

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

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Arkansas Memories

Morse Gist Sr.

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

October 25, 2012

Helena, Arkansas

Objective

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

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved in the Pryor Center archives. 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 and video recordings 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 ten 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 ten 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 18th 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.
- 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 Morse Upshaw Gist Sr. on
October 25, 2012, in Helena, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: All right—uh—Mr. Gist.

Morse Gist: Mh-hmm.

SL: Uh—Morse Gist. We are—uh—in your shop here, the Morse Gist Music store, on Cherry Street in Helena, Arkansas. My name is Scott Lunsford, and you have so graciously allowed—uh—myself and our crew from the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral History to be here today with you. Um—today's date is the twenty-fifth of October. The year is 2012. And I just wanna tell you that it's a great honor to finally get this opportunity to sit across with—from you and get as much of a—as much history as you're willing to—to—uh—put up with us—as long as you're willing to put up with us—about Helena and about your life.

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: And we record this in high-definition audio and video.

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: And what you will get from us is all the raw footage of everything we do here today.

MG: Mh-hmm.

[00:01:04] SL: And we'll send you—we'll—we're scanning photographs that you have here in the store as our conversation goes, and you'll get copies of those. And we will ask you to look at this interview

when you get it, and if there's anything in there that you don't want the rest of the world to know or you've said something that you kinda regret saying, we'll take it out for you. We're . . .

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . we're not here to try to—uh . . .

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . get you on anything. We're—we just want to hear your life story and the things that you witnessed and experienced as you grew up here in—in Helena. And when you're happy with that—if—if you're happy with the interview and with the images that we've got and—um—then we will want to post this stuff on the Pryor Center website.

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: And we will encourage children in the public schools, college undergraduate students, graduate students, documentarians—we'll encourage them to use this material. And . . .

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . we'll be very good stewards. Um—also, you will—you will get a transcript . . .

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . of this interview, as well, and we ask that you read it or that your family reads it. And it—we want to make sure that you are happy and satisfied with what we've done before we let anyone else see it.

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: So that's kinda the way we—that's—that is exactly the way we work. We make sure that the interviewee is happy. And when you're happy, we'll post this stuff on the web. We'll make as many copies of this interview as you like for your family, your grandchildren.

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: And then we will preserve everything forever so they—your family will always be able to access this material.

MG: Mh-hmm.

[00:02:49] SL: And they'll be able to use it for—for what they would like to use it for. So . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . if you're comfortable with all of that, we'll keep talkin'. But if you have any questions, you can ask me now, and I'll—I'll try to clarify, or we'll make any amendments that we need to make—uh—to make you comfortable with this whole process.

MG: Mh-hmm.

[00:03:09] SL: Are you—are you comfortable?

MG: I think so. Yeah.

SL: Okay. Well, thank you.

MG: Course, we're depending on a memory that—uh—[laughs] sometime varies, and I've been accused of—um—remembering things from time to time that never took place.

SL: Well, that's exciting for me. [*Laughter*]

MG: Okay, well—uh—so the accuracy of my memories are—um—I have no documentation that's gonna be able to prove it.

SL: Well, that's good.

MG: And there's nobody around that can challenge it.

SL: That's okay. You know . . .

MG: Uh-huh.

SL: . . . the folks that turn to this kind of material, the oral histories . . .

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . understand that they are based on memory and those . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . memories are fallible. And if they really are in here for the exact facts, they'll have to check that on their own.

MG: Yeah.

SL: Get other sources. I—you know, we're really just looking at—at life as you remember it, and—uh—that, for us, is priceless.

So . . .

MG: Well, I'll apologize in—in the front for the—uh—inaccuracies—uh—of my memory . . .

SL: Well, I'm not gonna hold . . .

MG: . . . for posterity.

SL: . . . your feet to the fire on exact—many exact details. [00:04:23]

We do usually start, though, with when and where you were born.

MG: I was born in Helena, Arkansas.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: Uh—September 16, 1923. [*Clears throat*] And—uh—have stayed here my full life. Yeah. Um—I was born in an old hospital that's long gone now.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:04:51] MG: Um—so—um—I grew up on—uh—on Beech Street in Helena until I was in probably the eighth grade. Then we moved to a house up on Prairie Street. That was during the Depression of the—uh—[19]30s . . .

SL: Yes, sir.

MG: . . . when we—uh—lost our home—uh—during the Depression—uh—to the building and loan company. So my father sold off him some farmland he had that he never—he wasn't a farmer and didn't wanna be a farmer, but he had inherited this farmland up near Marianna. So he traded it off for another house up on Prairie Street in Helena, and we moved up there. Uh—I was probably in the eighth—eighth grade when we moved. Um—I'm not sure now what—uh—what other information we're—we're lookin' for. You might ask some questions.

SL: I will ask you some questions.

MG: Stimulate some . . .

[00:06:06] SL: First of all, you were born Morse U. Gist. Now, what's the *U* stand for?

MG: Upshaw.

SL: Upshaw.

MG: Yeah.

SL: And is that a family name?

MG: Yeah, that was my mother's maiden name . . .

SL: Okay.

MG: . . . was Upshaw.

SL: And—and what was her first name?

MG: Rooney.

SL: Rooney.

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: *R-U-N-I* . . .

MG: *R-double-O-N-E-Y*.

SL: *Double-O-N-E-Y*.

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: What a great name. [*MG laughs*] [00:06:31] Um—so do you know where she was born?

MG: She was born in Helena, also, as was my father. He—well, my father was a—yeah, I guess—I guess he was probably born at the hospital.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: Uh—what hospital they had. He was—that was a little before the turn of the last century. Probably 1898 or something like that.

Uh . . .

SL: So . . .

MG: So he was a—he was in World War I as a—as a sergeant.

[00:07:07] SL: Did he ever tell you any of his war—War I stories?

MG: Well, he did. He was in France, and—uh—he was a machine gunner. His—uh—his favorite story was that the—uh—the machine gunners in those days had a life expectancy of twenty-four hours after they got to the front.

SL: Oh!

MG: And [*laughs*] he was—he was ordered to the front the day before the armistice, but he had not moved up, so the armistice came in, and he didn't have to—have to go to the front. So it was pretty close there.

SL: Literally missed the bullet . . .

MG: Yeah . . .

SL: . . . on that one.

MG: . . . he did. Uh-huh.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: So . . .

[00:07:53] SL: So—uh—any—any other descriptions of the war? You know, veterans are in—in—they have a—a history of not—of being reluctant to talk about their war experiences 'cause they were—were not very pleasant.

MG: Well, they—uh—he—he didn't really talk much about that. He talked about the—uh—a few—uh—good things when he lived in a—

and he was camped out in a house in France [*clears throat*] where the—uh—the cows and the chickens lived in one room of the house there. And—and they'd have to run 'em—run the chickens out of the bedroom before they went to bed. Things like that.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: Humorous stories. [*SL laughs*] But—uh—he—uh—he evidently—uh—did not worry too much about—uh—the situation that—uh—he seemed to almost enjoy his—uh—in fact, he only remembered and told me about the—uh—the good times he had in the—in the military. So . . .

SL: Well, you know, I think there's a combination of—uh—sparing the children and—and the family . . .

MG: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . uh—the horrors of war, and also . . .

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . it was probably painful, and he'd just soon not try to remember some . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . of that tough stuff.

MG: Could be a whole lot like that.

[00:09:20] SL: Uh-huh. And—um—did—did you ever know your—your father's parents—your grand—your grandparents on his side?

MG: I knew only my—uh—grandfather—um—as a real old man. He lived out at—um—on the homeplace, a farm up near Marianna, near the

county line there.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: Uh—we would drive out there, usually on a Sunday. It took all day long. It was one of my *[laughs]* most unpleasant childhood experiences 'cause we'd—we'd be drivin' all day long to get—get out there. And—uh—they would sit in the parlor and talk, and this old—this old fellow was evidently my grandfather, and—uh—he—uh—didn't much like children hanging around. *[Laughter]* So—so I would end up in the attic—uh—spending my time sitting on the floor lookin' at old pictures, old family pictures and things, until we got ready to go home. And—um—it'd take a—we'd be a—it'd be after dark before we would get back to Helena. It was—uh—gravel roads and all that kinda thing. So—uh—*[SL laughs]* but—um—that was usually on a Sunday, which took the whole day. Uh—that's about all I remember about him. I never had a conversation with him. Uh—such and *[unclear word]* . . .

SL: And—and do—do you know what his name was?

MG: He was Bogan Nathaniel Gist.

SL: Bogan Nathaniel Gist.

MG: Yeah, uh-huh. *[SL laughs]* So—uh . . .

[00:11:19] SL: These are great names. *[MG laughs]* Um—do you member the kind of car that you rode out there in?

MG: Well, it was a four-door car. I don't remember the name. But it had no windows in it, so it may've been what they call a touring

sedan.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: And they had what they called isin—I believe—isinglass windows that snapped in place around the—uh—around the car to keep the air out. Uh—and we would have to snap those windows up in the—in the fall or wintertime. Rainy days and things like . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MG: . . . that. It didn't have roll-up windows in it, but I don't remember the—uh—the manufacturer.

[00:12:12] SL: Were there—you know, a lotta folks say back in the gravel-road days—uh—there were flat tires, often flat tires. Tires were not . . .

MG: Often, yeah.

SL: . . . as great as they are now and . . .

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: Do you member your father havin' to get out and . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . change the tires?

[00:12:29] MG: We'd have to change tires, and—um—my father told me an interesting story that—uh—when he first got outta the military in bout 1920, thereabouts, fore he got married—um—one job he had was—uh—chauffeuring the wealthy people who had the cars, the big cars, in those days. And one man wanted him to drive him from here to St. Louis.

SL: Gosh.

MG: So [*laughs*]*—so the map, he said, was a—uh—little booklet. And you would drive so far on a dirt road or a gravel road until you came to Mr. Jones's—um—farm. And you would open the gate and go and ask Mr. Jones if you could drive across his property to get to another road, and so, that's the way it was all the way to St. Louis, goin' through private roads and—uh—and—uh—muddy roads and property.*

SL: Long before an [*someone sneezes*]*—an interstate system.*

MG: Oh, had no system whatsoever, as I understood it.

Billy: [*Sound of someone entering room*] Hello.

MG: Well, Billy just came in. [*Bell rings*]

SL: Well, Billy [*Billy laughs*], come on in. How you doin'?

Billy: All right.

SL: Um . . .

MG: You wanna do the back?

Billy: Yeah, I'm gonna get it.

MG: Okay. Can he fix that thing like we want it, Billy, do you think?

Billy: Huh?

MG: Can he fix that—uh—fan to do what we want it to do?

Billy: He said he could.

MG: Okay . . .

Billy: So—uh . . .

MG: . . . well—uh . . .

Billy: We'll see.

MG: Okay. Good deal.

[00:14:17] SL: So Billy's doin' some repair work in back?

MG: Huh?

SL: He's doin' some repair work in back?

MG: In the back. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

MG: At the back door there.

[00:14:26] SL: Well, good. [*MG clears throat*] Um—so you know, no one has ever s—talked about havin' to go from private-property owner . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . to private-property owner to get on a major road trip. But . . .

MG: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . that—you know, kids today would have no idea . . .

MG: No, they—they wouldn't. And it's almost inconceivable to me, really.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: 'Cause . . .

SL: 'Cause by the time you were along . . .

MG: We had roads.

SL: . . . you had some roads.

MG: Such as they were.

SL: At least some state roads that would . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . hook up with another state road and . . .

MG: Right. Yeah. So—um—but traveling was not easy in those days, and—uh—I've often thought of the folks that lived before those days, when they had to—uh—get in a covered wagon. His—his folks came up from South Carolina, and they had to come—come in wagons then. So—uh—that—uh—that was a big difference.

[Unclear words].

[00:15:27] SL: Did—you wouldn't know the names of the great-grandparents on your dad's side, would you?

MG: Well, I have a book that shows those. Uh—it—uh—you mean his background?

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: Well, Chris—the first Gist that got to America was in the 1700s was named Christopher. And he married an Edith Cromwell, who was Oliver Cromwell's niece in England. And they had to leave—as family lore—story—Oliver Cromwell was a pretty tough fellow, and they wanted to get away from him.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:16:23] MG: So they came to Helena. They married—uh—in—uh—South Carolina, and that's where the—uh—lineage comes in then. Uh—during the Revolutionary War—uh—my lineage of the family were Tories in support of the king. And their brothers were

revolutionaries. [*Laughs*] So that—uh—that kinda split the family.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: And—uh—one time my daughter wanted to—uh—join the—uh—
Daughters of the American Revolution, and we couldn't find a way
to—be—because you have to be of the lineage from revolutionaries.
And—uh—so she—uh—she . . .

