

SL: There you go.

[04:31:06] GG: In that trip there were two people that I collected form in El Dorado that are memorable stories. Guy's name—oh

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man. Buck Nobles. Gave me $25,000 on the telephone. He said—I—he's ninety-two, I don't—he said, "I don't trust the mail, Gibson." He said, "I want you to drive down here and pick up my check." And I go down, pick it up. I picked his check up, put it in my pocket, and we went to lunch. Well, I pulled the check out and make sure he'd signed it, 'cause I worried a guy that old may not have signed the check.

SL: Yeah.

GG: I opened it, and it didn't say $25,000, it said, $125,000.

SL: Oh my God.

GG: And I s—and I laid it down on the table, and I said, "Mr. Noble, " I said, "I got bad news for Sigma Nu and good news for you." [*SL laughs*] He said, "What's that?" I said, "You wrote this check for $125,000." He said, "Well, that's what I was gonna give you." And I said, "No, no, this was about $25,000." He said, "No, Son, you didn't listen good." He said, "You"—he said, "You gotta learn to listen." [*SL laughs*] He said, "This is a five-year commitment, isn't it?" And I said, "Yes, sir, but I thought that would—if you were gonna do that then that was $5,000." He said, "No," he said, "My intentions were $25,000." He said, "But I got to talkin' to my granddaughter this morning, and I said, 'I don't believe I'm gonna live to give the $125,000, I'm

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just give it to you now.'" [04:32:36] And the next guy there gave me $10,000, and his name was Ellium Curr, and ninety-three years old. Or ninety-two. Maybe same age as Buck. And so he's standin' on his back porch, and he's in a walking cane. And I said, "Just a minute, Mr. Curr, I don't want you walkin' down those steps, I'll come up there." He said, "Boy," he said, "this is my house. I can walk down these steps." I said, "That's too dangerous for you." He said, "Boy, you don't know what dangerous is." [*SL laughs*] He said, "You don't worry about me." He said, "I been in danger you can't even comprehend." And I laughed at him, and I said, "Okay, okay, Mr. Curr. I can't wait to hear this story. What'd you do, have too much milk of magnesia last night or somethin'?" He looked at me, and he said, "Son, you ever heard of Iwo Jima?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "I was one of the first 7,000 marines on Iwo Jima." He said, "I've seen it all."

SL: He has.

GG: He had seen it all. He gave me a bag of sand off of the shore of Iwo Jima and a rock from the flag, and I gave it to Sigma Nu. Isn't that wild?

SL; That a great story.

GG: I mean, and he said, "Oh, you may want this," he said, "Here's

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the battle plans," and he laid the battle plans out there, and he said, "My group, this was the plans." He said, "You can give this to the fraternity, too." And it was on oilcloth. And in pencil on oilcloth about who was hitting here and who was hitting there and—isn't that amazing?

SL: That is amazing.

[04:34:21] GG: I said, "You don't wanna keep this?" and he said, "I don't have anybody left."

SL: Mmm. Then give it to the fraternity. Did—have they got it displayed?

GG: I don't know.

SL: Gosh.

GG: I do not know.

SL: Boy.

GG: But isn't that powerful?

SL: It is powerful.

GG: And that—boy, when he said Iwo Jima, my brother, my dad's—I mean, my mother's brother was in the air over Iwo Jima. He never fought on Iwo Jima. [04:34:48] But anyway, those were—my—back to my wife, Ann. I'm very lucky to have her in my life. We're blessed, even though we're ten years apart. She's ten years younger than I am. She tells me I can ma—she

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says, "You got more energy than two puppies or two raccoons." [*laughter*] So I'm always energized. But she has been the sunshine of my autumn years.

SL: Aw, I bet you've done some stuff for her, too. I mean, helpin' with the kids . . .

GG: Well . . .

SL: . . . is a huge, huge deal.

GG: It was a challenge, and it was one I wasn't experienced in, but I'd been through it with children before, and I think it did help because you know what they're gonna do. You know the dog and pony show.

SL: Yep.

GG: But you gotta have both sides of the—you got to have the male and the female in the game together. And if they don't, there's a trap door outta there that those kids can get out of, and my job was to try to convince Ann that I was right, and when she finally accepted that I was right, the children turned a big corner.

[04:36:12] SL: That's amazing the—you know, that may be the best thing that you've ever done, really, for the future.

GG: I think that . . .

SL: I mean, you've done re sort of markable things, and you've got

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great kids, too, but those kids were kind of in trouble. They were at a . . .

GG: They were dodgin' and weaving.

