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

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Arkansas Memories Project

John Philpot

Interviewed by Randy Dixon

September 5, 2018

Fayetteville, Arkansas

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Objective

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

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

Transcript Methodology

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

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

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

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

Randy Dixon interviewed John Philpot on September 5, 2018, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Randy Dixon: It is September 5, 2018. I'm with John L. Philpot. Uh—this is Randy Dixon, director of the Pryor Center. We are in Fayetteville on the Fayetteville Square, and this is a Pryor Center interview.

Welcome, John.

John Philpot: Thank you, sir. My pleasure.

RD: I—I was—I was trying to think last night of how to describe you. [*JP laughs*] And several things came to mind there. It's—uh . . .

JP: Ugly. [*Laughter*]

RD: Agriculture specialist.

JP: Yeah, yeah.

RD: Um—former broadcaster.

JP: Yeah.

RD: Uh—outdoors expert.

JP: Yeah.

RD: Uh—motivational speaker.

JP: Yeah.

RD: Um—humorist . . .

JP: Pilot.

RD: . . . and storyteller.

JP: There you are.

RD: And—and . . .

JP: Pilot, poet—uh—well, a few other things.

RD: Does that pretty much sum it up?

JP: That does it.

RD: Okay. Well, thanks for coming in. It's good to . . .

JP: Yeah, man. See y'all later. [*Laughter*]

[00:00:55] RD: Yeah, see you later. Um—you were—uh—let—let's go ahead and get started. Um—you were born in doo—uh—in Mena.

JP: Yeah.

RD: Uh—tell me the date.

JP: Uh—the date was November 23, 1936. I was the fourth out of five children in the—uh—Fred Philpot, Fred and Oma Philpot family. We were all born in the house. We—uh—doctors made housecalls in those days. Uh—they had—uh—very different prescriptions for childbirth in those days. My mother was required to stay in bed for eleven days after each child was born, which was probably the worst thing in the wor—[*laughs*] in the world they could've required. I mean, it's almost like requiring women to ride a sidesaddle. But—uh—anyhow—uh—back in my history, our first ancestor came to this country—uh—probably—uh—just before the Revolutionary War. His name was James Philpot. He was an Irishman. He came to—uh—the port at—uh—Baltimore and—uh—then eventually migrated to eastern Virginia and then down into eastern Tennessee and—and then down into northwest Alaba—uh—northwest Georgia in the Buchanan area—uh—north—north and west of—uh—Atlanta. And they had a pretty

good-size family there. And—uh—then they—they started to migrate west, and some of 'em came on over to Alabama. And then the Civil War hit, and of course the men joined the Confederate army. And—uh—at some point—now I'm having to kindly add a little bit to this to make a story out of it, but I think here's what happened. They—uh—beg—they got under siege. I don't know if that was the Siege of Vicksburg, the Siege of Memphis, or just what. But—uh—under a flag of truce, the—uh—con—the Union commanders came in and said, "Listen, boys. Lemme just lay it out for you real simple like. You've got two choices: You can lay—take off those gray uniforms and put on these blue uniforms and join the Union forces, or you can starve to death." Well, the Philpots don't have a history of starving. I—[*laughs*] I've never known one to ever starve to death, so they joined the Union army. [00:03:42] Okay, after the war was over, I don't think they were welcome back in—in Mississippi where they had been living before the war started. Holly Springs, Mississippi. So the Philpots and the Taylors and a bunch of others got up a wagon train and moved from there to western Arkansas to a little community called Cherry Hill, which is—uh—out east of Mena. And there they—uh—tried to make a living. [*Laughs*] And—and—uh—my—my father was born in Cherry Hill, and then—uh—he marri—uh—my—my grandfather married in Cherry Hill, and they had—uh—three children there. And then they all moved to Mena and—uh . . .

RD: Now this was your grandfather on your father's side?

JP: On my father's side. Uh-huh.

RD: Okay.

[00:04:32] JP: Yeah. I never did know my mother's people all that well. They were just so unbelievably poor. They lived out at Big Fork, which—and they tried to raise cotton out there in those little, gravelly creek bottoms. You know, cotton was the cash crop, and then corn to feed the mules, and that was their existence. And—uh—there's a lot of stories in—in that early day there that I—I'll get to if you want to later on.

RD: Sure. So you didn't see those grandparents much, your—your mother's parents.

JP: No. I was about five years old when my grandfather died of tuberculosis. And he was a—a patient at the sanitorium in Booneville several times.

RD: Mm-hmm.

JP: And then my grandmother lived on till—I don't remember. She died—uh—around—uh—1950, somewhere along in there, maybe a little before.

[00:05:29] RD: What about your father's parents? Did they live in Mena?

JP: Yeah, they li . . .

RD: Or did they stay in Cherry Hill?

JP: Uh-huh. They—they lived in Mena.

RD: Mm-hmm.

JP: Uh . . .

RD: So you were fairly close to them.

JP: Yes, I was—uh—e—except I didn't know my—my paternal grandfather very well because I was just so young.

RD: Mm-hmm.

JP: Uh—but they—uh—for a time after they got married, they ran a boarding house at Eagleton, a little community northwest of Mena. Uh—in those days that—that was during the big timber harvest eh—time. And—uh—the timber companies were cutting out everything. Uh—they vir—[*laughs*] virtually got that resource. And—uh—but anyway, they ran that—that—uh—boarding house up there. Then they bought a house in Mena, a big two-story house, and they ran it as a boarding house for some time. And—uh—then my father died—my grandfather died . . .

RD: Mm-hmm.

JP: . . . of—uh—tuberculosis, and we continued to live in Mena.

[00:06:31] RD: So let's go to your early childhood.

JP: Yeah.

RD: What—what—tell me about your first memories.

JP: Boy, I tell you. Um—you know, I—I guess I really didn't take anything very seriously. [*Laughs*] Nothing was ever very serious with me. I was a sort of a town clown and—um—enjoyed entertaining people and had a big time with it. So the earliest memories I have are—I started to school when I was five years old. I was five years old November 23. No, I was si—I would be six years old November 23. But they

decided—"they," whoever they is, that they would go ahead and send me to the first grade. And so I was—uh—the youngest kid in the class. And then after the first grade—and then after the second grade, somebody decided there were five of us who—uh—needed to be promoted from the second to the fourth. Skip the third grade. And I was one of those. And I never understood that because all I could do—they said, "Well, he can read the *Weekly Reader*." Well, yeah, I could read the Weekly Reader pretty badly and very slow. But—uh—anyhow, they promoted me to—uh—the fourth grade. So that made me the youngest kid in my class all the way through high school, college, the whole works. I graduated from college when I was sixteen. I enrolled in the University of Arkansas—uh—just before I turned seventeen, and I graduated when I was twenty from the U of A.

RD: Wow. Smart. [*Laughs*]

JP: Wi—with a degree in general agriculture.

[00:08:32] RD: Uh-huh. All right, well, let's talk about your family life a little bit—uh—growing up. Um—you—they were very—you come from a religious family, don't you?

JP: Yes, oh, yes. Uh-huh. Yeah, my—uh—mother's father was—um—a minister. And—uh—that's one reason they were so poor [*laughs*] is because he had to minister several churches to get enough money to put food on the table. And out there in those rural communities, it was—it was hard—tough picking But—uh—my mother was always a—a devout—uh—Christian, and—uh—all of my brothers and sisters were,

and me. And—uh—Sunday school was very large for us when we were little. We went to Sunday school and—uh—matter of fact, we memorized the books of the Bible. And—uh—I still have a Bible that was given to me by the—the—uh—teacher of that class. She gave one to every kid that memorized all the books of the Bible. Well, I didn't have any trouble memorizing books of the Bible at that time. Oh, Lord, would you please bring that memory back to me now? [*Laughter*]

RD: We . . .

JP: But anyway, we—uh—we went to Sunday school and occasionally went to church and . . .

[00:09:58] RD: Well, describe a typical Sunday for me for your—you and your family.

JP: Okay. Yeah, the question on Sunday was how I was gonna foul it up. [*RD laughs*] Uh—Mom got us all spit shined, you know, and starched and pressed—uh—clothing. And she worked herself to death trying to get her family looking decent, and she had five kids to look out after. Mary Ellen was the oldest. Fred Jr. was second. Bill was four years younger than Fred Jr. I was two years younger than Bill. Judy was two years younger than me. So anyhow, she'd get me all slicked up and—uh—in khakis, probably, and she would say—uh—khakis at—at that time was a dress-up. Uh—she would say, "Now don't go get those dirty." I'd say, "Well, I'm—I'm not going to. I'm just going outside," and I would go outside. And the first thing is Reese Burnett

would throw a mud clot on me and just ruin all that hard work, and I'd have to go back in the house and say, "Look what I did." [*Laughs*] But anyway, we'd get it all together, and then we would go to church. My dad was not a great practitioner of Christianity in his early days. He became a good one later on and—uh—but anyway—uh—we would—we would sit there through—uh—we—we—Sunday school we liked because they tailored that to the younger kids. Big church, not so much. They talked above our heads—above my head. That wasn't very far. I left 'em a lot of headroom. But—uh . . .

RD: I would always draw.

JP: Yeah.

RD: And fidget a lot.

[00:11:53] JP: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, man. It was a—if—if you—if you didn't go to sleep, you had some real trouble pacifying yourself because kids must have something to do. Okay. So—uh—we would endure—uh—the preaching service, and usually they had some good music. And—uh—then we'd get out of there, and we'd go home. And—and—uh—Mom had probably already prepared the noon meal pretty much before we ever fu—ever left the house.

RD: Was it big?

JP: Yeah. Yeah. Big old thing. I—I tell you what. I tip my hat to my mother. Uh—she was noth—if she wasn't a worker, she wasn't nothing. I mean, she liked to—she worked herself to death every day just to try to keep everything headed in the same dir—same direction.

[00:12:46] My father was a—an automobile—automobile dealer. Well, actually, he spent some of his early days before and after World War I working for an outfit called the Wrought Iron Range Company out of St. Louis. They manufactured wood cookstoves, the—the—uh—Home Comfort range, and it was a good one. And my dad—in the early days—they—they would send teams out, sales teams out to everywhere in the boondocks and—uh—my dad—and—and—and they went out selling, delivering, and collecting for these ranges in a wagon and team. And—uh—so my dad saw all of Arkansas, most of—well, it was part of Oklahoma, part of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, part of Tennessee, part of Missouri in a wagon and team. He knew the geography, believe me. And he was a outstanding salesman because that company insisted that those men be good salesmen and know how to—uh—communicate and how to dress and how to behave and so forth. And—uh—so he was good at his job. [00:14:08] He left there and went to World War I and served in France in the Rainbow Division [*coughs*], but—but in—in [*coughs*]—in France, he didn't—uh—he wasn't in combat very long. I think—uh—they sent 'em all up on the front lines. He was in the artillery, and they sent 'em on the—up on the front lines, and something like three or four days later, they signed the Armistice. So he got out pretty l—pretty light. And he came back and went back to work for the Wrought Iron Range Company, but this time he had some luxury. He had a Model T Ford. And—uh—then he got married, and my mother said, "I spent my

honeymoon pushing him out of mud—mud holes." [*Laughter*] Hey, in that day, Randy—uh—there were no roads. There were just trails. And—uh—you know, I can almost remember when Highway 71 was paved. Uh—and it was—uh—it was our lifeline in Mena from north to south, and from east to west we kinda had to pick our way. We'd—usually we'd come up to Y City and turn out on Highway 270 to go to Hot Springs. But—uh—we didn't go there all that often. Anyway—um—I'm gonna stop right here and think for just a second . . .

RD: Okay.

JP: . . . because I lost my train of thought.

RD: That's fine.

[00:15:43] JP: Um—so anyhow—okay. After my dad and my Uncle Albert—they both worked for the Wrought Iron Range Company, and they had resigned. And they came to Mena and opened the P&M Filling Station, and it was the second filling station in Mena. The first one was the Diamond Front. And everybody in town said, "Boys, we've already got a filling station. What do we need with two?" Well, with no more cars than that, they didn't need but one, but it didn't take long. So they then—uh—eventually put in the fe—the P&M Restaurant as a part of the P&M Filling Station. Then Uncle Albert bought the Chevrolet agency, and—uh—a month or few months later, my dad bought into the Chevrolet agency, and it became the Philpot-Middleton Chevrolet. And they built a rock building on the south end of Main Street in Mena, Mena Street, and those rocks came off of Rich

Mountain. They were native stone. They were so proud of that, and that was their showroom, their parts department, and the service department back in the back. Then Dad sold out to Uncle Albert in 1941 and went into the insurance and real estate business, and then later on he picked up International Harvester and still stayed in motorized vehicles. And then in [19]47 he picked up Pontiac, and then he built his own grand building, Philpot Motor Company, and—uh—that—that was the—uh—the business and the source of income until some time later.

[00:17:35] RD: Mm-hmm. All right. So it—how old were you when World War II broke out?

JP: Okay. When World War—I remember the day that—uh—the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. I, tha—that's probably the earliest thing I remember—uh—because Dad came in, and he—he said, "The Japanese just bombed Pearl Harbor." Well, I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was, and I didn't know what a Japanese was either—uh—but I knew that something important had happened. And—uh—then I started se—uh—missing adult, male friends of mine around town. They were gone, and I couldn't figure out why so many of 'em were not in town anymore. Well, they were—they'd been drafted or they had volunteered. And then I remember very vividly—um—in 1945 I was walking up Main Street. I got to the Rexall Drug Store, and I heard pow-pow-pow-pow, shots fired around behind the Rexall Drug Store. Well, being a smart person, I ran to the source of the [*laughter*]—of

the—the activity, the bullets, and here was Fish Norris around the back shooting his pistol up in the air. And I said, "What's the deal, Fish?" And he said, "John, the war is over." And so okay, that's fine.