SL: It . . .

MG: . . . never was able . . .

SL: They wouldn't—they wouldn't let her join.

MG: Uh-huh.

SL: They wouldn't let her join, I guess.

MG: Right. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:17:27] SL: That's interesting—um—that your lineage—uh—left
England because of some kinda threat from Oliver Cromwell, but
then when they got here, they . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . still supported the king so . . .

MG: They supported the king. Yeah, King George.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: Anyway, I've only gotten that from—well, I've got a couple of family
history books that that . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: . . . came from.

SL: That's . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . that's fascinating history. So—um—you—you ne—did you not ever know your grandmother—uh—your ma . . .

MG: I didn't, no.

SL: . . . your dad's mom?

MG: You see—um—they had both died. My father—um—was the son of my grandfather's first wife, and she died. And she was a Heineman. She died, and then he married another woman named Hottel. Her family name was Hottel. And—uh—when my father was—uh—a small child, two or three or four years old, something like that.

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: So—and then I did not know—uh—either of my—those—those people as a child. Only my grandfather.

[00:18:52] SL: Did—uh—uh—do you know if your—if your—um—your father's first wife—uh—your blood grandmother—uh—wa—was it childbirth that caused her death?

MG: Oh, I don't know about that.

SL: You don't know?

MG: Uh-uh. I . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MG: . . . really haven't found out much about her.

SL: Okay.

MG: I found out that—uh—on the computer—a friend of mine tried to run it down on the computer, and it just said they were—uh—her

family were merchants in Phillips County, and they came over from Mississippi somewhere, but I don't know anything about her.

[00:19:29] SL: So—um—your grandfather, then—uh—he was the one that bought the property close to Marianna and . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . and—uh—he did farm it, then. They had . . .

MG: Oh yeah. They were all farmers. Uh-huh.

[00:19:42] SL: And when you—when you went there on those Sundays, can—can you remember what the house looked like? It—was it a two story or one story, and you were in the attic or . . .

MG: I was in—I would play in the attic, so it must've been a large one-story house with a porch running around it—frame.

SL: Uh-huh.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:02] MG: There was a lotta timber in those days, so mostly all the houses were a frame house. So . . .

[00:20:12] SL: So was this before the clear-cutting, and they were—had fields of cotton or . . .

MG: Yeah, mostly everything was cotton in those . . .

SL: Okay.

MG: . . . days. And so, I think that's about all they farmed out there. I doubt—I don't think they had gotten into soybeans or—some corn. They grew cattle feed, corn, things like that. They were [*beeping sound*]*—those farms mostly were self-sustaining farms, so they had*

vegetable crops and things like that. [*Sound of footsteps*]

SL: Okay. Did you get . . .

Billy: Mr. Gist, I don't know if we'll ever get them things out or not.

We're gonna have to do somethin' else on that thing. Them things are in there.

MG: Okay, well . . .

Billy: That's a powerful drill right there, and it won't budge 'em.

MG: It won't do it. Okay. Well, we'll think about it. May have to grind the heads off of a . . .

[Tape stopped]

[00:21:08] SL: [*Sound of door closing*] Do you know how much education that your father had?

MG: I really don't. I guess I don't know where he went to school. If he ever told me or if I were ever interested in finding out, I don't remember [*unclear words*].

SL: Well, it's—was unusual, really, to go much past the elementary grades . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . or a few grades after, you know, seventh or eighth . . .

MG: Well, he did graduate high school.

SL: Oh, he did?

MG: Yeah . . .

SL: Well, that's . . .

MG: . . . but . . .

SL: . . . somethin' else then.

MG: . . . whether he went to college or not, I don't know.

SL: Well, a high school . . .

MG: I don't think so.

SL: . . . degree, you know, at that time . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . was really—especially in an agricultural community . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . was fairly rare.

MG: Well, I'm pretty sure he went through high school. His brother, half-brother, lives in Marianna. Or did at that time. And when he was a student, the house I live in now was the first house that—my mother's brother married my father's sister. And they lived in the house that I'm in now when they first got married. And upstairs my father's half-brother, Tom Gist at Marianna, was in high school, and they wanted him to go to a high school locally. So he came here and lived in an upstairs apartment [*sound of a vehicle starting*] area in the house with my uncle and aunt and went through school. So they were interested in . . .

SL: In education.

MG: In education. Yeah.

[00:23:13] SL: What about—let's talk a little bit about your mother and her side of the family.

MG: Okay. She was an Upshaw. And her father owned this building

next to us here. It was an Upshaw Hardware Company. And he—I never did—he died before I was born, so I don't know just when . . .

SL: You didn't know him.

MG: . . . he did. And I remember my grandmother as elderly and most of the time in bed. They lived across the street from the house we lived in there. She was up some, but mostly as I remember her as being quite elderly and ill often. So I don't know much about her either. [00:24:25] But then my Uncle Morse, who later married my father's sister, was evidently the executive of the hardware company estate—whatever. And he was runnin' the hardware store. All at once, to the consternation of the family—I've heard 'em talk about it as a child. He sold the hardware company and took the money and went to—well, he came out to be a foot doctor—whatever they call 'em—coropotist or . . .

SL: Podiatrist?

MG: . . . podiatrist, whatever it was. And so, I think there was some irritation between he and my mother when he would come visit. [Laughter] But he did come. They spent a lot of time together. He would come over—they lived in Mississippi, and he would come over and visit. So evidently, it was a minor irritation to them, but they thought he oughta hold onto the hardware store but . . .

[00:25:43] SL: So did you ever get to meet him?

MG: Oh yeah, yeah. He was one of my favorite people. He was sort of a—the term they use sometime was a rascalion. He was a

[*laughs*]*—*he was sort of a free spirit, and so, it would irritate my mother sometimes in a friendly sorta way. [00:26:10] But they were good folks, and my father's sister was also—her name was Mary, and she was also a free spirit. So they made good companions, and she used—the first time I'd ever heard the phrase that it seemed like she was just sittin' around talkin', and I was sittin' on the fringe of the family conversation, and she said it seemed like everything she liked was either—what was it? What is that old phrase? I know you must've heard it—fattening, illegal, or immoral. [*Laughter*] So . . .

SL: That's probably still true today.

MG: Yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's funny.

MG: So [*clears throat*] . . .

[00:27:13] SL: Well, as near as you could tell, your dad and your sister got along fine and . . .

MG: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . and even though your uncle kind of changed course in midstream and raised some kind of a division among the family, you still—y'all . . .

MG: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . still got along.

MG: Oh, the family was pretty close, with some irritations at times. I know we had a family plot up at the cemetery, and it irritated my

mother until—till she died, I believe [*laughs*], that when my uncle's wife, Mary, my father's sister, died in Mississippi, he brought her over here and without permission buried her in one of the plots that was reserved for my father up in the family plot up there, in one of the graves. And that irritated her, but we ended up with enough burial in that plot to accommodate everybody.

[00:28:30] SL: So did your mother pretty much run the household? Is that—was that her—she was a homemaker, a housewife?

MG: My mother or . . .

SL: Your mother.

MG: Yeah. Oh yeah, she was quite the homebody, more or less, and . . .

[00:28:49] SL: Uh-huh. And, I'm sorry, your fa—what was your father's job? What di—what was it that he did?

MG: Okay, through the Depression everybody had a hard time. It—I find it somewhat amusing when I hear these politicians currently [*SL laughs*] comparing the current recession to the Depression—how close it is to the Depression. Now, in the Depression people worked for their next meal. As a child, I lived up on a hill on Prairie Street, and I liked to hunt, and I had that—I showed you the picture of the dog that . . .

SL: Yes.

MG: . . . I was raised with. And with a .22 rifle, we would go up in the hills and shoot at squirrels or whatever. Now, we had a city dump

up there, and the dump, it was a par—it was the top of a ridge that the trucks would drive up. In those days you hired your own garbage collector. He may have a wagon, or he may have a truck of some kind. [00:30:16] But he'd collect all the garbage from his constituencies and take it up to the city dump and pour it over the side of the ridge and it—into the canyon area there. And that was the city dump, wide open. And it was full of rats, and I would go up there with my dog and sit on the ridgetop and shoot the rats. And he would go down and bring 'em up to me. And I'd line 'em up like a safari. [Laughs] But anyway, that was my main hunting trips. [00:30:54] Now, on the top of that ridge—it was quite wide—there were people living. And they lived in—in those days, piano crates were [*sound of vehicle outside*] very large and sturdy and made out of wood. They would collect piano crates from somewhere and build hovels and houses out of 'em. And that's what they lived in. It was a community up there. When the dump trucks would come up, there was one truck from—I remember well 'cause they were neighbors of mine—from a Webb Packing Company. The building is still there where they were. And they threw away a lotta bones in those days. They would trim the bone with a knife and so forth and fill the truck up with bones and scrap meat and so forth. And the truck would park—often when I was up there, the truck would come up to dump these bones and things over into the dump. And he would stop, and the people who lived there would go through his

truck and pick out bones and meat and things. And they had a large pot. They had an iron pot hung over a fire, community kinda thing, and they would put it in there, and it was constantly boiling. And I remember at that time I thought that was a great way to live. In fact, I wanted to grow up and live up there with 'em. It—but that's how they were living in the—during the Depression.

[00:32:45] And people—we had four or five cows. We called ourselves a dairy, and we sold milk in the neighborhood. I would take milk and deliver it to the different houses in the quart bottles. But they—the ho—we had a group called hobos that would roam the country. There was a hobo camp right over the levee there, and the hobos would come up to the back door, and my mother would make 'em usually peanut butter sandwiches or something and milk. And they would clean out the pasture or the lots, the cow lots, and work around the house just for that meal.

SL: Peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

MG: The house stood about eight feet, six or eight feet, off the ground, and so, they would sleep under the house. They had some kind of pads or sleeping bags or whatever they had, and they would stay there several days and clean up, and she would feed 'em. Mostly sandwiches. And then one day we'd get up, and they'd be gone, but the others would fall in. So those were hard, hard times.

[00:34:09] My father—one job he had was a constable—as constable. And—but he couldn't've been—they couldn't have paid

him very much. He also had a little hamburger shop with a friend, so it was tough going for 'em, I know now, as I look back. I was never told that we were poor. *[Laughs]* I can't ever remember that he told me we were poor. Everybody, all of my contemporaries in school, when you wore a hole in the bottom of your feet there in your shoes, often we'd put cardboard in the shoes to keep the water out, that type of thing. When the kids in the neighborhood outgrew clothes, they were passed on to another neighbor who had a child that would fit it. [00:35:18] So it was a neighbor-to-neighbor thing in those days. Things like when we bought a pair of shoes, if we ever bought a new pair of shoes, they would buy it about two sizes too large, and I'd have *[laughs]* to stick paper in the toes of the shoe until I grew into the shoe to kinda extend the wear of the shoe. Things like that through the Depression is what I think these politicians that I hear cannot seem to understand or comprehend. It just—it's so much different, that Depression. It was terrible, as I think back on it now. As a child, it didn't bother me at all. I'd—I didn't realize that we were in any kind of a Depression.

[00:36:19] SL: I've heard that . . .

MG: Have you?

SL: . . . from others that they didn't realize that they were poor because they had everything they needed. I mean, they had a roof over their head, and . . .

MG: That's right.

SL: . . . and there was—always seemed to be food and—so did the house on Prairie Street—did it have electricity and running water?

MG: Oh yeah. We always had electricity and running water. We didn't have any central heat till decades later, but there was a fireplace in each room there.

SL: Oh, well, that's big.

MG: And so, you had to get up in the morning and build a fireplace. As a child when I lived on Beech Street, as a smaller child, we had a washtub that we would fill with water right in front of the fireplace and heat the water on the stove. And then that's where we would take a bath, right there in the . . .

SL: Yes.