SL: . . . at a fork.

GG: They were dodgin' and . . .

SL: Yep.

GG: . . . weavin', and they were getting big money out of their mother and big money out of their daddy, and they were tellin' their daddy how bad we were, and they were tellin' us how bad their daddy was. I mean, it was—they were—and they were takin' some expensive trips to Telluride, to Colorado, and doin' these ski trips and goin' to New York and doin'—oh my goodness. And they would talk—they would say, "Mom doesn't want me to do this, but Dad, this is what we wanna do, and would you please do this?" Oh, yeah, he's gonna do it, see. And then "Dad doesn't want me to do this, Mom, we wanna go to Cayman Islands, and he just don't—we"—I watched that till I finally decided—I even called the father and asked . . .

SL: I was wondering if you . . .

GG: . . . and asked him to meet me in Fayetteville. I said, "You and I both need to corner your son together, and let me tell you what's going on." So he flew to Fayetteville, and we were—went

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over to the cafe and sat down with his son, Jordan. And he said, "Mr. Gibson's told me what's goin' on." He said, "I'm not in the game anymore." So his dad was helpful. His dad was tough to deal with, but he turned out to be helpful.

SL: Well, hopefully his sons appreciate that, too.

[04:38:03] GG: Well, the children ever—you know, the thing that I always like in a family is that at this point the in-laws get along, everybody gets along, the children are all happy. And I tell 'em every day, enjoy that because at some point, competition, health, money, or something will create problems that you can fix right now by your bonding and let those other things not be important.

SL: They're not

GG: They're not. [*SL laughs*] They're not important. And so I think that what you said while ago—maybe my best success as an elderly person is bein' able, through experience, to help those two children.

SL: It's a big deal.

GG: And every time they got in trouble, I was there for 'em. I was there to stand up with 'em and not defend 'em, and I was also there when it was over to be the first ones to chew their butts out. [*SL laughs*] But I wouldn't do it in front of anybody.

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SL: Yeah.

GG: They have a right to their own private dignity, too.

SL: That's right.

GG: And it'll take a lot better if you're not in a crowd.

SL: Yep.

[04:39:25] GG: So Ann Gibson has been a journey in faith with me, and I've learned a lot in this pulling families together and how difficult it is. And I had a very difficult time. That's the reason I sold my home in Carmel California is because it was really Gloria's home. She took it to—built it, remodeled it, furniture, and I just couldn't see takin' Ann out there and her . . .

SL: Yeah.

GG: Her livin' in that environment.

SL: I can understand that.

GG: So I got outta there.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And then I sold my house in Little Rock that she basically put together and bought another house after Ann and I got married. And it was not I was tryin' to escape memories, it was tryin' to—I was tryin' to look ahead and not behind.

SL: That's healthy. That's a healthy thing to do.

GG: I think so, too.

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SL: It makes you more whole.

GG: Yeah. And so it's been a journey in faith. Ann's a very, very Christian woman. She's brought up in faith, and that was important to me. She is in the Stephens Ministry, which is a select group of people. They go through a two-year Bible study that earn the right to minister to people in need. And so she serves the church. There's only about four or five of 'em in all of the church, and she's one of 'em. And so she is a very faithful Christian woman, and to me, I mean, it doesn't get any more important than that.

SL: Yeah.

[04:41:03] GG: So like I say, I been lucky. I just been really, really lucky to have—I've had challenges in my life, but at the same time I've been blessed with things that—I was associated with good friends and good people. And the friends of the friends that I have have been good people. And I have one last story I wanna tell you about Arkansas.

SL: Okay.

[04:41:35] GG: I'm playing in the Buick invitational Pro-Am.

SL: Kay.

GG: There's a friend of my friend. Jeff Bridgecoat, I think their name—I can't. But anyway, I was having dinner, and his

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daughter was there, and she had just enrolled in Southern Cal University. And she found out I was from Arkansas, and she said, "You know, I been talking to Mom and Dad about going just to just look at the campus at Fayetteville." Well, make a long story short, she did. And I called Gearhart. I said, "You guys show 'em around. They're from San Diego." Four years she graduated from the University of Arkansas. She loved it. Played on the soccer team here. Great student. Had a full academic scholarship to Southern Cal.

SL: How bout that. How bout that.

GG: She loved it. Never been east to Arkansas.

SL: So when did she graduate?

GG: She graduated about four years ago.

SL: I bet I—I was still doin' ESPN games then. I bet I worked a soccer game she was in.

GG: I bet you did, too.

SL: 'Cause I did almost all of 'em that were televised.