RD: So you'd have been about nine?

JP: Uh—let's see, Randy. Yeah . . .

RD: Yeah.

JP: . . . it was something about like that.

RD: Okay.

JP: Uh-huh. That's about right.

[00:19:16] RD: So were you—would you listen to war news on the radio? And . . .

JP: Dad would.

RD: Uh-huh.

JP: We all had to get quiet when the war news came on. Uh . . .

RD: Mm-hmm. So you had a radio at your house.

JP: Had a radio. Uh-huh. Had a radio right there in the front room, and we all tune in and lean—lean into it.

RD: And you guys would sit around the—the radio?

JP: Usually the kids wouldn't. We weren't that interested in the war news.

RD: Mm-hmm.

JP: We—it didn't really affect us that much.

[00:19:43] RD: Were there any other shows that you listened to?

JP: Oh, boy, yeah!

RD: Like what?

JP: The Sunday afternoon lineup was fantastic.

RD: What was it?

JP: Oh, it was Jack Benny, Phil Harris. Uh—let's see. Sunday afternoon was *Gunsmoke*. Uh—Fred Allen. [*Clears throat*] Pardon me. I've got a frog this morning.

RD: You need some water?

JP: I probably do.

RD: Okay.

JP: [*Drinks*] Jack Benny and Rochester.

RD: Mm-hmm.

JP: You remember Rochester?

RD: Mm-hmm.

JP: And—uh—let's see. The—oh, there were . . .

RD: So what are th . . .

JP: . . . *I Love a Mystery* came on some night, and, oh, I loved that—that program on the radio.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:44] JP: Oh, there's one thing I meant to tell you about back in the very early days that I remember. In the early days of my life, Mena was a Saturday town, and there were a lot of Saturday towns in Arkansas.

RD: What does that mean?

JP: That means all the people in the surrounding area, in the commercial area in the coverage map, if you will, they might start preparing at

midnight on Friday night for the trip into Mena. And they'd load up the wagon and hitch up the mules or the horses, and they would travel into Mena to do their day of shopping. Now then, they had to have a parking place for those teams and those wagons. I can remember when there were three wagon yards in Mena. Two of 'em were only a li—about a block from my house, a little over a block from my house. And those people would come in there, and I guess they rented a space. I don't know. But they would park their wagon, and they probably had a livery stable around there somewhere where they would take their mules and horses. And but because it was just full of wagons, and then that was home away from home. That was the Airstream of the day. And all the kids being there, and the lunch would be in there. And they would work out of there, going to Joe Lawrence's dry goods store to pick up a pair of overalls and going to Carper-Dover whatever down here to pick up some sheets or something, whatever they needed. And they'd work in there all day long, and then they'd hitch up the team and go back home.

RD: They'd just collect all the items in there—right. And I'm sure they were safe just to leave.

[00:22:47] JP: You know, I was th—I've thought of this many, many times. I don't ever recall of anyone stealing anything out of a wagon and team. But the people in those days had a very high moral capacity. They had a great sense of responsibility, and they didn't steal as much as probably folks do today.

RD: Was there any crime at all that you remember?

JP: Yeah. Yeah. I remember when—one of my favorite people was a guy who ran the Mena drug store, and he was—he liked to joke with me and tease with me, and I liked it. I gave him back about as good as he got. Morris was his name, and he got murdered one night. There were two—two bad guys came, and he was still in the store. And they broke into the back door and came and—I remember Dad went up there. He was on the coroner's jury. And he went up there. And he said that one shot hit him right here. And he was shot twice. But that was Matt . . .

RD: Was it a robbery?

JP: . . . that was Matt Kimes. Where does that name come from? We're talking about fifty, sixty years ago. Matt Kimes, and he was executed at Tucker or Cummins or wherever for his crime.

RD: Wow.

JP: And then Vollie Bill Bates murdered a taxi driver there in Mena by the name of Dugan. And so there was some crime, you know.

[00:24:22] RD: Yeah. What was the population, about? You tell . . .

JP: Okay. Mena had a population of about 5,000 when it was a week old. It was when railroad was coming through, and it was a tent city at that time. And they made a town out of it primarily because of the outstanding water springs around there.

RD: Hmm.

JP: And one now is called the Park Spring. But Mena had a population of

about 5,000, and it pretty well held that population—maybe dropped down as low as 4,500 or something like that, and then back up to 5,500 and—for its entire existence. And it hasn't gained; it hasn't lost a lot.

[00:25:16] RD: So what was your house like growing up?

JP: We had—my folks bought that house when it was five years old. At that time, it had no electricity. Later on, we had it electrified, and electrified meant one cord hanging down from the ceiling per room with a light bulb on the end of it. And then eventually we got a wall switch that would turn it on and off, and that was, oh, that was really fancy. And then I can remember our first air conditioner. It was in a big window in the front room. And we asked it to cool a lot more than it was capable of cooling, I'm sure. But Dad was an International Harvester dealer. IH manufactured air conditioners at that time, so super us, smell me. We had an air conditioner. Most people didn't. And but anyhow, we really did like that. And that . . .

RD: What about heat?

JP: Oh, yeah, heat. We heated it—when I was just a kid, we heated the whole house with a centrally located coal stove.

RD: Like a Franklin stove?

JP: No.

RD: Like—no?

JP: It was more like a potbelly . . .

RD: Oh.

JP: . . . as best I remember. A potbellied stove, and it was in the central part of the house. See, we were close to the coal fields in Mansfield and Huntington, so forth, and those coal trains were coming down that way every day on the Kansas City Southern, so the whole town heated with coal. And we had a what we called the wood house out back. I don't know why it was the wood house. That's where they kept the coal. [*Laughter*] But somebody went out there and scooped up a big bucket of coal and brought it in the house. And I have no idea who put a package of firecrackers in there, and it wasn't me. [*Laughs*] I was too young. I didn't know what a firecracker was. As a matter of fact, it may have been before I was born. But anyway, they came in and threw that coal into that coal stove, and those firecrackers started going off. And Bill, my old—just older brother, two years older—it scared him, and he ran and dug in under the bed and wouldn't come out. And he stuttered for about four years, I think. [*Laughs*] Finally he got to where he could talk all right. But coal was the heat of the day in those days. Until we got butane, and then we got natural gas.

[00:28:06] RD: All right. Well, let's talk about school a little bit.

JP: Yeah.

RD: So you skipped the third grade.

JP: Skipped the third grade.

RD: Must've been pretty darn smart.

JP: No. [*Laughter*] I didn't even think I was very smart, you know. Ordinarily, people that have any indication they're smart think they're

a whole lot smarter than they are.

RD: Well, what kind of subjects did you like the most?

JP: I don't recall, Randy. I didn't like—I liked English all right. I did not like math, and why, I don't know because later on I had to take some math, and I just adored it. Just loved it. And algebra, I racked that. I—in high school. But anyway, probably coloring and some of those really tough, tough subjects.

[00:29:04] RD: What about sports?

JP: Sports—we didn't have any organized sports when I was a little guy. I started the first grade in what we called Southside School. It was an old frame building, big frame building, and it was a firetrap. Oh my goodness. They had heavy, heavy hardware cloth nailed over every window so the kids wouldn't break the windows out with softballs or whatever. Well, it also was a trap. It—if a fire had broken out, the kids in that classroom would've had no way of escape. So we didn't have organized sports. We played a lot of softball at recess. And Len Riles was probably the best hitter we had. I mean, he could knock it all the way out of the park. And I loved to pitch, so I was pitching to Len, and he hit that softball, and the cover came off. I mean, he knocked the cover plumb off. Well, the only ball we had left to play with was a baseball, and we didn't have much experience with baseballs, but they were very, very hard in comparison to a softball. And I fired one in there for Len to hit, and he hit that thing, and it—the sound was like [*hits fist into hand twice*]. The first one was when he

hit the ball. The second one was when the ball hit me. [*RD laughs*] And it hit right there. And I learned the term shiner at that point. It really boogered up my [*laughter*] my eye for a few days. It turned black, and I was a hero. I was somebody special. Another time I remember I wadded up a piece of paper and was sticking it in my ear [*laughs*] for some reason or other, and it got lost down there. And they had to take me out of school and take me to the doctor, and he pulled it out. I was forever doing—I was a resear—born researcher. I had a research project goin' all the time. So then, let's see. After I finished up at the fifth grade at Southside, they moved me on to Central for the sixth grade before going to what they called then the high school. It was a high school and junior high together in the seventh and eighth grade there and then on through high school.

[00:31:47] RD: So around the house did you have chores that you did, that you and your four siblings . . .

JP: Yeah. We didn't have assigned chores as such. We just sorta covered 'em as as they came about. I was probably the strongest, and so if it was heavy lifting, well, it was made for me. Grandma needed a mattress moved one time. She lived next door, and I picked that thing up and moved it for her, and she was amazed that I could do it by myself. But it wasn't a king-size mattress. [*Laughs*]

RD: So you were always big for your age.

JP: Yeah. Yeah, I was big. I was a big guy.

RD: So later on, what kind of sports?

JP: Okay.

RD: I mean, being a big guy . . .

[00:32:32] JP: Yeah, yeah. When I got to the seventh grade—Bill was a sports fanatic till the day he died, particularly football. And he absolutely begged me to go out for football. I didn't care anything about that. I was having fun messing around with the guys and going fishing and crawdad hunting and frog hunting and whatever. But anyway, when I was a freshman in high school, at that time we had—ninth grade was considered in high school. Nine, ten, eleven, twelve was high school. I was a freshman in high school. And Bill just absolutely begged me, and the other guys on the team begged me to come out and play 'cause when I was—they weighed us in September before—when that season started and m—I wouldn't be—let's see. I don't remember how old I was. I think I was about twelve years old at—in that September, coming thirteen, probably. And I weighed 206 pounds, and I was about five ten. I'm a great big guy. And so anyhow, I went out for football. And as freshmen we were on the junior varsity, and we only played three different schools. We played Heavener, Oklahoma, twice, we played De Queen twice, and we played Waldron twice. Well, it—as it turned out, we wound up with a fifty-fifty season. We w—I don't remember. One team, we beat 'em twice, and another one we tied twice. And the other one we lost twice. So anyhow, the next year I was a sophomore. Well, I was re—obligated then to go out for football, you know. And we had only two

seniors on the starting team. We had a halfback and a center, and the rest of us were sophomores and juniors about equally.

RD: What'd you play?

JP: I played right tackle.

RD: Okay.

JP: For a time I played left tackle, and then I switched over to right. I mean, if you got a kid that can't do anything else, you put him [*laughs*]—if he—you just need somebody to fill up a hole, then put the kid in at tackle. So we [*laughs*]—there are a lot of football stories to tell. Lots of 'em.

RD: Well, tell 'em.

JP: Tell 'em?

RD: Sure.

[00:35:19] JP: Well, okay. One I remember—we had about a fifty-fifty season when I was a sophomore. We were just kinda learning, you know, learning what to do. And we went down to play Nashville. Now Nashville always has had a good football team as far as I know, and they had some really good guys down there. I met 'em later and knew 'em. They had a kid named Shofner, I believe it was, who was as fast as greased lightning. He was a halfback or something of that sort, and he could outrun most of our guys. One of their tackles—I think he was right tackle, so he was on the other side of the line from me, was Blue Bagley. And Blue was a good—became a good friend of mine. My guy right in front of me was another Bagley. Blue and—I can't remember

the other kid's name. But anyway, we went down there to play Nashville. And this coach we had—we weren't real fond of him, to tell you the truth about it. I got to back up and tell a story to get us into this one.

RD: Okay.

[00:36:35] JP: We were practicing one day, and it was one of those days that, you know, my level was just two bubbles off, and I was jumping offsides. I didn't do it on purpose. But the coach—and I won't name his last name. He was probably a pretty good coach. He was a real good-looking guy. But he said, "The next person that jumps offsides is gonna run ten laps." Well, I—everybody was fed up with him that day, and sure enough, it wasn't but a few plays later, and I jumped offside. And he said, "Okay, Philpot, get after it and run ten laps." So I started walking to the gym. He said, "Run," and I walked on to the gym. I took my stuff off, I hung it up on the hanger. I took a shower. After practice was over I took it in to the coach, and I said, "There you are, coach. I'm through." And so he said, "Okay." Well, I was a big hero there because the team thought I'd defied the coach, you know. But that didn't last very long. A few days later they were all begging me to come back. [*Laughs*] And the coach called one night at the house and asked me to come back out for football. And I said, "Coach, I can't do it. I've got a job." I was cleaning out the park pond. And he said, "Well, when you get through with that, will you come back?" I said, "I'll give it a little consideration." So I did. I went on back out

there. Now we're playing Nashville. We get down there, and the coach's pep talk before the game was this: "Now, guys, we know we can't beat this peo—this squad. But let's just go out there and play a good game and try not to get anybody hurt." Well, it just absolutely infuriated the team players. And we went out there, and the score at the half was nothing to nothing. We came in at the half, and the coach was just going ballistic. "We can beat these people. We can beat. All we've got to do is score one touchdown. We can beat 'em," and he was having a fit. Well, that took all the air out of our sails. And the score at the end of the day was 36–0. Nashville. [*Laughter*] But that was when I was a sophomore. [00:39:18] Then when I was a junior, well, we had a good team then 'cause all those sophomores and juniors are now juniors and seniors, and we were big. We were big. James Copher next to me was about 230 pounds, and I was—and at that time, that was a huge size. You know, today 330 pounds is a big boy but—and I weighed a little more than Copher did. So anyway, we had a real good team, and we won almost every game that year except—I think the only game we lost was to De Queen, and they had Buddy Bob Benson as quarterback. And they had they had some other real, really great ballplayers, and they were well coached. And they beat us the last game of the season. At that time there were only three undefeated teams in the state: Mena, De Queen, and McCrory, and McCrory was a B school. So anyhow, we came close to winning nothing. They didn't have a playoff, they didn't have a state

championship, they didn't have anything in those days. But that was junior year. Then senior year was—we had a pretty fair team. And then Coach Dick Hitt, Bowden Wyatt's line coach, got in touch with me and asked me to come and talk to him at—here. I mean in Fayetteville at the U of A, and I did. And I really didn't wanna play college ball. I . . .