MG: . . . in bedroom in one of those things. [00:37:32] It—but I grew up—I remember President Eisenhower wrote two books. I read his first book from the time he was a child in canvas—in Kansas and the second book went through his war career. But I read the first one, and I remember some similarities in there. He said that his family was desperately poor, but he didn't realize it. His family never told him that he was poor, and he didn't realize it until years later he looked back. So I would go to the grocery store to buy a loaf of bread. Bread was ten cents a loaf, but you could get day-old bread for five cents a loaf. And when I asked why we bought day-old bread, I was told that day-old bread was better, more healthy for you than [*laughs*] . . .

SL: Well, in a way it was.

MG: . . . than fresh bread. It was. I think it really was.

SL: That it'd let you spend the nickel somewhere else . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . on other food. Yeah.

MG: And such, yeah. So that was the Depression that we went through there. [00:38:56] Oh, then a little later on, probably in the later—in the middle [19]30s, probably, maybe early [19]30s, my father—I don't know how he found out, whether he was told or something, that a fellow up in New York had invented a coin machine, coin-operated record player, and that was the jukebox. It was the Wurlitzer company. And so, he ordered one of those things. It used 78 records. I don't know where he got the money or how or anything, but he put in a café locally, and the café was so glad to get it because it would draw people in, and they would buy a beer and sandwich just to see that thing work. It was a nickel per play. They called 'em nickelodeons in those days. [00:40:07] And he got all of the money that went in there. He did not have to divide with the café owner. And so, we—he took a—I guess it was a two-door car, some type of a coupe. And he took the trunk lid off of the back and built a platform back there in the way of a truck bed, and that's what we hauled those things around in. He would put one on there and then we—he bought another one and another one and another one. [00:40:49] So it was the coin-operated business, the

jukeboxes, that finally got us through the Depression and on in, and I operated 'em up until the early [19]60s.

SL: Wow!

MG: Then I sold 'em out.

SL: Thirty years.

MG: Yeah, so . . .

SL: Or—so you were probably, what, ten or twelve when he started that business?

MG: Yeah, probably so.

SL: And so, the businesses were really happy to get 'em because they drew people in.

MG: They did.

SL: And so, after that first one, it wasn't long before you ordered another one and . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . and at a nickel a play, do you remember how big the purse was early on and . . .

MG: No, there was a lotta money. In those days you could eat a pretty good lunch for a nickel or a dime . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: . . . at a cafe. So a box full of nickels was really a gold mine in those days. So it really got us on through the Depression there. Later on, other people got the same idea, so compa—competition set in, and you were forced to divide half of the money with the café

owner.

SL: With the venue.

MG: And that broke it down a little bit. So—but that's what pulled us through the Depression. Otherwise, it was hand to mouth for us. We lost our home during the early part of that year. So . . .

[00:42:31] SL: Well, did your father diversify at all? I mean, was it—did he just keep reinvesting in the nickelodeons, or . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . did he save . . .

MG: And . . .

SL: . . . some money and start doing other things with it, or was there—the income wasn't that—enough to do other than just to keep buying more of 'em or . . .

MG: Well, he bought other types of coin machines, pinball machines and things like that. [00:43:03] But then he started investing in the stock market, whatever surplus he had, and that's been real good, and I followed along behind that, and that has established—all of that together, I was ready to—able to put my kids through college and then, of course, my wife—after the kids came along, while they were still in school, she took—she joined the first class of the nursing school at Phillips County Community College, and that was held down at the—a little south of Helena, bout four or five miles, and in a building that was used by the coast guard. It was a Coast Guard Academy at one time. So when the college formed, they put

the nursing school down there. She went through that nursing school and then started nursing, too. So altogether we've done—we've been well blessed, so.

[00:44:13] SL: Let's talk about your childhood and some of the things that you experienced here in Helena. First of all, were you—did you go to kindergarten? Was there a kindergarten that you attended here?

MG: No, I didn't. My—some of my friends attended kindergarten. But I imagine there was not enough money at one time [*laughs*] when I was kindergarten age . . .

SL: Well, that's right . . .

MG: . . . to get in there.

SL: . . . when the crash hit.

MG: But . . .

SL: Yeah.

[00:44:45] MG: Yeah, some of 'em did, but some of 'em—there were some families—I didn't notice much disparity between—there wasn't much for a rich family to buy that the poor family could not have. They bought—my friends from wealthy families, landowners and so forth, bought new bicycles for Christmas. They got new bicycles for Christmas. And I got a bicycle that had been rebuilt and refurbished. That kind of thing. But there was nothing like, "Do I have a—you know, get a bigger television than my neighbor has" . . .

SL: Right.

MG: . . . or [*laughs*] that kinda thing.

SL: Right.

MG: And like, cell phones and—these folks now who have limited income have so much expense in things that we did not have and did not need to spend money on, so it makes a big difference there. So even the richest people in the neighborhood, they had servants who worked in their house. [00:46:03] And we lived across the street from probably one of the wealthiest old families of Helena, big farm families, and so forth.

[00:46:14] SL: And do you member their name?

MG: Yeah, it was Dr. Rightor and his wife.

SL: Rightor.

MG: Yeah, and they were really good people, but the only thing they had that we did not have was they had servants who would—they had a lotta parties. They gave parties, things like that. But there was nothing else that they had that we did . . .

SL: Didn't have.

MG: . . . not have lesser of, so to speak. So there wasn't that disparity. We're building in this country now disparity between people, for some reason or another, that don't have much and people who have tremendous amount, and it can cause civil unrest. But in those days there was not enough disparity between the rich and the poor to—because nobody had a lotta money, anyway.

SL: Yeah, that crash really made a difference . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . for the wealthiest.

MG: Yeah.

[00:47:20] SL: So Beech Street, now, where is that in relation to
Cherry Street? Is it a few . . .

MG: Well . . .

SL: . . . blocks over? Is it downtown here s . . .

MG: . . . it's about five blocks.

SL: Five blocks . . .

MG: It was . . .

SL: . . . from here?

MG: . . . yeah, we lived in the middle of town. Yeah.

SL: Uh-huh. So early on, what was the—I mean, I understand that by
the time that you're up and around and kind of mobile in the
neighborhood and getting to know the lay of the land that the
Depression is hitting.

MG: Yeah.

[00:47:56] SL: Did it—did you ever see—were there public kitchens?
Were there soup lines or anything like that? Or was it more of
a . . .

MG: I don't remember . . .

SL: You don't?

MG: . . . that type of public facilities for the poor. Course, that, I guess,

that never entered my mind to think about it. I'm sure there must've been somewhere people helpin'. But nobody had much to share, except—now, I've got contemporaries through the years that—they remembered eating a lotta rice. I remember eating a lot of oatmeal, and they would eat rice as a breakfast cereal [*unclear words*]. And I would—we had oatmeal all kinds of things, oatmeal cookies and oatmeal this and oatmeal that. I do remember there was—we're talkin' bout the Depression era when I was small.

SL: Okay.

[00:49:10] MG: There was a store called Sanford's Grocery Store bout a half a block from where we lived. Now, that's where I would go to buy the bread mostly. It was about all she sent me up there for, but also, he ran sort of a butcher shop there, and I remember a big choppin' block, the old time—looked like pa—a piece of a tree stump sort . . .

SL: You bet.

MG: . . . of thing. And they would chop the meat off, and this floor around that was sawdust. And then he would rake the scraps off onto the floor and bring out a new piece of meat. And that was the sanitary procedure, to rake the top of that chopping block and put another piece of meat up there and chop it up. [*Laughs*] So I don't know whether any of his tools ever get—got more than just rinsed off in a bucket or something. But anyway, that meat on the floor, he would collect it up and throw it into the garbage or something.

So I had my dog, Pal, and I asked him if I could have that meat, and he said, "Yeah." So I'd take that meat home, and then I'd wash it off, and we'd cook it in a pot for my dog. And that's what we fed him. I'd put some water in there and boil it and make soup and add some bread to it, and . . .

SL: He'd . . .

MG: . . . and that's kinda how he'd . . .

SL: . . . have a feast.

MG: Yeah.

SL: That's really good stuff.

[00:50:51] MG: But after I washed it off, I remember my mother would pick certain pieces outta that thing, and it would go into a family stew or something. So that's—and that seemed natural to me. It may seem sorta primitively horrible to current people. But that's kinda how we survived through the Depression there. And I remember these real rich people—the son of the grocer, Sanford, was named Fay Sanford, and we were schoolmates together. We graduated high school together. His daddy went bankrupt, and I remember Fay told me one time that on his books—it threw him into bankruptcy later on. We were in high school by that time—was the fact that the richest and most prominent people in the community would not pay their bills, and his daddy kept adding to it like that. So that's a—it reminded me of a lotta people when I'd—they'd call it putting on the dog. They were not as wealthy as

they . . .

SL: They appeared.

MG: Yeah.

[00:52:39] SL: Yeah, you know, it was—back then it was not uncommon for grocery stores to let families run a tab . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . especially for the things like flour and sugar and—you know, I—people have said that they were often sent down to the store and "Get me a pound of this." And the—would get out the—the owner of the store would get out the ticket and write down the date and . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know, and how much. And that was kind of common with sharecropper arrangements with the general stores that the sharecroppers . . .

MG: Yeah, I think so.

SL: . . . populated, all based on money coming in at harvest or . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . whenever the product was picked. Well, those are great descriptions of the Depression. I haven't—some of that stuff I've never gotten from anybody before, so I . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . I thank you for that stuff. Now, as far as the town itself . . .

MG: Okay.

SL: . . . did it—was there—were you aware as you started gettin' out and about of the entertainment that was available here?

[00:53:57] Was there much music going on that you were aware of or—what about gambling? Was gambling prolific when you were . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . growing up?

MG: Okay, when we were in the jukebox business, we had—oh, I guess this was in the [19]30s—yeah, all through the [19]30s there, we had jukeboxes that played the 78 records. And it—we were just coming out of the Depression, if you remember. [00:54:34] My father had a store around the corner from here—the building's gone now. That's where we operated out of. So we had a lot of surplus 78 records that we sold for a quarter apiece or something like that. So Saturdays when the school was out, I had a wind-up record player, and I would go down the street there and, about two blocks from here, and sit on the curb with a stack of 78 records, mostly the blues ?same? records, because that was the Black part of the community south of here. Every one of those lots that you may've noticed down there, vacant lots, had a building on it in those days. Every lot had a building. And the buildings had, in the Black community, had stores, and the property was owned by Black folks. Brian Miller, you mentioned Brian Miller . . .

SL: Yes.

MG: . . . one time. [00:55:41] His family owned the—I don't know. It may've been his grandfather or something—owned a full, active movie theater down there. There were photography shops, and there were clothing, garment-making shops, tailor shops and things. But there were also a lot of cafés and honky-tonks and jukeboxes and things like that—where the jukeboxes were. So I knew those people, in a sense. My daddy would go in there and change records on the jukebox there. But I would go down there and sit amongst 'em and sell these records at twenty-five cents apiece with a wind-up phonograph. [00:56:29] So I did get to know those folks, and it was a—I noticed something very strange that—as a child—and I never could quite figure it out. The older folks, the Black folks, would always call me Master Morse. And—but I was not allowed to call them Mr. Jones or anything. And I would ask my parents about that, and they would tell me that it was the way things were in the culture, that they did not like to be called Mr. or Mrs., that they'd rather be called Uncle and Auntie. So—but I never could understand exactly why that was, but we were strictly, in my house [*coughs*], forbidden to use any of the derogatory terms referred to any ethnic group or any religious group. In fact, it just—it was a word that just was not said. We—when we spoke of people, they were [*laughs*] individuals. And they were never spoken of in a derogatory way, that so-and-so or this so-and-so belonging to different ethnic or racial groups. [00:58:32]

Now, in Helena we had an interesting society. We had a viable Greek society. We had a self-sustaining, viable Italian society. In those days, in my very youth, we had a viable Black society with people who owned their own property and their own business. They were business people in another part of town. We had a viable Chinese society. We had a viable Lebanese society. And I never knew of any friction between the children of those societies, and it was even later after I got into the military, I realized there were—when you were in a town, that if you went into the wrong community, they'd throw rocks at you, you see, if you were not of that ethnic group. And so, I found that an interesting way to grow up, but we were not allowed to use any derogatory term toward a group of people. So—and I was explained that the Black community simply had to be treated with respect, and the proper terminology was Negro with two syllables, is what they could be referred to as. But never any other way. And that's kinda how I grew up in my particular home. But it [*clears throat*] . . .

TM: Scott, we're gonna need to change tapes. Excuse me.

SL: Okay, we've got our first hour done.