GG: Yeah. She pledged Pi Phi sorority, and yeah. It was—they still talk to me about the experience she had here. She said—the mother—it was just beautiful. She said, "It was beautiful, beautiful. We love to come visit in autumn." 'Cause they don't have anything like that in San Diego.

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SL: No.

GG: Zero.

[04:43:23] SL: Well, now, wait a minute, there is a really pretty campus in San Diego, and it's a—is it a Catholic campus or a . . .

GG: San Diego State is there, but I don't believe it's San Diego State.

SL; No, this is up on top of the hill and . . .

GG: Oh, uh . . .

SL: . . . real ornate architecture and . . .

GG: Yeah, that—isn't that a [*snaps*]—oh . . .

SL: One of my kids . . .

GG: . . . Mormon—isn't that a Mormon school?

SL: No, I don't think so. One of my kids got offered a scholarship there, applied or got accepted there. Didn't end up going, but it was really a stunning, ornate—but it—I wanna say it was some faith-based school, but I can't remember what it was.

GG: Was it—was the structures white?

SL: White, but it also had some kind of a Byzantine . . .

GG: Oh, okay.

SL: . . . dome stuff on it, too. I forget.

GG: Well, it—there's several of those along 5 going east, north, and south.

SL: Right.

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GG: From San Diego up to Carlsbad. Man, I . . .

SL: And but anyway, it ain't Fayetteville, Arkansas. That . . .

GG: No.

SL: No. It's not.

[04:44:37] GG: But she loved it all four years she was here, and that was a total accident. Just—and I told her, I told her Mom and Dad, I said, "I been a fan of Fayetteville." I said, "If you ever wanna see Mother Nature in a full strut with her Easter bonnet on [*SL laughs*], you go to Fayetteville." I said, "The maples will beg your pardon." I said, "The maples are so beautiful, and the campus of the University of Arkansas sits high on a hill, several hills, and the air is never bluer even in California than in autumn in Fayetteville on a clear day." I said, "The clouds are whiter. [*SL laughs*] It's just a rhythm of life that you won't believe." I said, "But you have to go there and experience an October. And if you can't come away by Thanksgiving and think, 'This is Camelot,' you ain't livin'." And she said, "Oh, I love the four seasons, but I'm not around 'em." And so I sent them some photos of the Chamber stuff here.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And she said, "Did they just pick the best trees?" And I said, "Yeah, but there's about 90 percent of 'em are the best trees."

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SL; [*Laughs*] There's that.

GG: Yeah, it was a—that was a pleasant experience for her to come here.

[04:46:16] SL: Well, Gaston, I think we've had a pretty good talk today. I'm just wondering if there's anything else that I've dropped that we should have covered. I didn't really talk a whole lot about your athletics as a kid. Learned that you were fast and that you did the track deal. Is there anything else that you think we oughta plug in here?

GG: Let me think just for a moment.

SL: Yeah.

GG: To reflect and see if—because I promise you as a normal human being, I will be driving down to Interstate 40, and I will think of something.

SL: Oh, the—everyone—this happens to everyone.

GG: I know.

SL: And it's usually something that is so . . .

GG: It's right in front . . .

SL: . . . important.

GG: It's important, and it's right in front of you.

SL: It's right in front of you and—but I mean, you know, if we need to, we can do another day.

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GG: Well . . .

SL: You want me to go get your notes? You had s . . .

GG: Yeah. Yeah, that might be—that would be helpful, I think.

SL: Hey . . .

GG: To just to look at that.

SL: Sarah, let's look at his notes real quick.

SM: Okay, I'm gonna pause.

SL: Okay. All right.

[Recording stopped]

[04:47:45] SL: Gaston, you wanted to kinda finish up here with something that you had written. And it's—is this something that you wrote to your son? Is that . . .

GG: I wrote this to my son when I gathered the history of my journey through the University of Arkansas that reflected my freshman year and how charmed, amazed, impressed, and infatuated I was with a country that looked a lot different form cotton fields and [*SL laughs*] turnrows.

SL; Okay.