[00:40:57] RD: Well, and you were only sixteen, right?

JP: I was only sixteen, yeah. And he didn't want me. He really didn't want me, and I'll tell you why. The person who was playing the position I probably would've been assigned was a kid named Billy Ray Smith. And I knew Billy Ray.

RD: I've heard of him, yeah. [*Laughs*]

JP: I knew Billy Ray very well. Why, I saw him every day at Gregson Hall when we had chow together. He asked me one day, he said, "Hey, you're a big guy. Why don't you play football?" And I said, "What do they need with me? They got you!" [*Laughter*] So anyway, but those guys are—they're passing rapidly from the scene. I asked about George Walker the other day, and they said George is having some health problems. And gosh, there were just a lot of those. Oh, Ronnie Underwood died the other day, and Ronnie was on that team. I don't know. I knew a bunch of 'em. They were good guys.

[00:42:04] RD: What about basketball? Did you ever play basketball?

JP: I played basketball when I was a freshman in high school, and the coaches kinda got together, got themselves together and said, "Hey,

we've got a kid here who cannot run, cannot jump, cannot shoot, and can't dribble. I think he's a perfect football player." [*RD laughs*] And so anyway, I wasn't very good. I was on the second team, and I wasn't very good. I really couldn't do any of those things very well. If they needed somebody to s—to block, you know, [*laughs*] I was good at that. But that was about it.

[00:42:43] RD: All right. Let's talk about hunting.

JP: Oh, yes.

RD: That takes you way back again, right?

JP: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

RD: When'd you first start hunting?

JP: Me and Tommy Peters. Tommy borrowed his dad's squirrel dog, and we went out squirrel hunting.

RD: How old were you?

JP: I was probably—let's see. I probably about seventeen. Tommy was, too. And the dog struck a trail, and he barked a few times and then acted like he was treed. And we found him, and he was digging in a hole at the bottom—at the base of this tree. And Tommy said, "That squirrel has run in this hole." And I said, "Yeah, I believe he has." And I had heard the old-timers talk about twisting out a squirrel, twisting a squirrel out of a tree. What you do, you cut you a switch and put a fork on the end of it or split the end of it, and then you run it up there, and you tangle it up in his tail hairs and pull him out. Sound like a great idea to me. Never had done it, never had seen it done,

but great idea. So Tommy, he got down on his back and was looking up the hollow part of that tree. And he said, "Yeah, I see him. I see him." And I said, "Okay, here I come." I said, "You guide me." He said, "Okay, right back—back to you just a little bit. Right there, right there." Man, I poked that thing. It wasn't a squirrel, man. It was a skunk. [*RD laughs*] And it sprayed all up and down that arm and hit poor old Tommy Peters right full in the face. I'm telling you it was a bad day. And then the dog got it—off on a deer trail, and we like to never found that thing. We couldn't go home without him. Bill Peters would've fried us in his fire. But anyway . . .

[00:44:45] RD: So that was your first experience hunting.

JP: No, that wasn't really the first one. The first one was with Emmett McBee and several members of the Reed clan. They were kin to him, and Emmett was a good friend of mine. He took me squirrel hunting, and they had squirrel dogs. We went out there, and the dog treed. And Rick Reed said, "Yeah, I see him. He's right there." It was just leaves to me. I couldn't see nothing. "Don't you see him, John? See his head, his ears sticking up right there?" And I couldn't see him. And finally, he narrowed it down, and I said, "You mean right there?" And he said, "I mean right there," and ka-bang, I shot him, and he fell out. So that was my first experience at hunting was squirrel hunting, which is—happens a lot in a kid—with kids in Arkansas. Or I don't know if it does now or not. It used to be kinda the break-in hunting experience. But all of my people were wingshooters. We had

a lot of quail in those days. Lots of quail, and we used to go quail hunting. We all had bird dogs, and we loved to watch 'em work. And really smart ones. They really knew what they were doing. And I never was much of a deer hunter because we didn't have many deer in Arkansas in those days. It was after that that the Game and Fish Commission ca—restocked with deer they had brought in from Virginia or something like that, white-tailed deer. And they—it's been very successful. Now the deer are probably our number one nuisance animal in Arkansas. And there's something like many thousands of annual collisions, car-deer collisions. So—and so fishing, we did a lot of fishing. Let's see. I was trying to think of a fishing story. [*Laughs*] There were a lot. We went out fishing one night, and, you know, we—all this a big experiment. I'm a researcher, right? And so all—a bunch of us went out fishing, and we caught a whole bunch of fish. And we put 'em on a stringer and put 'em out there in the river and tied this end down. And the next morning we came, and they were all eaten except the heads. That's all that was left, and there was one that had a snake hung, stuck on it. Man, we learned the hard way. But we learned.

[00:47:26] RD: Yeah. Well, what else did you do for fun growing up in Mena?

JP: I stayed on a horse most of the time. Dad bought Bill and I a beautiful paint horse named Cloud. And the first—we wore out a set of shoes every two weeks. We were riding that horse to death. We were

[*laughs*]—but we'd have to go get that horse reshod every two weeks. Now that's pretty unusual. But Bill—as usual, Bill—his interest kinda waned a little bit, and mine didn't. So I stayed horseback for a lot of my early years. And let's see. What else did we do at that—oh yeah. [00:48:14] Another thing. Bill talked Dad into buying us a steel guitar, a little lap . . .

RD: Lap steel.

JP: . . . lap steel guitar. Yeah. And Bill's interest in steel guitar waned after a while, but mine . . .

RD: But yours didn't.

JP: . . . mine increased. So I never knew any music. I didn't know one note from the other, but I've got real good ears, and so I could play that steel guitar. And eventually, I worked all summer long for the Arkansas Highway Department and bought myself a triple-neck steel guitar from Fender. I got an old buddy of mine to send off for it. It came in. And some kind of a little amp to go along with it, and they cost $286.20. Now why did I remember that? The same guitar today would sell for $5,000, I'm sure. But anyway, I played that thing. And then I—Elmer Liles played bass, and he was a body shop man across the road from our house, and he heard me terrorizing the neighborhood with my steel guitar. Man, property values went down bad [*laughter*] in my area. And Elmer said "Hey, why don't you come and play down at the Hatfield Fair with us? We're gonna play with the Ruel Bain Band." And, "Oh, man, really? Yeah. Shoot, yeah." So I

got down there. I could tune it all right, and I could—but I couldn't play very well. And at the break, I said, "Elmer, I'm gonna sack my stuff up and take it on home. I'm just ruining this—the sound of this band." [*Laughs*] And he said, "Hey, John. Lemme ask you something. You looked the crowd over. Did you see anybody out there that could play steel guitar any better than you can?" And I said, "Well, no, but that doesn't really say anything." But he said, "It says you're the best steel guitar player in the house." And so I decided to go ahead and play. And Elmer Liles, I'll credit him with fifty years of really great experiences playing steel guitar with a band.

[00:50:28] RD: You still play?

JP: Not much, Randy. I hate to admit it, but I have neuropathy in my legs and feet. And don't have—and that makes it real tough to operate the pedals.

RD: Mm-hmm. But do you have one?

JP: Yeah.

RD: Yeah?

JP: Yeah. And my hands don't work as good as they used to, and my head quit working twenty years ago. And so I still play it every once in a while, but I don't just knock myself out with it.

[00:51:00] RD: Well, anything else you can think of about your childhood before we move on to, say, the University of Arkansas?

JP: I'll probably think of something later on that . . .

RD: Okay. We could always go back. Yeah.

JP: . . . that I meant to put in. But no, that'll pretty well cover it right now.

[00:51:13] RD: So okay. Well, tell me about your career, your life at the University of Arkansas.

JP: Oh, yeah. Well, I went up there, and I had no more idea what I wanted to study than anything. And at that time, when I enrolled my first year at the U of A, the total population, student population, of the University of Arkansas was 5,000. And course, I think they got 25,000 on this Fayetteville campus alone now, plus all the other campuses over the state. But anyway, so I—I got into business school because Mary Ellen was a business major, Fred was a business major, Bill was a business major. I didn't know what that even meant, but I got into it, and I stayed in there one semester. And there were a couple of courses that just knocked me slap out. I didn't like 'em, weren't interested in it. So I decided I wanted to work for the Game and Fish Commission. And I—somebody told me, "What you need is a degree in zoology," so I got into arts and sciences for the second semester. Well, that wasn't working out all that well either, so my brother-in-law, Theron Roberts, convinced me I ought to go into pre-veterinary medicine. Now Arkansas does not have it's own vet school, veterinary school. That means I have to go out of state. Well, that didn't really mean much to me at that time, but I got into veterinary medicine and stayed in that for a year and enjoyed it. But it—I started trying to get into a vet school then, and that's an impossibility. At that time

Arkansas had an agreement with Oklahoma State University, which was Oklahoma A&M at that time, to take our veterans who wanted to go to veterinary school, and Arkansas legislature appropriated some money for that. But not for just me and plain old people. So I saw it was hopeless to get into a vet school. I tried at LSU, Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, all around, and no, they didn't want me. I tried at Oklahoma A&M, and you know, my home was only fifteen miles from the Oklahoma line. That didn't cut any ice with 'em. "You're still an Arkansas boy. You'll come up here and graduate and go home. We'll lose all this investment in you, and it'll be worthless to the state of Oklahoma." I couldn't disagree with that. So I got out of veterinary medicine and I—if I had to point to one man who guided me the most correctly in my young life, it would be Dr. Jerry, Gerald—he was assistant dean in the College of Agriculture at the U of A, and I'll think of his name maybe later. Started with an H.

RD: So what kind of . . .

[00:54:41] JP: Hudson, Dr. Gerald Hudson.

RD: Okay.

JP: He advised me, and we sat down and went over my transcript and everything. And he said—I said, "I need to try to get a degree out of all of this." And he said, "Well, I think you can probably do best by going for a degree in general agriculture." Which was a kind of a surprise to me because my background was not in agriculture as such. I knew a little bit about livestock but nothing about row crop. I mean,

in Mena at that time? No, there weren't any row crops. I remember the last cotton field in Mena, but it was years before. So Dr. Hudson advised me to get into general agriculture, and it was absolutely heaven sent. It was one of those experiences where you get in there, and you know immediately, "I'm home." These people were the same as me. They had the same interests, same humor, the same goals. And I didn't know as much as they did. They'd been in it all their lives, and I didn't know that much, but I was gonna learn, and I did. And so my bachelor's degree was in general agriculture. My master's degree in 1975 was in educational media. Which they've changed the name of that since. They call it instructional resources now.

[00:56:15] RD: So what did you do in between?

JP: I worked for the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

RD: Yeah. Tell me about that.

JP: I went to work for them July 1, 1957, as assistant county agent in Clark County with headquarters at Arkadelphia. I worked there for two years, and on April 15, 1959, I went to Miller County as the—in the same position and worked there for a couple of years. And then a good friend of mine, Jack Tompkins, was farm director at KCMC-TV in Texarkana, Texas, and he was about to leave and change to an outstanding promotion at KWTV in Oklahoma City. And he did—he felt like he didn't wanna just leave them without anyone, and so he left 'em with almost nobody. [*RD laughs*] Left 'em with me. And so I went to work for that outfit and that . . .

RD: So this was your first experience in broadcast?

JP: Not exactly. I had done some radio as an extension agent. I had done some TV since the time I came to Texarkana, and I could do television pretty well.

RD: It was your first full time.

JP: No, not—not full time.

RD: No? Okay.

[00:57:48] JP: No. Not full time. It's my first full-time job in radio and television. So I left Extension, went to work for—and that was a Hussman outfit. Hussman owned that, and they owned the *Shreveport Times*, and they owned the *Texarkana Gazette*. And they owned lots of media. And so I went to work there, and it was a combo job. I had the responsibility of doing a farm show at something like twelve fifteen every day. And I also had the responsibility of feeding two hu—a thousand head of s—heifers and two hundred head of steers at—for Owen Brothers Livestock Commission Company. That's the way Jack Tompkins had set it up. So anyway, it didn't take too long to figure out that I wasn't gonna be able to get along very well [*laughs*] with the head of that Owen Brothers Livestock Commission Company, Wayne Owen. So I left and went to—back to Mena and worked at KENA radio until the semester came. And at that time I went to Iowa City and enrolled in the state University of Iowa after a degree in public relations. There were only three schools in the country that offered a degree in public relations at that time: Iowa, Boston, and

Brown. Well, I went broke at Iowa. I know I couldn't have afforded Boston or Brown. So anyway, I—that pretty well wraps up everything right there until I got—when I got back—when I went broke, I had to come back home, and I went back to work for the same outfit that I had been working for before, only they had changed the call letters to KTAL-TV in Texarkana-Shreveport dual market. And so I went to work for them as a farm broadcaster. Worked there for a year. Their noon block didn't work out. They came out with a share of two or some such like that for the whole hour. They were gonna just eat the world up, [*laughs*] and it didn't work. And the highest rated thing they had in the noon block was the farm program, of all things. So people didn't like what they were offering. So I went back to work at the KTAL-TV, worked there for a year, and they decided to reorganize. And they said, "We're not firing you. We just want to fold you into the news department."

[01:00:37] RD: What year is this, [19]62, [19]63? Something like that?

JP: Yeah-huh. Yeah, be right. Yeah.

RD: Okay.