[Tape stopped]

[01:00:44] SL: Morse, you have survived your first hour as a Pryor Center victim.

MG: Mh-hmm. Okay.

SL: I'm very pleased that—I—it looks like to me that you're having an

interesting time, that you're kinda remembering things that you hadn't . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . thought about before, and believe me, these descriptions that you're giving us are just fabulous. It's really, really good. We—we've been tal—this is our second tape, and I imagine we'll probably just try to do this tape and then maybe shut down for the day unless you feel like going on. So . . .

MG: Okay.

SL: . . . we're gonna kinda forego lunch . . .

MG: Yeah, okay.

SL: . . . as long as we're rolling here. I think—we had started to talk about the town of Helena, and you just gave us this great accounting of taking the 78 RPM records . . .

MG: Oh.

SL: . . . and a wind-up record player and going a few blocks down from your dad's shop and selling these records to—and I assume we were—you were selling the records to the African American community.

MG: Yeah.

SL: Is that right?

MG: Mh-hmm.

SL: And from that we started talking about how many ethnic groups . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . that Helena was made—it was a broad spectrum.

MG: It was. Yeah.

[01:02:00] SL: And you know, there was also—the religious community was diverse, as well, wasn't it?

MG: The what, now?

SL: The religious community.

MG: Oh yeah, yeah. And an interesting thing, as I think back. When I—see, I went to the Episcopal church. My family's historically in that church. And I had friends that went to other churches. One of the kids I grew up with in—he's long dead now, but we graduated school together—went—and he was in my wedding—went to the synagogue, the temple. Other friends—I would walk—we would walk to school, the high school down there, and they would stop off at what turned out to be the Catholic church and the Catholic school down there. *[Laughs]* Now, none of that resonated in my mind, which I find interesting now. I just thought the churches were churches, and these kids went wherever their parents went. And it—I had no idea what a temple, a Jewish temple was. I had no idea through school what a Catholic church was. There was a Baptist church, and some of my friends would go to that church. Us—and so, it—but somehow I grew up not *[laughs]* being aware of any differences in those churches. It was never discussed in my home, the differences in these various beliefs or the ethnic

community. It—so after I got into the military, I found it was different. There was a lot of animosity that people showed one ethnic group or another or the—even the church. And course, it's worldwide. You just find that . . .

[01:04:36] SL: Well . . .

MG: . . . problem.

SL: . . . was there—were there any—was there an Irish community at all here? Was there many Irish folks?

MG: Irish. I don't think—I can't think of any—some of these people were of Irish heritage, I'm sure, that went to the Catholic church, but there was never an Irish community that I'm aware of.

SL: Yeah, I hadn't ever heard mention of that. I just—but . . .

MG: Did you have—you were raised in Fayetteville?

SL: Yes.

MG: Did you have an Irish community in Fayetteville?

SL: No. Not that I was aware of.

MG: I don't recall anything. Now, I think in the East where the Irish were brought in to do the labor of the early communities, they formed communities.

SL: No, I just know that's another . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . group of folks that experienced great prejudice from time to time.

MG: Yeah.

[01:05:30] SL: You know, so we may as well go ahead and talk about the role of religion in your upbringing. Was—were—did y'all have a Bible in the house? Did you ever study . . .

MG: No, I wasn't much interested in it, really. I just went because I was required to go to Sunday school.

SL: Well, that's [*laughter*] not unusual.

MG: Now, my brother was. My brother, Charles, was four years older than I. And he was quite into the church. He became an acolyte, and in those days it was quite a—you had to work for this—have you been to an Episcopal ceremony?

SL: Absolutely. They're beautiful.

MG: Well, the crossbearer was usually some kid in the church. And—but in St. John's you had to work yourself up to be accepted into the crossbearer. So he became crossbearer, and he was—he kept tryin' to get me interested in it, but I only was there when I was required to be.

[01:06:42] SL: You know, as long as you've mentioned your brother, did you have other siblings?

MG: Had a sister. Now, my brother was killed early in an automobile wreck, coming home—he was a junior at Mississippi State College, and . . .

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

MG: . . . coming home for Christmas, they had a car wreck, and it killed him. There was some folks who were in the car with him that I

have talked to, and what had happened—there were about five of 'em in the car to come home. Somebody's car. And course, the privileged place in the car would be next to a window.

SL: Sure.

[01:07:33] MG: And his position in the car was in the middle of the backseat. Somebody, whoever was next to the window, said, "Stop the car. I've got to—I forgot something." He went out back and got a book or something. I don't know. And Charles moved over and took his position at the window, and this kid had to take the middle seat because he sacrificed his window when . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] He got up and left . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: His reservation was void. [*Laughter*]

MG: Yeah. So anyway, they were comin' home on a darkened road, and there was a lumber truck there with lumber sticking out the back. And somehow the lumber—one of the boards came through the back window and caught him in the chest there.

SL: Oh!

MG: And he was the only one hurt in the car. So it's how fragile our existence was. But . . .

[01:08:39] SL: I know that was a horrible blow to the family.

MG: Oh gosh, my mother just never really recovered from it. She just didn't, really. So it was quite sad. And he was sort of a—well, he was my idol, really. He was a scholar and a football player and a

social, debonair sorta fellow when he wanted to be. And he wanted me to learn to dance, and I never did see much purpose in learning [*laughter*] to dance when you take a .22 rifle and a dog and go up in the woods, you see?

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: And that type of thing. But anyway, I missed him because he kept in close touch with me, tryin' to encourage me into the social life of the community, so.

[01:09:42] SL: Did—was he a big help to your father with the nickelodeon business?

MG: I don't really know. I don't think he ever—I don't recall that he ever worked in the business.

SL: Okay.

MG: So . . .

[01:10:03] SL: And so, your brother's name was Charles.

MG: Charles.

SL: Charles. And your sister's name?

MG: Anne.

SL: Anne?

MG: A-N-N-E.

SL: Uh-huh. And was she younger or older than you or . . .

MG: She was two years younger than I, and he was four years older.

But he was an entrepreneur. [01:10:26] He independently worked for himself and deliverin' newspapers or one time—have you heard

of the name Kemmons Wilson?

SL: Kemmons . . .

MG: Holiday Inn founder . . .

SL: Okay.

MG: . . . perchance.

SL: I member—gets . . .

MG: In Memphis.

SL: Yes.

MG: In his early days, when my family—somehow, my mother and father knew his mother in Memphis, and Kemmons was probably four or five years older than my older brother. But he and his mother ran popcorn machines in movie houses up there . . .

SL: Concessions.

MG: . . . and coin machines somewhere. And that probably was the connection because my father was in the coin-machine business, and they probably met at the same purcha—you know, distributor or so forth, I guess. I don't know how they met, but occasionally they would visit. He came down here to Helena and put in a double-decker ice-cream cone stand company in one of these vacant buildings. And so, my brother was a manager of one of his ice cream places . . .

SL: Stands.

MG: . . . on Cherry Street. So evidently, he didn't—I don't recall he—that he spent much time in the jukebox business or the record store

or anything. But—and then he had the paper route. He got up early every mornin'. You had to get up before dark and deliver those newspapers on . . .

SL: You bet.

MG: . . . a bicycle. That kinda thing. [01:12:41] And I didn't wanna do that [*laughter*], so I sold things door-to-door. And one of the things I sold in the early days—the gas stoves, the cooking ranges, did not have pilot lights. You had to light the flame with a match or something.

SL: Yeah, sure.

MG: Well, this company—I don't know where I got it—out of some magazine or something. I ordered a device that was on—it was a metal tube, and on the end it curled up, and it had a wooden handle on one end and a—and curled metal on the other end. And inside that metal curl was a piece of some type of material—I don't know. But you could hold it over a flame and when the—I mean, over the natural gas and all at once it would glow red, and it would light the stove for you. And I think I bought 'em for a nickel apiece and went from door to door and sold 'em for a quarter. And I found that was much easier than gettin' on that bicycle [*laughter*] before dark—before sunrise and deliverin' those newspapers. So that's kinda what I did. We had, also, we had Coca-Cola stands, you know, on the curb for selling. Stuff like that. That's what we did as children for pocket money. But I remember, regressing somewhat, goin'

back to a story my mother told me . . .

SL: Okay.

MG: . . . that—this was the—in the early 1900s, about 1919 or 1920.

World War I was over. The troopers had come home, and my father had come home. They were dating, I understand, or something—maybe engaged. I don't know. [01:15:30] But there was some trouble down at Elaine, which ended up historically bein' the Elaine riots.

SL: Yes.

MG: You've read about that.

SL: I know quite a bit. Yes.

MG: Do you? And so, they called out all of these ex-troopers, and I think they were—they went in uniform, but I'm not sure. It was some type of official grouping.

SL: A posse.

MG: A posse kind of thing. And they all went down there. She got a report that he'd been killed, but it was false. And—but when he got back, he never told me anything about the riots, and I had a feeling that I wasn't supposed to ask him about it. So I really didn't know anything about what went on down there until later in some history books and things it was mentioned. But I got the impression that he was simply not very proud of what took place down there. So—but I don't know. So . . .

[01:16:55] SL: Your mom never could say she—he probably didn't

wanna tell her about . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . it either.

MG: Hmm. I don't know whether he told her about it or not but when I'd—the kids at school knew about it, and when I'd bring it up, I didn't get any kind of a discussion with him. So I just never did bother with it anymore, and I really didn't know the extent of it till years later when I'd read other accounts about it.

SL: That's very poignant. You know, to this day, folks don't like to talk about it and there—and it is mysterious because there's no—none of the structures are there. All the landmarks have . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . changed. What used to be woods are no longer woods. And the accounting varies widely from, you know, a few dozen fatalities to several . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . hundred fatalities . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know. [01:18:12] Did your mom ever say anything about the governor coming in with the National Guard or anything like that? I mean, that also happened.

MG: Yeah.

SL: It was—something happened down . . .

MG: Something did, but I . . .

SL: . . . in Elaine and . . .

MG: . . . I really don't—I—to this day, I don't really know what happened down there. [01:18:33] But I do know that in those days I—
[laughs] I've often wondered how these Blacks were able to tolerate the conditions, the social conditions, in the culture that existed at that time—that they could. It—and it's still in—a political discussion. There's one fellow that Romney is mixed up with now that said, "One of the best things that happened to the Black community was slavery." Have you been readin' that contest?

SL: I—yes. I . . .

MG: [Laughs] You see?

SL: Every evening I fall asleep watching . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . the—those—that coverage of that race, and yeah, I'm familiar with that. [01:19:34] You know, one of the things that came out of the Elaine riot is a court decision. It happened just down the street—that is cited . . .

MG: Wait. Would you speak up just a bit? I'm missing some decibels.

SL: Well, one of the be—one of the things that did come out of the Elaine Race Riots . . .

MG: Okay.

SL: . . . that is—has proven to be beneficial is there was a court case . . .

MG: Oh.

SL: . . . and it was decided—ruled on down the street here in
this . . .

MG: Really?

SL: . . . court building. And it is—that case is cited in every civil rights
case from here on out. Before, it was Dempsey versus somebody.

MG: Okay.

SL: But until that case, the federal government was not intervening . . .

MG: Oh yeah. That's right.

SL: . . . in the race relations.

MG: Yeah.

[01:20:23] SL: All the lynchings that were happening, all the imp—all
the—the federal court system was saying, "This is a state matter" or
"This is" . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . "a local matter."

MG: That's right.

SL: And until a ruling that came out of . . .

MG: It was still a state's rights.

SL: . . . came out of the race riots here . . .

MG: The federal court . . .

SL: . . . the federal government had not engaged in the civil rights.

MG: Oh, okay.

SL: And this is like the landmark case that was—*Brown v. Board of
Education* in 1957 . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . was built around that—this decision . . .

MG: Really?

SL: . . . just down the street here. So it . . .

MG: Well, I didn't . . .

SL: . . . gives me chills when I start thinking about what you say. How could they have lasted so long . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . living in the conditions and in the culture that was handed to them?

MG: Yeah.

[01:21:13] SL: And the one light is that there was a case decided down here that is . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . usually cited and included in every civil rights matter from here on out in the courts. Thank you for tellin' me that story because I would've asked you if you had ever heard anything about the Elaine Race Riots.

MG: Yeah.

SL: And it's a very mysterious and sobering part of history that is kinda just speculative, still. I mean . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . we don't know. I—you and I can talk more about this off camera.