[04:48:22] GG: I say, "Worth, what you're about to read is something that I have wanted to do for a long time and share with you. When Coach Bielema arrived at Arkansas, I thought he was one of those very rare King Arthur coaches that had

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come to save our little beautiful kingdom of Camelot like Barnhill, Broyles, Hatfield, and Holtz had done. You will see me refer to my alma mater and all that made up the Razorback football program on this campus as Camelot. It was an unplanned and accidental how I came to use the word Camelot for the University of Arkansas. I had received a letter from my mom and dad in early November of [19]59. I had been in Fayetteville as a freshman in the College of Business since the first of September. They knew that I had been long—that I had been here long enough for them to ask me if I was homesick and did I like school. I was always so excited to get a letter from them, even though I was rarely prompt in writing them back. I took their letter to my classes that morning and waited till they were over to go ov—to go sit on the east steps of Old Main and take my Coke and read it. After finishing their letter, I was looking around at all the beautiful color of the mini maple trees, the hills, and the sky was so blue, Son. And every day I was meeting someone new. Suddenly what I wanted to tell them came to me. I picked up my books, put the letter in them, and headed for the old Palace Drug Store for their outside pay phone and made a collect call to my mother and dad. I told them that I was not homesick, and I loved school, I loved the University of

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Arkansas because this place was Camelot. And Coach Broyles was King Arthur, and his knights were the football players. Dad laughed and said, 'Well, then, Son, what does that make all the rest of you in Camelot?' 'Lucky,' I said. 'It makes us all lucky, Dad.' Then Dad chuckled and said, 'Let your mom and I know when you run into Lancelot.' [*SL laughs*] I responded that I had already met him. His name is Lance Alworth. His jersey number was 23, and my hometown buddy, Jerry Mazzanti, had introduced me to him. Dad and Mom laughed."

[04:51:22] SL: That's good. You know, there was something about Lance Alworth that—he came up to my parents house to eat a couple of times with the football players. And he seemed to have a glow.

GG: He s—he does.

SL: He had a glow.

GG: He was . . .

SL: His face, his skin glowed.

GG: I guarantee you you're a hundred—I have never heard of anybody say that except my wife Gloria. She—her term was, "He seemed like he was in bloom."

SL: Yeah.

GG: He did. He had it.

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SL: I mean, there were a bunch of football players in our family room and sittin' at different tables, but he—there was so—his presence—there was something about his presence that was . . .

[04:52:10] GG: There was. And at that—we became good friends. As many times as I went out to San Diego, I would see Lance. I had a wonderful visit with him one time about his journey in football here because—I asked him what his greatest moment of success was. And I was expecting him to say something about Razorback football history, I was expecting him to say something about winning the Super Bowl with the Cowboys. He said, "You know, Gaston, it wasn't athletics." He said, "I didn't value athletics as I should," he said "because God gave me such a gift that I didn't value hard work, I didn't value the price to pay for winning," and he said, "When I'd come in the locker room, all the guys'd be cryin' or just excited that we won, and it didn't move me that way." He said, "'Cause I expected to win. I expected to win." And he said, "But what the thing was that changed my life is when I got out of pro football, and I went to work for a real estate company in San Diego. I couldn't sell anything. Everybody was glad to see me, but nobody had any confidence in me because I was the only—I was Bambi. I was the All-American football player, but nobody put any real stock in

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me as a real-estate person. So everybody treated me with golden gloves, but I never sold anything." He said, "The first real-estate sale I ever made was worth more than all the touchdowns, all the passes I ever caught because I felt part of the whole world at that point. I felt like I had made it." Isn't that something?

SL: That is something. That is something.

GG: I thought, man.

SL: Of all the incredible . . .

[04:54:17] GG: He—incredible talent. And he said, "I took it all for granted." And he said, "But that first sale was so powerful and so moving," he said, "I got—I understood everything that I missed out in athletics."

SL: Hmm. Wow.

GG: And we just had—and I coached his son. Oh. Here's another deal. I coached the Y football team that played for the city championship in Little Rock. When he was playin' for San Diego. And his son played for us, of course. Lance calls me, and he says, "You're gonna play this in War Memorial Stadium." He said, "I wanna come out there and bring a couple of guys from the Chargers." And I said, "Oh, that'd be wonderful, Lance." So Lance and Heidl, John Heidel, that was a quarterback . . .

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SL: Yeah.

GG: . . . and Keith Lincoln.

SL: Yeah.

GG: The fullback.

SL: Yeah.

[04:55:17] GG: They came out. We didn't have a game. Here's—the kids on the field were just lookin' at 'em like they were statues, monuments. We couldn't get 'em—we couldn't get the kids involved in the game because they were so mesmerized with Alworth [*SL laughs*] and Heidl and Lincoln. And finally at half time they said, "You know, maybe we better back away from here." He said, "Looks like these boys are always offsides. This is not a football"—so they did. They got out of the way in the second half, and we wound up zero to zero. But it was the funniest thing in the world, but it was—the kids just had their mouths open on both sides of the football lookin' at 'em.