JP: And so I worked in the news department for a while, and along about that time, KEEL radio, the hottest radio station in the Shreveport market, they got in touch with me and said "Hey, we want to hire you as farm director." Which was strange. It was a Top 40 station, but, you know, maybe it was the right thing to do, so I went to work for them for about three years. And that . . .

RD: How'd you like that?

JP: Well, I liked it just fine. I liked it fine. It was a lot of fun. I did some really hard work, good work, but it wasn't going anywhere.

RD: Yeah.

JP: We didn't have a salesman that would—that had confidence enough to go try to sell a farm program.

[01:01:42] RD: Yeah, so what did a farm director at a Top 40 radio station in the early [19]60s do? I mean . . .

JP: We—I broke my—the program down. It was part air work, but air work was only a part. And I broke the air work into three pieces: ag news, weather, and markets. And but the rest of the work was—I guess you'd have to call it public relations. I had a wagon that was painted up like everything, you know, KEEL Farm Department and so forth, and I went, and I was on the scene at every agricultural event around there. And I got the station pretty well known that way, but I don't think it did any good. I mean, eventually, you gotta get down to money. You gotta have income, and we didn't have very much, and we didn't have a salesman that was—felt confident. And we didn't have a national rep that was doing us any good. We were in the same market with KWKH in Shreveport, and Jack Tompkins, their sales manager or maybe station manager, had been president of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters and had gotten most of these guys working for the ag businesses their jobs. That's a little tough to battle. Jack was well known. I was not. And his farm

broadcaster was Jack Dillard, who was also very well known. So we—it did—it looked like a dead horse to me, and I decided I—I gotta tap from the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service to come back, go back to work for them in the state office in Little Rock as radio and television specialist. And I took it and worked there for a few years and then left there and went to—came back to Shreveport and worked at an ad agency, Jack Tompkins' agency. Jack—nah—I'll think of that later on.

RD: Okay.

JP: It wasn't Tompkins.

RD: Okay. Well, you you wanna take a break?

JP: Yeah.

RD: And we'll pick up with you rejoining the Cooperative Extension Service.

JP: Yeah. That's good.

RD: How's that?

JP: That's good.

RD: All right. Sarah, we're gonna take a break.

[Recording stopped]

[01:04:13] RD: Okay, John, I—I wanna ask you about your stint with the National Guard.

JP: I was in school at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville during—was it the Korean? Yeah, the Korean War. I was—you know, I had said before I was only sixteen when I came up here, so I was too young to go. But and I didn't know from apple butter, you know,

about anything about the military except I knew that I was registered, and I knew there was a draft board in Mena. And I knew that Alice Huen was the secretary of the draft board. So Alice got in touch with me, and she said, "You need a 2-S classification." I said, "Okay." I didn't know what that meant. So I applied for and got a 2-S classification. That S stands for school, and while I have that classification, they won't draft me to go to Korea. They weren't gonna draft me anyway. I was too young. And anyway, I got the 2-S. [01:05:29] And then later on, in 1956, Alice Huen told me, "You need to join the National Guard unit here in Mena," and I said, "Okay." I didn't know. I didn't know anything from anything. But I joined, and they had two batteries there in the 937th Field Artillery Battalion, and I joined service battery. Did service in A Battery. A Battery was a firing battery. Service battery furnished 'em gasoline, ammunition, all that kind of stuff. So I didn't know one from another. I don't know why I got in the service battery, but I did. And they made me ordinance parts specialist because my father was a automobile dealer. Did that mean I knew anything about parts that went into automobiles? Not a thing, not the first thing. [*RD laughs*] And so anyway, I couldn't do the job, but we went to summer camp at Fort Chaffee near Fort Smith. And that's from Mena, you go through Scott County, part of Logan County, to Sebastian County. And for a lot of those kids, that was the first time they'd been away from home, first time they'd been out of Pope County. I mean, these were—this was

not a very progressive area at that time, but anyway, we went up to Fort Chaffee, and of course, you know, if you—after you've been there once, then you're an authority. And everybody was an authority on Sebastian County and Fort Chaffee and Fort Smith and everything else. And I was the one that was—didn't know certain things and had to be taught. So anyway, after a few years there, they re—the Arkansas National Guard Association reorganized. And they took Mena out of an artillery tangent and reorganized us into an infantry—folded us into an infantry outfit, and because we had been firing the 4.2 with the—firing the 155 Howitzers and recoilless rifles, they made us the 4.2 mortar squads, and that was the nearest thing they had to an artillery unit in that infantry outfit. So anyway, they changed one other thing. They quit sending us to Fort Chaffee. They sent us to Fort Polk, Louisiana. That is a foreign country. They had radio stations down there that spoke only French. Those people are strange. They grew rice. We'd never heard of rice, never seen rice . . .

RD: Cajuns.

[01:08:32] JP: Cajuns. Yeah, they were Cajuns. And so anyhow, we went down there and—and before we went, though, we assembled in—at the armory there in Mena to get ourselves organized so we could load up on all of the vehicles and convoy down Fort Polk, Louisiana, down at—the nearest town is Leesville. So anyway, I'm standing out there with Lieutenant Bob Shaw, a good friend of mine. Shaw and I

are looking at this group. And they're all very antsy and anxious and making jokes that aren't funny and that sorta thing. They are going to a—another world. They've never been in the state of Louisiana, and that's another world to them. And we noticed that all these nice boys—the—their filthy language quotient had just skyrocketed. They were using the nastiest, filthiest language you ever heard in your life, which I guess made them feel a little bit stronger, I don't know, but anyway, Shaw and I were laughing about it. And they gave us out the box lunches, and we all loaded up into the convoy and took off down there. Now how in the world—they don't have radios r—internet radio communication back and forth with each other at that time. [01:10:18] How in the world could information from this truck get to that truck as they're perusing the road, down Highway 71, cruising down the road? How could that happen? It can't. But by the time we got to Texarkana and took a break or stopped, the rumors had gone back and forth, up and down that convoy. Everybody knew that this was a strange place we were going to, and everybody knew that they had down there the most poisonous reptile on the North American continent. They had gotten armadillos confused with Gila monsters. [*RD laughs*] And they were desperately afraid of those Gila monsters, those o—animals that they couldn't identify, never had seen before. We didn't have any armadillos in Arkansas at that time. So anyhow, there was that, and there were a lot of other things. Boy, they had some of the wildest stories going you ever heard in your life. So we

got down to Fort Polk and wh—the first night we had to go w—go to the field. And we drove out there to the area and dumped our stuff off, and the troops were instructed to set themselves up some kind of an overnight facility, which means a sleeping bag. Not even a sleeping bag, a shelter-half. And they call for—they had an officer call, which meant all sergeants, and I was one, me and Wayne Lindsay, we went up to the command post, and we had a little visit up there.

[01:11:58] Well, by the time we got back, it was after dark, but there was a bright moon that night. And we went up there to the area, and we couldn't find anybody, any of our people. And I said, "Wayne, this is the area where we dropped off, isn't it?" And he said, "Yeah, here's stuff laying around everywhere." And so somebody said, "We're up here, John." And they had taken their shelter halves and swung them between the pine trees up there twenty feet off the ground to evade the horrible Gila monsters that were bound to kill 'em if they stayed on the ground. All night long you'd hear, brr, wrapped up like a window shade, and here'd come some guy crashing down out of the pine trees. So we had to catch a few armadillos and show them that they weren't poisonous before they believed us [*laughs*] that this was not the most dangerous animal in the world.

[01:13:00] RD: [*Laughs*] How long were you in the National Guard?

JP: I was in there about six years . . .

RD: So you were in there during [19]57?

JP: Say what?

RD: In [19]57? The—Central High?

JP: I, yeah, I joined in [19]56 . . .

RD: Okay.

JP: . . . so I was in there in [19]57 and . . .

RD: So do you remember the National Guard being sent to Central High in [19]57?

JP: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Very, very well. Um . . .

RD: Not you?

[01:13:30] JP: No. I was lucky. I was working as assistant county agent in Arkadelphia, and I was drilling attached with their unit there.

RD: Oh.

JP: And they had a big attached contingent because they had two colleges, Ouachita and Hendrix there in Arkadelphia. So anyway, that day in August or de—September, whenever it was, I was with my friend, Jim Jones, and we went over to his house, and his mother said, "John, you better call the armory." And I said, "Why?" And she said "They're—they've been mobilized, and they're shipping out to Little Rock." I said—I went down to the armory, got hold of the warrant officer down there, and I said, "What are we su—attached personnel supposed to do?" He said, "I don't know. We haven't had any instructions for you." But he said, "What I'd do is go and get a telephone and call Mena, call your armory there. They're all there. Everybody's mobilized. But we're just one of the groups that they're sending to Little Rock right now." They were loading up. So I found

out from—I called the people in Mena, and they said, "John, we haven't been given orders." And he said, "All we're doing is just staying here at the armory until we get further instructions." But he said, "We know how to get in touch with you. And we'll holler at you if something else needs to be done."

RD: Hmm.

[01:15:01] JP: So it didn't—we—I didn't have to go. They had plenty of people from all over the state that they brought in to Little Rock, and I don't think any of them had to get on the line as such at Central High. I think they kept them all out at Camp Robinson. But that was something I didn't want any part of. I couldn't imagine shooting at one of my own people. And—or bayoneting or fighting with or whatever. I just—I couldn't imagine it. There were no Black people in Mena, in Polk County, Scott County, or Montgomery County. I was not raised up with Black people. I didn't understand all that was going on. We had, you know, we had some other people that were a little different. We had some old Germans, a lot of Germans around Mena when I was growing up. But they were all nice people. They were trying exceptionally hard to be nice people during World War Two. But and—but anyway nothing happened until we got the order to go to Camp Robinson for an induction physical. I mean—well, the deal is Orval Faubus mobilized the National Guard, but two days later, Dwight Eisenhower federalized the National Guard. Well, now when you're federalized, you're in the army, and there ain't no alignment with

Arkansas National Guard at all. In that case, it had been superseded. So I had to go to Fort Chaffee, I guess it was, Fort Chaffee for this induction physical, and I got up there and they were up—all my buds there from Mena. Nobody knew what was gonna take place. Well, they ran us into this big squad room. And they had the medical system all set up there, and they had booths down this side of the building and booths along the other side of the building. And then the latrine was at the end of the building. And so we got in there, and they said, "Okay, take off all your clothes." Huh? And somebody's bound to say it, "Y—you mean all of our clothes?" "I mean, if it won't bleed, get it off." And so we all got jaybird naked. Now that is not a customary situation for a guy to be in, I'll just tell you that. And the first problem we had to solve is what do you do with your eyes? And so everybody got very interested in what was going on on the ceiling, which was nothing. And everybody was looking at the ceiling to avoid looking anywhere else. And then they start running us down through these booths where various doctors and nurses were situated, and they checked everything. And of course they had—[*laughs*] probably shouldn't tell this.

RD: Oh, go ahead.

[01:18:41] JP: They had to check all the men for—I guess they were just checking 'em for prostate gland enlargement or cancer or something. Well, [*laughs*] there's, you know, there's a lot of disbelief that goes along with that. He is not really going to, is he? [*Laughter*] Yeah, he

is. He is. And so anyway, that was one station. Oh, incidentally, the doctor would say the same thing to everybody, "Bend over and grab your cheeks. Bend over and grab your cheeks." There's always going to be one guy that doesn't understand [*RD laughs*], and so he grabs his cheeks. But anyway, we got through that. We went on down here. Now we'll go into the yer—the place where they wanted you to give a urine sample . . .

RD: Latrine.

[01:19:41] JP: Latrine, yeah. They hand you a little jar, and you're gonna—supposed to go in there and give a sample. Well, there are some people who simply, if anyone else is in the room with them, they just can't go. And there was this one guy, I think his name may have been Carter, and Carter was at the very end, trying to get away from everybody, and his face was as red and looked like it would explode, and he'd been trying and trying for I don't know how long, and he couldn't do it. Couldn't get it done. So anyhow, we came back up the other side and left Carter back there. And then now we got to take a blood sample. Okay. Some of those kids, I thought they're going have to cut their heads off to get enough blood for a sample. But anyway, we got all that done. Now we come back out here to the central gathering area, and here are all these naked men standing around, sitting around whatever. Finally, they decided—there's a bench around the edge of it, and the seat is like—it must've been iced down before anybody got in there. You'd hear a guy take a seat and

then scream. And so anyway, they—finally, some of our people came in, and Captain Simpson came in, and someone said—probably me—said, "Captain Simpson, no one has told us we couldn't put our clothes back on." He said, "Sure, go ahead and put your clothes on." Why didn't you tell us that thirty minutes ago? But anyway, we put our clothes back on. Now we're laying out on the grass out front. And somebody said—the warrant officer said, "Is that everybody?" And someone said, "Carter was still in the latrine [*laughter*] when I left there." And somebody explained to him what the deal was, and the warrant officer said, "Philpot, go back there and give Carter a good sample, good, clean sample." And so I did. I'm sure that boy didn't have any [*laughs*] contagious diseases, he just couldn't go. [*RD laughs*] So that was the prelims, and I didn't have to go. Some of our guys did go because they didn't have a job, and they were offered that, said that you can go ahead and get in the army. Well, it turned out pretty good for them because they got a benefit package out of it. They discharged me the day before I was—would have gotten any benefits. They did it on purpose, you know, and I don't blame them. I didn't do anything for the for the National Guard. I just went where they told me.

[01:22:33] RD: All right, let me ask you about something else. At the beginning, you mentioned that you were a pilot.

JP: Yeah.

RD: Tell me about that.