MG: Okay.

SL: There's many people that are very interested in this stuff and
are . . .

[01:21:55] MG: Yeah, did David speak of this?

SL: David spoke a little bit of it. His—he said that his father was ready
to go on . . .

MG: Oh.

SL: . . . the posse.

MG: Oh, okay.

SL: But for some reason they wouldn't let him, and he claimed it was
because—they said he had two children at home . . .

MG: Oh.

SL: . . . and they didn't want him to go.

MG: Oh, I see. Yeah, could be.

SL: But I . . .

MG: Could be.

SL: . . . and I don't know if that was the very night or—you know,
this . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . went on for a number of days . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . so—it's interesting. It is interesting.

[01:22:29] MG: It is. But you see, they—the town was real busy during
that time when I was a child. Saturday nights the town was filled

with people. They would come down, whole families in their cars, and fill up Cherry Street, parking with their cars. And families would sit on the car or the car fender or whatever and visit, and they would walk up and down the street. [01:23:08] Now, even as a child, I can remember walkin' down the street when it was crowded, and there'd be some elderly Black folks coming the other way, and they would step off of the street into the—I mean, step off the sidewalk into the street so that I could pass. You see, it was that type of situation. [01:23:34] We had—we were around here in this office, and there was an attorney. I guess he was an attorney. He practiced as such. Now, in those days the—there were no Black attorneys. None. And no white attorney would take the case of a black man against a white man. Did David speak to that at all?

SL: No.

MG: He didn't?

SL: Hm-mm.

MG: So thi—I'm speaking of a—as a layman. [*Laughs*] So I don't know all the insides of the legal profession there. Whether they intentionally did that or not, I don't know, but it was street talk that they would just not take a case. So the Black people had no legal representation. And if a white cha—white fellow brought a charge against him that—it just—so I remember this attorney. I used to drink coffee with him over there sometime at the drugstore. He

was probably of my father's age, as I recall. And these—he would marry a Black couple. They would come in—he told me this story—that some of his business was they would come in and wanted to get married. And he'd say, well, he'd marry 'em and they—I think it was five dollars they'd pay him to get married. And so, then he said if they wanted a divorce, they would come back to him, and he would give 'em a divorce for another five dollars. So see, that type of activity went on constantly. [01:25:34] There were cotton buyers here, and in those days the cotton buyer [*clears throat*] was skilled in grading the cotton. You've seen 'em pull the cotton . . .

SL: Yes.

MG: . . . and grade it. But the farmer—very few farmers knew how to grade their cotton, so when the Black farmers—and there were some that were farming their own land, and when they would bring the cotton in, it was customary for the—some of those cotton buyers—the town was full of cotton buyers down in that end of town. And they would just downgrade the cotton and buy it at a cheaper price. [01:26:22] They—now, David Solomon's family was in the cotton-buyin' business.

SL: Yes.

MG: But he never—they—his family never had such a reputation. There were others that did, but everybody on the street knew what they were doin'. But I never heard a word of criticism of David's family doin' that.

SL: That's nice. That's good.

MG: So—but they—how they had the patience to tolerate that, I don't—I believe I would've ended up as a Black Panther. [*Laughter*] But there's a lotta—we're still payin'—you know, the sins of the father come to the sons in several generations now. And we—we're still in that kind of problem right now.

[01:27:25] SL: You know, this—the department stores would stay open till midnight on Saturday nights, right?

MG: Yeah.

SL: I mean, people—it was not only just a social gathering, coming into Helena on the weekends, but people would actually buy clothes and buy things.

MG: Yeah.

SL: The store—the stores . . .

MG: Yeah, they would.

SL: . . . were open.

MG: Yeah, they were busy.

[01:27:52] SL: So you know, I wanna go back to the 78s from the jukeboxes that you . . .

MG: Okay.

SL: . . . would sell on the corner. Now, they were actually blues music. These were records that had . . .

MG: Yeah, that I sold in that neighborhood. Yeah.

SL: Uh-huh. And do you member some of the names on those records?

MG: Well, not for certain. I believe Muddy Waters was singing at that time. And "Big Boy" Crudup. They were some of the older records that came out.

[01:28:34] SL: Do you member any of the musicians here in town that were play—were they—were there places in the juke joints? [MG *coughs*] Do you ever remember hearing about any of the local musicians and their work?

MG: Well, you see, I didn't have any personal reason to make contact with the local musicians. The only value that I remember they had for me was whether their record was selling and whether their record was being played on the jukebox. We had, in the early days, a device that every time a record would play, there would be a little lever that would click a recording, a mechanical recording wheel, there. And you could read that—it would tell you relatively how many—which record was being played and which wasn't being played. And that's how we changed the records. If it wasn't getting any play, we'd pull it off. So the only reason that I had for—the musicians were just people who made records. Their personality or their history or their individuality, I was not interested in at that time. So a lot of 'em would come into the store, but their names didn't mean anything to me, and I didn't . . .

[01:30:33] SL: That's interesting. So really, you were on that corner, and how old were you when you were selling—peddling those on the corner?

MG: Well, I was born in [19]23, and that was in the middle [19]30s, so what would that be? Around eight or nine, ten years old.

Somethin' like that.

SL: So you were actually peddling the records that were not getting the most play on the nickelodeons, then, the ones that . . .

MG: No, I . . .

SL: . . . had been replaced.

MG: No, it was [*laughs*]*—see, in those days the record would wear out.*

SL: Ah!

MG: If you—you've seen some of those old phonographs with a . . .

SL: Yeah, sure.

MG: . . . with a heavy needle in there and so forth.

SL: Yeah, sure.

MG: Well, that's kind of what we had. And the record would actually—you've seen 78 records.

SL: Absolutely.

MG: Very shiny. All right, now, the record would get so much play it would turn white.

SL: Wow.

[01:31:30] MG: But they would still sell for a quarter apiece, see. And [*laughs*] people—and I read in some of the trade journals there are people [*coughs*] who like those old records because they [*laughs*] like to hear the scratchy sound of the needle. See, everything is cleaned up in these . . .

SL: Right.

MG: . . . new records and CDs and things they've got out. But they wanna play those old records and hear the, you know, the s—it brings back memories to them and so forth. So yeah, the records that sold—the most popular ones were the ones that we considered worn out. They had so much scratch on 'em we'd have to replace 'em. B.B. King, for instance. When we would go out and change records on the jukebox, we'd always take a box of B.B. King's records with us to replace the same record that was on the machine because we knew it was gonna be worn out, see. And that record would be brought in, and we would sell it for a quarter in the store or—and those were the records that I would take down and sit on the corner as a child.

[01:32:56] SL: I'm so glad [*laughs*] you cleared that up 'cause I just assumed that your counter—you know, you would start to—you always would want to have popular records that people would play.

MG: Yeah.

SL: And you'd take the ones that nobody played, and then you'd sell those, but it was just the opposite. You were selling the ones that were worn out.

MG: Oh yeah.

SL: Okay.

MG: Mostly. For the most part.

SL: For the most part.

MG: Yeah, because nobody wanted to—the [*laughs*] records were—that were not popular, not many people would wanna buy 'em anyway.

SL: Wanna buy 'em anyway, yeah.

MG: Yeah, you see, so it—but it—those were interesting times.

[01:33:41] SL: Were you aware of the gambling that was going on in town?

MG: Yeah, you see, my father—in that era we had a place here called Mike's Pool Hall. Have you heard of that term?

SL: I . . .

MG: Did David mention that?

SL: . . . I—I'm not sure he's called it Mike's Pool Hall, but there was a kind of a bookie operation . . .

MG: This—that was the pool hall.

SL: Okay.

MG: Okay. Now [*laughs*], my daddy spent a lot of time in the pool hall, and my mother would take me down and tell me to go in there and get him out. Dinner was ready or some kinda something. And he played dominos. He sat in the front and they—four or five people—I never did learn to play dominos. Did you learn to play?

SL: I did. Yes, my . . .

MG: But . . .

SL: . . . father played dominos.

MG: Did he?

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: Well, they would sit there playin' dominos. Now—so I got, as a kid, I got to know those folks. They were real interesting characters, sort of Damon Runyon type names that they had. And there were four or five pool tables in the back on the ground floor, and there was a counter. They made cold sandwiches and sold beer over the counter. And I got to know all the folks that worked in there.

[01:35:20] Mike Etoch was the fellow that ran it.

SL: Yeah.

MG: And in the back there was a room, as I recall, that had a poker table, and a certain group of people would sit around that poker table and play poker. It was just sorta—you just walked through the door, and they'd be sittin' there playin' poker. [01:35:46] Upstairs they had a real booking agency, and it's just like you see—do you remember the movie, *The Sting*?

SL: Yes.

MG: That they set up . . .

SL: Yeah, sure.

MG: Well, it was a whole lot like that, with a big chalkboard . . .

SL: Yes.

MG: . . . and all that kinda stuff. And so, I had, I guess—I know they didn't allow children up there, but I had privileged asset—access to—so I did go up there occasionally, and it was fascinating. They were all sittin' around talking, just like in *The Sting* movie.

[Laughs] But—and I think Mike Etoch had special permission from

whoever in that era could grant permission—it probably was the sheriffs that did it. And I think he paid some type of a fee to somebody for . . .

SL: Sure.

MG: I don't know their arrangements that way. But anyway, as I got a little bit older, I wanted to grow up and be a person who hung out in the pool halls, and [*laughs*] that was my ambition.

SL: [*Laughter*] The ambition in life.

MG: Yeah.

SL: Be at . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . Mike's Pool Hall.

MG: I no longer wanted to live up on the city dump. I was gonna [*SL laughs*]—'cause they seemed to have more fun than anybody else, you see.

SL: Right.

[01:37:20] MG: But anyway, there was—now, down in the Black community, they had the same sort of operations. Not a booking agency, but they had tables. They called 'em pool halls, and they had pool tables in there. In fact, in later years, it's on my pool table—coin-operated pool tables in there. But they would run—they'd shoot dice on the pool table there. So—and there was a fellow—he had a café called the Manchester Grill. His name was Roger Sims. He had other people working, and he owned these

other businesses in the same block there, the pool halls and the [coughs] gambling joints. [01:38:29] And he told me one time that he paid a certain fee to the city clerk up there to operate. And he actually took the money up there and gave it to her, and she actually gave him a receipt for occupation tax or something. I don't member. So the money actually went into the city treasurer, he thought, because it went through the city books into the thing. But he would pay a franchise fee or something, occupation fee, whatever they called it—weekly, I believe he'd go up there.

SL: Weekly?

MG: Yeah, he'd go up there and pay that weekly. And that would—that receipt would be his weekly permit to operate. So there was that going on, too, in an organized way. But there was always dice gra—dice games goin' on in the alley or the sidewalk or somewhere until somebody'd come along and break it up. But that was the organized . . .

SL: So it was pretty wide open.

MG: Yeah. Yeah, the town was pretty wide open.

[01:39:51] SL: Now, I think Sonny Payne told me one time that there were actually slot machines . . .

MG: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . out on the corner of—in drugstore or—I mean, slot machine—were you ever in the slot-machine business?

MG: In a way. I was—this was in—after World War II, I think. The

Legion, they were building a new hospital, and some woman, I can't think of her name right now, had left seed money to start a new hospital fund. So the American Legion got permission from the sheriff, and they put—they allowed us to bring in these slot machines, the mechanical-type machines, and put 'em anywhere that stores wanted 'em in the community. And all of the money was supposed to go toward the fund to build the new hospital. And it finally got built, and I don't know who managed the funds or not, but it was under the sponsorship of the American Legion.

[01:41:11] Now, I didn't like that idea because if you have a jukebox and a pinball in a café, beer hall, honky-tonk, whatever, and they come in with those slot machines, they absorb all the pocket money. And it really cut down on the income from the jukeboxes and the pinball machines. So I wasn't very pleased with it, but it was supposedly goin' to a good cause. But Sonny's right. They were everywhere—in the drugstore—anybody that—in business that had a lotta customers, they would want one. I don't—I didn't—never did get in on any of the operation of it, so I don't know how the money was divided, how much the store or what percent the store owner made or anything like that. But—so . . .

SL: You just—it was just a—you saw it affect your business, though. It had a definite effect.

MG: A what, now?

SL: You saw it affect your business . . .

MG: Oh, it did. Yeah.

SL: . . . or the family business. It . . .