SL: Yeah. Yep, I would've done the same thing.

GG: Oh, well, sure.

SL; Yeah.

GG: But it [*SL laughs*]—Lance has always been a good guy and a good friend. And Betty—I met her when she came with him. She was sixteen years old.

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SL: Wow.

[04:56:17] GG: That's, you know, that's the reason he didn't get to go to Ole Miss is because Johnny Vaught would not accept married students. And so he was married—he married her when she was fifteen years old.

SL: Wow.

GG: And when they got to Fayetteville—that's another thing I asked Coach Broyles. I said, "Coach, how in the world did you take Lance Alworth when Johnny Vaught turned him down, and he was probably the best athlete to come out of the Southeastern Conference." He said, "Gaston, Johnny Vaught—Bobby Dodd didn't have a problem with mar"—he said, "I called Bobby Dodd, and he said 'Frank,' he said, 'you'll know where that boy is at night.'" [*Laughs*] And he said . . .

SL: That [*laughs*] sounds like Dodd.

GG: He said, "I took him." But he said he checked with old Bobby Dodd before. He said, "There's nothing wrong with that," he said, "You'll know where that boy is at night." [*Laughter*]

SL; It's the little things.

GG: That's right. That's right.

[04:57:26] SL: You know, I don't know if you looked at the interview that we did with Coach Broyles, but he talks about workin' a deal

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out with Coach Dodd and—you know, after their—at the start of their coaching careers. And they were trying to not upset—who was his coach? I'm tryin' to think of—you'd have to just—we—I probably should've just played it for you. But it's a story that he had never told anyone and that—but it . . .

GG: When he was playin' for Dodd?

SL: Yeah, well, it was like he—yeah. He was gonna—he had signed with the pros, somehow or another, but ended up doing something else, and it was all so Coach Dodd wouldn't get mad at him. There were two guys involved and . . .

GG: Well, you know, he went right into bein' assistant coach at Georgia Tech.

SL: Yeah.

GG: And he—Coach Bobby Dodd, according to John Barnhill, was the most visionary—he said, "He was the most innovative, forward-thinking coach that I had ever been around." And he said, "When he was at the University of"—no, it was the Southern Conference before it was the Southeastern Conference. He was the quarterback. And Bobby—and Coach Barnhill said, "And the signs around campus was In Dodd We Trust." [*SL laughter*]

SL: I like that. And why wouldn't they?

GG: Yeah.

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SL: Yeah.

[04:59:20] GG: 'Cause you know how many games that Barnhill and Dodd lost in their tenure there?

SL: One.

GG: One game.

SL: Wow.

GG: And they were both all SECC, or the Southern Conference. But yeah, I just—I've always had a special place in my heart for the mountains and Fayetteville. There's something magic here that you can't mail out, you can't send pictures, you can't put on television. There's something that requires your eyeball presence.

SL: Yeah, I don't know anybody that can explain it. You know, someone—I read something one time that it's these seven hills that they emit naturally occurring negative ions. And there's a—there's—in the sky scrapers, they will pump negative ions into the HVAC system because it makes everyone more relaxed and makes them feel better, a feeling of—you know, it's kinda like a gas that makes everyone [*laughs*] happier without any of the, you know—without making . . .

[05:00:41] GG: And you can't define it.

SL: You can't define it. Hm-mm.

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GG: No. That's the thing that also changed here. It—when we used to have finals after we'd come back from New Years.

SL: Right.

GG: We'd have finals. And there would be a break before you start second semester. Nobody went home. We stayed up here.

SL: Well, sure.

GG: Everybody stayed. Nobody, hell, nobody had cars anyway.

SL: Right. [*Laughter*] Right.

[05:01:13] GG: But we stayed here, and we enjoyed it. And the magic of the drive to me was Mount Gayler. Once you topped Mount Gayler and the grade started down, you were comin' home.

SL: Yep.

GG: That was home, whether you were alumni, whether you're student, whatever you were, there was a feeling of homeward bound when that nose of that automobile started downhill.

SL: I've felt it many times.

GG: Oh, it just—and when I flew, when I was a pilot, flying into Fayetteville on a clear day—there was nothing like it. It was the most exhilarating, unbelievable feeling. It was an autumn high. It was a . . .

SL: Drake Field.

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GG: Yeah.

SL: How many times have they meet the team comin' back into Drake field?

GG: Oh, Lord. [*SL laughs*]

[Recording stopped]

[05:02:13] SL: All right. Well, listen, thank you.

GG: Thank you.

[End of interview 05:02:24]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]

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