JP: I got a pilot's license in 1963 when I was living in Shreveport and working as a farm broadcaster down there. The little field out south of town—and I went into pilot training out there and took my check ride and passed it all, and I flew. I only flew for three or four years, and not very much at that. But I moved to Little Rock in the meantime, and that's when I got into Civil Air Patrol. You know, very few of the people in civil air patrol in the Little Rock unit could fly, and I could fly. They had a Piper Tri-Pacer that they owned, and I had trained on a Piper Colt, which is the same thing as a Tri-Pacer only, ppt, kind of a squeezed-down model. And so I could fly and flew it some. And but I—it wasn't as much fun flying around Little Rock as it was around Shreveport because, for some reason, Arkansas has a perpetual haze. You get up in the air, and you see it. Shreveport did not, and that surprises me because, you know, the Red River runs through there, and the Arkansas River runs through here, and it's agricultural land, agricultural land, and very similar, similar population size. And—but it was very different. It wasn't that much fun anymore, and I didn't have access to a plane anymore.

[01:24:22] RD: Mm-hmm. Any interesting flying stories?

JP: Yeah. [*Laughing*] Yeah, yeah, gosh. The first solo cross-country I took after I got my pilot's license, I took along Buddy Blasingame and his wife, Cille, and we flew to Destin, Florida. And, man. You know, I knew the basics of flying. and I knew how to fly and how to navigate and everything, and it was a good day and—weather-wise. I didn't fly

if it wasn't good weather. I just didn't do that. So we flew off down there. And we got—but I'm flying over country I'd never seen before. So all that area down there around Florida is restricted airspace that close to Cuba. So you've got to get permission to fly from here to there to wherever before you get yourself into it. [01:25:28] So we're supposed to fly down to—I think the little town was Clearview or something like that, Lakeview, Clearview, Florida, and get permission, call in and get permission from the VOR station there to fly down the corridor down to Destin. And our visual sign was a VOR station out here on our lift. Okay, a VOR station is red and white, and it looks like an upside-down mushroom. And so I find an upside-down mushroom that's pink, and I asked Buddy, I said, "What's that look like to you?" And he said, "Yeah, it looks like a VOR station, but it's the wrong color." So we looked around, and I said, "This has got to be it." So I had already called and got permission, I fly south from there and wound up right over the main field at Brookley Air Force Base. And here are all these practicing pilots around, and they're flying in and prop washing me and trying to knock me out of the air, and I got out of there as fast as I could, flew back north, flew on east a ways, found my red-and-white VOR station, got permission again for—we landed at Clearview and stopped and talked with them a little while and then flew down to Destin, Florida. Now when we got ready to leave to come back, it's a hot day, and on a hot day, it takes you more runway. You got to have more runway to take off. And so anyway, it was a

clay strip, and it was not lengthy. And I filed my flight plan and everything, and I got up there and got all the way to one end of the runway, turned right down the runway, locked down the wheels, and ran that engine up. Rrrn. It was really turning some RPMs. Turned the thing loose. Brrr, here we go down the runway, trying to gain enough speed in that hot air to lift off the ground. Here's some cars parked across the other end of the runway, which I failed to see at first sight, and I finally—I reached and got the stick and pull back a little bit, no pay off at all, shoved it forward to get some more airspeed, pulled it back a little bit more, and tried to, and shoved it forward. Finally, I got a little bit, I thought I had enough, and I pulled that thing. I didn't have enough to clear those cars. So I reached down and got that flap knob and pulled me a couple of notches of flaps, and it went, whoop, and [*laughs*] and I flew for about a hundred miles at about twenty feet off the ground before I dared get any altitude at all. But I enjoyed flying, but you've got to identify your limitations as well as your capabilities.

[01:28:35] RD: [*Laughs*] That's awesome. Let's see. So what happened next? You went back to the Cooperative Extension Service, right?

JP: Yeah, I had been . . .

RD: After Shreveport?

JP: Yeah. I had been working in Shreveport. And like I said, it just didn't seem like it was gonna pay off, and I said, "Listen, you may be better off if you try to hire another farm broadcaster if you want to keep this

department open because it's not paying off with me being here. The chemistry's just not working."

RD: This was the radio station?

JP: Radio station.

RD: Top 40 radio station?

JP: Top 40 radio station.

RD: Yeah.

[01:29:13] JP: Yeah. So I left Shreveport and went back to Little Rock as a radio TV specialist with the Extension Service again and stayed there, that time, about nine or ten years. And during that time is when I took the leave and went to Morocco to work.

RD: Yeah, I wanna hear all about that.

JP: Well, that one . . .

RD: Tell me how it happened first.

JP: Okay. Yeah. It's strange the way it happened because I was—in 1966, I guess, [19]65, nineteen—end of 1965 I was gathering my s—materials and documentation up to prepare my income tax report for the year of 1965. And in those days I was not very good at anything, and particularly not numbers and filing and so forth. And I probably had the biggest part of it in a shoe box, like a lot of other people do. Well, I got in there and got to lookin' at all—here's an envelope that never has been opened. And it's from the office of the dean of agriculture at Purdue University. I opened that thing up, and it's a letter from the dean at Purdue. And he said, "I understand that you

might be interested in a foreign assignment. I suggest you get in touch with RTV International in New York. They have various assignments in various places, and they might—you might be able to make a deal." Well, I wrote to 'em, and I said, "You're not going to believe this." [*Laughs*] Famous redneck statement. "You're not going to believe this," and I told them the story, and they wrote back. I was surprised. They answered my letter, and they said, "This is such a wild idea, it almost has to be true." And so they said, "Why don't you come up here to New York, and we'll talk about this thing? We'll send you a ticket." Hot dang, man. Country boy come to town. I'm going to New York City.

RD: It's a big trip for you.

[01:31:39] JP: Oh, big, big, huge, large. And it became more so because after I got back, I found out I had been on two or three record flights. Yeah, that was a record flight from Little Rock to Memphis because that's the—that was the first jet plane going from Little Rock to Memphis. The first one. But that trip from Memphis to New York I guess was also a record flight because they set a speed record. So anyway, I got up there to New York, and they met me, and he got me into the RTV offices on—right downtown Manhattan, and they were just the nicest people in the world, and I was just crazy about them, and we got to visitin' about everything, and they said "We've got this assignment in Zambia." I didn't know where Zambia was. And they told me Zambia used to be Southern Rhodesia. I didn't

know [*RD laughs*] where Southern Rhodesia was, either. But so anyhow, we talked about that some, and it, you know, it sounded good. It—very interesting, going to an exotic place somewhere else in the world, my goodness. "Yeah, sure. I'm going. I'm ready." So I got back to Little Rock, and they contacted me there, and they said, "The Zambia deal has fallen through, but how would you like to go to Morocco?" I didn't know where Morocco was, either. "Fine, suits me. Let's go!" [*RD laughs*] [01:33:23] Well, as it turned out, it was just almost providential because that's the most fun I ever had in my life in three months time. I had a three month assignment there. And what we were trying to do was they had an excellent trans—television transmission system set up by the French, but the French had been gone since 1956, and they were trying to run the thing, and they didn't have a good handle on it. And they could put a city-grade signal in almost every cave out there in the Atlas Mountains, they were—really good system, had two studios. Had a studio in Rabat and a studio in Casablanca. And they could really do some pretty good jobs as far as transmission was concerned, they just had poor programming capabilities. What they were doing for programming is they only turned the transmitters on at six thirty in the evening and turned them off at eleven o'clock. And in the le—that length of time, they would air whatever somebody sent them. They might have Russian cartoons and Algerian folk games and—whatever they sent, that's what they put on. I don't know if they were trying to sell it or make money out of it.

I never did get that far into it. But anyhow, what we were gonna try to do is use that excellent transmission system for pr—for a program of national development. Morocco had been a net wheat exporter for many years. They had now fallen to a net wheat importer. Well, they had mined their old soil for centuries, and it just didn't have anything left. So they had a Tennessee Valley team come in there and sample all their soils and try to make some sense out of what to do, and we were supposed to teach them how to apply some nitrogen fertilizer to wheat acres, and they didn't want to because the French had convinced them that that nitrogen would burn the soil, and it will if you put too much on. But if you put the right amount on it and get some rain with it and so forth, they'll be back in the chips again with their wheat crop. And so anyhow, we went over there and tried doing that, and a lot of things happened, lots and lots and lots of things happened, but I'm going to cut to what eventually turned out to define our effort. [01:36:08] We had met a man named Awad Hanna, and he was the American—well, what was his title? But anyway, he was the communications man and . . .

RD: Didn't he have a show?

JP: Yeah, he had a show. His show was the ah—was the . . .

RD: Uncle . . .

JP: *Uncle Awad's* show, that's right, yeah. And it was the hottest thing on Moroccan TV because it was done live. And he was . . .

RD: He was like the Johnny Carson of [*laughs*] Morocco?

JP: Well, yeah, only it was for kiddies.

RD: It was—oh, so he was the Captain Kangaroo.

JP: Yeah, Captain Kangaroo. He spoke excellent Arabic because he had been born in what is now Israel and spoke Arabic all of his life. He spoke classical Arabic. He also spoke good English, and he spoke good French. And so Awad was a great guy and a good friend of ours. [01:37:07] Well, Awad had a speaking engagement up at Tétouan, which is just east of Tangier up in the northern part of the country, at a school up there, and he asked Fred Allen, my sidekick, and I to go along with him on the train. We went on the train up there and go out to Tétouan. And he was delivering his speech, and he got through, and I was—we wuh—you know, it was in an old gymnasium, and it looked a lot like some of our old gymnasiums. And we were kind of backstage, and here was a door. And I pulled on that door, and here were about seven or eight strands of wheat that had been taken directly from the field. And I asked Awad—I said, "Hey," and maybe some other guys, "Is this Moroccan wheat?" And they said "Yeah." And I said, "Fred, we're in trouble. We're in real trouble with our project." This wheat was about—the stem on it was close to six feet tall. There was a little head out here with wheat grains on it, about an inch and a half long, or maybe not that long, maybe an inch long. If you hit that with nitrogen fertilizer, that stalk is gonna go to 10 feet tall. That head is going to lengthen and get heavier, and the first wind that comes along is going to blow the whole thing down on the ground,

and it's going to rot. They call that lodge. It's very common among wheat growers to talk about, or rice growers. The crop lodged. And so I said, I—as soon as we could get back to the USAID people, I said, "Listen, people, we don't need fertilizer advice. We need a new wheat variety, and the only one I know of is down at Mex—down in Mexico. Norman Borlog, those people down there have bred up some stiff-stem wheat with bigger heads on it." And so they got in touch with 'em down in Mexico, and they sent six hundred pounds of that precious wheat seed to us in Morocco. And they offloaded it on the dock in Casablanca, and some fool ate about half of it before we could get to it and get it distributed. And it would've been perfect. The wheat stands up about that high. The stalk is big around as my thumb. You couldn't knock it down with a baseball bat. And the the head on it is about like that. It would've doubled their wheat production. But it was sent to us strictly for expansion, and hopefully some of it got expanded. [*Laughs*]

[01:40:06] RD: Mm-hmm. So they thought you were a cowboy.

JP: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

RD: Tell me about that.

JP: I took along a hat, a Levi jacket, Levis, and cowboy boots.

RD: So you packed light.

JP: I packed light, and I can use that for almost anything. I can go into a meeting or something with that garb on and look all right, and I can go to the field with it and make out fine. But there are two words of

English that everyone in the world knows, and that's "cowboy" and "Texas." They know those two words, and I'd walk downtown in Rabat sometimes, and little kids would run from two, three blocks away up there just to get to speak to me, say—and they can all say, "Hey, cowboy. Hey, cowboy!" And they would come up, and they would touch me just to make sure that I felt kinda like a human being. And then they'd try out whatever [*laughs*] words of English they knew. It may be the wildest combination you ever heard of, but they'd try it out. And . . .

RD: I'm sure you stood out.

JP: I stood out for sure. For sure, I—and course I played with 'em. I'll played with anybody, and they're—they were cute kids, little old black-eyed boogers. And they were just sweet as they could be, and so I played with 'em and talked to 'em, you know. They couldn't understand me, and I couldn't understand them, but it didn't matter. Didn't matter just so long as I was talking. That was all they wanted.

[01:41:52] RD: And you were a singing cowboy too, right?

JP: Oh, my gosh. Yeah, I didn't intend to be.

RD: Tell me about that.

JP: Well, Fred Allen—I told you about Fred Allen. He and I decided to examine the bar up on the top story, the top story of this hotel, Hotel Tour Hassan, where we were staying. And we—as a matter of fact, we renamed it The Roof Garden, and they had a band playing up there.

RD: Hmm.

JP: And I got acquainted with the band members. And there was—talk about a mix. Their guitar-playing front man was German. Their drummer was Danish. Their piano player was Spanish. You know, it was just a Duke's mixture there. And so Arie, the German, he spoke perfect English, and he said, "Well, hey, do you sing?" And I said, "Well, yeah. I try to sing a little bit." And he said, "What do you sing?" I said, "Mostly Bob Wills." He said, "I love Bob Wills!" [*RD laughs*] I said, "You're kidding me. I—you're the only German in the world ever heard of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys."

RD: And the Texas Playboys.