MG: Yeah. [01:42:22] And any of that gambling will affect regular business. See, we've had—since they've opened up over at Lula, Mississippi, across the river there, they—and Mississippi's full of those casinos now. It's put a lotta people outta business over here. It's closed up several businesses. The owner would get involved, and the slot-machine people or whatever would end up owning his business, more or less. So it's never—it never helps the community. Now, it makes certain politicians profit quite a bit from it. So—but anyway . . .

[01:43:12] SL: Let's get back to home, growin' up. You know, you didn't really—there—the church wa—it wasn't really a very central part of the home, was it? I mean, you'd go to church on Sundays. Was there a Sunday school that you went to?

MG: Yeah, that's what I was encouraged to go to, and I did make some Sunday school classes. Yeah.

SL: But it wasn't, like, mandatory. You didn't—you weren't expected to always . . .

MG: [*Laughs*] Well, no, they didn't, for some reason, they didn't always force me to it, but my brother was there just whenever the church was open. He was quite involved in it, and he kept tryin' to encourage me to go there, but I don't remember the family or my parents forcing me to go, except on certain holidays or somethin'

like that. And my father never attended. He would only attend church during certain festivities, Easter, Christmas . . .

SL: Christmas.

MG: . . . that type of thing.

SL: Yeah.

MG: Yeah.

SL: So [*telephone rings*]*—oh, there's your phone.*

MG: Oh, excuse me.

SL: You want me to get it for you and [*telephone rings*] . . .

MG: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[01:44:34] SL: Okay, Morse, we were talkin' about the role of church when you were growin' up in your home.

MG: In the family. Yeah.

SL: And we [*MG clears throat*] established that you were encouraged to go, but you didn't always go. But your brother was very involved.

MG: Yeah.

SL: Your father never really went unless it was a special occasion.

[01:44:53] What . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . what about your mom? Did she . . .

MG: Oh yeah, she was quite involved in it—in all the activities, making biscuits and rolls and serving meetings there and so forth. She was quite involved in it. [01:45:15] We, until a certain time, we had a

minister there that was quite—he was a young fellow at that time, and he was quite involved in getting other young people into the church. He did [*laughs*—I think he did a lotta proselating because a lotta young people from other churches came and joined the Episcopal church at that time. So he was one of the most popular ministers that we had ever had there. But he was not one of my favorites, for some reason. I don't even know why now. But he was quite a social individual. He was at all the parties and was sort of a celebrity, a local celebrity at—this was a party town among the moneyed people. They were always having some type of a little formal party of some kind. So he spent a lotta time there.

[01:46:49] But anyway, my brother was killed, and word was sent to the minister my mother wanted to see him. And he would not come to the house. He was at a party. We called, and he was called at the party. It was a very socially prominent group of people who were partying that night, and he would not leave to come be with her. Well, it really hurt her, so she quit the Episcopal Church and joined the . . .

SL: Methodist?

MG: No, the church that heals without medicine.

SL: The Church of Christ . . .

MG: Mary Baker . . .

SL: . . . maybe or . . .

MG: Who?

SL: Church of Christ?

MG: No.

SL: Latter-day Saints? The . . .

MG: No, the . . .

SL: . . . well, the Scientologists . . .

[01:48:04] MG: Mary Beth Eh—what was her name—that she can—the church that believes in healing without medicine. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, there's—the Scientologists do that.

MG: No.

SL: Not them?

MG: It was—that came along later. This was the early . . .

SL: Well, for . . .

MG: Oh, it's right on the tip of my tongue. It's not active locally anymore. Hadn't been for decades.

SL: It'll come to us. We . . .

MG: Oh yeah. Okay.

SL: . . . we don't have labor over it. [*MG laughs*] So she switched affiliations.

MG: Yeah, yeah.

SL: And was—who was—obviously, what a horrible thing to . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . after being dedicated to her church and the pastor wouldn't even . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . come see—at the death. That's too bad. And I guess your sister was a little bit younger, so she probably wasn't—do you think she was as . . .

MG: No, it didn't—that didn't affect her then. It didn't bother me. I [*laughs*] never did put a whole lotta faith in people. [01:49:27] They—I guess Jesus Christ is the only real person that you can put faith in because everybody else will fail you, so I just accepted it. And it turned out he went bad, too. He was finally defrocked from the church, and he got mixed up in certain scandals, I think, in Louisiana after he left here. So it—and I wasn't surprised at the time. But anyway, that's—but he did bring a lotta kids. One of 'em went on a—Jack Allin was his name—that came into the church because of that—because of this minister. And he went on to become the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in America. So he really did a lot to build up some jobs.

SL: He had some influence and . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: And sometimes it was for the good.

MG: Yeah. [01:50:43] So anyway—Christian Science.

SL: Christian Scientist. Of course.

MG: Yeah. [*Laughs*] But anyway [*laughter*], she just never did really . . .

SL: Recover.

MG: . . . recover from that experience.

SL: Well, that kind of thing changes . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . thi—it changes folks. [01:51:12] And what about chores around the house? Were you expected to do some things around the house? I mean, like, did you . . .

MG: Now, when . . .

SL: . . . always make—did you always make your own bed in the morning?

MG: Well, when—as a child?

SL: Uh-huh.

MG: Oh. No, we always had—oh, I was expected, in the early days, up until I was about, let's see, about fifteen—till my teenage—early teen years, I was expected to get up and build a fire in the fireplace in the room. Take the ashes out. Now, in—we lived in a real good neighborhood right across from Dr. Rightor that I was tellin' you about. [Laughs] And it's amazing. My children saw the house I lived in at one time. It was a large—it actually had four floors.

SL: Wow.

MG: [Laughs] It—if you include the attic. You know, kind of a—it was a huge house, and it was a Victorian-type of a house. The lot was probably 50 feet wide in one of the better neighborhoods of the community there and close to downtown. Probably 100 to a 125 feet deep. Now . . .

SL: That's bout a quarter acre.

MG: I guess. Somewhere. And this house took up most of it. It was
a . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: Filled up the lot. [01:53:12] But [*laughs*] on that lot we had a
dairy with five cows. I raised chickens and sold chickens up and
down the street. We called 'em fryers when they were about two or
two and half pounds. In those days people would not buy a dead
chicken. They just would not buy a dead chicken. They—you had
to walk from house to house. Even the grocery store sold live
chickens. And the people, the housewife, who would buy a chicken
would come out and feel the chicken all over and look in his eyes
and all that kinda stuff. Everybody killed their own chickens and
cooked 'em. They wanted 'em fresh. And so, I would walk around
town with four chickens, two on each hand, and go door to door and
sell chickens. I had a—on the roof of a house, I had built a
pigeon . . .

SL: Roost.

MG: . . . house, and so, I had pigeons up there. And I sold what we
called squabs. Are you familiar with the squab?

SL: No.

MG: That's the baby pigeon . . .

SL: Okay.

MG: . . . before it's able to leave the nest.

SL: Okay.

MG: And there was a restaurant here called Habib's Restaurant.

SL: Famous restaurant here.

MG: You know Habib's?

SL: David Solomon . . .

MG: David told you.

SL: . . . loved Habib's.

MG: Okay.

SL: Yeah.

[01:54:50] MG: And I sold them squabs. Okay, now—and I had no complaints from the neighborhood at all. None of the neighbors—and this was in the middle of the Depression Era, and people didn't complain about that I knew anything about it. I would take the cows early in the mornin' before—on the way to school, I would take the cows outta the lot at the house and march 'em down the street and put 'em in a fenced-in grazing area about two or three blocks down the street. And I had to keep 'em out of my—one of my schoolteachers, a Mrs. Butterick, grew pretty flowers, little daffodils, along the street. And she would beg me not to let the cows eat the daffodils. So that was one [*laughs*] of my chores was to stand between the daffodils and the cows as we passed her house. But people were tolerant in those days. They were just—well, course, every neighbor knew every other neighbor, and that . . .

SL: Sure.

MG: . . . that's not true today, I think.

SL: That's correct.

MG: Yeah. So—but—and probably some of these pigeons that are quite a nuisance today in the community were [*laughter*] what I had.

SL: Came out of your hutch.

MG: Yeah. [*Laughter*] Anyway, that was—so . . .

SL: Well, that's interesting. You had just a—like a little cattle drive down the neighborhood.

MG: Yeah, just walked down the street with the cows, and there was usually five. Five of 'em.

SL: Wow!

[01:56:47] MG: And we sold milk to the neighborhood. And I remember my mother talkin' to her contemporaries and—that she had the cleanest milk in town because most folks would—you'd strain the milk to get trash and bugs out of it when you'd bring it in. And most of 'em—the habit was you'd take a big container and put a heavy cloth over the top and pour the milk down through the cloth. But she used two cloths, so she claimed that her milk was cleaner than anybody else's milk in town. So things like that come to mind. But . . .

[01:57:52] SL: Well, you know, that might have somethin' to do with your affinity to sell things door-to-door that . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: You know, because you all—you grew up with that from

probably . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . your earliest memories of that kind of commerce. The . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . neighborhood commerce and . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . and you probably were comfortable with that, you know. And a lotta folks these days would never consider going door-to-door to sell anything.

MG: I think you couldn't do it. Now, every once in a while, I'll read in the paper where somebody went to door-to-door and the guy shot 'em. But . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: There's a little—it was in the paper in—within the last few days, some guy shot a little girl. Did you read that?

SL: No.

MG: She was dressed up. She was tryin' out a costume that he claims looked to him like a skunk.

SL: Oh, I did . . .

MG: Did you . . .

SL: . . . read something . . .

MG: . . . see that?

SL: . . . about that.

MG: So these . . .

SL: It was a relative, too. It was one . . .

MG: I think.

SL: . . . of her relatives.

MG: I think. Uh-huh. [01:58:56] So these people are so quick.

They're so frightened of people comin' to their door. And there's a right f—a good reason for that. I—not too long ago, a couple years ago, I put up a—early on in our marriage when I moved into this house, I put these security doors up there so that my wife could open the heavy wooden door to talk to whoever came up to the front porch. But she'd have a good security behind that door. So anyway, oh, a couple months ago, six months ago, probably, there was a fellow that—I remember seein' him on the street. He carried a little Bible, a little, very small Bible, and occasionally he would stop people and quote a scripture there and ask—he would ask me occasionally on the street to explain this particular paragraph to him. So one day I got out—I'd been in the hospital a couple weeks, and I was tryin' to learn to walk again. [*Laughs*] It was just that—so I was sitting at home, and he came up on the back porch and sat on the bench there. I saw him. He came through a locked gate. That should've roused my suspicion anyway. I keep a gate there to keep folks out, really, but it's just got a little hinge lock on it. And I was sitting in the chair, and then he looked up at me and opened his Bible and waved to me and asked, you know, as though he was pointing to something. He wanted me to—well, I didn't wanna talk

to him. [02:00:55] So I opened the security door enough to tell him that I didn't feel like talkin' to him that day. Well, soon as I got that door cracked about that much, he put his hand in there and yanked it up and pulled out a big pistol . . .

SL: Oh my gosh!

MG: . . . [*laughs*] and came into the house. And so, I gave him some money, and he took me upstairs and put me in the bathroom and said, "If you come out, I'm gonna shoot you." So then he looked all around the house, I guess, and I couldn't hear him anymore. So I reached for the telephone and called 911, and they were there in just about two or three minutes. [02:01:46] And they finally caught him a couple of days later. He was invading a motel around here and—with a long bowie-type knife on him. But he had left my house then. So you see, these people that walk up now, they are quite risky . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: . . . to open your door to them, so you can't go door-to-door anymore.

SL: Yeah, it's against the law in some towns.

MG: Yeah.

SL: It's not allowed.

MG: And see, kids can't deliver papers on bicycles anymore. They—it's all done in automobiles now. You don't see these folks—we used to have, on the street in the [19]30s and [19]40s, we'd have hot

tamale people with hot—you've seen those pushcarts. But you see, that's all gone because they would be robbed as soon as they sold—somebody would take the money away from 'em. So it's changed. The society has—the culture has changed, not for the better, I think. [*Laughs*] So . . .

SL: So you got the fire started in the morning. Took the ash out in the morning, and you also had the, really, farmhand duties . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . with the livestock.

MG: Yeah, we had to take care of that and . . .

[02:03:25] SL: And did your mom have a garden, a vegetable garden, or . . .