[01:43:07] JP: Yeah. He said, "Come on up and do me one." They were in—just in practice there one afternoon. So I got up there, and I—we did four or five good tunes. You know, same old ones. "San Antonio Rose," "Deep Water" "Who's Gonna Chop My Baby's Kindlin' (When I'm Gone)" or whatever. And they just loved it. They just loved it. So Fred and I went up there that night, and it was during the time—you know, they were in business then, and they said, "Hey, we have a guy here who sings Bob Wills, and we want you to hear him." And they called me up, and it went over big. Those people couldn't know what I was saying, but anyway, they thought it was just wonderful. And that happened quite a few times. Then I got the word from Awad Hanna. Awad Hanna showed up one day and said, "Hey I want you to come and entertain at the ambassador's little boy's birthday party." What? [*Laughs*] No, the first thing he did is said, "I want you to come and

speak to my American-Moroccan club at the US Information Agency." And I said, "I don't know what you're talking about, Awad." And then finally, he talked me into it, and I went and dressed up like the cowboy and [*RD laughs*] talked to 'em, and I don't know if they understood me or not, but they acted like they enjoyed it. [01:44:38] And then he said, "I want you to entertain at the ambassador's little boy's birthday party," and eventually I had to say yes to that. And it was a lot of fun. All these little kids and, like I say, they're all cute. The mothers weren't too bad looking either. [*Laughter*] But anyhow, they had his birthday party, and I did my bit there. And then I got back, and Awad in a day or two said, "Hey, the Sunday afternoon talking-head show wants you to come and be on Moroccan TV." And I said, "Man, there is a language barrier. I do not speak Arabic or French." He said, "Doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. He—he'll handle it." So I went and got on Moroccan TV, of all things on earth, and we had—wasn't but about thirty minutes. And then in a few days I got a note in my box from the hotel administrators there at the Hotel Tour Hassan. "Would you come and entertain at our Christmas party?" Now that's not a very big party there because Christmas means nothing to the Muslims, and all of the Frenchmen, they were staying home for Christmas. So we were unique in that we were guests there at the hotel. There weren't very many. It was almost empty. So I said, "Sure." [*Laughs*] He said, "What'll you charge us?" I said, "Two tickets. One for me, and one for Fred." "You got it." So I got up there and did my thing

there. And you know, two days later he—I get another note from him. "Would you come do it again at our New Years Eve party?" And I said, "Yeah, I'll be glad to do that," and did. And . . .

[01:46:39] RD: Did you get any work done? [*Laughs*]

JP: I'm the—see, by now, it's really getting to me. It's really getting to me, and I tell Fred, I said, "Fred, I've got to stop this." I said, "I didn't come over here to be an entertainer." And Fred just handed me a piece of paper. He was sending in reports to RTV International. And he—this is a letter he get—got back from Dick Bertrandias, our president. And it said, "Tell John to keep going. He's on a roll. He's doing more for the Moroccan and American" . . .

RD: Relations?

JP: Yeah, "relations than anybody could." And so . . .

RD: You were a good-will ambassador.

JP: I was a good-will ambassador. Well, I had to quit because we had a lot of work we needed to do, and it was—my time was almost up anyway, so I left the the performing circuit to the Moroccans.

[01:47:41] RD: Well, now, if you were there in the winter, it sounds like you were there during off season.

JP: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. We're . . .

RD: Was that a problem?

JP: No. Wasn't a problem for me.

RD: Right.

JP: 'Cause I . . .

RD: I'm saying as far as the project.

JP: Oh. Gosh, man. Oh, yeah. Well, what I told you about the Moroccan wheat—it just demonstrated to us that the whole thing was half-baked to start with. And then I found out who had done the research on this. Some professor from Brooklyn University had developed this whole idea of sending two guys over there to try to help the wheat situation. Well, he didn't know wheat from Adam's off ox, and it was pretty obvious. So anyway, it looked like the whole project was going to have to change, and I'm gonna have to leave. I gotta leave Fred there 'cause I gotta get back to the Extension Service. My leave time is up. And so that's virtually what I did. We worked real hard and got as much of it done and revamped as we could before I left, and then I left to come back.

[01:48:57] RD: But you got to see a little bit of Europe on the way back.

JP: Yeah. Yeah, I decided, you know, I may not be back this way, and sure enough, I never was. So I arranged—all my traveling buddies—and I knew people from the USAID, I knew people from the—what's this volunteer outfit that a lot of Americans used to—omething corps, Job Corps.

RD: Peace Corps.

JP: Peace Corps. Peace Corps. And they all told me—I told 'em I wanted to come back. I wanted to see Spain, Italy, and London. London, Rome, and Madrid. And they said, "Well"—and Paris. They said, "You'll probably like Madrid and Rome, and you'll probably just hate

London and Paris." Well, I found it just exactly opposite. The people in Paris—course I knew enough French at that time where I could grunt and groan and kinda get by a little bit. And they were just wonderful to me, all except for some Americans. And the people in London just bent over backwards. It was unbelievable the f—the way they served me. And the people in Madrid—course your first impression of Madrid is you tell the taxi driver you want to go to the Hotel Ritz, and you don't walk in the front door. You walk in this little door right over here, and you drop your bags right there. And they search 'em while you go out here and go in and register. And that was a little strange to me. And Rome—you know, you form an opinion from a very small universe of people. I had a policeman that treated me nasty, or two of 'em, whatever, and so I didn't get the best treatment there. They just kinda looked through me. They knew I was a tourist, an American. They didn't knew they—I didn't have anything to offer them. So anyway. But I did get to see those places. It was interesting.

RD: That's good.

JP: Yeah.

[01:51:26] RD: So what happened when you got back?

JP: Oh, my gosh.

RD: You went back to the Extension Service.

JP: The first of all, I had made the arrangements with RTV International. They said "We'll stay here until you get in, and as soon as you land in

New York, go to a phone and call us, and then we'll give you instructions on where to go and meet us." And so flying back in, I looked down, and, man, it was iced over. This is January 15, and it was really cold down there. I think that night it got down to seventeen or eleven or something like that in New York City. So I landed. I made the call, and John Dufault [John Thayer] answered the phone. Oh, he was tickled to death to hear me, and "Oh yeah, that's great. We got a big party all planned for you. It's at 625 East 34th Street." That's not it, but, you know, that can serve for the purpose right now. "We'll meet you when you get there. Come right on over. And you'll stay here. It's in the penthouse." And so finally I got in a cab, and we went to that address, and it was a vacant lot. [*RD laughs*] And he said, "Maybe it's West 34th Street," and we went over there, and that wasn't right. And we went here, there, yonder. We went up and down every place. It wasn't there, and now it's getting late. [01:53:13] And he—I said, "Listen, you gotta put me out. You're losing money, and I don't have all that much money to pay you." He said, "Don't you worry about it." He just reached over and turned the meter off. He said, "I've got a good friend that's a doorman up here at this building. Let's go up there and talk to him." We went in, talked to him a while, and he just went to cussing like a sailor, man. "Anybody that would do such a terrible thing to someone from out of town"—and he said, "I tell you what." He said, "You can stay here all night," and he said, "At least you'll be warm." And I said, "That's fine." So I brought my stuff

in, and I said, "Do you mind if I leave my stuff here and I go looking? I may find something." He said, "Go right ahead." So I took off down the street, and the neighborhood started to look familiar. And I rounded the corner, and there was the San Carlos Hotel. That's where RTV International had put me up the very first time I went to New York. I went in, and the room clerk, of all things, remembered me. And, well, he acted like he did. I told him the story, and he went to cussing like a sailor for the terrible way I'd been treated. I said, "Well, no, no. That's fine." He said—so I said—he said, "Listen. I don't have—all my rooms are full, but you go get your stuff and bring it back down here, and I'll have a room for you as soon as you get back." [01:54:50] And so I did, and I went back up there. And I'd been up for nineteen, twenty hours at that point. And man, I was about out of gas. And I had one [*laughs*] one great big bag that, I don't know, it would probably weighed seventy pounds, and I went back. And we didn't have rollers in those days. [*Laughs*] So I went back up there, and thanked this fellow for letting me put my stuff up. Oh, I had thanked the cab driver generously before he took off. And here I start down the street about eight blocks. Eight blocks is not a long distance unless you're worn out and carrying a heavy load.

RD: And it's really cold.

JP: And it was really cold. I was just about out of gas when I rounded that corner. And I walked in there, and the desk clerk said, "Did you see him? Did you see him? He just walked out ahead of you. You're

bound to have seen him." I said, "Who?" He said, "A guy from RTV International." And what had happened over there with the bunch when I had failed to show up—and we didn't have cell phones in those days. Dick Bertrandias said, "Now let's stop and think a minute. John is a hunter." [*Laughs*] He said, "He will go and search for familiar territory." And they all three said, "San Carlos." And Dick Bertran—or Dick Storm—he had been with us for a time in Morocco, and he said, "I'll get him." And he went to San Carlos Hotel and left word, wrote it all out and so—and I should've known where this was. I—they had taken me there before. It was Sardi's East penthouse. Penthouse over Sardi's East Restaurant. But anyway, I got back over there, and man, I was out of gas. And I embarrassed myself because I'd be sitting there talking to somebody and just fall asleep. I was dead. And they said, "Listen, you go ahead and get a good night's sleep."

RD: Wasn't much of a party.

JP: Not much of a party. [*RD laughs*] Not much.

[01:57:13] RD: Well, I can see why that was the best time you had, that three months.

JP: Yeah. It rea—it truly was. It truly was.

RD: So . . .

JP: I—see, Morocco is the nearest place to the United States that is a faraway place with strange-sounding names. And they are very different, but they—their regard for Americans is almost unbelievable. They treated us like we were supermen. The adults and the

youngsters, too. And I just didn't feel worthy [*laughs*] of the praise they were holding me in. [*Laughter*] And I advised a guy from Holiday Inn International that came over there and stayed in the hotel. He said, "We're gonna erect nine new Holiday Inns over here." And I said, "I think you're—you got a winner." He said, "There's just one thing we don't know what to do." He says, "What do we do about television?" And I said, "Well, tell you what I would do. I'd set me up a nice closed circuit, and I'd rent me a whole bunch of movies, and I'd have those available. I'd pick up English TV out of London, and maybe a local channel for Moroccan music." And I think that's what he did. But he didn't offer me a job.

RD: [*Laughs*] Well, I wondered if—Sarah, should we take a break?

Sarah Moore: Yep. I think it's about time for lunch.

RD: Okay. That's a good place to break.

[Recording stopped]

[01:58:56] RD: You had mentioned earlier that you grew up playing steel guitar, lap steel.

JP: Just about grew up. My brother Bill talked Dad into buying us a little old single-neck Supro lap steel and a little old amplifier about this size, tiny little old thing. But that was good that it was tiny because it couldn't hurt the neighborhood any—as much as a big amp could. I mean, as soon as I started playing steel, property values in our neighborhood just went to the bottom. Had people moving out to get away from that awful sound. And but yeah. Bill played it a little bit

and . . .

RD: Did you play in any bands?

JP: Who me?

RD: Yeah.

JP: Oh, yeah. I played in a bunch of bands. I took the thing up, and I really enjoyed it, and I played like everything. And I learned a little bit about music and a little bit how to play. And then I worked all summer long on a survey crew for the Arkansas Highway Department on a high—surveying Highway 8 or 88 from Mena to the Oklahoma line. Worked all summer long to make enough to buy myself a triple-neck Fender steel guitar. Smell me. I developed an attitude. I was somebody. I had a triple-neck Fender steel guitar. And . . .

[02:00:26] RD: Was it a lap or a pedal?

JP: It was just—it was not ne—it was neither. It was on legs.

RD: Okay.

JP: This was before the pedals really came in. And so anyhow I learned to play that a little bit, and Elmer Liles—I've told you this before. Have I told you this before about Elmer Liles wanting me to come play with Ruel Bain down at the Hatfield Fair?

RD: No.

JP: Well, who did I tell that to? I told it to somebody just recently. Okay, I'll try to start back at a place where it'll edit all right. So a good friend of mine—as matter of fact, he's kin to me. His name was Elmer Liles. He played bass, and he ran a body shop right over kinda catty-

cornered across from my folks' place. And he had heard me picking, thumping around on this steel guitar over there, this triple-neck Fender. And he said, "Hey," he said, "why don't you come and play with us at the Hatfield Fair, play in the Ruel Bain Band?" And the Ruel Bain Band was a local band, but they were sky high on my list. I mean, they were heroes. And I sa . . .

RD: Oh, is this where he told you to look out in the audience?

JP: Yeah.

RD: You did tell me that one. I'm sorry.

JP: I did tell you that.

RD: Yes, yes.

[02:01:43] JP: Yeah. Okay. Let me back up and hit it from another angle. Oh yeah. Okay. I was playing with a group of guys. We came from everywhere, really, to—there's a honky-tonk out the west of—a dance hall out west of De Queen. Over across in Oklahoma. And it's called Wagon Wheel Danceland. Now I had played at the old Wheel before it burned and it—there's the only place I ever played where they honestly did have chicken wire up in front of the band to keep the beer bottles from hitting 'em. But I played some wild places. But anyhow, they—it burned down. They rebuilt the Wheel, Wagon Wheel, and me and four other guys were playing there. And one was front man. He played bass. One was a drummer, one was a fiddle player. We actually had two fiddle players at—for a time. And then a guitar player, and me playing steel. And it's just an absolute natural fact.

Back in those days, some people really just adored fighting. [*RD laughs*] They must've loved pain because some of 'em would come to that dance every Saturday night with the express purpose in mind of starting a fight. And so anyhow, we were constantly trying to break up fights. And one old boy set off a stick of dynamite right out there just outside the front door one time. They'd just do anything and never stop and think about it much. We were playing there. [02:03:35] The bad thing about the new Wheel is they never did finish it, and all they had up here for a ceiling was just the roof. It was a metal roof and no ceiling under it. And then over here in the corner they had a big fan, and in that corner they had a great big fan. And they never did close those things in the fall, and here it was the dead of winter, and those things were still open. It was seventeen degrees in there one night. We're playing in our overcoats. And Buddy Beasley was one of our fiddle players, and when he took a ride, he would jump right up there and throw his head up and really make a show out of it. And it came time for him to jump up there and take a fiddle ride and he—nobody noticed that as long as we'd been playing, the steam had been rising off the band and collecting on the ceiling, and there's a great big snow spot up there. [*Laughs*] Nobody noticed that. Buddy ran up there and went—looked up, and it went splat, right [*laughter*] right in his face. Oh, my gosh. It was—I don't know. We may have had to close up that night. It was a bad night. It wasn't any people in there anyway. [02:04:49] But we were right in the

throes of it there one night, and we were trying out a new bass man. And back in those days, we'd have called him a beatnik. And, I mean, he was killing himself with that bass. Tun-tun-tun, tun-tun-tun, tun-tun, tun, tun. And all of a sudden someone threw a hog in the front door, about a 150-pound hog, and that thing screaming, squealing bloody murder. And it's running around the dance floor here, and about 200 people behind it chasing it, and they'd dive on it and pbbt. It'd just squirt out like a big bar of soap, you know. And it ran by the bandstand, and this bass man said—tun-tun-tohn-tohn-tohn. And he just stopped, and he said, "Hey, don't throw that cat out. I know him." Duh-tohn, tohn-tohn-tohn. [*RD laughs*] Oh, man, we had some wild people in there. But that—we had a bunch of great times.

[02:05:53] RD: [*Laughs*] Let's shift gears a little bit. When you were with the Cooperative Extension Service and in radio and television as Farm Service—I noticed a lot of photos of a lot of fairs.

JP: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, one of . . .

RD: You must've gone a bunch of fairs.

JP: When I was in in Shreveport as a farm broadcaster down in Shreveport, I used to try to make every fair I possibly could. Well, there's a fair in every county or parish, and so I was making about thirty every fall. I mean, I got to the point where I thought I had seen the rear end of these—all the good beef animals in the world. I didn't need any more. [*Laughs*] I had had it with those people. But you know, the people kindly expected me to admire what they had. That's

common human characteristic. I've got . . .

RD: And like you had said, you were also doing PR for the station.

JP: That's true. That's true, yeah. Uh-huh. And so anyway, I went to a lot of fairs. And the State Fair of Louisiana is there in Shreveport. It's not in Baton Rouge. They have one in Baton Rouge, but it's connected with LSU down there. Or I don't know what they do now. These—I'm talking about forty years ago. But anyhow, we had some good times down there.

[02:07:22] RD: Okay. So when you came back to Arkansas in broadcasting, you went to KAAY, right? Fifty-thousand-watt Clear Channel station.

JP: Yeah. I went to—the deal is that when I came back, I went back to work for the Extension Service first.

RD: Right.

JP: And I used to listen to Marvin Vines every morning. You remember Marvin Vines.

RD: Oh, yes.

JP: Marvin was farm broadcaster at KAAY for twenty-seven years. And he was a good friend of mine. And KAAY and KEEL were sister stations, and so Marvin and I worked together quite a little bit and traveled together on sales calls. And so I was listening there one morning, and Bill—forgot his last name, he was news director. I thought of it just the other day, and then I forgot it again. But anyhow, Bill was just doing the best he could, and it was right in the middle of the hot, hot

season for commercials. I mean, Marvin was sold out. And Bill was trying his best to get something on and keep it on and still play all the commercials, and I could tell he was in a world of hurt. So as soon as I got to work at the Extension Service that morning, I called over there, and I said "What happened?" He said, "Well, Marvin went up to his farm at Guy yesterday, and he made a kind of a sharp turn, and he was kinda on a downhill slope, and his right rear wheel dropped down in a hole. And it turned the tractor over on him and killed him." And he said—I said, "Well, you don't look like you're real well organized." He said, "We don't know what to do." I said, "Would it help any if I made you some interviews, and you can run those? They won't be as good as what a real farm broadcaster would do." He said, "That'd be perfect. Good, really good." So I wo—got my recording device and hit it—head out and got hold of some people and made a few interviews. Took 'em over there to him, and oh, man, they were so appreciative of that. And the station manager was Gary something. I don't remember his name either, but he appreciated it very much, and he and I got along good. They had a great staff at KAAY at that time. [02:09:59] And so anyhow, I did that for the rest of the week. And then Gary called me, and he said, "We wanna hire you as farm broadcaster." And I said, "Well, hadn't thought much about it." He said, "Give it some thought." He said, "I'll need you in here soon as you can get here." And so I decided to go ahead and go to work for 'em, go back into farm broadcasting. But I had been talking with Dale

Nicholson and some—and Jim Pitcock at Channel 7 about going to work over there because Jimmy Leake, the owner of the station, he wanted a farm department. Well, he owns the station, and so do what Jimmy wants. And I said, "Is there any chance I could go to work for both of you?" And we had a meeting over at KAAY. And Dale and Gary got together, and they said, "Yeah, well, he's gotta be on someone's pen—benefit package," and Gary said, "We'll put him on ours." And I said, "Okay, I'll do for Channel 7 what I can." And as it turned out, I couldn't do very much. It just took too much. I just didn't have that much John. I didn't have that much juice to be able to do that much. So anyhow . . .

RD: That's two full-time jobs.

[02:11:15] JP: It's two full-time jobs. It's two full-time jobs. And plus, you know, if you're doing television, you've got to worry about a cameraman. And you've got to worry about editing and scripting because nobody at the station's gonna know what you're doing, and you can't just record a big long string of stuff and expect to transfer that straight to the air. You can't do that. So anyway, I did the best I could. And as it turned out, it turned out pretty good because Gary resigned his position as station manager and left and went to Phoenix and left them with nobody to run that station. And they got an old boy, and he was a real good guy. And the—just a couple of day—few days before he was supposed to be there, he had a heart attack and died. So they were going to get whoever they could. And Bill, the

news director, said, "I know I guy. He's a salesman in Chicago, and I really don't know that much about him." And they said, "We got to have somebody." They got in touch with Phil Zeni. And Phil Zeni came there and went to work for 'em as station manager. And he was a satanic demon. He was the worst thing that could happen to you. He was bad about eating people out, and he was eating me out about some client I had or thought I had, and he backed out on advertising with us. And Zeni told me to go tell him that "I'm comin', and I'm gonna to stick a .45 right down his throat." And I thought, "I don't want to work here any longer. That guy's crazy." And so I left KAAY, and they hired another old kid. A good friend of mine from West Texas, but anyhow.

[02:13:20] RD: Is that when you went to Channel 7 full time?

JP: Went to Channel 7 full time, yeah.

RD: Okay. That's when I met you.

JP: Yeah. Yeah. That's when . . .

RD: That's—I was a kid, shooting. I used to shoot with you.

JP: Yeah. Yeah.

RD: But you did some fun, fun things at Channel 7.

JP: Yeah, yeah, they were fun things.

RD: Well, lets talk about that a little bit since . . .

JP: They were fun things.

RD: . . . since that's the part of you I know.

JP: Yeah. We'd go to the Peach Festival or something, and they'd give us

a bushel of peaches. Well, wow. We come home with a bushel of peaches. [*Laughs*] But we did a bunch of stuff. We did everything you could imagine.

RD: Well, you would live for the opening of duck season.

JP: Yeah. Yeah. Duck season was was pretty important. And I MC'd the duck-calling contest down at Stuttgart for, I don't know, six or seven years.

[02:14:08] RD: Mm-hmm. But you do a special every year on the opening day of duck season, right?

JP: We did. Channel 7 had always done a duck special ahead of the opening day of duck season. And then I came along, and they said, "You get the duck special." And I said, "Fine." And so Dale Carpenter and I—Dale was one of the greatest shooters I ever worked with. He and I got together, and we started traveling around and shooting video and doing voice over and making plans on this thing. And I don't know if it was so expensive they didn't want to do it again or if they didn't think they would be able to match the picture, the quality of what they had if they did it again. But that was the last duck special Channel 7 ever did.

RD: Was it?

JP: Yeah, me and Dale.

[02:15:03] RD: Now you also did the five o'clock weather for a while.

JP: Yeah. That turned out to kind of bad on account of—you are acquainted with the Magid organization.

RD: Oh yeah.

JP: And Magid was a—what did they call it?

RD: A consultant.

JP: Consultants.

RD: Yeah.

JP: Consultants, okay. Consultant means . . .

RD: Out of Iowa.

JP: . . . consultant is the best job in the world because you always stand far enough away from the problem that you don't have to take any of the blame if it blows up. But you stand close enough so if it's successful, you can claim at least a part of the credit. They are masters at it. So you know, if anything happens on Channel 7 that Magid doesn't—didn't create, they don't like it. They don't like it. If it ain't ours, if it ain't us, it's no good. Well, Dale Nicholson is the one that created this thing. He came to me, and he hit me up about this. He said, "I want you to think about you doing the weather on—the five o'clock." And I said, "Great, let's go." [*Laughter*] So I was doing the weather, and of course, I was doing it in my inimitable style, which is country as a turnip green. And . . .

[02:16:21] RD: I thought it was thoroughly entertaining. [*Laughter*]

JP: And anyhow, people would send me things to point—back in those days we didn't have all the electronics we have now. We'd point to a weather map here, here, here, here. And I had all kinds of pointers that I used. They got to sending me walking canes. They sent me

one made out of a palm tree. And one made out of a—everything you can imagine. And I had my own there, made out of witch hazel. And I was pointing to that, and then they started sending me other stuff. And then it got to be a thing over the state of Arkansas. What will John use as a pointer tonight? Okay. Dove season came along, and I used my 20-gauge shotgun.

RD: In full camo.

JP: Full camo.

RD: I remember it.

[02:17:11] JP: I forgot that. Had the breach open. And I was pointing with this shotgun. [*Laughter*] The next day Pitcock said, "Come in here. I need to talk to you." He said, "You're not ever gonna use that shotgun again, are you?" and I said, "No. That's just a one-time shot." He said, "Good. Don't do it. We got phone calls. We got a mess of phone calls objecting to that thing." And I said, "You did? I'm surprised at that." So I decided to do a little research on my own. I go down to the operator, telephone operator, receptionist. I said, "I understand you got a mess of phone calls concerning my pointer last night on the weather." "Well, we got eight." "Eight? I thought it may—was maybe 100." "No. We got eight." I got those, and I sorted 'em out here. And these four thought it was fantastic. And these two just didn't understand what I was doin'. And this one objected to it. One person out of a lousy eight objected to that. And so if you s—if you think your telephone call to a TV station doesn't get some action,

try it some time. Somebody got some action. We—not only did we did we take the shotgun off, but as soon as Magid got hold of any part of that, it was Dale's idea, and I executed it, and they hated it. It's the most terrible thing I've ever seen. And so he knew that they were going to tell Jimmy Leake and others about how bad a decision Dale had made. So he said, "We'll have to take that off," and I said, "Fine."

RD: Mm-hmm. So do you have funny stories about being out in the field with photographers and . . .

[02:19:18] JP: Hey, let me tell you a real funny story about another TV station.

RD: Okay.

JP: After I left Channel 7, Swaty, what was Swaty's first name?

RD: Joe.

JP: Joe Swaty called me from Channel 16?

RD: Mm-hmm.

JP: Channel 16. He said, "Hey, we've got this program we're thinking about doing called *Dialing for Chickens*." [*Laughter*] And I said, "Dynamite. Just my stuff." He said, "We want you to do it." So, I went out to 16, and we would video tape this *Dialing for Chickens* thing. And it was nothing. It—you know, call in, and if we choose you, if you're the thirteenth, nineteenth caller or whatever, you get a chicken sandwich. [*RD laughs*] The reward was nothing. But it was such a great idea that Joe had come up with. So we started doing this *Dialing for Chickens*. And then eventually I started dressing in

overalls. And we were doing it great. Doing it up, you know. So anyhow, Joe caught me there one day, and he said, "Hey, we've got to stop doing *Dialing for Chickens*." I said, "Why? It's such a dynamic success." He said, "It's because of a request from sou—from s—the telephone company." In those days it was Southwestern Bell. And I said, "What happened?" He said—it was a snowy time, a bad-weather time, and he said, "They called us up, and they said, 'Hey, would you guys please take that off, at least until this weather moderates?' He said, 'Every time you do that, there are so many telephones pick up at the same time, it has blanked out one entire exchange in Russellville, two in Little Rock, and one or two in Conway and Lonoke. Blanked—I mean, so many picked up their lines couldn't handle it.' And he said, 'We can't have that in these times of emergency here with this weather,'" and he said, "Okay. We'll stop it." So that ended *Dialing for Chickens*.

[02:21:40] RD: Oh, man. [*Laughter*] All right. So what was next? After 16, what did you do?

JP: Well, I guess I probably went to work for the Arkansas Radio Network at that time.

RD: Okay.

JP: As a farm broadcaster and . . .

RD: What was the Shell Bug Report?

JP: Oh, the Shell Bug Report, yeah. After I decided that I was going to leave the Arkansas Radio Network—lets see, how did this go? There

must have been some reason I made that decision. I can't think for the life of me right now what it would have been. Probably some administrative people that I didn't get along with, and I can understand that. [*RD laughs*] But anyway, I decided that—oh, I know what it was. I know what it was. During the tail end of my tenure as farm director at the Arkansas Radio Network, Allen & Dorward got hold of me. And when I had first gone to work for KAAY, Marvin Vines had left this program all ready to go, and that was the day it was supposed to start, and they didn't have anybody that could do it. And Lee Bullis was the account executive with Allen & Dorward in Shreveport—in Houston. And they had the Shell account, Shell agri account. So anyhow I had met Lee, and as a matter of fact Lee came up here the night before and spent the night in a hotel just so he could listen to my program, see what it looked like. And I'm making a big jump here. And we'll get back to that other part in just a minute.

RD: Okay.

[02:23:42] JP: But so it was a kind of an involved thing. I was talking with—I was recording four—one, two, three—maybe it was three—the cotton entomologist from Arkansas, cotton entomologist from Mississippi, cotton entomologist from Louisiana, every day, five days a week and getting a daily update on the cotton insect situation. Later on we picked up Georgia and put four states on that. And but anyway, so the—and then run a Shell commercial, run a—produce an open and a close and run that. And we did it that first day, and the telephone

rang, and it was Lee Bullis, and he said, "That was perfect." And I said, "Well, I don't know that I could do any better than that." And so anyhow, I ran that thing. And then when I left I wanted to take it with me, but Phil Zeni was threatening to sue me and Shell. And Lee Bullis called me and said, "John, we can't even face the prospects of a lawsuit on this thing. We got to go with them." So they went with the new farm broadcaster that they had hired, Doyle Patton.