MG: I did. I had somewhat of one. Not—I was never much of a gardener. It—but I would try to grow some things but not really very much. Usually there were people who had gardens. Durin', now, durin' the war they promoted what they call victory gardens.

SL: Yes.

MG: You member readin' about that. And so, people did grow a lotta things, and they would give surplus. They didn't sell it, but they had surplus things, and they would trade vegetables. And we always had some kinda fresh vegetable. But they had curb—what they called curb markets. Have you heard that term?

SL: No.

MG: Well, it was sorta like a farmers' market, in a sense. There was one

around here bout two blocks that way [gestures with thumb over his shoulder]. And the farmers would come in, and I believe it was on a weekend or something, and they'd have a lotta fresh produce there. Some of 'em would have animals that [*car horn beeps*] had been killed, rabbits or something, hanging up there. But—so the vegetables were not really expensive, and they were plentiful, so somebody was growing 'em somewhere. But we had those.

SL: Let's talk a—let's get back to the house, too. I . . .

MG: Okay.

[02:05:19] SL: So I assume that you guys had a radio in your house?

MG: Yeah, we had what was—well, there's one right behind you there.

And then before that, we had one that had a big horn sittin' on top of it. [*Laughter*] It was a fascinating thing. You couldn't—you could not always hear. They didn't have the powerful stations that they've got now, of course. But on certain nights we would gather around that thing. I don't know. It may've been *Jack Benny Show* or one of those . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: . . . shows.

SL: *Amos 'n Andy*, maybe, or . . .

MG: Yeah, *Amos 'n Andy* and things like that.

[02:06:10] SL: Anything out of—there was a show outta Chicago called *The Shadow*. You member *The Shadow*?

MG: The what, now?

SL: *The Shadow*.

MG: Okay, now, that—yeah, I had a—usually I would have a small table radio by my bedside. And I loved the radio dramas [*coughs*], and there were lots of 'em. Did you ever hear one of 'em?

SL: No. I mean, I've heard recordings but not—I never . . .

MG: Yeah. They were gone, yeah.

SL: They were gone.

MG: But they were good in that they, I think, they stimulated your imagination. You had to build—you heard these voices, but it was your imagination that built the surroundings, wherever they were. So I think they had a good cause, but I guess they wouldn't be popular now.

[02:07:12] SL: Well, when the family would gather around the radio, what programming did y'all listen to? I mean, was there a time in the evening when—after dinner or something where there was a favorite program that the family liked to listen to together or . . .

MG: Well, it seemed to be just certain—when a certain program was on, excuse me, that we all liked, we would be—they would be I guess Jack Benny or Gracie Allen . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: . . . type [*rumbling*] shows, and they were good. Sometimes—but we didn't—I don't recall spending much time at family gatherings with radio, you know, in front [*revving engine*] of a radio, unless it was special. [*Bell rings*] Somebody tried to come in.

[Tape stopped]

[02:08:15] SL: What about sports broadcasts? Boxing or . . .

MG: Well . . .

SL: Do you member those at all or . . .

MG: If we wanna go back into the [19]30s . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: [*Coughs*] Excuse me. [02:08:34] We'll get back to Mike's Pool Hall.

SL: Okay.

MG: Now, people would come down on certain days when Jack Dempsey was boxing, for instance, and park on the street outside of Mike's Pool Hall and gather round and be sitting, some of 'em on the curb, some of 'em on car fenders and bumpers and whatever. There was a loudspeaker outside the—Mike's Pool Hall. And somebody inside would be broadcasting over these loudspeakers the . . .

SL: Round.

MG: . . . the fight or the ball game or whatever it was that was on that particular night. And they would give round—each round and each punch and each—you know, the color that—it was kinda like—gettin' back to *The Sting*, you know how the guy who did the race . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: . . . on *The Sting*. Okay.

SL: Well, so, now—but it wasn't the actual live broadcast. It was someone . . .

MG: No. But it was . . .

SL: It was delayed.

MG: [*Laughs*] What I found out later—I don't—I didn't pay much—I never have been really caught up in sports. [02:10:02] But what I found out years later, decades later or af—maybe after I got outta the military—there was a fellow here named Bob Evans. He was probably my senior by three or four years, something like that. But he was into show business. Do you remember Bob Barker?

SL: Yeah.

MG: That name? Okay.

SL: Sure.

MG: All right, now, he was Miss America?

SL: Yes.

MG: Okay. All right, now, Bob Evans—they were tryin' to pick the moderator or the host of Miss America, and Bob Evans was into show business then, and he was a—the last competitor to Barker. And he lost out, and Bob Barker [*SL laughs*] got the job. Okay. But this was high school days and . . .

SL: Yeah.

[02:11:01] MG: Okay. And he was quite a musician. He was an arranger for Fred Waring's band. Does that ring a bell with you?

SL: It—a dull . . .

MG: He was . . .

SL: . . . bell. I ki . . .

MG: . . . one of the big bands . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: . . . of that era. But anyway, it turned out—and I didn't find this out till well after the war. We were back here talkin'. [02:11:23]

It was Bob Evans who was sitting in Mike's Pool Hall upstairs, reading a tape. Just like that fellow that was reading the horse racing. And all of the color of the fight, he had to put in [*laughter*], so it sounded as though somebody was right there at the ring broadcastin' this thing, see. And it was so good it fooled me, really, for all those years. I . . .

SL: That's funny.

MG: . . . I thought there was something comin' over the radio, but it really wasn't. He was—he had a PA system set up there.

SL: That's funny.

MG: But it was coming over that tape.

[02:12:05] SL: How innovative and how smart Mike must've been.

MG: He was a—I liked Mike. I called him Mr. Etoch. He was of my father's generation. But everything was kept quiet. We never had gangster effect in the community. The sheriff really kept the gangster element out of the community, and they had tried to come in several times out of St. Louis or somewhere. They would. So he was the only gambling that was, except private individuals in their homes and back rooms of the stores and things, commercially operating. And I think he was quite an accommodating man. I

understand that he was quite generous with his charities and things like that, but I'm not sure. But it was kept low-key, and nobody complained. [02:13:37] I remember one time I was on a jury up there. This was after the war and the judge—we were all businessmen. I was in here at the time, I think, runnin' this business. And the judge said, "I wanted to thank y'all for coming up here, and we decided that we wanted on the jury the citizens of Helena who were in business. We didn't want the Mike's Pool Hall hangers-on." Because they [*laughs*—up until that fellow came in as judge the—part of the income for those folks hangin' out down there at Mike's was to be on a jury. You get ten dollars a day or somethin' like that, which was . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: . . . pretty good, whether you served or not, you know. [*Laughter*]

SL: So they funneled the jury through . . .

MG: Yeah, he worked . . .

SL: . . . until that judge came along.

MG: Yeah, that's why he had called businessmen to [*SL laughs*] the jury.

SL: That's funny.

MG: But . . .

SL: Wow!

[02:14:50] MG: It—but I always thought those guys were good guys. I wouldn't mind havin' my case judged by, and there were some businessmens that I had rather have . . .

SL: Well, sure.

MG: . . . Mike's Pool Hall hanger-on . . .

SL: Sure.

MG: . . . make a judgment than . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: Yeah. So—but that—I found that amusing.

[02:15:11] SL: Now, what about—was there any musical inst—were there mis—musical instruments in your home, growing up?

MG: No. Uh-uh. None of us were musically inclined. We—this music store came about [*car honks*]*—the—we were in the jukebox business, coin-machine business, and we had a building around the corner there, the same one that my father had had durin' the Depression Era, and it got too small. The loading zone was a vacant—part of a vacant lot that a fellow who owned it built a building there. So that clut—cut off our truck . . .*

SL: Access.

MG: . . . loading zone back there. We had to move. So this building became vacant, and we moved into this. [*Coughs*] All we needed for the jukebox was the back half of the building there. We had workshop back there and so forth. Plenty of room. So this was vacant. Had no idea what to do with it. [02:16:29] So a fellow in St. Louis who had some connection to my father—I don't know how—St. Louis Music Supply company. I still—I think—I don't deal with 'em anymore, but I think they are one of the largest in the

nation still in business. [02:16:50] But this fellow was my father's contemporary, and he asked him, "Why don't you sell some musical instruments," you see. So said, "Okay." He said, "I'll send you some guitars and some sheet music." So in this whole store that you see now was empty except for three guitars and a rack of . . .

SL: Sheet mu . . .

MG: . . . sheet music—this whole front end. [*Car horn beeps*] We would sell one guitar and buy two more. At that time you could double your money on a guitar. It would—so instead of spending the money, we would—if we sold one, we'd buy two more. In those days you could only buy guitar strings at the drugstore. Did you ever hear of that?

SL: No. [*MG laughs*] I've never heard that.

MG: Yeah. [*Laughter*] They sold Black Diamond guitar strings.

SL: Well, Black Diamond, of course.

MG: Yeah.

SL: Heard that. Yeah.

MG: And so [*laughter*], we put in some guitar strings. Somebody asked about guitar strings. [02:18:14] So when people would ask about something, we, of course, didn't have it. But we would get one or two in and put it on the shelf, so that's the way it kinda built up in here.

[02:18:28] SL: So what year was that when you started . . .

MG: We moved into this building in [19]53.

SL: Okay.

MG: Yeah. So . . .

SL: So that's post-World War II.

MG: Hmm?

SL: I mean, that's after the Second World War.

MG: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

MG: After that. Uh-huh. So up until then we were still around there and just in the jukebox business. Just that.

[02:18:57] SL: So now, did you go—were you a veteran of the war?

Did you . . .

MG: Yeah, I went in [19]43. And I came out in [19]46, early [19]46.

SL: Okay, maybe we can talk about that—some of that tomorrow.

But—and I definitely wanna get to the music store here, but we really haven't even gotten you through high school yet, and it sounds like that you preferred to go, growing up, that you preferred to go hunting and just kinda be a loner. I . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . didn't get—I don't get the impression that you engaged very much with the . . .

MG: Not in social activities.

[02:19:47] SL: Uh-huh. What about athletic activities or sporting activities?

MG: I never was very good at that. I would try, and I'd turn out for

athlete—athletic activities, basketball, football, mainly. But I never was really adapted to it. We'd play sandlot baseball but—and the game has so changed now that I'm not even interested in watching it on TV. When I played basketball in high school, the coach that we had then would chastise us severely if we even got too close to the opposing player. And if we touched him the—our own coach would pull us out, you see. It was [*laughs*]*—we—but now when I watch it on TV . . .*

SL: Oh!

MG: . . . it's become a contact sport.

SL: Absolutely, it's a contact . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . sport.

MG: So I'm not really—I don't watch it at all. But anyway, so . . .

[02:21:13] SL: Now, this is the coach at Helena . . .

MG: High School.

SL: . . . High School.

MG: Yeah.

SL: Do you member his name?

MG: One was named Rabbit Brown and the other named Dick Ligon.

They were all teachers. These were real teachers.

SL: Oh, okay.

MG: And they weren't hired as . . .

SL: Coaches.

MG: . . . they do now—as coaches.

SL: Yeah.

MG: So one taught science, and I forgot what the other coach taught.

And the sports were sort of a sideline with 'em. [02:21:55] So played on Saturday. It was a Saturday afternoon game. It wasn't a light—lighted game. So it—I think it was a better high school sport in those days than they're tryin' to make it today. They—it's all changed up.

[02:22:23] SL: What position did you play?

MG: I played forward on the basketball and played—tried to play end on football. [*Roaring sound*] Course, I was a little taller—skinnier than . . .

SL: And we're talking . . .

MG: . . . than the other guys.

SL: . . . on the offense. You . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . on offensive side.

MG: So—but as I said, I didn't get to play a whole lot 'cause I wasn't—really wasn't that good. [*Laughter*] I guess I just didn't really see the importance of it, maybe.

SL: Right.

MG: I don't know.

[02:23:04] SL: But your brother, on the other hand, enjoyed . . .

MG: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . playing football.

MG: Yeah. So yeah, he was good at just about everything he did. He was a—so . . .

[02:23:18] SL: Well, how bout academics? How were you as a student?

MG: Mediocre. Now, he was a good academic student, but I just kinda got by. It—I was interested in it, and I thought it was important, but it was a struggle. I had friends—one particular friend who had a photographic memory, I believe. [*Laughs*] And he could just whip through those pages and be done with the history and so forth. [*SL laughs*] It'd take—I'd have to read every word [*laughs*] . . .

SL: Right.

MG: . . . to get through a page. So—but it worked out pretty good, yeah.

[02:24:19] SL: The—I mean, was there any particular subject that you favored at all?

MG: I kinda liked mathematics. I was fairly—pretty good at mathematics. [02:24:31] But one of the problems I—and I found out later that I struggled with—I've always been terribly nearsighted, and I always sat at the back of the class. And the chalkboard . . .

SL: So you couldn't see the board.

MG: . . . was at the front of the class.

SL: It didn't make sense to you.

MG: So I'd have to—after the bell rang, I'd have to run to the front of the class and take notes of whatever was up on the chalkboard there. And I had no glasses at that—in the early days, so it was the Dr. Rightor that I was tellin' you about across the street that made my first pair of eyeglasses. And it made all the difference in the world. I was a pretty good shot with that rifle, but [*laughs*] I shot to the middle of the blur.

SL: Yeah.

MG: And it amazed me when I put on my glasses that he made for me that the trees had individual leaves. You know, I could see the individual leaves then. Otherwise, it was just all a . . .

SL: Soft.

MG: . . . color. Soft color, yeah.

SL: You know, our mi—our younger son, we didn't realize he had sight problems until he was probably in junior high school.

MG: Really? Have what kinda problem?

SL: Well, he—I guess he was nearsighted.

MG: Oh, okay. Yeah.

SL: But he just thought, I mean—and it—the biggest impact that it had on him immediately was baseball. He could now see the ball come . . .

MG: He couldn't see the ball . . .

SL: . . . he could see the ball come . . .

MG: . . . until it got right there [indicates a space directly in front of himself].

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

MG: I had that trouble, too. [*Laughs*] [02:26:16] And tryin' to catch a ball, playin' in—you know, the ball—I'd see the fellow down there throw, but then the ball would appear right—you know, all at once.

SL: Same—yes. [*Laughter*]

MG: Well, I empathize with him 'cause . . .

[02:26:31] SL: That's funny. Well, now, when it came time for homework did—was there any—anything set up at home? Did you have to . . .

MG: Oh, I had . . .

SL: . . . complete . . .

MG: . . . to do my . . .

SL: . . . your homework before you could do anything else?

MG: Oh yeah. Yeah. That was required in my home. There was enough discipline there that I could not go out until I had done my homework. And so, sometimes it took longer than—sometimes it was dark before I—we had to be in at dark. We'd—on a Friday night or something, we could play out in the yard after dark. But . . .

[02:27:17] SL: Was your mother the enforcer on that?

MG: More or less. Yeah, she was. See, my—as I found out later, she kept mildly chastising my father for drinking too many beers, you

know. "You've had enough beer tonight." [02:27:42] Well, I think he went through a period of bein' alcoholic in their early days. And it was just one of those problems he dealt with. And so—and I didn't realize it, but she had a hard time keepin' him sober, and then all at once he quit drinkin' anything. We had no beer around the house. I never did really know why he did that. But he could be quite irritable sometimes when he would come home, so I'd—I would stay away from him. He would be somewhat belligerent, seemed to me, I guess. And I'd just try to stay out of his way. But it was interesting. I didn't really understand it at the time, or rather why, but *[laughs]* I did after I got out of the military. See, in the military we could go to the officers' club, and whiskey would flow like water. Yeah. At breakfast they would serve you champagne if you wanted it. Anytime during the day. So it was a ver—I was in Bavaria and part of Austria there, and I remember one time they had, it was a special occasion, they had—the enlisted men were the host to the officers, and we met at the enlisted men's club. And everybody got drunk 'cause there was lots of whiskey. There was plenty—all the whiskey you could *[SL laughs]* carry. And it was cheap, too. *[Laughs]* And I woke up Sunday, and I couldn't get outta bed, and I thought it was Sunday, but my corporal came in to get me, and I asked him what day it was. He said it was Tuesday.

SL: Oh my gosh!

[02:31:02] MG: *[Laughs]* So he said he'd been comin' over checkin' on

me, but finally I sobered up that—so anyway, it wasn't long after that, maybe six months or a year, I got discharged, and I came home. I had some money saved up. Wasn't anything to spend money on over there, so I'd sent it all home. So I had several thousand dollars in a savings account. So I didn't go to work. Why the par—why my parents put up with me, I don't know, but they did. I slept at home. They fed me. I slept most of the day. Then I would go out at night with my buddies, and we'd get drunk. And I would drink anything, beer and whiskey, whatever. It didn't make any difference the mix, whatever it was. But I was always sick. My stomach always hurt. And I was eating Alka-Seltzer like . . .

SL: Candy.

MG: . . . every—yeah, I'd buy it by the case. I'd buy that Alka-Seltzer by the case. I was livin' on that stuff. So I finally went to the doctor [*coughs*], and he said, "Well, I can't help you." I said, "What?" 'Cause I wanted him to give me a pill or somethin'.

SL: Yeah.

MG: I don't know. I was kinda naive and . . .

SL: Sure.

MG: . . . dumb. But he said, "There's nothin' I can do for you."

[02:32:56] He said, "You're an alcoholic, and you have to cure it yourself. Nobody else can—you have to quit drinkin'. And if you don't, you're gonna die one of the most horrible deaths because it's going to dissolve your liver and eat up your stomach, and you

gonna be in pain the rest of your life if you don't quit." So I quit. And so, that—and then I got better, cured up. And then I went to work with my daddy at the—so it was about a year or so that I didn't do a lick of work. I just—every night—and they were tolerant enough to keep up with me. [02:33:46] But I do think back, and he probably went back—went through that same experience. You're in the army. You have responsibilities. This is kinda psychobabble on myself, but I had certain responsibilities and certain command. When I asked for something to be done, it got done, and so forth. Well, when I got out, there was nothing. All of that [*laughter*] was instantly gone. There was no real purpose for my being there, in a sense, and so, I just—I guess that may've been the reason. And he might've experienced the same kinda thing when he . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: . . . when he came out because you see a lotta these veterans, now, it's a real problem in the nation today, these veterans that are hooked on all kinds of stuff. In the military—have you ever been in the military?

SL: No.

MG: Well . . .

SL: My draft number was in the two hundreds, so I . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . avoided—I didn't have to serve . . .

MG: Yeah.

SL: . . . in the Vietnam War. But that's would've been the war . . .

MG: Yeah, that would've been it.

SL: . . . that I'd been . . .

MG: Well, it—everything is provided. You've always got a place to go sleep, you see. You've always got plenty of food there. Everything is available to you. It's a certain security involved in that. All the medical attention you might ever need. And all at once all that's wiped out. Gone. So maybe that—I don't know, really. But I had a lot more respect for what my father had gone through than I had—than I remembered as a child, so.

[02:35:50] SL: So did you go to college after high school?

MG: Yeah, I went to Arkansas Tech. And it was a small coll—a two-year college at that time. I gue—I—are they four year, or is it two years now? Do you know?

Trey Marley: It's four.

MG: How many?

SL: It's . . .

TM: It's four.

SL: . . . it's four now.

MG: Four? Okay. And [*laughs*] what an experience. I was talkin' to a friend not long ago about football. They gave us, when I got up there, they gave us a pep talk about "We want"—all of the football players were actually students in those days [*laughs*], and so, they encouraged us to go out for football. They needed students to

come out for football. So I felt patriotic, and I [*SL laughs*] went out and walked on that field. And when I saw those football players that were out there, they were several inches taller than I and weighed fifty pounds more. [*Laughs*] I turned around and walked off the field. [*SL laughs*] I never got to the coach. But . . .

[02:37:15] SL: So what was Ark—where was Arkansas Tech, now?

Where . . .

MG: It was at Russellville.

SL: Russellville.

MG: Yeah.

SL: And what was it like? I mean, was this really the first time you'd been away from home?

MG: Yeah, more or less. It—I think it was the first time I'd ever been—oh, I'd gone to Memphis a couple of times with my mother, shopping or whatever. But it was a completely new experience up there, and it was a good experience. In those days, as I remember, the tuition, room and board was something like twenty-five dollars a month. [*Laughter*] Isn't that amazing?

SL: That is amazing.

MG: When I think of the cost they doin' now. I don't know what's made the difference, but I don't understand inflation, anyway. I've got a harmonica back there that I used to sell to Sonny Boy Williamson—fifty cents. It's a Marine Band HOHNER harmonica. Now that thing is fifty dollars. Yeah, but anyway, up there they—we had three

meals a day. We'd go to the cafeter—no, it wasn't the cafeteria.

[02:38:46] It was a mess hall, I guess is what—I don't know what they called it at that time. But—and we all had tables to sit at

[*laughs*], so we had this one football player who sat at our table.

[*SL laughs*] And he was quite in command. He wasn't a very

friendly fellow, and it was served—you'd have a bunch of 'em—just like home service. You had a bowl full of mashed potatoes, and

you'd pass it around. Well, he would take half of the potatoes and

all of the best part of the asparagus and whatever [*SL laughs*] they

put out there. So [*laughs*]—and he used salt and pepper. So one

day I—gosh, I wish I could think of that fellow's name. Oh, me.

But anyway [*laughs*], he had a bad reputation on bein' pretty

rough. And he was a big fellow. So one day the—we had regular

salt shakers, those glasses with tops on 'em, so I unscrewed the top

and barely set it on there and put it back on the table. [*Laughs*]

And he reached for that thing and dumped all that salt on his food.

Well, he never did find out who did that. It . . .

SL: Thank goodness!

MG: But it bothered me. You know, I—if he found out, I don't know

what woulda happened to me. But anyway [*laughter*], at Sunday

we had a—at Sunday breakfast—the Sunday meal was a sack lunch.

It had an apple, a coupla sandwiches, and it always had a candy bar in it.

SL: Yeah.

[02:40:46] MG: And he would stand at the front door as people came out, and he would match 'em for their lunch, you see. And he ended up with several sacks there every time. He was a good flipper of the coin and so forth. So I took my candy bar—that's the only thing I ate outta that thing anyway—and I took my candy bar out and put it in my pocket and then went up there. And when he matched, he won my lunch. Okay. So the athletic dorm was attached to the student dorm.

SL: Kay.

MG: Men's dorm, they called it. And all at once, one of those football players came around and said, "Morse, so-and-so wants to see you." [*Laughs*] I said, "What does he wanna see me for?" He said, "I don't know, but he sent me to get you, and I'm gonna take you around there. Do you wanna go with me, or want me to take you?" [*Laughs*] I said, "Well, I'd go." So he came out the door when I got to his bedroom there and said, "Where's my candy bar?" And so, I had it in my pocket, so I gave him the candy bar. And he said, "Don't you ever cheat me again, you see." And I said, "No." I might've said, "No, sir." I don't know [*laughs*], but anyway, now we skip over into when I went into the military. [02:42:33] And I had graduated the cadets and got my commission, and they sent me first to Las Vegas out there, army air base.

SL: Yeah.

MG: And I went into one of those little bars on Main Street there and sat

down, you know, in a booth with some kind of a drink or somethin'. I don't know. And I looked over [*laughs*], and there was this girl sitting there next to this tall captain. And she looked at me, and I'm—and smiled, and I smiled at her, kinda grimaced and so forth, and all at once, the captain turned around and looked at me and this girl. And he got up outta that chair—out of his barstool and started comin' over, and he was a great big fellow, and it was dark in there. Those places were always dark anyway.

SL: Yeah.

[02:43:39] MG: [*Coughs*] And when he got close to me, got up close to me, he said, "Aren't you Gist?" And I said, "Yeah." It turned out to be that same fellow.

SL: Same football play . . .

MG: [*Laughter*] And he was so glad to see me, and I was glad to see him, too, and I guess he had forgot about my cheatin' him.

SL: Cheatin' him on the candy bar.

MG: Yeah. So . . .

SL: So he outranked you.

MG: Oh yeah, he outranked me, and he was physically bigger. And I didn't know what I was gettin' into. When I first recognized him comin' over there, he wasn't smilin'. He was . . .

SL: [*Laughter*] You were messin' with his girl.

MG: I was messin' with—well, it turned out she was just a bar girl and . .

SL: Ah.

MG: . . . showin' up, and he didn't know who she was so . . .

SL: Yeah.

MG: Anyway [*SL laughs*], but that was an interesting coincidence, I thought.

SL: So . . .

TM: Scott, we need to change tapes.

SL: Oh, we're done with this tape?

[End of interview 02:44:35]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]