RD: Hmm.

[02:25:09] JP: And then eventually Doyle Patton left them. He couldn't stand Zeni either. And so Lee called me, and he said, "Hey, it's up for grabs. You want it?" And I said, "Sure, I'll do it." And so I started doing it while I was at the Arkansas Radio Network. And then I decided I'm doing enough business I think I can make a living if I leave the network, and I did. I formed my own—I called it an advertising agency. And that was the only account I had, but I was doing pretty good with it. And one thing led to another. After two years of doing that I found that my heavy season is April through September. And the rest of the year I don't have anything to do. So that's when I decided to go into the professional speaking business a little more like full time. And so in the off season, I'd speak. In the on season, I'd do Shell Bug Report. And did that for several years, and it worked out very, very well. And eventually though, I told Allen & Dorward and Shell—well, Shell was gone. Shell eventually quit us. And I sold it with Dupont, and then Dupont quit us. And I think I sold

it with somebody else for a little while. But eventually it was obvious that that thing's time had come and gone. No longer did advertisers need farm broadcasts. They needed narrow cast. They could hire salesman and go visit farmers face to face cheaper than they could put it on a broadcast medium. So they got out of it, and Shell Bug Report came to an end in 1995, and I went into full-time professional speaking. And I spoke everywhere, man. I spoke twice in Canada. And I've been by far the biggest numbers of states there are. Spoke three times in Montana. And I spoke in Delaware and all kinds of [*laughs*]—I spoke in Florida several times. But anyhow, that was okay. And then I fi—it—after 9/11 things were just very different.

RD: Oh, it was tough traveling.

JP: Oh, tough traveling. Tough traveling. I had a speaking engagement the night of 9/11 down in Stuttgart or DeWitt or somewhere off down there. And I'd thought, "Well, if I can do this, I can do anything." And it turned out good. But it was so hard to travel. I didn't like traveling anymore, like I had at one time. And so I decided to just back up, quit marketing my speaking services, and let the cat die. [*RD laughs*] And so that's what I did.

[02:28:31] RD: Well, one thing we've left out is your stint with AETN, which is still kind of ongoing.

JP: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

RD: So let's talk about AETN and how all that happened.

JP: Jim Holmes and I had been working together since way, way back in

my Extension days and his first days at AETN as a director. And I was still a radio-TV specialist with Extension at that time. And he came to me, and he said, "Hey, we wanna do an outdoor program, and I want you to do it." And I said, "Sounds good. Let's do it." So we were going to call it *Arkansas Outdoors*. This is in [19]92. We started that thing, and he said, "I want to have a cooking segment, a hunting segment, and a fishing segment on each one." So fine, splits up good that way. We'll divide it in threes and go. And so we went— we had a cooking guy there, a chef, whose name was John Phillips. And it was kind of a left-handed thing, John Philpot [*RD laughs*] introducing John Phillips. And I don't think John really wanted to do it very much. He was kind of promoting his cookbook, and that was about it.

[02:29:53] So anyhow, Jim ran across a lady who worked with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission who fancied herself as a great outdoor cook. Name was Phyllis Speer. So he and I were going to meet her. We went to the state park up at Mountain Home. She lives at Buffalo City, not far from Mountain Home. And by the time we got up there, she already had the fire going. She had it—it was down to coals, and she was ready to go. And she had an iron pot there, and she womped up a peach cobbler that would make you claw yourself it was so good. [*RD laughs*] And so anyhow, she was just going to do one time. And I said, "Phyllis"—after we got through, I said, "Phyllis, I guess you've done a lot of TV." And she said, "No, this is the first time I've ever done any." She's the most natural TV talent I've ever

known. And she's still that good today or maybe even better because she . . .

RD: She's the one that's on there that . . .

JP: Yeah. Uh-huh. Does all the cooking.

RD: She—it aired last night.

JP: Yeah, that's right.

RD: Yeah.

JP: Yeah. So anyhow, we did that. And we would produce one program a month. And it went on like that for many years.

RD: This is *Arkansas Outdoors*?

JP: *Arkansas Outdoors*.

RD: Okay.

[02:31:21] JP: And then when the terrible depression—deflation came along in nine—in 2008, 2009, something like that, the station just ran out of money. I mean, there was just no money to be had, and they'd—they couldn't afford gasoline for the vehicles or anything. So they were gonna—we did our last live *Arkansas Outdoors* in December of [20]09.

RD: Now you had a separate show with her, right?

JP: No.

RD: No? That was all just part of *Arkansas Outdoors*?

JP: Yeah. Yeah.

RD: Okay.

JP: She started off as a kind of a contributor to that one third of *Arkansas*

Outdoors. Jim and I would get other people to sit in on the hunting and the fishing and so forth.

RD: Right.

JP: And then Phyllis—she and I together would do the cooking thing.

RD: Okay.

JP: And so . . .

[02:32:18] RD: Yeah. I saw one segment while we were goin'—out there going through some of your videos that she cooked coot.

JP: Oh gosh. Yeah.

RD: I didn't think you could eat coots.

JP: Oh.

RD: Well, first explain what a coot is for people who don't know.

JP: I didn't think so either. I don't know if I can explain. I know it's not a duck. It's a waterfowl, and it's migratory. And I think it's probably against the law to shoot 'em.

RD: I think duck hunters shoot 'em when they can't get any ducks. [*Laughs*]

JP: That's it, and leave 'em laying there on the water because—they call 'em trash ducks. Nobody eats a trash duck. Well, Phyllis had been after me to let her cook some coots for a long time. And I said, "Nah, I ain't gonna eat no trash duck." Well, Sheffield Nelson got hold—she and Sheffield were out duck hunting one day, and they got to talking about it. He said, "You got a recipe for coot?" She said, "Yeah." She sa—he said, "Why don't you feed some of that to John? He"—she said,

"I've tried. He won't touch it." He said, "Don't tell him what it is." She said, "Well, I ain't got any way of getting out and getting any coots." He said, "I'll go shoot you some coots." So Sheffield Nelson [*RD laughs*] went out and shot her a bunch of coots, brought 'em in. She dressed 'em all out and just breasted 'em. Now there's not much meat on a coot. I mean, it's a—there are two little pieces of meat about like that, and that's about it, on the breasts. But she—and you got to get all of that fat off 'cause, man, that fat is where the bad flavor is.

RD: So, we're talking less then a quail?

JP: Yeah. That's—not even as big as a quail.

RD: Yeah.

[02:33:54] JP: There's not even that much meat. So anyway we got up to her house to do that cooking segment, and I said, "What are we—what are you cooking today?" and she said, "Coots," and I said, "Don't call me that in front of all these people." [*RD laughs*] She said, "No, I didn't say old coot. I said coots." And so we started going on this—on these coots, and we got tickled, and we just broke up. And Phyllis is one of those people that can't get straightened out. She'll get control, and then think of it and blow it out again. And so anyhow, we were just screaming by the time that thing was over. We were laughing so hard. I mean, everything you said was funny. I mean, though shalt brown thy coot [*laughter*] and all that becomes something really funny. And so anyhow, she got that . . .

RD: Yeah. Once you get tickled on camera it's a little tough to stop.

JP: Oh, it's ten times as hard.

RD: Yeah.

[02:35:05] JP: Yeah. You remember John Hudgens and . . .

RD: Oh yeah.

JP: Who was the anchorman at that time?

RD: That would have been Steve Barnes, wouldn't it have?

JP: No. He's a big guy.

RD: Fred DeBrine.

JP: Fred DeBrine and—and John Hudgens could make the funniest sound with his mouth. And he could do that, and Fred DeBrine would just splatter. Just splatter. And they finally got on both of 'em and said, "Hey, you just got to stop doing that."

RD: Well, Bob Steele was the same way.

JP: Really?

RD: He'd get—yeah. He'd be on trying to do sports, and once he got tickled he couldn't stop.

JP: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Bob's—Bob has a great sense of humor, and everything's funny to him, everything. [02:35:53] So anyhow, she got that stew made up with those coots in there. And I don't know if she put beef broth in it, and maybe that's what gave it the flavor, but Randy—I shouldn't have said that.

RD: What?

JP: Maybe that's what gave it the good flavor, but I'll tell you this, it was

good. It was super good. I was surprised. And now I haven't eaten any since, but then I hadn't had Phyllis to cook it. [*Laughter*] She's a little too far out of town.

RD: You wouldn't order it in a restaurant?

JP: No, I wouldn't order coots. [*RD laughs*] No. But, oh, the order of the thing. This is not terribly important, but anyhow, after 2009 they ran reruns and some that we had done, special preparation of programs to run after that thing stopped running. And they ran that for about four years, and finally they just said, "Listen, we're taking *Arkansas Outdoors* off the air. We're gonna go back and pull out all the cooking segments, hook 'em up together, and make a new series called *Cooking On the Wild Side*."

RD: That's what I was thinking of.

[02:37:16] JP: And that's what they're still running.

RD: Okay.

JP: And it's—you know, everybody knows that it's a rerun. But I ask people about it, why they watch it, and they say, "Hey, we can't get that kind of television anymore." And so I guess I understand what they mean.

RD: Well, there're people here in the office that watch it.

JP: Yeah.

RD: I watch it, so.

JP: Yeah. Yeah.

RD: Yeah.

JP: Yeah. So it still has a great, fantastic audience after all this time.

RD: Yeah.

JP: So I don't know how long they're gonna run it. But that's good.

RD: I'd say they got their money's worth out of you.

JP: Yeah. [*Laughter*] They should get their money's worth out of that.

[02:37:59] RD: So you were inducted into the Arkansas Agricultural Hall of Fame.

JP: Yeah. I was one of the original committee members that got together and formed the Agricultural Hall of Fame. I can remember a few of 'em. There was Marion Fletcher, Ned Ray Purtle, C. R. Sawrie. I can—I don't know if—well, I've forgotten the names of the rest of 'em. But anyway, we got together down at the chamber one time, Little Rock chamber, and put this thing together. And we started it up with an annual induction ceremony and—and luncheon. And the first year we inducted ten. And you know, we had our choice of the class, triple-A, gold-star farmers and agri business people, and so we couldn't go wrong. And they needed an MC. And they asked me to do it, and I said I would. And so I've done most of 'em. The vice president for agriculture at the University of Arkansas did it one time when I was inducted so that I didn't have to do that. But anyhow, I did it for, ooh, I don't know how long, thirty-some-odd years. And finally I decided, hey, it's time to let somebody else do it. Some—you know, it's time to do it another way. Let somebody else do it their way. So I resigned. And I plan to attend all of 'em that I can until my health gets bad or

whatever. But it's been a great experience to get to shake hands with and meet all of the outstanding agriculture representatives the state of Arkansas has had. When you talk about those people you talk about the best of the state of Arkansas because they were in on the—they were in when the times were tough. They stuck it out, and they stayed with it, and they are enjoying the improved situation in the State of Arkansas now.

[02:40:23] RD: Mm-hmm. Now you were president of the Pulaski County Farm Bureau too, right?

JP: I was. We have a deal.

RD: For two years?

JP: Two years, yeah.

RD: Yeah.

JP: We have a deal over there that we—it's a tradition with us. It's a training situation we use. Everybody gets two years in the president's seat. They get two years in the second vice president, first vice president, and president. And then two years as past president. And then they move on out of the officer corps. We bring the others along. But I was the president of it for two years, and I still am a member of Pulaski County Farm Bureau.

RD: Okay.

JP: It's a good outfit.

RD: Hmm. All right. Here's a tough one.

JP: Mm-hmm.

[02:41:08] RD: Out of all of your experiences, either personal or business or educational, what's the most important thing you've learned in your life?

JP: Shew.

RD: I told you it's a tough one.

JP: Yeah, it was. It is. Uh-huh. Well, I'm gonna surprise you probably. But this is the truth. The most important thing I have learned is when times get tough there is always a higher power I can call on. And that higher power—I'm not privileged to what's gonna happen in the future, but he is. And he knows exactly how I'm gonna walk through this thing. And all I have to do is have faith in that guy, and he'll get me out of this problem. Now I haven't had very many problems in my life. I really haven't. I've had almost a perfect existence. And a very long good health. And I'm still in good health, as far as I know. Of course, you're only in good health until your next scan. [*Laughter*] But that's as good as anybody can do. So that's about the way that goes.

[02:42:28] RD: What's the best advice you've gotten?

JP: The best advi—I guess probably the best advice I ever got was from John Measel, a county agent in Miller County, when he said, "You know, you really have no use in work—no business in working for an outfit like the Cooperative Extension Service. You should be in public relations." And I went back to school to the University of Iowa to get a degree, get a graduate degree in public relations and went broke before I got there. But I think John may have been right. I've worked

in public relations ever since, in one way or another.

[02:43:15] RD: So have I missed anything? Is there anything else you want to talk about or cover?

JP: Nothing now. We may do this again, and I'll think of some other things.

RD: Oh, I think we should.

JP: And I'll . . .

RD: 'Cause for us this is a short interview.

JP: Yeah.

RD: You know.

JP: Oh yeah, I'm sure that's true.

RD: Usually—yeah, they're usually about twice as long, but.

JP: Yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure that's right.

RD: Well, thank you . . .

JP: Oh yeah.

RD: . . . for your time.

JP: Oh yeah.

RD: And your donation. I appreciate it.

JP: Oh, my pleasure, my pleasure, my friend.

[End of interview 02:43:58]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]